

MAGDALENE CHRISTIANITY

Patriarchy Storms In



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PATRIARCHY STORMS IN

Nomadic tent dwellers

The shift to patriarchy happened at different times in different places. But it is associated with restless nomadic peoples whose lifestyle was supported by keeping herds. This was different to other nomadic peoples, for example the Indigenous people of inland Australia who moved seasonally within a wide territory living according to what sacred 'country' provided.

Nomadic pastoralists included the Semites with a patriarchal culture, a branch of which would later emerge as the Jews. But the cattle herding people who would bring the first great change to the whole of Eurasia came from the mountains and steppes of the Caucasus between the Caspian and Black seas and the Volga basin of south Russia – hence they became known as Caucasian. The first migrations may have begun around 4000 BCE, spreading into Europe where the old goddess culture lived on. Hurrians moved southward as far as Syria. They established the Mitanni empire around 1550 BCE, spoke a long extinct language, and their culture was matrilinear - the line of descent coming through the female.

This was unusual. Patriarchy was the pattern for most of the cattle-herders from the Caucasus. They would come under the umbrella name Indo-Europeans. The name does not refer to ethnicity but rather to a common language source. Languages descended from the Indo-European include Sanskrit, Persian, Greek, Latin, Italian, Celtic, English, German and Spanish.

By the mid-second millennium different sub-groups had migrated outward in all directions – Hittites south-west to Anatolia and Syria, Indo-Iranians east to the region that would become Persia, Indo-Aryans into the Fertile Crescent and further south-eastward to India. Other groups reached as far as Xinjiang in western China and spoke now-extinct Tocharian (there was similar migratory movement of Asiatic peoples).



Mountains and plains of the vast steppes

The spirit behind the patriarchy

Empires with their hierarchies of gods and goddesses rose and fell. But the human world was changing. Plenty has been said about how the shift happened. I include a spiritual impulse. With a focus on the evolution of consciousness we can view the dominance of patriarchy as a passing phase. Nothing can stay the same forever. The old matriarchal culture had fallen into stasis with its cycles of the eternal now. The religion-based city-states that replaced it would move into their own stagnation through excessive formality. A new dynamic was to take their place through the incursions of those wanderers.

For a people who regularly packed up their tents and goods and gathered their herds to move on in search of new pasture, local deities had no role. Although some groups carried tribal gods with them in the form of small idols, their gods and goddesses were not embedded in the land as local powers to which something had to be given back.

The celestial realms needed to be closely observed and from here came the significant deities – of sky, storm and the stars. Mary Boyce writes:

It was ancient nomadism, lived on the vast steppes, which gave an especial character to these ancestral gods ... Their gods were seen as exercising unbounded influence throughout the world, their sway being limited only by function.

—*A History of Zoroastrianism, Volume 1, The Early Period*

Boyce notes that the Indo-Iranian wanderers she studied had no temples with images. Fire and water were revered with daily offerings as vital

spiritual forces, for example in Zoroastrianism which developed from the original impulse of Zarathustra, the mysterious entity who is said to have incarnated many times to help evolution move forward.

Warrior culture

The herd owning Indo-Europeans tamed horses to ride and pull wagons – and later chariots. Skilled in bronze work they produced masterful artwork and lethal weapons. Their ability to charge upon a settled community on horseback, to wreak havoc and then quickly disappear gave them a terrifying advantage. Warfare became conquest through annihilation of the defeated people.

In the culture of those nomadic herders one would think that males who rode forth to conquer or die were more expendable than childbearing women on whom the future of a tribe depended. Instead warrior power was what gained prestige. This happened from China in the east to far western Europe.

Strong leaders could protect a tribe's herds, mothers and children and the elderly, keeping the community together, supported by the gods in whose names they claimed authority. These cultures made way for a dramatic shift in attitudes – when power over others intensified the concept of ownership and of a radical concept of inheritance, still with us today.

If a society had also become patrilinear – the hereditary line passing through the male – the female role would be seriously diminished. A woman would need to be owned to ensure patrimony. Marriage as a legal contract replaced its value as a celebratory echo of the sacred union between god and goddess. Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss wrote of 'the exchange of women', through which a female could be a means of trade like cattle, a gift to leaders of another group, as a means of negotiating alliances, or for sex as hospitality to visiting tribal leaders.

The eventual spread and domination by the patriarchy emerged gradually from the lives of the nomadic pastoralists. Their customs came to dominate as the nomads settled in as the new empire builders. And the stories of divine beings reflected this.

The gods emerging in patriarchal religions told a story akin to emerging human values. The goddesses would be demoted. There was no sudden expulsion of the goddesses; neither were they eliminated. In some regions they still retained great power, such as in western Europe, and the goddesses are ever present in patriarchal religions, if you look behind the overt stories. And we need to emphasise that they faded from sight slowly. Indo-Europeans in Anatolia built the mighty Hittite empire (1600-1100 BCE). From their capital Hattusa they conquered extensive regions of the

Middle East and the Levant under the banner of their storm god. Yet the matrilineal culture of the indigenous Hurrians remained strong with its independent and powerful queen.

Likewise in Iran, the Gathas, poetic hymns to Ahura Mazda that form the oldest part of the Zoroastrian Avesta, state that women as well as men could become rulers and priests. Suitability for these roles depended on charisma that marked an individual as a 'truthful one'. This would change. Zoroastrianism today has only male priests.

But in the Babylonian empire the myths that developed reflect a patriarchal view. In the *Enuma elis*, Marduk leader of the new young gods conquers Tiamat the primordial goddess, now depicted as the chaos dragon or 'tumultuous sea' and stretches out her great shattered body to form the time-based heavens and the earth. It's assumed that he kills her. But such a primal mother-power cannot be killed. Meanwhile the goddess Ea is busy creating humans.



Stone tablet found at the Temple of Nimrod showing Marduk fighting Tiamat

Did the nomadic pastoralists bring anything worthwhile to humanity?

In the big picture of the evolution of consciousness, they brought a shift connected with the development of the frontal lobes, which was not exclusive to males. This development, a long time coming, would lead eventually to the emergence of abstract thinking, thinking based on concepts. But the more rigid differentiation of roles meant thinking developed in different ways.

The idea that there are neurological differences between male and female brains has produced plenty of controversy. One research study indicated that in comparison to the male brain, in female brains there is more activity in the pre-frontal cortex, called the 'inner CEO' governing planning, organisation, impulse control and learning from mistakes (conclusion – women would make better leaders). Other research has found no statistical differences, other than that male brains are generally larger.

Whether neurological or sociological, the typical male mindset has produced the dominant wilful, outward thrusting, expansion-orientated, linear, calculating, confrontational side of human nature. So, what of value came from this?

There is something. From east to west we see restless, pushing humanity surging outwards, wreaking havoc through war and forced exodus, yet also mixing up human beings and their cultures. Despite the nomads becoming disruptive empire builders themselves, from the restless momentum of the wandering life a seed of a different spiritual focus had been planted and was slowly germinating.

Soul progression is symbolized by the 'tower of Babel' and the emerging consciousness of differences. Pre-historic humanity had a universal culture, which evidence from the arts and early built structures confirms. This was innate, not forged by the human will. One day, still in the future, we will again know ourselves as one humanity, created through an empathy that overrides differences. But first came the breaking up. This process is still going on. Humans are still on the move, crossing seas for work, adventure, a new life or as refugees escaping persecution, and being rejected because they aren't 'like us'. The path to one humanity is a long and complex one.

The sacred text of the Jews, the Torah, contains much legendary material. Yet within this there are truths about human nature, and it contains a portent of a major development in consciousness. The Hebrew prophet Elijah heralded this when the voice of Yahweh came to him, not from the outside in the wind or earthquake or fire, but inwardly as 'a still small voice' (1 Kings 19:11). This voice is the divine I AM, and it was to be individualised in us, but gradually. This too is still to be fully achieved in our world today.

The Age of the Intellectual Soul; the goddess transformed

The fourth post-Atlantean era, the Greco-Roman began in 747 BCE (year of the legendary founding of the Republic of Rome). Remember the threefold soul? This era is also known as the Age of the Intellectual Soul. In the two great poetic works of Homer, we see a shift. There's a marked contrast between Greek Achilles or Trojan Hector in the *Iliad* and

Odysseus in the *Odyssey*. Unlike the heroes of the Trojan War, who are 'playthings of the gods', Odysseus often acts through personal assessments of a situation – he's crafty and clever. But so is his faithful and desperate wife Penelope, and the cunning female demi-spirits and goddesses. These strong females with their own point of view has led some commentators to believe the *Odyssey* was written by a woman, although the societal framework is clearly patriarchal.



Odysseus and the Sirens by John William Waterhouse

The episode with the deadly sirens who lure men to destruction with their seductive song comes from a comfortably masculine mindset. Often they are depicted as mermaids. In the painting above they are harpies, mythical birds with human female faces.

Many old certainties do start to fall away, however, and humanity finds itself in a liminal zone, as if there is a long, deep and often fearful cultural breathing in, accompanied by questions before new outcomes burst forth. And so we arrive at the period philosopher Karl Jaspers called the Axial Age

Wisdom, the divine feminine, was active in the extraordinary cultural movements of the sixth century BCE. In India Gautama Buddha reached enlightenment. In Babylon Zarathas taught the secrets of the starry heavens and prophesied the incarnation of the *saoshyant* who would reveal the Sun Being on earth. Cyrus the Great, king of the Persian Empire from 550 BCE wrote the first known declaration of human rights. In China Confucius taught his practical wisdom of moral behaviour and Laozi wrote the *Tao Te Ching* with its Taoist philosophy of 'going with the flow'. Pythagoras formed his mystery school at Croton, which included many

women – his discovery of the harmonies of the cosmos in music and mathematics would have a profound influence on scientists, philosophers and artists. Greek metaphysics emerged with the Pre-Socratics such as Thales, Anaximander, Parmenides and Heraclitus. We have the soul-searching tragedies of playwright Aeschylus and a new poetry of personal feelings, the lyric, in Sappho and Alcaeus on the island of Lesbos (two women – after all, poetry is inspired by the female goddesses, the Muses).

Yet in the age of the Intellectual Soul the goddess Wisdom was being radically transformed. Judaism developed after captives in Babylon were permitted to return to Judea from 539 BCE and scribes led by Ezra set to work editing and transforming old holy writings. The ‘religion of the book’ would emerge with the Wisdom goddess in there but disguised and hidden beneath the Law of Yahweh.

She took a different form in Greek philosophy – *philos-Sophia*, ‘love of wisdom’, giving rise to a shift towards the idea of an overarching moral imperative that could be discovered personally through questioning and seeking and becoming a true friend of wisdom.

Aesthetic and philosophical systems would develop that explored the rational order of the cosmos and how to live the ‘good’ according to its principles. Greek artistic culture grew out of this profound feeling for the spiritual ideal, the heavenly Wisdom behind physical forms. I’ll always remember standing before the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis profoundly moved by its awesome beauty undimmed by time’s ruinous attack. Its architects came as close as humans on earth can to achieving the harmonic ideal through their understanding of ratio and proportion. Greek thought was to permeate nations from Egypt to India through the conquests of Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE).