

Evidence of Matriarchy being overrun my Patriarchy

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The Sumerian legend of the Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi (See <http://home.earthlink.net/~templezagduku/dumuzi.html> or <http://www.mindspring.com/~mysticgryphon/synopsis.htm> or <http://www.craton.net/inanna/main.php?action=synopsis>) describes a time when Sumer was ruled by a woman in a matriarchial society. I find this interesting. I tried asking anthropologists if Inanna was a real person but maybe I'll have more response from archeologists.

Inanna –or Ishtar– is probably best known as a character in the Epic of Gilgamesh (See <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/MESO/GILG.HTM> or <http://novaonline.nv.cc.va.us/eli/eng251/gilgameshstudy.htm>). In that story –reportedly the world's oldest story– Inanna desired Gilgamesh and he rejected her. Inanna sent "the Bull of Heaven" to kill Gilgamesh and cursed his friend, Enkidu, to die after the two of them teamed up to kill it.

The basic problem is that the historical Sumerian king Gilgamesh has been dated back to 4700 years ago whereas references to Inanna, presumably, date back 5500 years ago to the begining of Sumerian writing. Clearly they weren't contemporaries.

I have a theory. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Sumer is clearly becoming a patriarchy. Gilgamesh is described as "two-thirds god" presumably because he was fathered by one of his mother's priests and not by Lugalbanda, his mother's husband, who was also considered a god. Power was handed down through Gilgamesh's mother, not by Gilgamesh's father. Nor was his mother considered a whore because she had more than one consort. Nevertheless, it is Gilgamesh's son, Ur-Nungal who became the king after Gilgamesh. As a ruler of Sumer, Gilgamesh exploited women and, his rejection of Ishtar, may have been symbolic of his rejection of the old matriarchy. The Epic of Gilgamesh describes Ishtar as evil and vengeful but, ultimately, unable to prevent Gilgamesh from assuming power without a queen.

>>From <http://www.pinn.net/~swampy/inanna1.html>

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"Inanna relates to the Neolithic Great Mother and is considered one of the three Great Goddesses of the Bronze Age: Isis, Inanna, and Cybele being the three. As the Great Mother she gives life and to the waxing and wanning moon...her mythology revolved around the connections made between the dark and light phases...she is Bride, Sister, Mother...and her dark phases is reflected in her sister, Ereshkigal.

"There is a lot of political change between Inanna and Ishtar, and perhaps addition of local male gods, and differences in the Goddess's relation to the new local gods. Civilization is creating itself, and the shift from matrilineal to patriarchal is going on here. There are clues in the myths if we read them with an open mind and look for traces of this.

"There was a definite shift when the Semite people from the North came into the South. The Goddess was the predominate deity in the South and the people from the North brought in the male sky Gods; that is when you begin to see that a male God "seized" a Goddess. This was not something that one sees in the southern cultures, they were still following the older Neolithic Mother Goddess traditions. Later on, the Goddess becomes a wife or a sister, not the Great Mother of the past."

The website I just quoted blames Semitic people for crushing the old matriarchy and introducing patriarchy. I disagree. I think the Epic of Gilgamesh is about two things: first, the transformation of Sumer from a matriarchy to a patriarchy and, second, Gilgamesh's realisation that man can achieve a kind of immortality if his work, in this case both his part in the building of the city of Uruk and in his supposed writing of the Epic of Gilgamesh itself, live on to be admired by future generations. Who can argue with his reasoning, 4700 years later when the Epic of Gilgamesh is available in bookstores, libraries and on the net and the city of Uruk, though buried under sand for thousands of years, exists as evidence that this man actually lived? Patriarchy and immortality are related, naturally, in that by passing on your kingdom to your male descendents you guarantee that it is your name that goes down in history: hence we have the Sumerian King list and not the Sumerian Queen list. In the battle of the sexes, it was the winner who got to write the history books, or tablets in this case.

So what happened to transform Sumer into a patriarchy? The Epic of Gilgamesh speaks of a Great Flood. Perhaps this was a historical event that happened locally in the mesopotamian region. This historic local flood could have been –and probably was– the inspiration for the Biblical global flood. I suspect that the great flood may have

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destroyed the old matriarchial society and caused it to be replaced by the more brutal, less civilized, patriarchial society described in the Epic of Gilgamesh (in which Gilgamesh claimed the right to have sex with brides before their marriage, for example).

The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi clearly portrays a matriachy: Dumuzi was a mere shepherd who became king by marrying Inanna, the queen. In a related story, Inanna returns from hell and finds Dumuzi having assumed the role of king and Inanna has him sent to hell in his place. In contrast, the Epic of Gilgamesh portrays a king who is firmly in control and does not need a woman to rule.

Biblical and archeological evidence would place the Great Flood to around 5250 years ago. There's no evidence of a more recent great flood in Mesopotamia, certainly not one wiping out the civilization, and in any case it has to date back more than 4700 years for the story to have been passed down to the historical Gilgamesh.

Here, I am taking at face value the idea that the Epic of Gilgamesh was largely written by Gilgamesh himself, a fictionalized autobiography if you will, specifically –and cynically– designed, by his own admission, as a means by which his name would go down in history. This is similar to the way Chinese rulers created fictional legends about themselves. To me, this is a plausible explanation for the origin of the Epic of Gilgamesh, although I am not by no means an expert and the story was, no doubt, changed by the time the official Akkadian version was written down.

Now I'm thinking that Inanna was a real person who lived before the Great Flood and Gilgamesh was a real person who lived after the Great Flood and that the contrast between the Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi and the Epic of Gilgamesh in terms of the relative importance of male and female rulers indicates that their society was a matriachy before the Great Flood and became a patriachy soon after. This makes a lot of sense to me.

Following the destruction if the Great Flood, men might have been able to convince people that the Gods had rejected rule by women. Myths such as that of Pandora's Box and the Garden of Eden seem to reflect the idea that women cannot be trusted to make decisions and should not be obeyed. (When I refer to the Garden of Eden as a "myth", I should point out that it is, at best, a legend because there are no written records dating back more than 5500 years.)

Presumably Egypt was a matriarchy more than 5000 years ago. Presumably Egypt became a patriachy with rule by Pharoahs 5000 years ago when invaders from Mesopotamia brought their patriarchial society with them.

Patriachy was set into law in Babylon with the Code of Hummarabi around 3800 years ago. The Code of Hummarabi was a Draconian code in which women who committed adultery could be stoned to death. Similar laws

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were included in the old testament and some Muslim societies, to this day, strictly follow this code.

If I am right about all this then the Great Flood represented a great tragedy, not simply due to the loss of life at the time, but due to the destruction of a great matriarchial society in which women were actually seen as superior to men. In the past four millenia, women have been able to win back some of the rights they lost but they will never be able to achieve equal status with men.

I am going to include some quotes below that I am going to copy and paste from previous posts of mine on sci.anthropology. Basically, it would seem that matriarchy was seen as natural because women were able to have children

but men were not. Only when the connection between sex and fertility was understood could there be dynasties based on the passing of power and property from father to son: in a matriarchy in which a female queen had many consorts, no one consort could claim to be THE father of her children so there wouldn't have been a clear line of descent from father to son. Even in Gilgamesh's day, this would appear to have been true because it was known that the king wasn't his real father and that he was only "two thirds god (and one third human)". Gilgamesh's son, however, did succeed him as king.

Anyway, on with the quotes.

<http://www.bigeye.com/sexeducation/ancientegypt.html>

"Ancient Egypt's lineage was traced through women and property was passed through women. For this reason, Ancient Egypt originated as a matriarchy. The pharaohs were trustees of the property passed down and their reign was decided by their matrilineal status. Because of the matrilineal structure, husbands would lose their property and status if their wife died. The property was passed down to the daughters and granddaughters. Many incest relations began with fathers and daughters and granddaughters because the men wanted to stay with the property. There were also numerous brother/sister incest marriages."

Similarly,

<http://womenshistory.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F...>

"The argument for the existence of prehistoric matriarchal societies (societies, that is, in which familial and political authority was wielded by women), first developed by Johann Jacob Bachofen [see also the section Mother Goddess under Women in Prehistory], was further articulated by, among others, Friedrich Engels in his book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* published in 1884. Engels argued that the transition from primate societies to the earliest human social structure was achieved by granting to solidarity a supreme importance which transcended even sexual competitiveness and jealousy. According to Engels, solidarity was achieved through "group marriage"

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where whole groups of kin-related women were collectively "married" to whole groups of men. Under these circumstances, only the mother of a child was known, so kinship tended to be traced through the female line, creating what Engels called a "matrilineal clan." The kinship rights of men were his sisters and her children.

"The question of whether or not some cultures in the early historical period were, if not matriarchal, then at least matrilineal, is today a controversial one. The consensus among most anthropologists and sociologists is that a strictly matriarchal society never existed. The issue has important ramifications. To argue in support of matrilinearity in ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Crete, and Anatolia is also to argue that these cultures were still matrilineal as they entered the historical period; that they, and by inference other cultures too, were matrilineal in the prehistoric era. If this was indeed the case, then matrilinearity was, and for some still is, a more "natural" (because prehistoric and therefore "primitive," uncorrupted, and true) arrangement of human society. This "natural" state, however, was gradually destroyed as men established the "unnatural" condition of patriarchy by subjugating women and usurping female power.

"The historical period, beginning around 5,500 years ago, marks the beginning of the rise of patriarchy. It arose gradually, however, and for a while women appear to have maintained, mostly by default of tradition and custom, especially in conservative societies like that in Ancient Egypt, a position of importance that was not only different from but, and this is the crucial point, also independent of that of men. In other words, for a while in Ancient Egypt (and also in Minoan Crete and still in Archaic Greece), women were recognized as embodying an identity and power which derived from, and was based upon, the female, of which the Mother Goddess, and ultimately all female goddesses, was its manifestation. It was a power acknowledged and respected by men which resided in the female and could be claimed by all women; it was not, as it subsequently became in the later Egyptian, Greek, and Minoan periods and has remained ever since, a power defined and delimited by men."

Indeed, <http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/99/maya/sarah.html>

"Worship of the Goddess began in matriarchal prehistoric societies in which the people did not possess the conscious understanding of the relationship between sex and conception, and believed that women had the power to create life, in which men had no part. In these societies, names, titles, possessions, and territorial rights passed along female lines. In the Ancient Near East, Southeastern and Central Europe, Egypt and Crete, women, like the land, were seen as the primary source of life. These early agriculturalists envisioned a female deity, the Earth Mother Goddess, as the creative power behind all animal and plant fertility."

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Sumer was probably the same way, except that they clearly recognized the connection between sex and fertility.

<http://www.sexuality.org/1/wh/whsacre2.html>

"Both Qualls–Corbett and Monick assert that prior to the Christian era sexuality was a – or, more likely, the – primary way in which people experienced and expressed their spiritual leanings. In Sumer, Babylonia, Phoenicia, and other early civilizations the feminine principle stood for abundance, fertility, nurturance, and passion. These archetypal qualities remain where the feminine principle is still embodied today, but while they were highly valued and praised through worship of the goddess in matriarchal times, they have fallen in stature in our patriarchal ones."

If Inanna lived in Sumer 5500 years ago and was considered a goddess then perhaps the legends of Isis, Venus and Cybelle were based on her.

<http://www.ejfi.org/Civilization/Civilization–12.htm>

"We see an example in Egypt where the matriarchy was overcome by a patriarchy invading from Mesopotamia roughly 5,000 years BP, or about 3,000 B.C. Before the patriarchal invasion, writing and tool use were unknown in Egypt."

Patriarchy was enshrined by the Code of Hummarabi (18th Century BC).

<http://www.earth–history.com/Sumer/>

"Mesopotamian society was a patriarchal society, and so women possessed far fewer privileges and rights in their marriage. A woman's place was at home and failure to fulfil her duties was grounds for divorce. If she was not able to bear children, her husband could divorce her but he had to repay the dowry. If his wife tried to leave the home in order to engage in business, her husband could divorce her and did not have to repay the dowry. Furthermore, if his wife was a "gadabout, . . . neglecting her house [and] humiliating her husband," she could be drowned.

"Women were guaranteed some rights, however. If a woman was divorced without good reason she received the dowry back. A woman could seek divorce and get her dowry back if her husband was unable to show that she had done anything wrong. The mother also chose a son to whom an inheritance would be passed.

"Sexual relations were strictly regulated as well. Husbands, but not wives, were permitted sexual activity outside marriage. A wife caught committing adultery was pitched into the river. Incest was strictly forbidden. If a father committed incestuous relations with his daughter, he would be banished. Incest between a son and his mother resulted in both being burned."

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Talk about a 180 degree change in a matter of a few centuries! The change makes sense if property was passed from father to son rather than mother to daughter: a father would be more concerned that a child was his if he was to receive his enheritance whereas a mother would have no doubt who her daughters were.

The change from matriarchy to patriarchy, of course, affected the way men and women related: before, men were subject to the whims of women and then, suddenly, it was reversed and women became almost like slaves in society. The implications go further, however: a patriarchy is necessarily more warlike with the male soldiers that once protected the women now running things. Suddenly there was the possibility for armies to conquer other lands and subjugate their people. No wonder patriarchial societies came to dominate! Men have been in control for thousands of years. The result? We almost destroyed ourselves in nuclear annihilation! Somehow I think we were all better off, men included, under matriarchy.

I really want to know what people here think about this.

Martin