

Section 7 – the Emerging Patriarchy

Babylon

Desert irrigation contains the seed of its own destruction by depositing salts in the soil. There is not enough natural rainfall to leach these out again. Progressively increasing salinity in the soil around Uruk, caused by many hundreds of years of artificial irrigation, began to cause problems. Crop yields fell, and a change was made from the production of wheat to barley, which is more resistant to salt. The people tried flushing the land with fresh water, but ultimately there could be no cure and climate change, over-intensive agriculture and salination of the soil turned the fertile plain of Sumer into a sterile desert. Uruk collapsed and now sits abandoned in desolation, with no sign that it was once the greatest and most beautiful city on Earth and one that was truly of the Goddess.

By that time, war had scourged the land for hundreds of years, and the centre of power had shifted from the Sumerian south east of Mesopotamia to the Akkadian north west. Ishtar remained a goddess of love, but she was increasingly seen in her role as goddess of war. She was no longer just the lioness who bares her teeth in defence of her family, but the hunting lioness leading a great horde of armed men on the path of pillage and spoil. She embodied the military power of Babylon. Fearsome armies marched out through the Gate of Ishtar, and she was their Great Goddess. She was revered and worshipped by her people and, more importantly, hated and feared by Babylon's enemies.

From the third millennium BC onwards, not a century passed without catastrophic warfare within the territory. As a result of this turmoil, we see evolving religious beliefs. Son and daughter gods overthrow old gods, usually replacing them with even more brazen warriors. Inanna might have been the lioness who defended her children, but Ishtar had acquired the patriarchal characteristic of territorial aggression.

It would not be long before a male god was put in charge and women deemed as being 'half the value' of men, and allowed no access to power in military, religious, political or spiritual areas of life.

Men would stand tall over the bloody wars that they caused, venerated as heroes and their violence and fighting ability celebrated. For thousands of years to come, those at the top of the hierarchy would subjugate those at the bottom. Many male warriors would die, but the principal

victims of this ongoing carnage would be women and the children they sought to protect, the old, the ill and the weak.

The patriarchy had come of age.