

Section 7 – the Emerging Patriarchy

The Patriarchy's Greatest Fear

Kings have always taken counsel from prelates and in Sumer this was undoubtedly so. Sumerian cities were theocracies, where political and religious powers merged.¹ The king's religious, spiritual, and temporal consort was the High Priestess. The priestesses had great power, for they had the ear of the king; power flowed from the Goddess to the King, and the Priestesses were the Goddess incarnate. They had the ability to influence events, to see those they favoured rewarded and those they did not cast down.

As cities developed, so did formalised systems of government and regulation. The Sumerians invented the contract and a type of cylinder-seal that could be rolled into a clay tablet to perform the same function as a notary's seal. This being a theocracy, the lawyers who drew up contracts and the bureaucracy that administered them would have been of the priestly classes. Control over that bureaucracy, and control over the treasury that would pay for everything, was the remit of the main temple of the city's patron deity.

But temporal and political power is coveted. Like the other Mesopotamian cultures that followed it, Sumer was polytheistic, with both male and female deities. In the early culture, these were all served by priestesses, but as the patriarchy developed some of them began to be served by male priests instead. They were jealous of the political power of the priestesses.

As the wealth of the Sumerian cities increased, notions of class status arose; a function of the burgeoning patriarchy. For the first time society had its rich and its poor. An unequal distribution of wealth naturally led to an unequal distribution of power. With the rise of warrior culture, men, especially men of the lower classes, were expected to fight and die not only to protect their city and their families but also to expand the wealth of their kings and the powerful men at the top of the hierarchical pyramid. The patriarchy weighs most heavily on women, but also on men.

The fundamental tool through which the patriarchy exercises control is by legally binding each woman, as property, to a man and punishing her for any transgression. We still see today, in some cultures, how women who have been the victims of rape may be legally flogged for 'sex outside marriage' and those who dare to have extra-marital sex willingly are judicially murdered

¹ Jacobsen, Thorkild (Ed.). *The Sumerian King List*. Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. 1939.

in public.² There is nothing as important to the patriarchy as the control of women's ability to create life. Even today in the West, a constant battle must be fought against the repressive forces that try to limit women's rights over their own reproduction. The appropriation of property rights, by men, over women's bodies, and the entrenchment of this through law and custom, is the cornerstone of the patriarchy.

This is why right-wing religious demagogues and the groups they animate today are so militant in their opposition to what they see as the dilution of the institution of marriage. They hate the idea of people 'just living together' because it undermines their power over society. For marriage to have meaning, *they must approve it*. Think how much more galling it must be for them, to see same-sex marriages permitted and honoured! Marriage, in their minds, exists as a mechanism for the enslavement of women to men, and so it must be *between* a man and a woman.³ For them, a woman marrying another woman confers the right of marital slave-ownership upon a woman, an unthinkable contradiction in terms. Even more insufferable to them is the idea of marriage between two men since, for them, marriage is not a profession of deep and sincere love of two equals but an arrangement by which one is put under the dominion of another. It is invidious, to this mindset, to see two men marry because, once again, it undermines the power structure inherent in the patriarchal concept of marriage.

But the patriarchy's fantasy is just that, for in truth, women do not need men at all. They just need semen, and everything else they can happily manage for themselves. One man can make hundreds of women pregnant, given the opportunity and energy, but once his purpose as impregnator is served, he has no further function. Women are perfectly capable of managing society, finding or growing food and bringing up their children without the assistance of a man, and the way they do this is to come together in matriarchal groups. That is something that the patriarchy goes to immense lengths to prevent.

This is why it punishes single mothers and their children, once condemned as 'bastards', and lesbian women who live in partnerships of mutual support. Above all else, the patriarchy fears sexually and reproductively independent women, supported by their sisters. A man who is promiscuous may be occasionally called a 'womaniser', but more often he is admired. Consider what a woman who is similarly in control of her sexuality is called – whore, tart, loose woman, slut – the litany of obscene names is long. Lesbian couples who use the seed of an unknown

² In Islamic law, adultery is a crime of property and all women belong to a man. A woman who willingly has sex outside marriage denies either her father or her husband's possession of her sexuality. However, a man only commits adultery if he has sex with a woman who 'belongs' to another man. If he has sex with a girl or woman who is orphaned, widowed, abandoned, captive, 'dishonoured' or not Muslim, this does not count, since there is no right of property established over her sexuality. Yet, of course, such a woman can still be whipped or killed for having sex outside marriage.

³ Notice that in today's polygamous cults, such as Islam and Mormonism, only men are allowed multiple marriage partners. This speaks volumes about how these cults see women.

donor to conceive children and then raise them, never once knowing a father's 'authority', are likewise condemned.

Without the establishment of men as figures of power, dominant over women, the whole facade of established patriarchy crumbles into nothing.