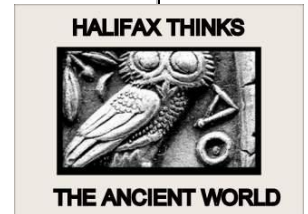


Before Civilization: The Patriarchy Thesis

Colin Starnes

Text in [blue](#) is a hyperlink. Text in **bold** suggests discussion topics. First mention of the names of key people (with dates) is in *underlined italics*. Large additions to the recording are in [square brackets].



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1 – The First Cities

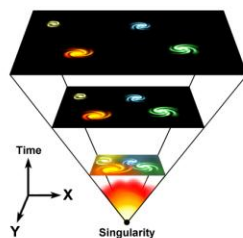
City-life and civilization began independently at least 3 times in 3 widely-separated places in the world. The absolute first group of cities was formed in the southern part of Mesopotamia starting around 3,500 BCE followed soon after by cities in the nearby Nile valley. The next to emerge was that of North China, from about 2,000 BCE. Finally, in 1,800 BCE, a third group appeared in Mesoamerica. These three were the mothers of all subsequent civilizations. Our focus in these lectures is on the family of civilizations that began in the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates, amongst Sumerian-speaking peoples, in the fourth millennium BCE.



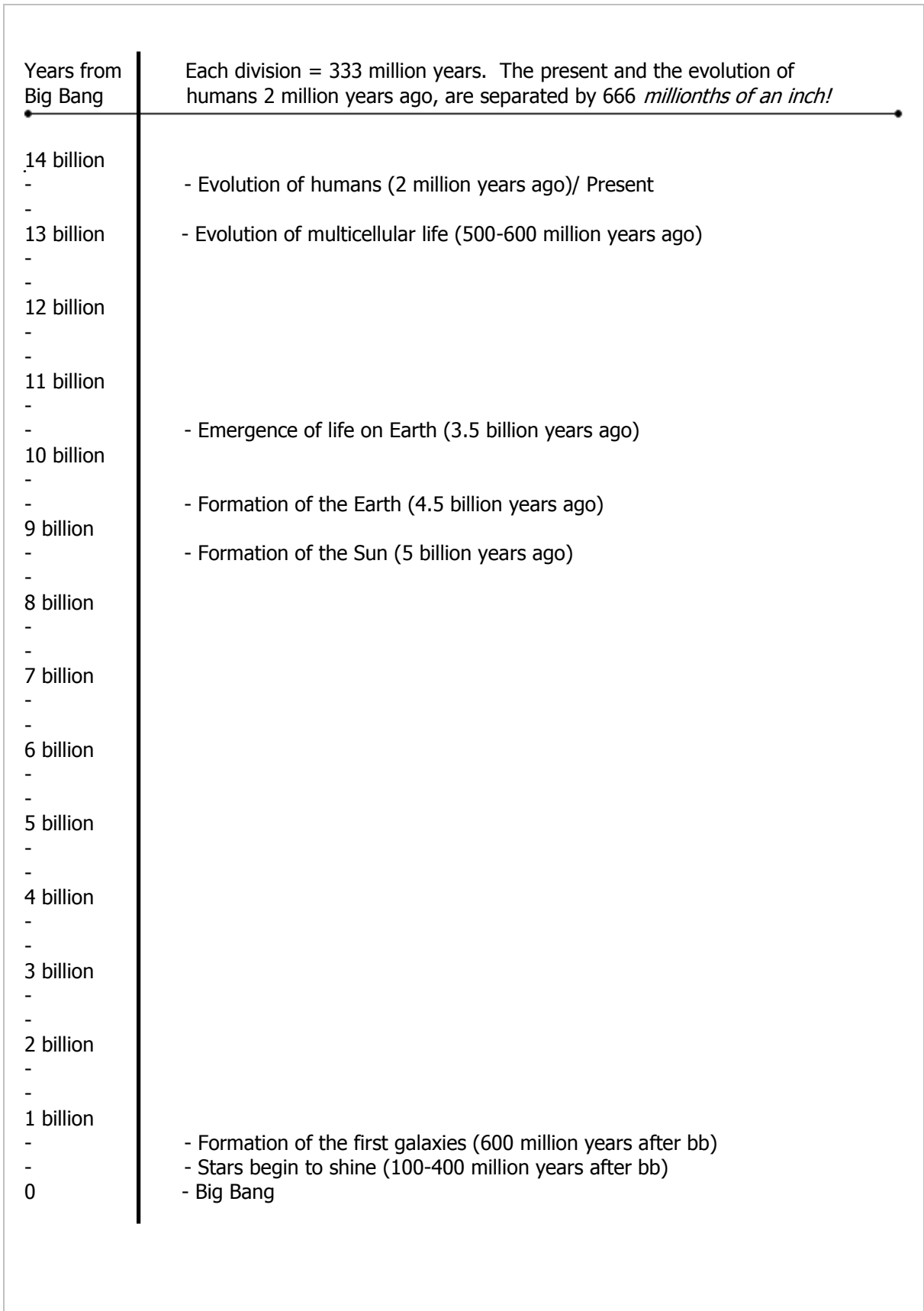
But before starting down that road let's try to place this momentous development in a context. We can do this with quick backward glance at the most important events which, as we now know, preceded the appearance of civilization. Amazingly, we are now able to see parts of the picture all the way back to the beginning of time and everything.

2 – The Big Bang

If we imagine the 5,000 years since the start of civilization as the last pages of a book, they would amount to about 40 cms of a volume that would be 1,200 kilometres thick if it had a page for each year going back to the Big Bang – the point from which the universe started, roughly 13.7 billion years ago. We know about the Big Bang by working backwards from the observed rate at which the all galaxies are moving away from one another. This implies that the universe has been continuously expanding from a primal state in which all its matter and energy and time and space were once compressed into a single point of unimaginable temperature and density – a singularity.



A rough [timeline](#) is sketched on the next page. In all those billions of years the human species has existed for only 2 million, and civilization for no more than the last 5 thousand!



3 – From Big Bang to the Creation of Earth

The Big Bang was not a conventional explosion in which pieces pre-existing matter are thrown outward into pre-existing space. Rather, it was an event which *created both matter and the space and time in which it existed*. The first particles immediately began to rush away from each other at fantastic speeds ‘dragging’, so to speak, time and space with them and thus creating the still expanding universe in which we find ourselves. As these particles separated, they cooled. In the first minutes they had cooled enough to allow the pre-atomic particles to come together in stable ways – from which atomic matter, as we know it, was then formed. 90% of all the atomic matter that came out of the big bang was, (and still is), the smallest, simplest atom, [hydrogen](#). The other 10% was, and is, the next lightest atom, helium.

As matter rushed apart it did so more or less uniformly in every direction– but not *absolutely* so. This created ‘ripples’ in the expanding universe – places where matter was more condensed than others. The greater gravity of the matter in these dense spots attracted more matter – eventually resulting in the formation of stars. After billions of years the first stars collapsed into [dense red giants](#). This created conditions in which heavier elements could now be formed out of atoms of Hydrogen and Helium. And they were – but only in minuscule amounts compared to these two which still constitute over 98% of all the atomic matter in the universe (by mass). The key was the creation of Carbon from the simultaneous fusion of 3

helium atoms. From Carbon all the other, heavier atoms were subsequently created – out of which planets, and amongst them, Earth, were ultimately formed.

4 – From the Appearance of Life to the First Humans: Darwin’s Account

A 19th century Englishman, *Charles Darwin (1808–1882)*, was the first to present a coherent scientific theory concerning the origin of living species. This appeared in his work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, published in 1859. He proposed that species come into existence by evolution – that is, by gradual changes over a very long time. He suggested three basic “mechanisms” which resulted in evolution. The first of these is **variation** within a species. This pointed to the fact that offspring of the same parents are never absolutely identical but exhibit minor variations from one another. Individual offspring, because of these differences, were not equally successful in the struggle to survive and reproduce in any given environment. He called this culling process “**natural selection**”. It is the second of his two “mechanisms”. The third was his assumption that the tendencies which had favoured parents were **inheritable**. The offspring thus shared the traits that advantaged their parents. So they too reproduced more offspring who lived to reproduce themselves than those who did not share the characteristic beneficial for survival in their actual environment.

Over time the inherited characteristics that secured this advantage would produce a new species better fitted to some particular place in the environment than any other creature at that time. Darwin's thesis is wonderfully simple – species emerge through variation of inheritable characteristics and natural selection.

Darwin saw that variations existed but had no explanation of why they did. There was no credible account of this until the work of *Gregor Mendel (1822-1884)*, and others, late in the 19th century. By the mid-20th century the actual mechanisms of inheritable variations had been confirmed through the discovery of genes, chromosomes, and DNA.

Darwin's thesis applies to every form of life on earth. Current research indicates that life here began approximately 3.5 billion years ago. Although the mechanism is not yet fully understood, it is becoming clear that, in certain naturally occurring circumstances, complex organic compounds formed that were able to make copies of themselves. These molecules eventually joined together to make the first living cells – that is, beings which nourished themselves and reproduced. For the next 3 billion years the only forms of life were tough, microscopic, unicellular creatures capable of living in conditions of extreme heat, cold, pressure, acidity, etc. There are perhaps a billion of species of these bacteria. Their descendants still form by far the largest part of the bio-mass of earth – more than all plant and animal life combined.

Around 500–600 million years ago, multicellular beings began to form, starting probably with sponges. Through evolution, this eventually led to all the living (and extinct) species of plants and animals on this planet. About 5 million years ago, proto–human ancestors speciated from the ancestors of chimpanzees.

5 – The Evolution of Humans

Of all the other living species on earth, humans are most closely related to three of the great apes: gorillas, chimpanzees, and their close cousins, bonobos. 92– 98.5% of their DNA is identical with ours; we share the same ABO blood groups with them; they have 48 chromosomes: we have 46.

Apes and humans belong to the large mammalian ‘Order of Primates’ which also includes lemurs and monkeys. Within that Order, humans belong to the Family of Hominids which includes all two–legged, man–like species, extinct or living. Within the Hominid family are a number of extinct erect–walking apes, our immediate ancestors, and ourselves. We are members of the Genus *Homo* ("Man"). Our species name is *Homo sapiens* ("wise or knowing man"). Sometimes we are further classified as a subspecies, *Homo sapiens sapiens*. All living humans are members of this subspecies.

Because of the similarities between apes and humans, Darwin speculated that they shared a remote common ancestor. He regarded gorillas and chimpanzees as our closest living relatives, and suggested that human origins lay in Africa – the

only place where these great apes live. His guess has proven correct. Darwin's thesis – that the emergence of our distinctive characteristics appeared in gradual stages over a long time – plus the evidence which has since emerged to support his view – can be seen in this image of three skulls.



[Start of MP3 Recording](#) – 2 of 7 – (10 minutes)

On the left, is the skull of the chimp-like hominid ape, *Australopithicus afarensis* “Southern Ape from Afar” – of which [Lucy](#) is the most famous example. On the right is that of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Such similarities led to a search for the expected intermediate forms – the “missing link” – shown here by the skull in the middle. This creature, nicknamed “Java Man”, was discovered in 1891 by a Dutch naturalist, Eugene Dubois (1858–1940), who had set out to confirm the theory and find the link. Believing that humans evolved in Asia, he

searched in Java and found the bones of this animal that seemed midway between apes and humans. He called it “erect ape-man”. Earlier examples of the species have since been found in Africa. It has been renamed *Homo erectus*, “erect or upright man”.

In the century since this discovery, well over two dozen other members of the hominid family – both apes and humans – have been found. As further evidence is uncovered, the relationships between these early hominid species are being constantly revised. They become more complex, but the overall picture – (1) *afarensis*, (2) *erectus*, (3) *sapiens* – also becomes more secure.

1 – *A. afarensis*. The species existed from 2.7 – 4 million years ago – and was discovered in 1974 in the Afar region of Ethiopia where the exceptionally complete skeleton of Lucy was unearthed. There is now clear evidence of other Hominid ape species, some of which existed as long as 6–7 million years ago. Yet it is Lucy, and the fragments of more than 300 individuals of her kind, that have provided the most exciting insights. In overall size, brain size, and skull shape she looks like a chimpanzee, but her pelvis reveals that she walked upright like humans. This shows that early hominids came down from trees long before the disappearance of woodlands and forests in eastern Africa. In other words, our Hominid ancestors were by chance “pre-adapted” to the conditions of drier, more open country that came to prevail later on. Her skeleton also overturned the then prevailing theory that the

development of a larger brain (than that of an ape) is what triggered the evolution of humans as bi-pedal creatures.

2 – *H. Erectus*. Dubois' discovery of *Homo erectus* has turned out to be one of the first human species – although examples have been found of earlier creatures for whom this title can be plausibly claimed – like the tool-using *H. habilis*, with a brain 30% larger than Lucy's. However, *H. erectus* had a brain 50% larger than that of *H. habilis* – which brought it near the size of that of modern man. *H. erectus* lived between 400,000 – 2 million – years ago. These creatures used a much more finely developed group of tools than any earlier species and there is (ambiguous) evidence that, by 1 million years ago, the species had learned to control and use fire. These beings seem to have been the first human species to migrate out of Africa and it is clear that they adapted to many different environments: their remains have been found in Europe, India, Indonesia, and China. Among early *Homo erectus*, the males are almost twice as big as the females – as was the case with *A. afarensis*. Yet about 1 million years ago the size differential between males and females changed and became roughly the same as in modern humans – where females are approximately 80% as large as males. This may signal important behaviour changes like the adoption of more human-like social structures.

3 – *H. sapiens*. This species has existed for at least 400,000 years but the earliest skull we possess that is in every way like our own – i.e., of the subspecies *Homo sapiens sapiens* – dates

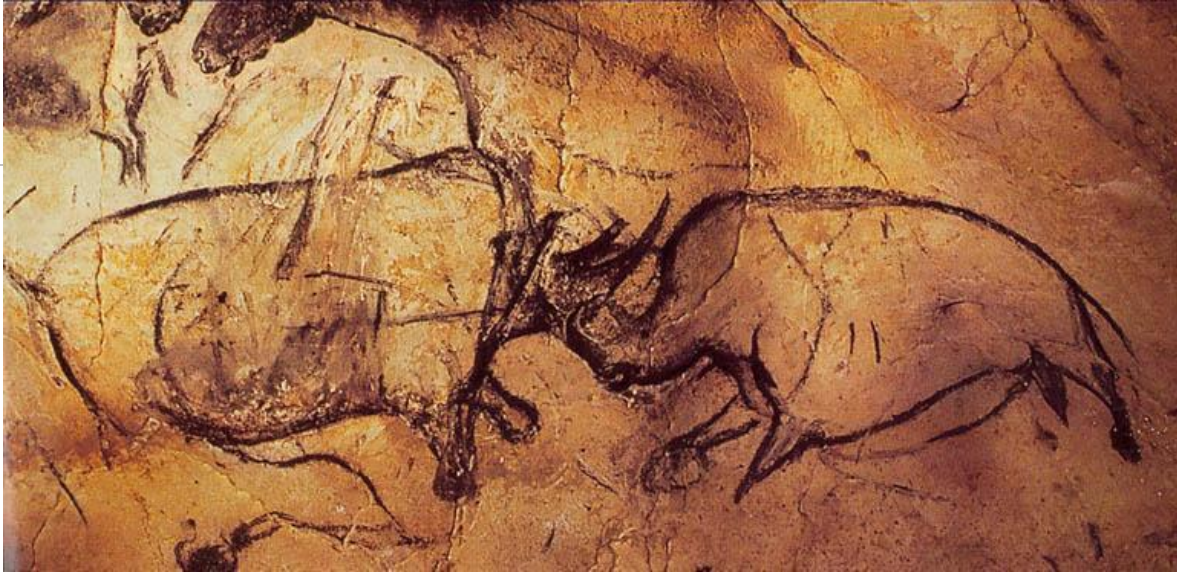
from 200,000 years ago. It was found at Omo in East Africa. By 30,000 years ago this species had either out-lived, out-competed, exterminated, or absorbed into its gene pool every other form of hominid. It was the only one left on the planet.

These ancestors of all modern humans had moved into Europe some 35,000 years ago where scores of sites – stretching from Spain to the Urals – have been discovered containing their remains and artefacts. These provide overwhelming evidence of pervasive cultural practices and of a complex social life.

They used a sophisticated range of tools which began to change fairly rapidly, unlike those of the earlier humans who had continued to make the same tool in the same way over tens of thousands of years. These people were not merely foragers or scavengers but were able to hunt large and

dangerous mammals – and they did so in a harsh Ice-Age environment. They used fire, cooked, made clothes, were able to care for the ill and knew of the medicinal properties of plants. They practised burial and, above all, had developed the use of symbols – which we see in the amazing cave paintings found all over Europe.





We cannot be certain when humans began to speak but these paintings indicate a level of abstraction that is close to that of language. Dated to 32,000 ybp, they come from the recently discovered (1994) Chauvet cave in south France. The drawings (aurochs, rhinoceros, and horses) antedate the more famous cave paintings at Lascaux by about 15,000 years.

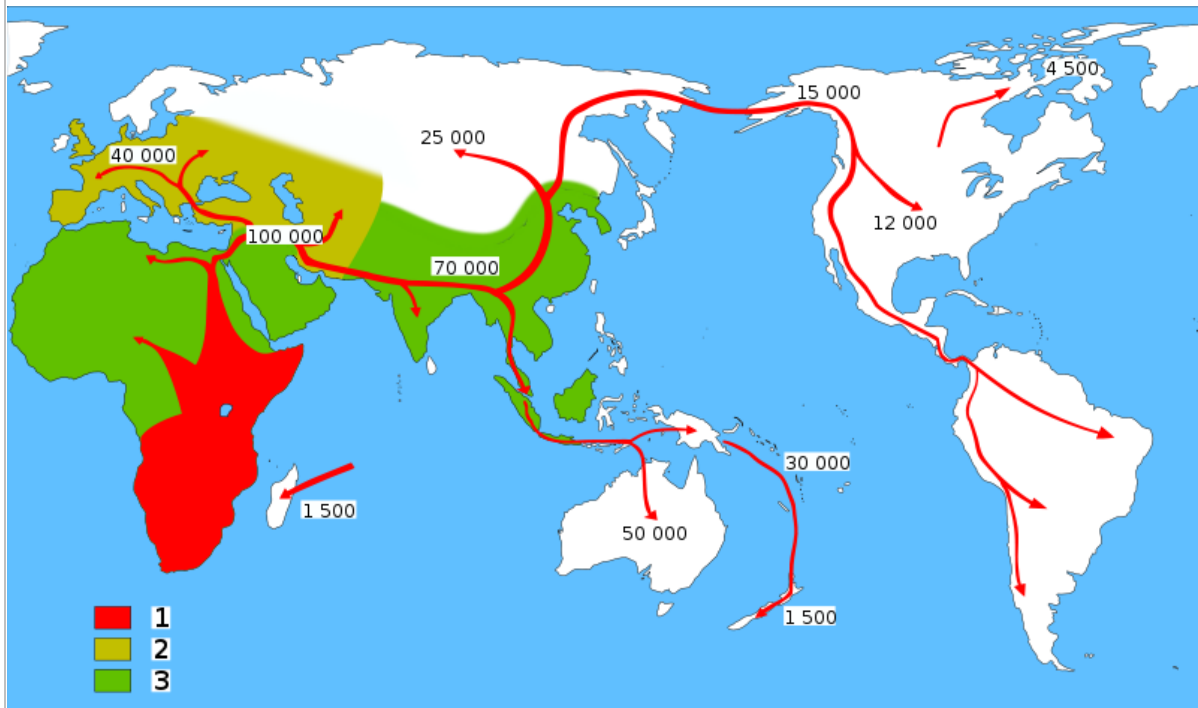


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6 – From Hunter–Gatherers to the Neolithic Revolution

It is now believed that *Homo sapiens* began to spread out of Africa 100,000 years ago. They were established in Asia by 70,000 years ago, in Europe by 40,000 years ago, and reached the Americas by about 15,000 ybp. As they went, they gradually displaced all other early human forms on earth – species like *Homo neanderthalis*. Neanderthal man had descended, independently, from *H. Erectus*, (some of whom had left Africa and colonized Eurasia as early as 2 million years ago). The reasons for the ultimate success of *H. sapiens* are in question.

For most of our time on earth *Homo sapiens* have lived primarily as hunter–gatherers. It is generally assumed that the

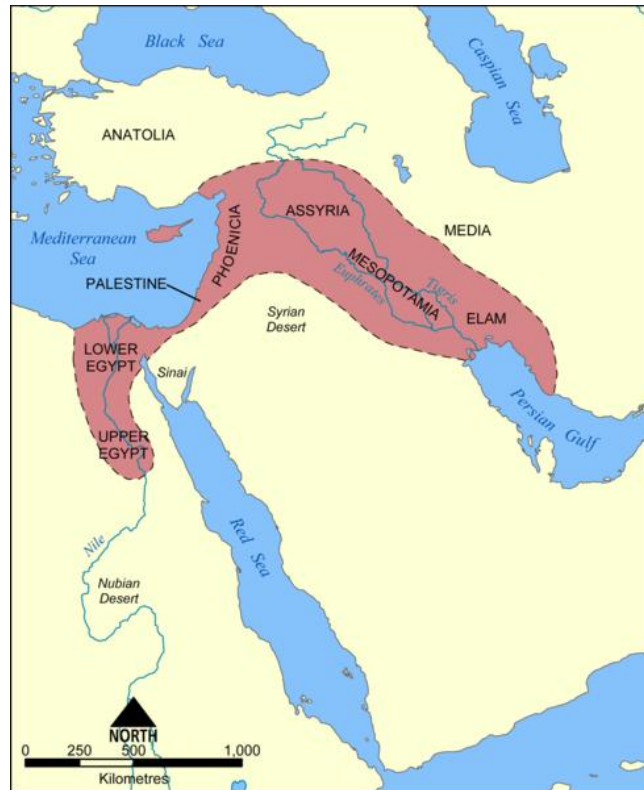


males hunted and the females, encumbered by nursing offspring, stayed closer to 'home' and gathered. This nomadic way of life exploits many resources lightly rather than depending heavily on a few. There is clear evidence that our ancestors knew the uses and properties of several hundred plant species within their range – both as food and medicine – and that they understood the requirements for growing many of them. Archaeologists believe that, in temperate climates, gathering provided about 75% of their needs and hunting the remainder. Roaming a defined range in bands that rarely exceeded 250 persons they had “a surprisingly diverse diet and abundant leisure.” With knowledge, tools and tasks shared communally there was little specialization and no sharp gender or social distinctions. Above all there appears to have been a very robust and effective natural check on fertility so that the human population tended to stay in balance with available resources.

Nonetheless, for reasons that are much debated, the deliberate, [settled cultivation](#) of plants as either a replacement for, or a major supplement to, hunter-gathering, began, independently, and at different times, (between about 10,000 and 6,000 ybp), in at least six widely separated parts of the globe. Contrary to what we might think, the introduction of agriculture does not seem to have immediately resulted in a healthier population but rather the opposite. It may well have originated as a second best to hunter-gathering when for some reason a people became restricted to a small area so

they could no longer follow either the ripening plants through the seasons or the animals that fed on them.

The earliest evidence of a cultivated crop so far uncovered is from the Solomon Islands in Melanesia where taro was introduced for human use about 25,000 years ago. The introduction of agriculture in the [Fertile Crescent](#), between 7,000 – 9,000 BCE, was to be especially important from its eventual connection with the first cities.



There are only a few dozen plants other than fruits and nuts, berries and vegetables that can be cultivated for food or fibre – just as there are only 14 species of animals that can be domesticated for agricultural purposes. In the Fertile Crescent, Neolithic agriculture depended on a “basket” of 8 domesticable plants – 3 cereals, 4 pulses (i.e., legumes), and flax.

When it finally happened, settled agriculture led to the creation of large Neolithic villages, of which Jericho is the oldest (8,500 BCE), and Catalhoyuk (7,500 BCE), in Anatolia, is the largest yet

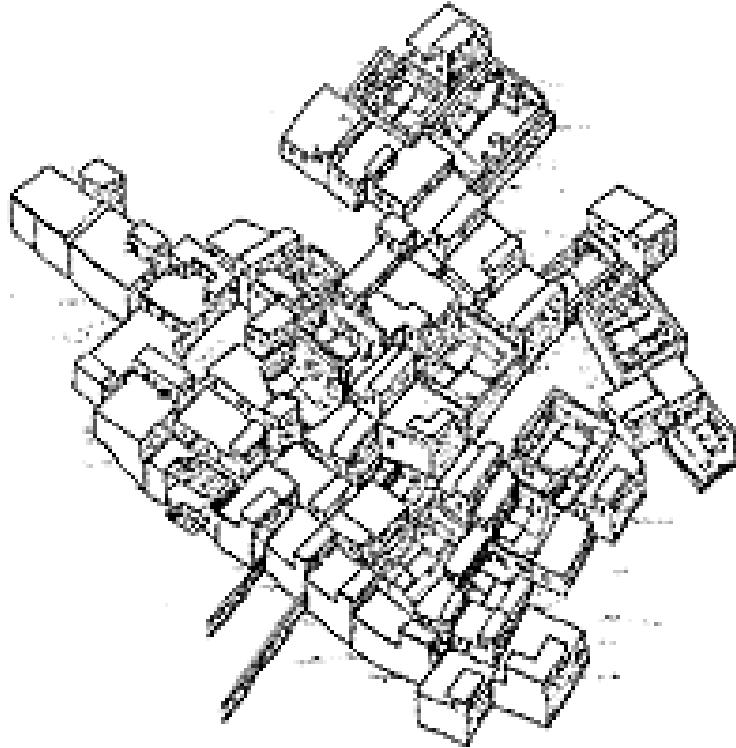
discovered. It had a population in the range of 5,000 – 8,000 people.

Settled agriculture increased population since females, who now did not have to limit births to the number of infant children they could with them, as did hunter-gatherers, could substantially shorten the spacing between births. Increasing population required new means of decision-making – leading in the direction of formally established government. It also encouraged new concepts of property since grain that had been planted acquired a different status than the same grain happened on in the course of gathering. As humans settled they drew into much closer contact with those animals that they were able to domesticate. This exposed them to certain diseases that jumped to humans from animals – amongst which were influenza, smallpox, and measles. This exposure ultimately increased the human immunity to these diseases.

*[Jared Diamond](#) (1937 –), in *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, points out that the native peoples of the Americas were decimated by the rapid spread of such diseases to which they had no immunity since there were neither horses nor cattle in the New World until these species were introduced by the Europeans in the 16th c.*

Settled agriculture also created the possibility of surplus food. This brought with it the need for storage facilities, the possibility of trade, and the appearance of specialized work

not concerned with getting food – such as the various occupations of governors, soldiers, and artisans.



Drawing of [Catal Hoyuk](#) by its discoverer, *James Mellaart (1925-2012)*. This sketch shows the complex beehive of streetless structures, the only access of which was by ladder through openings in the roof.

7 – The Meaning of Civilization

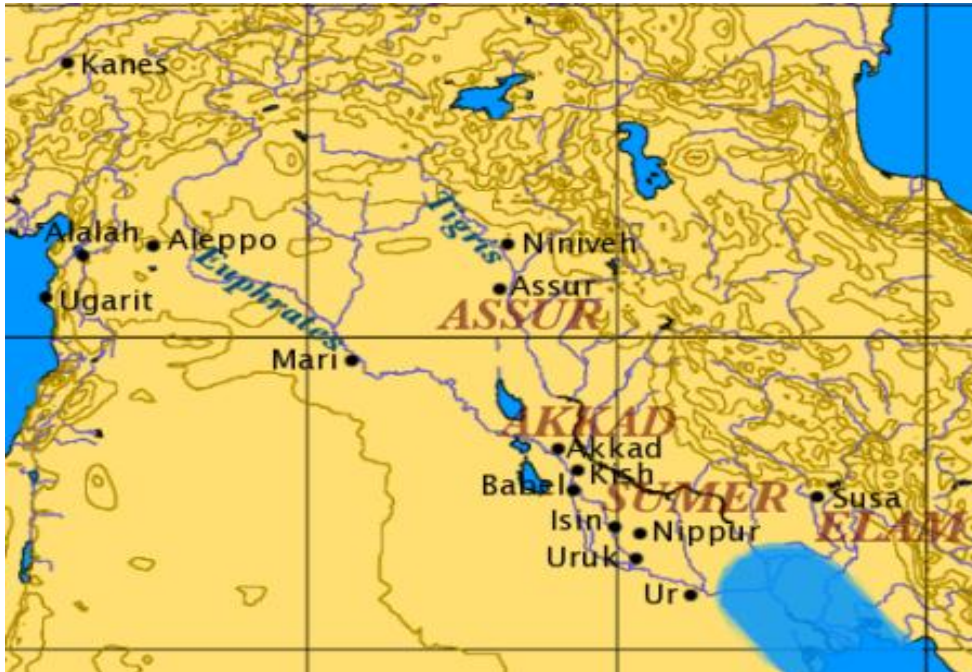
A city is not just a village with a lot more people, nor is it a certain kind, or quantity, of buildings, walls or other structures. [At first](#) cities were not even places where humans dwelt so much as they were the homes or estates of the gods and the location of their altars. There is evidence that when cities first began, people still lived in the country and only

came to the city to worship, trade, or – in times of danger – for the protection of its fortified citadels.

In the prehistory of human societies, villages, including even the largest like Jericho and Catalhoyuk, were kin-based communities, without writing, whose organization was closely tied to agriculture. Cities, on the other hand, were so large (with at least 25,000 inhabitants) as to be composed of significant numbers of people who are **neither kin-related nor directly employed in the production of food**. These two factors introduced a new dynamic.

Cities were a completely new and different form of human association from any that preceded them through all the hundreds of thousands of years since our species came into being. The earliest cities (Uruk, Ur, Erich, and some dozen others), collectively known as ‘Sumerian’ (the term applies to all speakers of the Sumerian language), appeared in the southern end of the valley between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in approximately 3,500 BCE. The foundation of cities was a crucial turning-point in human history. It marks the start of what we call civilization. Civilized life is human life which has been adapted to the city – understood as a union of humans who are not members of a single extended family or tribe. The Latin *civitas* – meaning either “citizen” or “a union of citizens”, lies at the root of the English “civil”, “civilized”, and “civilization”. It describes a new relation of humans to one another – i.e., primarily as *citizens*, rather than as family. A history of civilization is thus a history of the forms,

achievements, and changes that have occurred through, and to, humans whose most important form of association is that of the city – in which members of several families or tribes live together.



Mesopotamia showing the location of Sumerian cities and the coastline in 4,500 BCE

The primary features of cities include a permanently settled form of life on the basis of agriculture and husbandry and a division of labor such that not everyone is involved in the production and preparation of food – to a degree, these characteristics were already present in the large, late Neolithic, villages like Jericho and Catalhoyuk. More important than any of these *material* elements is the crucial distinction that **those who belong to the city are not simply members of a single extended family but include many such families under the rule of a common, expressed, law.**

City life also marks the origin of **recorded history**. As distinct from artifacts like stone tools, cave paintings and sculptures, or the remains of the earliest human-made structures (at Jericho, Catal Hoyuk and [Gobekli Tepe](#)), we have not found any form of an intentional human *record* that antedates the cuneiform tablets and cylinders discovered in the ruins of the Mesopotamian cities. By far the greatest numbers of these are simply records, for temple use, of the affairs of the god's estate – the accounting of what was produced, what was given to the god as sacrifices, what to men, what traded, with whom, for what, and so on. There are also records of the gods' instructions to men, of human petitions to the gods, legal codes and procedures and some few, but important, stories, amongst which are the creation myths and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.



Pre-cuneiform contract for the sale of a house and field – Shuruppak, c 2600 BCE.

8 – The Patriarchy Hypothesis

There is no clear answer as to why people began to build cities. It is now certain that the origin of cities is not connected, as was once thought, with the beginning of

agriculture and animal husbandry. These practices were established at least 5,000 years before the earliest cities – so they are neither an immediate cause of cities, nor do they result from their foundation. I propose that **the establishment of patriarchy is the primary – but not the sole – condition for the creation of cities.**

I suggest this as an answer to the question about why it is that, from the first cities of Mesopotamia to the present day – and in every part of the world where civilized life has appeared, ('civilized', that is, in the precise sense of the 'form of human life based on the city') – it has **always and everywhere been established on a patriarchal basis** and never as a matriarchy.

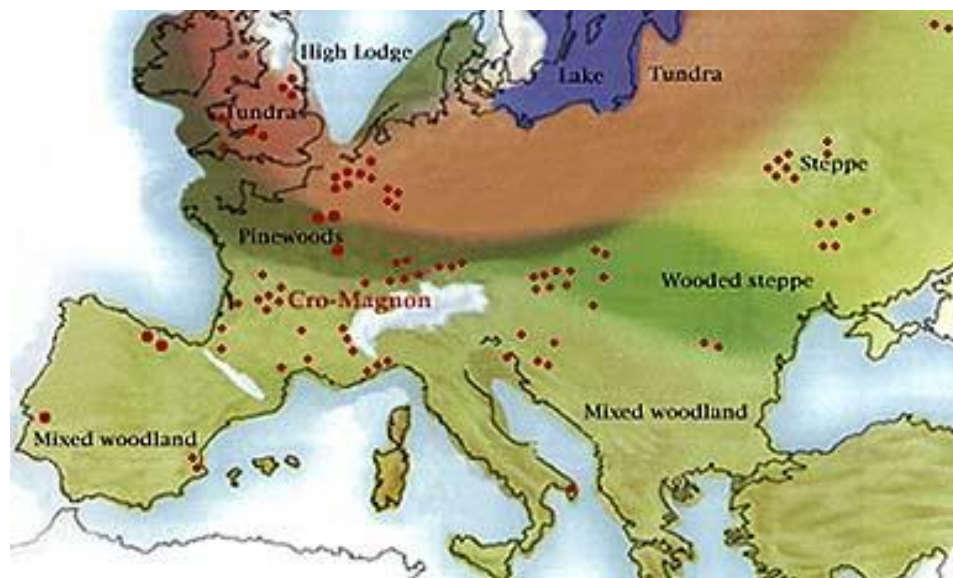
There *are* myths of human societies organized around women – such as the warlike Amazons of Greek legend. There are also a number of instances of small matrilineal, matrilocal, or matrifocal societies. Finally there are well-known cases in which the rule of a patriarchally organized city passes to a female who becomes its queen. But there is **not a single instance of a matriarchal city in which rule is consistently exercised by its females – a kind of polar opposite to patriarchy.**

[Start of MP3 Recording](#) – 4 of 7 – (14 minutes)

It is certain that the vast majority of people, both now, and since the start of recorded history, have supposed that

patriarchy is the proper and natural condition of our species – condoned by God and hardwired in our DNA. There is *some* science that supports this assumption. For one thing, as we have already remarked, human females have, on average, only 80% of the body mass of males. This means that, in this sense, males have an advantage in size they can use to dominate females. It is also the case that the three species of primates that are our closest relatives, gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos, all live in male-bonded societies – although in this they are an exception to the normal female-centered societies that are found with most other primates.

Nevertheless there is an expanding body of evidence which suggests that **patriarchy did not exist in the first 190,000 thousand of years of our existence as a species** – i.e., between the time *sapiens* first separated from the earlier *Homo* species like *erectus* right up to about 8,000 to 10,000 years before the present. Only then do we begin to find the first concrete signs of typical patriarchal structures. Most of this evidence has been uncovered in the past century and much of it comes from the many European sites containing the remains of Neolithic peoples – both *sapiens* and *neanderthal*. Nowhere else on earth is there such a rich concentration of evidence from this period. This evidence suggests that, from the colonization of Europe by *Homo sapiens* roughly 35,000 – 40,000 years ago), until the time when patriarchy makes its first, indisputable, appearance – which is only a few thousand years before the foundation of cities – patriarchy was unknown. Well, what is the evidence and how compelling is it?



Homo Sapiens sites in Europe 35,000 – 12,000 bce

9 – The Evidence (i), Johann Jakob Bachofen (1815–1887)

The suggestion that patriarchy might not be the invariable condition of humanity first began to be seriously considered in the 18th C as reports started to reach Europe from North America telling of native societies which traced heritage through the female line. By the mid19th C, a Swiss, Johann Bachofen, in his work, *MotherRight: An Investigation into the Religious and Juridical Character of Matriarchy in the Ancient World*, (1861), argued that the basic human social unit – the family – was originally defined through the female line since, amongst humans, **maternity is certain and knowable in a way that paternity can never be**. This, he claimed, resulted in a phase of **women’s social power which preceded the patriarchal family**. Thus in the first period of our species, descent was reckoned through the female line, inheritance passed from mothers to daughters, and women – having the only certain relation to children – were the leaders. Because women stay with their mother’s family this grouping gave them strength and formed the definitive unit of human society in which offspring were raised– while the males went off on their own (whether singly or in troupes). His ideas influenced many but were controversial for three main reasons.

The first problem is that Bachofen’s thesis was immediately confused with a common Victorian misinterpretation of Darwin’s account of evolution – according to which the development of human societies was understood as a series of

stages in which ‘better’ forms win out over the ‘less fit’ – resulting in a slow but inevitable progress from a primitive past towards a more perfect future. According to this view, matriarchy was a semi-barbaric, immature form of social organization on the way to the highest – i.e., present – state of ‘civilization’ as the chief construct of patriarchy. The [Social Darwinism](#) of this view should be abandoned, but the insight that patriarchy is not the most natural nor original system ought to be taken seriously.

The second problem is that what was supposed to precede patriarchy was spoken of as matriarchy by both Bachofen and [Engels\(1820– 1895\)](#), who used Bachofen’s thesis extensively in his own, influential, *Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). Through this book the notion of an ‘Age of Matriarchy’ entered into the Marxist canon and was widely disseminated. Bachofen and Engels thought of this as the *arche*, (=rule), of mothers – i.e., as a female version of patriarchy. This too was misguided and confusing. **The evidence is now overwhelming that there never has been a true matriarchy** – i.e., as the simple opposite of patriarchy – although, as we have noted, there are examples of matrilineal, matrilocal, and matrifocal societies.

Matrilineal means that children are identified through their mothers rather than through their fathers: extended families and alliances form along female bloodlines.

Matrilocal is used to describe societies where maternal authority is important in domestic affairs owing to the

fact that a husband joins the wife's family rather than the other way around; as such she is supported by her extended family and husbands tend to be isolated.

Matrifocal means a society in which only a mother and her dependent children are active and significant; adult males in the form of husbands, fathers, brothers, or mother's brothers are either absent or, if present, marginal. In the early 20th c the Polish anthropologist, *Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942)*, thought that the Tobriand Islanders of New Guinea formed a true matriarchy but this view has since been overturned. The principal examples of such matrilineal, matrilocal, and/or matrifocal societies today are the Minangkabu – a group in West Sumatra, numbering about 4 million. The Nair community in Kerala, South India I estimated to include almost 3 million people. Much smaller (30,000) are the [Mosuo](#) people of Yunnan province in Southern China and the Minicoy Islanders of the Maldives, a society of matrilineal Muslims.

The third problem is that Bachofen had almost no 'hard' evidence to back up his thesis. Working primarily with texts and inscriptions, he pointed to faint echoes of long-dead practices drawing from a broad array of ancient peoples including those of Lydia, Crete, Greece, Egypt, India, Asia, Rome, North Africa, and Spain. His arguments were presented in a difficult literary style which – along with the shocking novelty of his claims – guaranteed them a limited audience.

Nevertheless, his arguments resonated deeply with many important thinkers in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Amongst those influenced by Bachofen were a whole raft of important poets, thinkers, and scientists including the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–1881); Friedrich Engels; Thomas Mann (1875–1955); the classicists: Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928), inspired to devote her life to the study of mythology by Bachofen, and Robert Graves (1895–1985), whose *White Goddess* (1948), suggested an original form of goddess worship; Sigmund Freud (1856–1939); the psychologist and philosopher, Erich Fromm (1900–1980); the poet, Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926); the scholar of myth and religion, Joseph Campbell (1904 – 1987); the archaeologist V. Gordon Childe (1892–1957); and, most recently, Marija Gimbutas (1921–1994).

10 – The Evidence (ii), Marija Gimbutas (1921 –1994)

In the century following the publication of *Mutterrecht*, many Neolithic and Bronze Age sites were discovered throughout Europe. Marija [Gimbutas](#) made these her life's work. A Lithuanian who studied first in Vilnius, she fled to Austria because of the Second World War. By 1946 she had earned a doctorate from Tübingen in linguistics, archaeology, and Indo-European cultures. In 1949 she moved to the U.S. where she immediately found work at Harvard. In 1963 she became professor of archaeology at UCLA where she remained for the rest of her career. While at UCLA, Gimbutas directed numerous

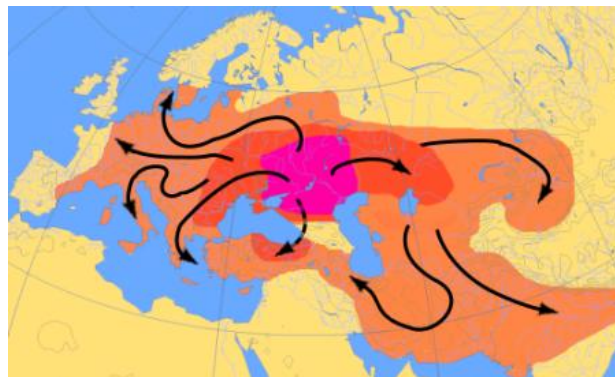
digs that unearthed and documented a vast store of artefacts. She was recognized as an expert on the late Neolithic inhabitants of Europe and Indo-European Bronze Age cultures.

In her last three books, she begins to sketch out a thesis about the pre-history of Europe – which she dubbed “Old Europe” – i.e., the time between the first appearance of *Homo sapiens* in the area until shortly before the beginning of civilized life.

There are two major components to her thesis:

Start of MP3 Recording – 5 of 7 – (16 minutes)

1 – The first, introduced in 1956, is what she called the **Kurgan Hypothesis**. In it she combines linguistics with the archaeology of the distinctive burial mounds of the Russian steppes, called “Kurgans”. Through this work she was able to trace the gradual incursion of Proto-Indo European speaking peoples into Europe in the 5th – 3rd millennium bce as they moved from an original ‘homeland’ in the area between the Black and the Caspian seas.



Assumed expansion of Kurgan – i.e., Indo-European – culture into Europe

Her interdisciplinary approach, unusual for the time, was to be influential; the Kurgan hypothesis, although not uncontested, still provides answers to major questions about the origin and spread of Indo-European speaking peoples (amongst whom are the Greeks and Romans, Germans, Celts, Slavs, Armenians, Anatolians, Iranians, and Aryan Indians).

2 – The second – and vastly more controversial – element was her slowly growing conviction of a radical difference between the characteristics of the Kurgan culture on the one hand and the much older Neolithic culture that had grown up in Western Europe from the first appearance of our species on the continent. She outlined these differences, with increasing sharpness, in her last three books: *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* (1974), *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), and *The Civilization of the Goddess* (1991). Gimbutas grounds her claims on a vast base of archaeological discoveries as well as on linguistic evidence.

She sees the Proto-Indo European speaking Kurgans as pastoral, warlike, horse-borne, **patriarchal** societies. These people possessed weapons and were easily able to overcome the long-settled, peaceful, Neolithic peoples they found throughout Western Europe. **Her most**



stunning claim is that the culture that the Kurgans overwhelmed – the culture of “Old Europe” – was not patriarchal. She points to a consistent pattern of human culture lasting over 30,000 years found in site after site throughout Europe. In these there was a relative lack of weapons and fortifications, a marked preponderance of female (as distinct from male) statuettes and drawings – the so-called ‘Venus’ figures and figurines – as well as a preponderance of other (contested) allusion to female deities, along with burial practices not designed to place men in a privileged position. All of this she reads as evidence of a society that was not yet patriarchal – but marked by a kind of peaceful, gender-balanced equality which neither systematically degraded and devalued the interests of women nor aimed to dominate nature so much as it sought to live in harmony with it.

In 1974, when she first propounded this view, the idea of a peace-loving, egalitarian, co-operative, non-competitive, goddess-worshipping past to which humanity might return in the New Age, struck a chord with the then flourishing women’s movement. Her books spawned an enormously successful exhibition in Wiesbaden (1993/4) and several documentary films. Some of her followers made enthusiastic claims about the existence of long-standing *matriarchal* societies worshipping a single, universal, Mother-goddess, in which women exercised all the power. Gimbutas herself insists that there never was a matriarchy – as the opposite of patriarchy – but argues for what she called either a *gylany* – as a balance between the separate interests of women (Greek = *gyne*), and

men (Greek= andros), a *matrifocal* society, or a *matristic* world – meaning one in which the concerns and interests of women are those around which society is primarily organized without in any way demeaning the interests and concerns of males. She also does not claim that all female figures and drawings represented a single Goddess but rather identified them as a variety of female divinities depending on their particular context.



The Venus of Willendorf
(Austria) 24,000–22,000 bce



Nevertheless many scholars have pointed out that Gimbutas pushed the boundaries between speculation and fact. They are not convinced by her identification of various female figures as “Goddesses”, and are even less convinced by her identification

of many Neolithic symbols, squiggles, stylized eyes and so forth, as being “clearly” symbols of some female deity. Yet in spite of the legitimate controversy and ambiguity surrounding these identifications there, nevertheless, remains a vast and growing body of evidence which shows a continuous Neolithic culture stretching over more than 25,000 years **that was markedly different** from the indisputably patriarchal cultures which, in the case of the Ancient Near East, we are able to read backward with confidence to about 4,000 BCE. (Also patriarchal were the cultures that later, and independently, produced cities in North China and Mesoamerica). The difference can be summed up by saying that **the Neolithic culture is nowhere as evidently patriarchal as were the cultures that produced the first civilizations.** Why not?

This difference can be explained in at least two ways – both of which present a problem. On the one hand, although there is no evidence allowing us to trace patriarchy backwards beyond about 4,000 BCE, we may suppose it *must* have been in place in earlier times, as it was later. To many, this seems to be quite ‘natural’ – men are bigger and stronger and, in all *recorded* history, there are only scattered and small examples of any societies that were **not** patriarchal. The problem in this position is to explain why none of the clear signs of patriarchy have been found anywhere that date to a period earlier than about 8,000 – 10,000 years ago.

Another possibility is to read the situation more or less as does Gimbutas. But, rather than concentrating on her sometimes forced hypotheses, look instead at what we do *not* find. Viewed in this way, what is remarkable is that throughout “Old Europe” for the entire 30,000 years (between the appearance of *homo sapiens* on the continent to a point just a few thousand years before the first cities) although we have many artefacts and abundant evidence we find none of the signs of patriarchy of the kind that might be expected before the appearance of writing – such things as males getting better food than females, being buried in better places, with better or more important artefacts than females, or the production of more – and more important – figures and drawings of males than of females etc.

There just is **no evidence** of the deliberate promotion of the importance of men with a corresponding demotion of the importance of women. This lack, in relation to what we know of all patriarchally organized societies, points toward the existence of a gynarchy, or a matristic world, such as Gimbutas describes – i.e., in which neither gender dominates the other.

[Ian Hodder](#) (1948 –), who led the excavations at Catalhoyuk has concluded that: “When we examine how people lived their daily lives – what they ate, where they were buried, who was paramount in terms of lineage and family – we see little in the way of a radical division between men and women, **no evidence for either patriarchy or matriarchy**. ... What we are seeing is

perhaps more interesting – a society in which, in many areas, the question of whether you were a man or a woman did not determine the life you could lead.” This is just what Gimbutas meant by a *gylany* or a *matristic* world.

The difficulty in this position is to explain why – after 30,000 years – such a very successful arrangement was suddenly overthrown by patriarchy. Gimbutas proposed an external answer. The patriarchal Kurgan culture easily overcame the defenceless matristic world of Neolithic Europe. But this only pushes the question a step further back. It does not explain how Kurgan culture itself became patriarchal if the prior state really was the widespread and long-lasting matristic era. This is the problem I seek to address.

11 – The Achievements of Neolithic Culture

What, exactly, were the achievements of our Stone Age ancestors? We are perhaps inclined to think of those people who lived ‘before civilization’ as ignorant, brutish creatures living in caves, in constant danger from predators, exposed to the weather, doomed to an endless hunt for food, and enjoying none of the refinements that we think make life human – paramount amongst which would be leisure, and capacity, to use reason.

This is, of course, a grotesque caricature. The reality is very different. After all, the people we are speaking about were biologically and anatomically **the same as ourselves** – with

brains every bit as developed as our own and which they used to great effect. Archaeological discoveries over the past century have shown us that **all the fundamental *rational* accomplishments** through which humans actually gained control of their environment – and by which they are distinguished from the non-human members of the family of great apes, as from all other animals – were developed **long before the first city and civilization** and consequently, according to our argument, **long before patriarchy ever appeared in human populations.**

Amongst these achievements are: the making and use of *tools*; *building* with wood and stone; control of *fire*; *cooked* food (allowing for rapid digestion, food storage, and the use of otherwise indigestible plants); *agriculture* (at first in small plots revisited by nomads and then on a sedentary basis); *irrigation*; *domestication* of animals; use of *symbols* in cave *drawings* and sculptures (and the even more abstract language they perhaps imply); *clothes* (permitting life in colder zones); *ornamentation*; *toys*; *medicine*; *astronomical* observation and a *sense of time*; mutual *assistance* in childbirth (necessary to humans alone of all species because of the large heads of their offspring and their narrow pelvises which are the result of walking upright); *long term care* – not merely of infants (which are born in a more underdeveloped condition than any other species so that our big heads can fit through the birth canal) – but also of weak or wounded members of the group; *burial* (with its concomitant sense of

an afterlife – related to an abstract, imperishable part of the individual?); and, finally, the recognition and *worship* of an essential, and again abstract, world of numinous beings – goddesses and gods, behind or above the things we can sense ... but somehow, and importantly, related to them. Every one of these accomplishments is well-attested long before the appearance of the first civilizations. Gimbutas views most of them as the work of women – through their relation to the getting, bearing, and rearing of children.

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Gimbutas' two most important insights – apart from her incomparable knowledge of the sites, their artefacts, and dating – are, first, **the recognition that the opposite of patriarchy is not matriarchy, but a kind of gender-based equality – a gynany, where neither sex rules or has dominion while each does what it naturally inclines to – without needing to *control* the activity of the other.** And, second, **her recognition that, in such a condition of gender 'equality', the concerns of the female will take the lead and predominate in all human societies – which she described as the matristic world.** As between the interests of the two genders, those of the females are the ones that are basically creative. Her interests are to bear and rear children and get the best mate she can, his is to go where she is.

[Alison Jolly \(1937 -\)](#), speaking of gender differences amongst the great apes, writes: “Females depend on

food to nourish their young. Each extra bite at the margin makes more babies, or healthier ones. Females spend their energy as adults gaining resources first, and more or better mates second. Males, by contrast, use any extra ounce of strength to mate with more females, or else to invest time and care to ensure paternity with their “official” mates. It is females who pattern their lives according to the distribution of food. Males just go where the females are.”

That is the matristic world – it is a kind of social organization in which, accidentally rather than intentionally, it is the interests of the females that define the life patterns of the group. This does not come about because they *impose* their pattern on the males (which they don’t) but because the females, doing what comes naturally to them, follow the food for the sake of *their* offspring while the males, doing what comes naturally to *them*, simply follow after the females and for exactly the same reason – that is, for the sake of *their* offspring. Neither gender rules over the other but the natural inclinations of the females, centered on their known and very concrete offspring, takes the lead – while the role of males, whose paternity of particular individuals is far more abstract, (and is actually unknown by them or by anyone), is to follow after the females as spear carriers.

12 – Patriarchy and Thought

This seems like such a sweet arrangement – so stable and successful over hundreds of thousands of years in the life of our species – that it forces us to ask why it was ever abandoned. Engels supposed it had to do with the introduction of herding. This provided men (who are thought to have been able to follow the sheep – being unencumbered with infants) with a source of wealth and power that was independent from the (agricultural) world of women. Gimbutas, on the other hand, referred to the Kurgan invaders from the steppes, with horses and weapons, who overwhelmed the more peace-loving agricultural societies. I think that neither of these gets very close to the heart of the matter.

I want to suggest the apparently outrageous view that patriarchy took over from the preceding matristic culture – and did so swiftly, and in every known human society – simply because it **allowed human reason to flourish far, far more quickly than could ever have happened in a matristic world.** Patriarchy was, as it were, a silver bullet, for the *development* of human reason. I contend that just prior to the appearance of cities – say roughly between 8,000 and 3,500 BCE – patriarchy took over from a prior matristic era which had characterized human society as far back as we can see clearly into human social structures– which, at present, goes back over the last 35,000 – 40,000 years. Patriarchy ‘took over’ because it had the power to liberate human thought from being tied to the satisfaction of concrete necessities in a way that the organization of human societies around the concerns of its females did not. Once freed from that attachment,

human reason, over and over again, created an abstract world of thought parallel to the one we are aware of through our five senses. This abstract world is the realm of words and numbers, of grammar and mathematics, of human thought and its intelligible objects. Patriarchy promotes the creation of these things and within a few thousand years it began to produce cities, civilization, expressed law, writing and science. In the long run however – and by that I mean ‘today’ – patriarchy has turned out to be too simple and primitive a view of reality and is unable sustain either them, or itself – but that is another story.

I AM NOT SAYING THAT MEN ARE IN ANY WAY MORE CAPABLE OF REASON THAN WOMEN. This is not the case – even though men, especially, have long confused the subordinate status into which *they* have placed women, with women’s actual abilities. I am saying that patriarchy swept over the world because, unintentionally, but surely, it created and encouraged the conditions in which human reason was able to achieve its fullest potential. In the matristic world, human thought – meaning, the thought of both men and of women – reached only so far as was required to meet the concrete necessities of life. In a patriarchy, thought is forced to go as far into abstraction as it is able. Why is this so?

[Stephen Pinker \(1954 –\)](#), notes that Alfred Russell Wallace – who worked out the process of natural selection independently of, but at the same time as, Darwin – became a creationist (unlike Darwin), “when he noted that

foragers – ‘savages’ in nineteenth-century parlance – were biologically equal to modern Europeans. Their brains were the same size, and they could easily adapt to the intellectual demands of modern life. But in the forager’s way of life – which was also the way of life of our evolutionary ancestors – that level of intelligence was not needed, and there was no occasion to show it off. How then could it have evolved in response to the needs of a foraging lifestyle?” “Natural selection”, wrote Wallace, “could only have endowed savage man with a brain a few degrees superior to that of an ape, whereas he actually possesses one very little inferior to that of a philosopher.” Pinker shows just how very far *human* foraging is different from that of other great apes and just how much mental power it takes to do all the apparently ‘simple’ things that we now know distinguished the lives of our Stone Age ancestors from the things done by any other animal.

Since well over 99.99% of all the humans who have lived from the dawn of *recorded* history have been born into a patriarchal world, we tend to suppose that the concept of paternity is obvious. It is anything but. Just think of it. Where membership in a particular family and one’s identity (who goes with whom) is established through the male side, the most important thing in the world is to determine who is the father of whom. Patriarchy can only exist if paternity is known. But as easy and as certain as it is to know who is the mother of an infant, **it has been impossible to establish who is its father with**

a comparable certainty or directness. This remained the case until less than 20 years ago with the mastery of DNA testing – which is as certain, though nowhere near as easy.

The real concern in every patriarchy has thus turned from this hitherto impossible goal of determining – in a biological sense – who is the father of an infant, to the more doable task of making sure that no person but *this* man is the father to children born of *this* woman. The only practical way of ensuring this has been for men to so control the lives of women that they are, at least ideally, sequestered from all contact with adult males in the period from puberty to marriage, and from all, unwatched and unsupervised, contact after marriage with any adult males but their husbands. Bringing this about in concrete terms has proven to be difficult. **Only if men rule over ‘their’ women in this way can patriarchy come into being – and in every place on earth patriarchy soon led to the creation of one form or another of civilized life.** On the other hand, the existence of patriarchy requires no comparable necessity being imposed on men. The result, as Engels caustically put it, is that patriarchy *always* amounts to “a scrupulously guarded monogamy for the females, supplemented by adultery and prostitution for the men” – which, in turn, **creates** the logical, but equally unnatural, categories of illegitimate children and unmarriageable women – i.e., bastards, prostitutes and sluts. Neither married women, whores, nor illegitimate children have any existence apart from patriarchy. As a result, patriarchal societies are all deeply conflicted between the desire of men

for their wives and daughters to be monogamous and for other women to be not so. And yet, just because they seek, find, and create women who are not so, the fathers are bound to assume that their wives and daughters are not naturally monogamous and can only become so by being placed under their strict control. It is a perfectly vicious circle.

It is just because patriarchy is so very unnatural, so difficult to bring into existence, so plain weird, that I think it cannot have been the original condition of humanity. I take this as strong support for the existence of a prior matristic era such as Gimbutas describes. I suppose that patriarchy arose as the result of some accident ... perhaps, a sickness leading to the death of all the adult females in a group, which was then *forced* to define their identities and primary relationships through the male side. But however it happened, once this step had been taken, the results were so powerful and so compelling that a similar change soon swept, like an unstoppable epidemic, through the entire human population. I am not suggesting that males in any sense *wanted* control of women and children, but that the abstraction of thought which is required for recognizing and maintaining a claim to paternity revealed the existence of an abstract world hovering, as it were behind or above, the concrete sensible world that is obvious to our senses. **That abstract, intelligible world is what was so powerful, so compelling and so fatally attractive. Patriarchy provided humanity with the door that led to that abstract world as a kind of short-cut – like a wormhole through some book which immediately connects distant parts.**

What difference does it make whether a family is defined through the mother or through the father? A family relationship established through the mother is an identity established by the senses and biology. But these tests do not establish paternity. That can only be determined by thought and law. As soon as the family is identified through the male side – which, in practice, means that it is established in virtue of some *abstract* or ‘deemed’ bond of paternity between a man and an infant – *men* discovered that, to support and maintain this hypothetical identification, they were soon *compelled* to create an abstract world alongside, or rather above, the world we are aware of through our senses. This is the *world of abstraction*; a world of law. It is a [binary](#) realm of strictly delineated black and white, yes and no, a this or a that, legal or illegal, sacred or taboo, with us or against us – whose logic is to bring an ever-widening circle of human activities under its rule. At first, just prior to the foundation of cities, these inflexible laws appeared in the *religious* constitution of each patriarchal family. These ancient, mutually exclusive, families with their rigid traditional law, sanctioned as religion and handed down from father to son, very soon turned, by a process that was already well-understood in antiquity, to the construction of *inclusive* cities based on *expressed* laws, and from these to the unfolding of all subsequent civilization.

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Fustel de Coulanges' (1830–1889), [The Ancient City](#) is the seminal work in this field. In it he lays open the patriarchal nature of the family that lies immediately behind every ancient city. He writes:

“The entrance of a son into the family was signalled by a religious act. First, he had to be accepted by the father, who, as master and guardian of the hearth, and as a representative of his ancestors, had to decide whether the newcomer was or was not of the family. Birth formed only the physical bond; the declaration of the father formed the **religious** bond. This formality was equally obligatory in Greece, in Rome, and in India.”

This abstract acknowledgement is something far different from the concrete, material, bond between an infant and the mother who carried it in her womb as “flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood, bone of my bone.”

“The son who is to perpetuate the domestic religion must be the fruit of a **religious** marriage. The bastard, the natural son, whom ... the Romans called *spurius*, could not perform the part which religion assigned to the son. In fact **the tie of blood did not of itself alone constitute the family; the tie of a common worship had to be added.** Now, the son born of a woman who had not been associated in the worship of the husband by the ceremony of marriage could not himself take any part in

the worship. He had no right to offer the funeral repast, and the family was not perpetuated for him ... for the same reason he had not the right of inheritance.”

[He continues:

“The religion of these primitive ages was exclusively domestic {i.e., of the family}. Religion did not say to a man, showing him another man, ‘That is thy brother.’ It said to him, ‘That is a stranger; he cannot participate in the religious acts of thy hearth {i.e. the sacred fire at center of each family religion}; he cannot approach the tomb of thy family; he has other gods {i.e., divinized ancestors} than thine, and cannot unite with thee in a common prayer; thy gods reject his adoration, and regard him as their enemy; he is thy foe also.’ ... In this religion of the hearth man never supplicates the divinity in favor of other men; he invokes him only for himself and his.”

“From all this we see that the family, in the earliest times, with its oldest branch and its younger branches, its servants and its clients, might comprise a very numerous body of men. A family that by its religion maintained its unity, by its private law rendered itself indivisible, and through the laws of clientship retained its servants, came to form, in the course of time, a very extensive organization, having its hereditary chief. The Aryan race appears to have been composed of an indefinite number

of societies of this nature, during a long succession of ages. These thousands of little groups lived isolated, having little to do with each other, having no need of one another, united by no bond religious or political, having each its domain, each its internal government, each its gods.”

de Coulanges lays out the straight path from patriarchal families, whose aim was to remain separate and apart from all other families, to the new city whose principal aim is to connect the members of different families and ultimately to unite all the species into a single community.

“When we sought the most ancient beliefs of ... men, we found a religion which had their dead ancestors for its object and for its principle symbol the sacred fire. It was this religion that founded the {patriarchal} family and established the first laws. But this race {referring to the Aryan forbears of the Greeks and Romans who are the objects of his study} has also had in all its branches another religion – the one whose principal figures were Zeus, Here, Athene, Juno, that of Hellenic Olympus, and of the Roman Capitol. ... These two orders of belief laid the foundation of two religions that lasted as long as Greek and Roman society. They did not make war upon each other; they even lived on very good terms, and shared the empire over man; but they never became confounded. Their dogmas were always entirely distinct,

often contradictory; and their ceremonies and practices were absolutely different.”

“The ancestors, heroes, and *manes* were gods, who by their very nature could be adored by only a very small number of men, and who thus established a perpetual and impassible line of demarcation between families. The religion of the gods of nature {the Olympic pantheon} was more comprehensive. No rigorous laws opposed the propagation of the worship of any of these gods. There was nothing in their nature that required them to be adored by one family only, and to repel the stranger. Finally, men must have come insensibly to perceive that the Jupiter {adored in the worship} of one family was really the same conception as the Jupiter of another, which they could never believe of two *lares*, two ancestors, or two sacred fires. Let us add that the morality of this new religion was different. It was not confined to teaching men family duties. Jupiter was the god of hospitality; in his name came *strangers*, suppliants, ‘the venerable poor’, those who were to be treated ‘as brothers.’”

In other words these intelligible gods as a whole – and in particular the chief amongst them, (whether this was Zeus, Jupiter, or Yahweh) – are always understood as actually encouraging and ordering men to welcome and to treat the stranger just as they would their own families. The ancestral

gods of each family and tribe did the opposite. They commanded their offspring to shun the stranger and to have no dealings with him.

de Coulanges goes on to describe a kind of progression between family, tribe, and the city. He writes:

“The domestic religion forbade two families to mingle and unite; but it was possible for several families, without sacrificing anything of their special religions, to join, at least, for the celebration of another worship which might have been common to all of them. And this is what happened. ... At the moment when they united, these families conceived the idea of a divinity superior to that of the household, one who was common to all, and watched over the entire group.”

The first such unions – which may have come together only infrequently for this common worship – comprised a group which the Greeks called a *phratry*, (a word related to the Latin ‘*frater*’, English, ‘brother’) – meaning a clan of kindred race. Several phratries might associate as an even larger ‘tribe’.

“The god of the tribe was generally of the same nature as that of the phratry, or that of the family. It was a man deified – a *hero*. From him the tribe took its name. The Greeks called him the *eponymous hero*.”

The crucial distinction came at the next step – where we find several tribes uniting or associating. The day on which this alliance took place the first city came into being.

”Family, phratry, tribe, city were ... societies exactly similar to each other, which were formed one after another by a series of federations ... {in which} none of them lost its individuality, or its independence. Although several families were united in a phratry, each one of them remained constituted just as it had been when separate. *Nothing was changed in it, neither worship nor priesthood, nor property nor internal justice. ... From the tribe men passed to the city; but the tribe was not dissolved on that account, and each of them continued to form a body very much as if the city had not existed.* In religion there subsisted a multitude of subordinate worships, above which was established one common to all: in politics, numerous little governments continued to act, while above them a common government was founded.

The city was a confederation. Hence it was obliged, at least for several centuries, to respect the religious and civil independence of the tribes, phratries and families, and had not the right, at first, to interfere in the private affairs of each of these little bodies. It had nothing to do in the interior of a family; it was not the judge of what

passed there; it left to the father the right and duty of judging his wife, his son, and his client.”

Patriarchy was then the catalyst that led to the rapid formation of cities and civilization. That is to say, of communities whose members are not defined and governed by their actual, concrete, birth from a particular mother ... but by an abstract definition and the rule of law. The largest community that we have so far discovered from the matristic era is at Catalhoyuk in central Turkey. At its peak, (7,000 BCE) it grew to about 8,000 people and 2,000 structures occupying some 26 acres – or about the space occupied by a modern stadium and its parking lots. **The leap to city size (about 25,000) is a consequence of the fact that many more individuals can be brought under a definition than can ever be produced as the offspring of a group of related women – let’s say as ‘the people who belong to Nanna’, (the Sumerian moon god, whose city was Ur).**

In the *Republic*, (II, 368c ff) Plato (423–347BCE), tells a story which perfectly illustrates the transformation between the matristic era and the beginning of patriarchy although, of course, he doesn’t think of it in these terms. In the dialogue, Socrates (469–399BCE), and some friends are trying to figure out what justice is. Socrates suggests they start by looking for it in the simplest imaginable form of human community – which, he proposes, would be a small, self-sufficient, group of men and women who live a life of near total leisure on a plain vegetarian diet. They make bread and wine, clothes for winter,

and houses for shelter. They eat on the ground – like a picnic – feast with their children, drink wine, “garlanded and singing hymns to the gods in pleasant fellowship”. Above all, they do not go begetting children beyond those they can support, lest they fall into poverty and war. There is no need of law or rulers because they are, as it were, just *by nature*. **All their actions aim only at satisfying the necessities *of nature* – which they share amongst themselves equally.** Once this much had been done they spend the rest of their time in the simple enjoyment of one another’s company. Socrates (not entirely ironically) calls this the “true state, the healthy state”. It is a perfect description of Gimbutas’ matristic world ... or of the Catalhoyuk as described by Ian Hodder ... or of life in the Garden of Eden?

Nevertheless – at the request of his friend, *Glaucon (445-4th century BCE)*, who spurns this as a brutish, sub-human community, fit only for pigs – Socrates turns to the demands of what he calls the “fevered, luxurious” city. **This is the community that aims to satisfy everything of which the mind of man can conceive.** “What more could you possibly want?” asks Socrates, in pretend amazement. The answer is: everything the human mind can conceive – and that means things that can only be provided by civilization. First Glaucon wants tables and benches from which to eat, “like civilized people”; then comes the demand for every imaginable kind of food so that, instead of eating grain, its citizens have to set about raising ten times the grain they need to feed themselves in order to feed a pig – on which they will then dine; and shoes, not

merely worn in winter when they are necessary to prevent frozen feet, but of every color and style – for work and for play – and so on, and so on. Socrates has no trouble showing a direct connection between *these* demands and a kind of inflationary need for vastly more resources, an explosion of specialized trades, competition between them, private wealth, the necessity for expressed law, police, armies, government ... and war.

Of course our thesis raises a question about why women would ever have accepted the change to patriarchy since they were so little included in it. This problem comes out of the misconception that, prior to patriarchy, there was *matriarchy* – as if women controlled men and so could, would, or should have prevented the switch. This was not so. In the matristic world men, like women, were left to do their own thing. The important point is that the new, clear, black and white abstractions of the patriarchal world appeared as an *addition to*, rather than a replacement of, what was already there. The men built their *new* constructions on top of the great platform that had already been raised far above the plain by at least 190,000 years of rational life in matristic societies. There is no doubt that the new abstract world that was built on those platforms was, everywhere, designed, controlled, and for the most part inhabited, by men. These constructions were the cities. They created a political realm (*polis*) as distinguished from what now came to be recognized as private world of the family (*oikos*). They were territory from which men for the most part systematically excluded women. The few but

famous, queens of antiquity – Hatshepsut, the Queen of Sheba, Dido, Cleopatra – nevertheless show that no one doubted that women were rational beings, who could *rule*, just like men.

But the males could only have introduced this new way of seeing things (i.e., according to the way that they appeared purely and exclusively according to their *thought* of them), if they did not destroy, or even substantially alter, the matristic world in any way that threatened the reproduction of the species. That they left as unchanged as possible. They simply went off to make another world of their own in a different ‘space’ – i.e., in the parallel universe of thought. It is not the world of the senses – it is not the world of concrete children of actual mothers – but an abstract world of ‘deemed’ fathers and ‘acknowledged’ sons. From the female perspective, not much had altered. Women still bore and raised the children while the men occupied themselves with ... something else. And that something else produced the entire panoply – for both good and ill – that forms the history of human *civilization* dominated by males. Civilization was, as it were, *their* sandbox.

The discovery of patriarchy brought all this about because it actually resulted in the ‘liberation’ of human reason by allowing a more complete expression of this human potential than was ever going to be swiftly possible in a matristic world. There, the potential of human thought was so closely bound to immediate, concrete, sensible, necessities and interests that neither women, nor men, saw any need, or reason, to go beyond this simple paradise or to create, above that, the

parallel world of abstraction, law, and science – which we call civilization. Who needs it? I do not claim that there is any evidence that patriarchy was established *in order to do this* – as if people first figured out that their rational powers would be ‘freer’ if they were detached from natural necessities and then set up patriarchies to make it so. All the same, the liberation of the powers of thought which all humans have possessed – though without explicitly realizing it – ever since our species came into existence was, I am suggesting, **the inevitable consequence of the weirdly unnatural, difficult, and improbable business of defining the family through the male side** – i.e., in terms of the, directly unprovable, concept of the *paternity* of any infant.

Wherever civilization has arisen, the patriarchal family has been understood as something sacred, established by a god – which is to say by a principle that is essentially intelligible. It is still held to be such in all of the world’s major religions and thus by a large majority of the world’s population. I think it is better understood as the result of an accident, but what is certain is that patriarchies – no matter where in the world, or when – have *only been able to realize this liberation of reason for the male half of the human population* – and for this reason they are not a final position in which humanity can rest. No one can reasonably suggest that mothers are any less rational than their male offspring – or sisters, less rational than their brothers.

In the long run patriarchy has turned out to be dangerously inadequate – not only to the well-being of the physical and biological world on which we all depend, but even more so to the continuing existence and well-being of the very reason it liberated in the first place. Its inevitable inequities – which were eventually seen to involve the unnecessary subjugation of women and a corresponding of men – reveal that it has come to be in contradiction with itself. It must either be abandoned as soon as the opportunity arises or else men and women will have to live with an inequity and degradation they cannot neither justify nor tolerate. The question – for another day – is just how, when, and under what conditions this opportunity emerges?

For now we will turn to the beginning of those first cities that were to be the unique creation of patriarchal families. They constituted the first form of human community through which, as it were, we gave our reason its head, enabling it to run as far and as fast as it could. In this account the start of patriarchy is the point at which humanity fell out of the Garden of Eden. It is also the point from which Gary McGonagill picks up the story in the next lecture. The rest of the course will trace the arc of the first ride of our species on the backs of the galloping horses of thought.

THE END

Endnotes

p. 1 – image – Wikimedia Commons.

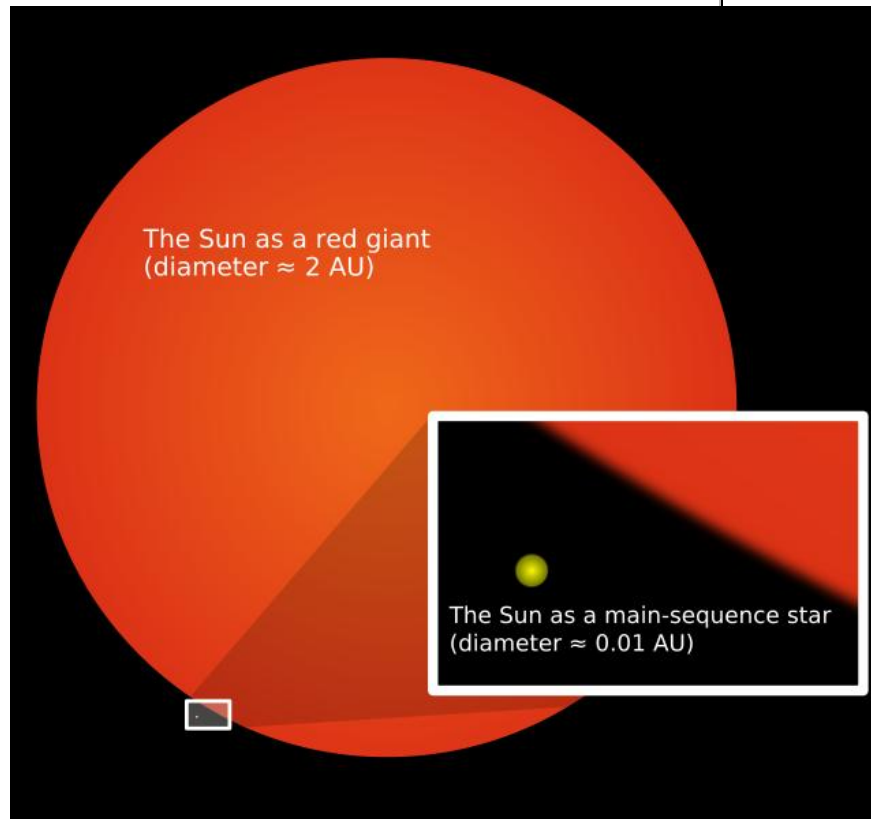
p.2 – [timeline](#) – Our timeline is very crude. A much more sophisticated one is found at [this](#) location on the PBS website.:
“From the Big Bang to the End of the Universe. The Mysteries of Deep Space Timeline.”

p. 4 – [Hydrogen](#) – [This](#) link takes you a lovely discussion illustrating the size of a Hydrogen atom.

p. 4 – [dense red giants](#) – [This](#) link takes you to a simple explanation of a red giant star in the framework of the history of the universe.

This image from Wikimedia Commons shows the relative size of our sun as it is now – when it is known as a ‘main sequence star’ – and as it will be as a red giant in some 5 billion years.

p. 8 – image – The image of the three



skulls came from the website of Washington State University, GenEd110, World Civilizations, “The Long Foreground: Human Prehistory” which is not longer available.

p. 8 – [Lucy](#) – [This](#) page from the Institute of Human Origins, takes you to documentary by Donald Johanson – the discoverer of the 3 million year old bones of Lucy. He describes how he made the find and its significance. It takes about 45 minutes to play through. A one page [summary](#) – on Lucy’s Story – that can be read in a few minutes is available from Arizona State University’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences’ Institute of Human Origins.

p. 11& 12 – images – These images of fighting rhinoceros and aurochs date from about 30,000 – 32,000 ybp. They are from the recently discovered Chauvet Cave in France. The French government maintains an extensive [website](#) on this cave – and the many others in France. A readable, elegant and thorough account of the discovery of the cave paintings, and of the changing views about their interpretation, can be found in Gregory Curtis, *The Cave Painters: Probing the Mysteries of the World’s First Artists*, Anchor Books, 2007.

p. 13 – map – The map showing the dates of the dispersal of *Homo sapiens* out of Africa comes from the Wikipedia article ‘Recent African Origin of Modern Humans’.

p. 14 – [settled cultivation](#) – Washington State University, GenEd110, World Civilizations, “The Emergence of Agriculture” – available at [this](#) site, although dated (1996), nevertheless distills into a simple and clear text, the results of years of scientific research and hundreds of academic papers from all over the globe.

p. 15 – [Fertile Crescent](#) – map – Wikipedia Commons. Ian Morris, in his recent book, *Why the West Rules – For Now: The Patterns of History and What they Reveal About the Future*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (2010), consistently uses the archaeologist’s term ‘Hilly Flanks’ rather than the older ‘Fertile Crescent’. This basically refers to the upland parts of the Crescent. He says, “The clearest evidence for clumping (of people) and settling comes from what archaeologists call the Hilly Flanks, an arc or rolling country curving around the Tigris, Euphrates, and Jordan valleys in southwest Asia ... which saw humanity’s first major movement away from hunter–gatherer lifestyles – and with it, the birth of the West.” (p. 82). His account of this transition from hunter–gatherer to settled agriculture, (Part I – Chapter 2 – “The West Takes the Lead”), is a masterful 50 pages weaving together of the findings of modern research in a dozen fields – including a account of the reasons and effects of the so–called Younger Dryas – the name attached to the sudden cooling that began around 10,800 and was over by about 9,500 bce.

p. 16 – [Jared Diamond](#) – Jared Diamond, professor of geography at UCLA, is the author of the international bestseller and Pulitzer Prize winning, (1998) *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*, 1997, W.W Norton & Co., 1997. There is a PBS documentary on Diamond and his book at [this](#) site.

p. 17 – [Catal Hoyuk](#) – Mellart’s works on Catal Hoyuk are listed on this extensive [website](#) of the Catalhoyuk Research Project.

p. 17 – [At first](#) – At the top of the Fertile Crescent, in modern Turkey, Gobekli Tepe is the oldest known man-made religious structure on earth. First noticed in 1964 and first excavated in 1994 it consists of 20 round structures, some up to 100 feet across, with massive standing stone pillars quarried from a nearby site by flint tools and erected about 12,000 ybp. Although made by hunter-gatherers it is thought, by its chief investigator, Klaus Schmidt, to have played a key function in the transition to agriculture. He assumes that the necessary social organization needed for the creation of these structures went hand-in-hand with the organized domestication of wild crops. Wild cereals may have been used for sustenance more intensively than before and were perhaps deliberately cultivated. The DNA of modern wheat is closest to that of a kind of wild wheat growing only 20 miles from the site – “suggesting that this is where modern wheat was first domesticated.” (Wikipedia – art. Gobekli Tepe).

p. 19 – map – Wikimedia Commons.

p. 21 – image – The illustration of part a cuneiform tablet is from a sales contract for the selling of a field and a house, Shuruppak, ca, 2600 bce., pre cuneiform script. Louvre. Wikimedia Commons.

p. 20 – [Gobekli Tepe](#) – is the earliest known human-made religious structure dating, probably, from 12,000BCE. It is found in the hill country of southeastern Turkey at the top of the Fertile Crescent. [This](#) website of the Global Heritage Fund describes the discovery and its significance.

p. 23 – maps – The maps of *Homo Neanderthal* and *Homo sapiens* sites in Europe are from Washington State University, GenEd110, World Civilizations , “The Long Foreground: Human Prehistory”. The upper map shows the concentration of *Homo sapiens* sites in Neolithic Europe (35,000–12,000 BCE). The lower one shows the location of *Homo neanderthalensis* sites (130,000–30,000 ybp). The ‘classic’ Neanderthal appeared in Africa about 200,000 years ago. Skeletons are also found in Europe and central Asia. The last ones disappear from Asia about 50,000 ybp and from Europe about 30,000 ago. There was some interbreeding between *Sapiens* and *Neanderthalensis* as modern Eurasians from France to China share 1–4% of their genes with the Neanderthals. *Sapiens* who stayed in Africa did not interbreed with Neanderthal men as

modern Africans have no Neanderthal DNA. Morris, (2010) p. 52-71.

p.24 - [Mother Right](#) - An English translation of Bachofen's *Mother Right (1861): A study of the Religious and Juridical aspects of Gynecocracy in the Ancient World* - translated by David Partenheimer, is available from the Edwin Mellen Press, 2003. A selection of Bachofen's writings may be found in *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, Preface by George Boas, Introduction by Joseph Campbell, Translated by Ralph Mannheim, Princeton University Press, Reissue edition, 1973.

p. 25 - [Social Darwinism](#). This Wikipedia article provides a fairly balanced account of the so to speak 'rise and fall' of the concept.

p. 25 - [Engels](#) - Friedrich Engel's *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* is available from Pathfinder Press (NY), 1972 - or online at this [website](#).

p. 26 - [Mosuo](#) - The Mosuo people of Yunnan in Southern China constitute a matrifocal society that has recently been much in the news in both China and the West. This is chiefly because the great sexual freedom accorded to its women is both repellent and fascinating to males in a patriarchal world. A recent book by a Mosuo, Nang Erche Namu, (with anthropologist Christine Mathiew) - *Leaving Mother Lake; A Girlhood at the Edge of the World*, back bay Books, (2004), is

an account of her life in this isolated society and of how she moved beyond it to become a kind of international celebrity in both China and the West. I take this description of Mosuo village life and of the relations of men and women to be the closest modern equivalent to the *character* of all human society during the hundred thousand years of the stone ages in the sense that the females form the core society that actually raises the next generation and the males circle around it.

p. 27 – [Gimbutas](#) – Gimbutas' first major work was the definitive *Bronze Age Cultures of Central and Eastern Europe*, Walter de Gruyter, (1965). Her last books, in which she develops more controversial views on the pre-patriarchal condition in Late Neolithic Europe, are: *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images* (1974) University of California Press, New and Updated Edition, 1982; *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), Thames and Hudson, New Edition, 2001; and *The Civilization of the Goddess*, Harper, (1991). Her final book, published after her death in 1994, is *The Living Goddesses*, edited by Miriam Robbins Dexter, University of California Press, 2001.

p. 28 – map – Wikimedia Commons – art. Kurgan Hypothesis.

p. 30 – image – cover illustration of the Italian (tr.), *Le Dee Viventi* (The Living Goddesses), published by Medusa Edizioni, (2005).

p. 32 – image – Venus of Willendorf, 24,000–22,000 bce – Naturalhistorisches Museum, Vienna. Wikimedia Commons. Christopher L.C.E. Whitcombe, professor of art history at Sweet Briar University, maintains a webpage about these female ‘goddess’ figures at [this](#) website. The seated female figure flanked by two lionesses (right) from Catal Hoyuk is dated much later – between 6,000–5,500 bce. It is one of a great many female figures found at the site (far outnumbering those of males). Museum of Anatolian Civilization, Ankara.



p. 33 – [Ian Hodder](#) – Catalhoyuk was discovered in 1958. The first period of excavation (1961–1956) was led by James Mellart. Ian Hodder, (Cambridge University), is the current director of excavation and investigation. The quotation comes from his illustrated article “Men and Women at Cattal Hyauck,” *Scientific American*, January, 2004. A number of universities and institutions maintain a site on Catalhoyuk – link above, above n., p. 17.

p. 36 – [Alison Jolly](#) – Alison Jolly, *Lucy’s Legacy: Sex and Intelligence in Human Evolution*, Harvard University Press,

(1999). Jolly is a primatologist specializing in the lemurs of Madagascar. Sarah Blaffer Hardy – who explained the reproductive strategy in the infanticide practiced by male langurs, writes, “Alison Jolly is a pioneer in the study of social intelligence and one of primatology’s Great Souls. This book is a treasure.” This view is shared many of the world’s leading primatologists as by a much wider public.

p. 39 – [Stephen Pinker](#) – Stephen Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, W.W. Norton & Company, (1997), is a Canadian born evolutionary psychologist, who has taught at M.I.T and is currently the Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology at Harvard. In this book, along with his equally popular, *The Blank Slate*, Pinker argues that the human mind evolved like all other body parts. He understands our minds to have developed by perfecting a number of specialized abilities in response to problems faced by our Pleistocene ancestors. He likens these particular abilities to modules or sub-routines for doing this or that particular thing. Some of these, evolved for one task, later on turn out to be useful for another.

p. 43 – [binary](#) – The great French anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss arrived at a similar conclusion in the early part of the last century. Edward Rothstein, writing an obituary in the November 3, 2009 edition of the *New York Times*, (“Claude Levi-Strauss, 100, Dies; Altered Western Views of the ‘Primitive’”), notes that Levi-Strauss held that:

“Each society must shape itself out of nature’s raw material, he believed, with law and reason as the essential tools. This application of reason, he argued, created universals that could be found across all cultures and times. He became known as a structuralist because of his conviction that a structural unity underlies all of humanity’s mythmaking, and he showed how those universal motifs played out in societies, even in the ways a village was laid out.

For Mr. Lévi–Strauss, every culture’s mythology was built around oppositions: hot and cold, raw and cooked, animal and human. And it is through these opposing “binary” concepts, he said, that humanity makes sense of the world.

This was quite different from what most anthropologists had been concerned with. Anthropology had traditionally sought to disclose differences among cultures rather than discovering universals. It had been preoccupied not with abstract ideas but with the particularities of rituals and customs, collecting and cataloguing them.”

p. 43 – [*The Ancient City*](#) – Fustel de Coulanges’ groundbreaking work of historical scholarship was published in 1864. Although this book is one–sided and superseded in its insistence that religion alone explains the political and social evolution of Greece and Rome, de Coulanges

nevertheless lays bare the patriarchal foundations of those societies in a manner that is quite unique – and he does so in a style that is so striking, so logical, so novel, and so elegant that it is deservedly one of the masterpieces of French historical writing. The work is available in PDF format at this [website](#).

p. 47 – [manes and lares](#) – Latin words, referring respectively to the spirits of deceased ancestors, and to the household gods.