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Tales with a Point of View

Though we live amid high-rise steel buildings, formica countertops and electronic television screens, there is something in all of us, women and men alike, that makes us feel deeply connected with the past. Perhaps the sudden dampness of a beach cave or the lines of sunlight piercing through the intricate lace patterns of the leaves in a darkened grove of tall trees will awaken from the hidden recesses of our minds the distant echoes of a remote and ancient time, taking us back to the early stirrings of human life on the planet. For people raised and programmed on the patriarchal religions of today, religions that affect us in even the most secular aspects of our society, perhaps there remains a lingering, almost innate memory of sacred shrines and temples tended by priestesses who served in the religion of the original supreme deity. In the beginning, people prayed to the Creatress of Life, the Mistress of Heaven. At the very dawn of religion, God was a woman. Do you remember?

For years something has magnetically lured me into exploring the legends, the temple sites, the statues and the ancient rituals of

the female deities, drawing me back in time to an age when the Goddess was omnipotent, and women acted as Her clergy, controlling the form and rites of religion.

Perhaps it was my training and work as a sculptor that first exposed me to the sculptures of the Goddess found in the ruins of prehistoric sanctuaries and the earliest dwellings of human beings. Perhaps it was a certain romantic mysticism, which once embarrassed me, but to which I now happily confess, that led me over the years into the habit of collecting information about the early female religions and the veneration of female deities. Occasionally I tried to dismiss my fascination with this subject as overly fanciful and certainly disconnected from my work (I was building electronic sculptural environments at the time). Nevertheless, I would find myself continually perusing archaeology journals and poring over texts in museum or university library stacks.

As I read, I recalled that somewhere along the pathway of my life I had been told—and accepted the idea—that the sun, great and powerful, was naturally worshiped as male, while the moon, hazy, delicate symbol of sentiment and love, had always been revered as female. Much to my surprise I discovered accounts of Sun Goddesses in the lands of Canaan, Anatolia, Arabia and Australia, while Sun Goddesses among the Eskimos, the Japanese and the Khasis of India were accompanied by subordinate brothers who were symbolized as the moon.

I had somewhere assimilated the idea that the earth was invariably identified as female, Mother Earth, the one who passively accepts the seed, while heaven was naturally and inherently male, its intangibility symbolic of the supposedly exclusive male ability to think in abstract concepts. This too I had accepted without question—until I learned that nearly all the female deities of the Near and Middle East were titled Queen of Heaven, and in Egypt not only was the ancient Goddess Nut known as the heavens, but her brother-husband Geb was symbolized as the earth.

Most astonishing of all was the discovery of numerous accounts of the female Creators of all existence, divinities who were credited

with bringing forth not only the first people but the entire earth and the heavens above. There were records of such Goddesses in Sumer, Babylon, Egypt, Africa, Australia and China.

In India the Goddess Sarasvati was honored as the inventor of the original alphabet, while in Celtic Ireland the Goddess Brigit was esteemed as the patron deity of language. Texts revealed that it was the Goddess Nidaba in Sumer who was paid honor as the one who initially invented clay tablets and the art of writing. She appeared in that position earlier than any of the male deities who later replaced Her. The official scribe of the Sumerian heaven was a woman. But most significant was the archaeological evidence of the earliest examples of written language so far discovered; these were also located in Sumer, at the temple of the Queen of Heaven in Erech, written there over five thousand years ago. Though writing is most often said to have been invented by *man*, however that may be defined, the combination of the above factors presents a most convincing argument that it may have actually been woman who pressed those first meaningful marks into wet clay.

In agreement with the generally accepted theory that women were responsible for the development of agriculture, as an extension of their food-gathering activities, there were female deities everywhere who were credited with this gift to civilization. In Mesopotamia, where some of the earliest evidences of agricultural development have been found, the Goddess Ninlil was revered for having provided Her people with an understanding of planting and harvesting methods. In nearly all areas of the world, female deities were extolled as healers, dispensers of curative herbs, roots, plants and other medical aids, casting the priestesses who attended the shrines into the role of physicians of those who worshiped there.

Some legends described the Goddess as a powerful, courageous warrior, a leader in battle. The worship of the Goddess as valiant warrior seems to have been responsible for the numerous reports of female soldiers, later referred to by the classical Greeks as the Amazons. More thoroughly examining the accounts of the esteem the Amazons paid to the female deity, it became evident that

women who worshiped a warrior Goddess hunted and fought in the lands of Libya, Anatolia, Bulgaria, Greece, Armenia and Russia and were far from the mythical fantasy so many writers of today would have us believe.

I could not help noticing how far removed from contemporary images were the prehistoric and most ancient historic attitudes toward the thinking capacities and intellect of woman, for nearly everywhere the Goddess was revered as wise counselor and prophetess. The Celtic Cerridwen was the Goddess of Intelligence and Knowledge in the pre-Christian legends of Ireland, the priestesses of the Goddess Gaia provided the wisdom of divine revelation at pre-Greek sanctuaries, while the Greek Demeter and the Egyptian Isis were both invoked as law-givers and sage dispensers of righteous wisdom, counsel and justice. The Egyptian Goddess Maat represented the very order, rhythm and truth of the Universe. Ishtar of Mesopotamia was referred to as the Directress of People, the Prophetess, the Lady of Vision, while the archaeological records of the city of Nimrud, where Ishtar was worshiped, revealed that women served as judges and magistrates in the courts of law.

The more I read, the more I discovered. The worship of female deities appeared in every area of the world, presenting an image of woman that I had never before encountered. As a result, I began to ponder upon the power of myth and eventually to perceive these legends as more than the innocent childlike fables they first appeared to be. They were tales with a most specific point of view.

Myths present ideas that guide perception, conditioning us to think and even perceive in a particular way, especially when we are young and impressionable. Often they portray the actions of people who are rewarded or punished for their behavior, and we are encouraged to view these as examples to emulate or avoid. So many of the stories told to us from the time we are just old enough to understand deeply affect our attitudes and comprehension of the world about us and ourselves. Our ethics, morals, conduct, values, sense of duty and even sense of humor are often developed from simple childhood parables and fables. From them we learn what

is socially acceptable in the society from which they come. They define good and bad, right and wrong, what is natural and what is unnatural among the people who hold the myths as meaningful. It was quite apparent that the myths and legends that grew from, and were propagated by, a religion in which the deity was female, and revered as wise, valiant, powerful and just, provided very different images of womanhood from those which we are offered by the male-oriented religions of today.

“A FORTNIGHT AFTER THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE”

As I considered the power of myth, it became increasingly difficult to avoid questioning the influential effects that the myths accompanying the religions that worship male deities had upon my own image of what it meant to be born a female, another Eve, progenitress of my childhood faith. As a child, I was told that Eve had been made from Adam's rib, brought into being to be his companion and helpmate, to keep him from being lonely. As if this assignment of permanent second mate, never to be captain, was not oppressive enough to my future plans as a developing member of society, I next learned that Eve was considered to be foolishly gullible. My elders explained that she had been easily tricked by the promises of the perfidious serpent. She defied God and provoked Adam to do the same, thus ruining a good thing—the previously blissful life in the Garden of Eden. Why Adam himself was never thought to be equally as foolish was apparently never worth discussing. But identifying with Eve, who was presented as the symbol of all women, the blame was in some mysterious way mine—and God, viewing the whole affair as my fault, chose to punish *me* by decreeing: “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband and he shall rule over you” (Gen. 3:16).

So even as a young girl I was taught that, because of Eve, when I grew up I was to bear my children in pain and suffering. As if

this was not a sufficient penalty, instead of receiving compassion, sympathy or admiring respect for my courage, I was to experience this pain with guilt, the sin of my wrongdoing laid heavily upon me as punishment for simply being a woman, a daughter of Eve. To make matters worse, I was also supposed to accept the idea that men, as symbolized by Adam, in order to prevent any further foolishness on my part, were presented with the right to control me—to rule over me. According to the omnipotent male deity, whose righteousness and wisdom I was expected to admire and respect with a reverent awe, men were far wiser than women. Thus my penitent, submissive position as a female was firmly established by page three of the nearly one thousand pages of the Judeo-Christian Bible.

But this original decree of male supremacy was only the beginning. The myth describing Eve's folly was not to be forgotten or ignored. We then studied the words of the prophets of the New Testament, who repeatedly utilized the legend of the loss of Paradise to explain and even prove the natural inferiority of women. The lessons learned in the Garden of Eden were impressed upon us over and over again. Man was created first. Woman was made for man. Only man was made in God's image. According to the Bible, and those who accepted it as the divine word, the male god favored men and had indeed designed them as naturally superior. Even now I cannot help wondering how many times those passages from the New Testament were read from the authoritative position of a Sunday pulpit or from the family Bible that had been pulled down from the shelf by father or husband—and a pious woman listened to:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach or to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed and then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. . . . (I Timothy 2:11-14)

For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Let the women keep silence in the churches, for it is not permitted unto

them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, so saith the law. And if they learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church. (I Corinthians 11:3, 7, 9)

Strangely enough, I never did become very religious, despite the continual efforts of Sunday School teachers. In fact, by the time I reached adolescence I had rejected most of what the organized religions had to offer. But there was still something about the myth of Adam and Eve that lingered, seeming to pervade the culture at some deeper level. It appeared and reappeared as the symbolic foundation of poems and novels. It was visually interpreted in oils by the great masters whose paintings glowed from the slide projectors in my art history courses. Products were advertised in high fashion magazines suggesting that, if a woman wore the right perfume, she might be able to pull the whole disaster off all over again. It was even the basis of dull jokes in the Sunday comics. It seemed that everywhere woman was tempting man to do wrong. Our entire society agreed; Adam and Eve defined the images of men and women. Women were inherently conniving, contriving and dangerously sexy, while gullible and somewhat simple-minded at the same time. They were in obvious need of a foreman to keep them in line—and thus divinely appointed, many men seemed quite willing.

As I began to read other myths that explained the creation of life, stories that attributed the event to Nut or Hathor in Egypt, Nammu or Ninhursag in Sumer, Mami, Tiamat or Aruru in other parts of Mesopotamia and Mawu in Africa, I began to view the legend of Adam and Eve as just another fable, an innocent attempt to explain what happened at the very beginning of existence. But it was not long afterward that I began to understand how specifically contrived the details of this particular myth were.

In 1960, mythologist Joseph Campbell commented on the Adam and Eve myth, writing:

This curious mythological idea, and the still more curious fact that for two thousand years it was accepted throughout the Western World as

the absolutely dependable account of an event that was supposed to have taken place about a fortnight after the creation of the universe, poses forcefully the highly interesting question of the influence of conspicuously contrived, counterfeit mythologies and the inflections of mythology upon the structure of human belief and the consequent course of civilization.

Professor Chiera points out that "The Bible does not give us one creation story but several of them; the one which happens to be featured in chapter one of Genesis appears to be the one which had the least vogue among the common people . . . It was evidently produced in scholarly circles." He then discusses the differences between the religions of today and the ancient worship, saying:

Just a few years ago we succeeded in piecing together from a large number of tablets the complete story of an ancient Sumerian myth. I used to call it the Darwinian theory of the Sumerians. The myth must have been widely circulated for many copies of it have already come to light. In common with the biblical story, a woman plays the dominant role, just as Eve did. But the resemblance ends there. Poor Eve has been damned by all subsequent generations for her deed, while the Babylonians thought so much of their woman ancestress that they deified her.

Now as I read these other myths, it was apparent that the archetypal woman in ancient religions, as represented by the Goddess, was quite different, in many respects, from the woman Eve. I then observed that many of these origin and creation legends came from the lands of Canaan, Egypt and Babylon, the very same lands in which the Adam and Eve myth had been developed. The other legends of creation were from the mythical religious literature of the people who did not worship the Hebrew Yahweh (Jehovah), but were in fact the closest neighbors of those early Hebrews.

2

Who Was She?

It was not long before the various pieces of evidence fell into place and the connections began to take form. And then I understood. Ashtoreth, the despised "pagan" deity of the Old Testament was (despite the efforts of biblical scribes to disguise her identity by repeatedly using the masculine gender) actually Astarte—the Great Goddess, as She was known in Canaan, the Near Eastern Queen of Heaven. Those heathen idol worshipers of the Bible had been praying to a woman god—elsewhere known as Innin, Inanna, Nana, Nut, Anat, Anahita, Istar, Isis, Au Set, Ishara, Asherah, Ashtart, Attoret, Attar and Hathor—the many-named Divine Ancestress. Yet each name denoted, in the various languages and dialects of those who revered Her, The Great Goddess. Was it merely coincidence that during all those years of Sunday School I never learned that Ashtoreth was female?

Even more astonishing was the archaeological evidence which proved that Her religion had existed and flourished in the Near and Middle East for thousands of years before the arrival of the patriarchal Abraham, first prophet of the male deity Yahweh. Archaeolo-

gists had traced the worship of the Goddess back to the Neolithic communities of about 7000 BC, some to the Upper Paleolithic cultures of about 25,000 BC. From the time of its Neolithic origins, its existence was repeatedly attested to until well into Roman times. Yet Bible scholars agreed that it was as late as somewhere between 1800 and 1550 BC that Abraham had lived in Canaan (Palestine).

Who was this Goddess? Why had a female, rather than a male, been designated as the supreme deity? How influential and significant was Her worship, and when had it actually begun? As I asked myself these questions, I began to probe even deeper into Neolithic and Paleolithic times. Though goddesses have been worshiped in all areas of the world, I focused on the religion as it evolved in the Near and Middle East, since these were the lands where both Judaism, Christianity and Islam were born. I found that the development of the religion of the female deity in this area was intertwined with the earliest beginnings of religion so far discovered anywhere on earth.

DAWN IN THE GRAVETTIAN GARDEN OF EDEN

The Upper Paleolithic period, though most of its sites have been found in Europe, is the conjectural foundation of the religion of the Goddess as it emerged in the later Neolithic Age of the Near East. Since it precedes the time of written records and does not directly lead into an historical period that might have helped to explain it, the information on the Paleolithic existence of Goddess worship must at this time remain speculative. Theories on the origins of the Goddess in this period are founded on the juxtaposition of mother-kinship customs to ancestor worship. They are based upon three separate lines of evidence.

The first relies on anthropological analogy to explain the initial development of matrilineal (mother-kinship) societies. Studies of "primitive" tribes over the last few centuries have led to the realization that some isolated "primitive" peoples, even in our own cen-

tury, did not yet possess the conscious understanding of the relationship of sex to conception. The analogy is then drawn that Paleolithic people may have been at a similar level of biological awareness.

Jacquetta Hawkes wrote in 1963 that "... Australian and a few other primitive peoples did not understand biological paternity or accept a necessary connection between sexual intercourse and conception." In that same year, S. G. F. Brandon, Professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Manchester in England, observed, "How the infant came to be in the womb was undoubtedly a mystery to primitive man . . . in view of the period that separates impregnation from birth, it seems probable that the significance of gestation and birth was appreciated long before it was realized that these phenomena were the result of conception following coition."

"James Frazer, Margaret Mead and other anthropologists," writes Leonard Cottrell, "have established that in the very early stages of man's development, before the secret of human fecundity was understood, before coitus was associated with childbirth, the female was revered as the giver of life. Only women could produce their own kind, and man's part in this process was not as yet recognized."

According to these authors, as well as many authorities who have written on this subject, in the most ancient human societies people probably did not yet possess the conscious understanding of the relationship of sex to reproduction. Thus the concepts of paternity and fatherhood would not yet have been understood. Though probably accompanied by various mythical explanations, babies were simply born from women.

If this was the case, then the mother would have been seen as the singular parent of her family, the lone producer of the next generation. For this reason it would be natural for children to take the name of their mother's tribe or clan. Accounts of descent in the family would be kept through the female line, going from mother to daughter, rather than from father to son, as is the custom

practiced in western societies today. Such a social structure is generally referred to as matrilineal, that is, based upon mother-kinship. In such cultures (known among many "primitive" peoples even today, as well as in historically attested societies at the time of classical Greece) not only the names, but titles, possessions and territorial rights are passed along through the female line, so that they may be retained within the family clan.

Hawkes points out that in Australia, in areas where the concept of paternity had not yet been understood, ". . . there is much to show that matrilineal descent and matri-local marriage [the husband moving to the wife's family home or village] were general and the status of women much higher." She writes that these customs still prevail in parts of Africa and among the Dravidians of India, and relics of them in Melanesia, Micronesia and Indonesia.

The second line of evidence concerns the beginnings of religious beliefs and rituals and their connection with matrilineal descent. There have been numerous studies of Paleolithic cultures, explorations of sites occupied by these people and the apparent rites connected with the disposal of their dead. These suggest that, as the earliest concepts of religion developed, they probably took the form of ancestor worship. Again an analogy is drawn between the Paleolithic people and the religious concepts and rituals observed among many of the "primitive" tribes studied by anthropologists over the last two centuries. Ancestor worship occurs among tribal people the world over. Maringer states that even at the time of his writing, 1956, certain tribes in Asia were still making small statues known as *dzuli*. Explaining these he says, "The idols are female and represent the human origins of the whole tribe."

Thus as the religious concepts of the earliest *homo sapiens** were

*The term *homo sapiens* (literally "knowing or knowledgeable man") illustrates once again the scholarly assumption of the prime importance of the male, in this case to the point of the total negation of the female population of the species so defined. If all "*homo sapiens*" had literally been just that, no sooner than the species had developed would it have died out for lack of the capability to reproduce its own kind.

developing, the quest for the ultimate source of life (perhaps the core of all theological thought) may have begun. In these Upper Paleolithic societies—in which the mother may have been regarded as the sole parent of the family, ancestor worship was apparently the basis of sacred ritual, and accounts of ancestry were probably reckoned only through the matriline—the concept of the creator of all human life may have been formulated by the clan's image of the woman who had been their most ancient, their primal ancestor and that image thereby deified and revered as Divine Ancestress.

The third line of evidence, and the most tangible, derives from the numerous sculptures of women found in the Gravettian-Aurignacian cultures of the Upper Paleolithic Age. Some of these date back as far as 25,000 BC. These small female figurines, made of stone and bone and clay and often referred to as *Venus figures*, have been found in areas where small settled communities once lived. They were often discovered lying close to the remains of the sunken walls of what were probably the earliest human-made dwellings on earth. Maringer claims that niches or depressions had been made in the walls to hold the figures. These statues of women, some seemingly pregnant, have been found throughout the widespread Gravettian-Aurignacian sites in areas as far apart as Spain, France, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Russia. These sites and figures appear to span a period of at least ten thousand years.

"It appears highly probable then," says Maringer, "that the female figurines were idols of a 'great mother' cult, practised by the non-nomadic Aurignacian mammoth hunters who inhabited the immense Eurasian territories that extended from Southern France to Lake Baikal in Siberia." (Incidentally, it is from this Lake Baikal area in Siberia that the tribes which migrated to North America, supposedly about this same period [there developing into the American Indians], are believed to have originated.)

Russian paleontologist Z. A. Abramova, quoted in Alexander Marshak's recent book *Roots of Civilization*, offers a slightly different interpretation, writing that in the Paleolithic religion, "The image of the Woman-Mother . . . was a complex one, and it

included diverse ideas related to the special significance of the women in early clan society. She was neither a god, an idol, nor the mother of a god; she was the Clan Mother . . . The ideology of the hunting tribes in this period of the matriarchal clan was reflected in the female figurines."

THE NEOLITHIC MORNING

The connections between the Paleolithic female figurines and the later emergence of the Goddess-worshipping societies in the Neolithic periods of the Near and Middle East are not definitive, but are suggested by many authorities. At the Gravettian site of Vestonice, Czechoslovakia, where Venus figures were not only formed but hardened in an oven, the carefully arranged grave of a woman was found. She was about forty years old. She had been supplied with tools, covered with mammoth shoulder blade bones and strewn with red ochre. In a proto-Neolithic site at Shanidar, on the northern stretches of the Tigris River, another grave was found, this one dating from about 9000 BC. It was the burial of a slightly younger woman, once again strewn with red ochre.

One of the most significant links between the two periods are the female figurines, understood in Neolithic societies, through their emergence into the historic period of written records, to represent the Goddess. The sculptures of the Paleolithic cultures and those of the Neolithic periods are remarkably similar in materials, size and, most astonishing, in style. Hawkes commented on the relationship between the two periods, noting that the Paleolithic female figures ". . . are extraordinarily like the Mother or Earth Goddesses of the agricultural peoples of Eurasia in the Neolithic Age and must be directly ancestral to them." E. O. James also remarks on the similarity, saying of the Neolithic statues, "Many of them are quite clearly allied to the Gravettian-Paleolithic prototypes." But perhaps most significant is the fact that Aurignacian sites have now been discovered near Antalya, about sixty miles from the Neolithic Goddess-worshipping community of Hacilar in

Anatolia (Turkey), and at Musa Dag in northern Syria (once a part of Canaan).

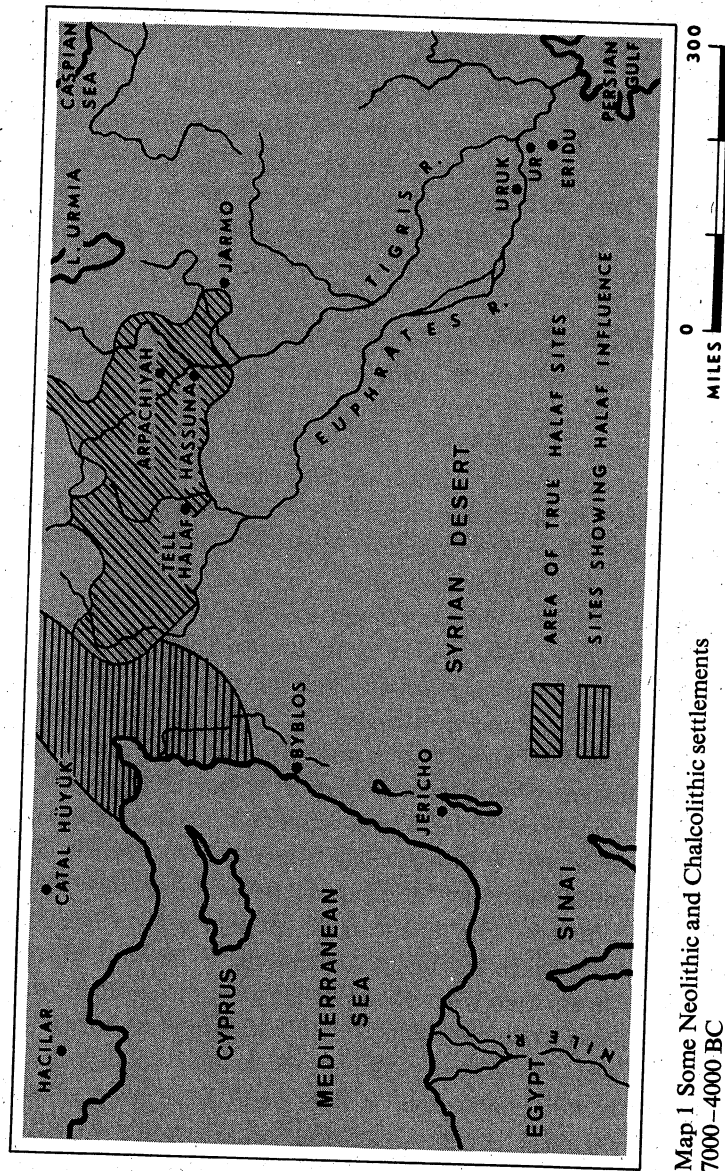
James Mellaart, formerly the assistant director of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara, now teaching at the Institute of Archaeology in London, describes the proto-Neolithic cultures of the Near East, dating them at about 9000 to 7000 BC. He writes that during that time, "Art makes its appearance in the form of animal carvings and statuettes of the supreme deity, the Mother Goddess."

These Neolithic communities emerge with the earliest evidences of agricultural development (which is what defines them as Neolithic). They appear in areas later known as Canaan (Palestine [Israel], Lebanon and Syria); in Anatolia (Turkey); and along the northern reaches of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers (Iraq and Syria). It may be significant that all these cultures possessed obsidian, which was probably acquired from the closest site of availability—Anatolia. One of these sites, near Lake Van, would be directly on the route from the Russian steppes into the Near East.

At the site that is now known as Jericho (in Canaan), by 7000 BC people were living in plastered brick houses, some with clay ovens with chimneys and even sockets for doorposts. Rectangular plaster shrines had already appeared. Sybelle von Cles-Reden writes of Jericho, "Various finds point to an active religious life. Female clay figures with their hands raised to their breast resemble idols of the mother goddess which were later so widely disseminated in the Near East." Mellaart too writes of Jericho: "They carefully made small clay figures of the mother-goddess type."

Another Neolithic community was centered in Jarmo in northern Iraq from about 6800 BC. H. W. F. Saggs, Professor of Semitic Languages, tells us that in Jarmo, "There were figurines in clay of animals as well as of a mother goddess: the mother goddess represented by such figurines seems to have been the central figure in Neolithic religion."

Hacilar, some sixty miles from the Aurignacian site of Antalya, was inhabited at about 6000 BC. Here, too, figures of the Goddess have been found. And at the excavations at Catal Hüyük, close to



Map 1 Some Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements 7000-4000 BC

the Cilician plains of Anatolia, near present day Konya, Mellaart discovered no less than forty shrines, dating from 6500 BC onward. The culture of Catal Hüyük existed for nearly one thousand years. Mellaart reveals, "The statues allow us to recognize the main deities worshiped by Neolithic people at Catal Hüyük. The principal deity was a goddess, who is shown in her three aspects, as a young woman, a mother giving birth or as an old woman." Mellaart suggests that there may have been a majority of women at Catal Hüyük, as evidenced by the number of female burials. At Catal Hüyük too red ochre was strewn on the bodies; nearly all of the red ochre burials were of women. He also suggests that the religion was primarily associated with the role of women in the initial development of agriculture, and adds, "It seems extremely likely that the cult of the goddess was administered mainly by women . . ."

By about 5500 BC houses had been built with groups of rooms around a central courtyard, a style used by many architects even today. These were found in sites along the northern reaches of the Tigris River, in communities that represent what is known as the Hassuna period. There, as in other Neolithic communities, archaeologists found agricultural tools such as the hoe and sickle, storage jars for corn and clay ovens. And once again, Professor Saggs reports, "The religious ideas of the Hassuna period are reflected in clay figurines of the mother goddess."

One of the most sophisticated prehistoric cultures of the ancient Near and Middle East was situated along the banks of the northern Tigris and westward as far as the Habur River. It is known as the Halaf culture and appeared in various places by 5000 BC. At these Halaf sites, small towns with cobbled streets have been discovered. Metal was in use, which would place the Halaf cultures into a period labeled by archaeologists as Chalcolithic.

Saggs writes that, judging from a picture on a ceramic vase, "It is probably from the Halaf period that the invention of wheeled vehicles date." Goddess figurines have been found at all Halaf sites, but at the Halafian town of Arpachiyah these figures were associated with serpents, double axes and doves, all symbols con-



20 Above: Amazons, fact or fantasy? Greek and Roman records report that the Amazons worshiped a Goddess as the Mother of All Deities. This is one section of a massive relief depicting the Amazons on the tomb of Artemesia in Halicarnassus, Turkey (ancient Caria). The monument is one of the numerous portrayals of Amazon women battling against Greek men. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

21 Below: This votive relief dedicated to the Goddess Artemis portrays the presentation to the Goddess of the torch passed in a race run in her honor at Piraeus, Greece. It is dated to the fourth century B.C. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.



8

They Offered Incense to the Queen of Heaven

Though buried deep beneath the sands of what was once Canaan, statues of the female deity have been continually unearthed in archaeological excavations. These images of the Goddess, some dating back as far as 7000 BC, offer silent testimony to the most ancient worship of the Queen of Heaven in the land that is today most often remembered as the birthplace of both Judaism and Christianity.

Yigael Yadin, Professor of Archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Director of the Institute of Archaeology there, recently published his account of the excavation of the city of Hazor in biblical Canaan. Somewhat evasively, he describes the evidence of the worship of the Goddess there in this way:

Although the official religion of northern Israel was that of Yahweh—the god of Israel—we know from both biblical verses and archaeological discoveries that the cult of Ba'al and Astarte strongly influenced the local population in the form of folk or popular beliefs—for double insurance as it were. Indeed we discovered quite a number of clay figurines representing Astarte, the fertility goddess, and of what may be called the holy prostitutes connected with the Ba'al and Astarte cult.

Discussing the Late Bronze Age in Canaan (about 1500–1300 BC) Professor Albright tells us that

One of the commonest classes of religious objects found in Late Bronze levels is constituted by the so-called "Astarte" plaques. These are pottery plaques, generally oval in shape, on which were impressed (from a pottery or metal mould) a figure of the nude goddess Asherah, *en face* with her arms upraised, grasping lily stalks or serpents, or both, in her hands. The goddess's head is adorned with two long spiral ringlets identical with the Egyptian Hathor ringlets. These plaques were borrowed from Mesopotamia, where they have a long prehistory in the Early Bronze Age [about 3200–2100 BC].

Kathleen Kenyon, former Director of the British School of Archaeology at Jerusalem, discussing biblical Canaan, writes of:

... the Astarte plaques which are the most common cult object on almost all sites of the period [Late Bronze Age]. That such plaques, with their association with Phoenician religion, are found cannot, however, be taken on any particular site as evidence that it had not yet come under Israelite control, for Tell Beit Mersim itself provides clear evidence for the occurrence of such plaques or similar figurines right down to the 7th century BC. The denunciations by the prophets are enough to show that Yahwehism had continuously to struggle with the ancient religion of the land.

In exploring the influence and importance of the worship of the Goddess in Canaan in biblical times, we find that as Ashtoreth, Asherah, Astarte, Attoret, Anath or simply Elat or Baalat (both defined as Goddess) She was the principal deity of such great Canaanite cities as Tyre, Sidon, Ascalon, Beth Anath, Aphaca, Byblos and Ashtoreth Karnaim.

In 1894 Robertson Smith conjectured that Astarte had already become the less important wife of Baal by biblical times, yet we read inscriptions to the Goddess in Canaan as Celestial Ruler, Mistress of Kingship, Mother of all Deities. She is certainly associated with Baal, or a Baal or many Baalim, but upon careful observation we find that the ritual and form of the religious practices are those of the ancient Goddess religion.

According to Seton Lloyd, Professor of Western Asiatic Archae-

ology, the word *baal*, which is usually translated as lord, originally implied a temporary position or temporary ownership of property. It may have been used much like the Indo-European word *pati*, also used as lord, owner, master and husband, and as I mentioned before may even be related to the Sanskrit word *bala*. In the legends of Ugarit in northern Canaan, Baal of Mount Saphon asked the Goddess, known there as Anath, to help secure a temple for him when he had none. In these same legends of the fourteenth century BC, Anath easily slew the enemy who had been powerful enough to first frighten and then murder Baal. Though the name Baal may have been introduced centuries earlier as the storm god of Mount Saphon by the Hurrians in Ugarit, by the time of the writing of these legends the name was also identified with the consort of the Goddess and in Ugarit, Baal held the dual role as storm god of the mountain and the dying consort, much like Damuzi, Tammuz, Attis, Osiris and Adonis. Upon his death, we are told, Anath's grief for him was like that of a cow for her calf.

Even Thor-El, an older male deity, described by some writers as the head of the deities at Ugarit, was recorded to have hidden in the innermost sanctuary of his eight chambers, trembling in fear at the approach of the mighty Anath. In these same texts, Anath was known as "Mistress of Kingship, Mistress of Dominion, Mistress of the High Heavens." In light of the tablets of northern Canaan, one can hardly defend the idea that either of these male deities was portrayed as all powerful or omnipotent, unless one simply insists upon assuming that all male deities always are. Though this conclusion is left unspoken by most writers, it is the Goddess Anath who emerges from these Canaanite legends as the deity of greatest valor and strength.

In his *Dictionary of the Bible* of 1900, J. Hastings asserted that Ashtoreth was supreme, saying of Her, "This Goddess was the chief divinity of the Semites in their primitive matriarchal stage of organization. She was the analogue of the human matriarch, free in her love, the fruitful mother of the clan, and its leader in peace and war."

In the pages of the Old Testament however, Ashtoreth, the name

used most often in southern Canaan where most of the Hebrew people had settled, seldom appears alone. Her name was nearly always joined with Baal, much as many of the serpent demons of the Indo-European legends were the sons or husbands of the Goddess; at times the religion is even designated as Baalism. Though it is certainly possible that the Canaanite religion in the south, where Aryan princes had by now made deep inroads, may have elevated Baal to a higher status by later biblical times, the worship, the rituals, the sexual customs, the eunuch priests, the grieving for Tammuz or Baal as the dying consort, the abundance of the As-tarte statues and plaques, the symbolic pillars and poles (actually called *asherah*, though always in lower case), all reveal that it was the symbolism and customs of the religion of the Goddess that were actually the target of Hebrew aggression. It appears more than likely that the Levite priests, just as they purposely misspelled and mispronounced Her name (reciting it as *bosest*, meaning shame), and referring to Her only in the masculine gender, refused to even recognize the position of the Goddess, doing this by continually linking Her name with that of Her male consort.

As we read before, the Bible and other religious literature may well be partially the result of intentional political aims as much as a record of some longstanding belief or lore. In discussing the Paradise myth of the Bible, Joseph Campbell wrote of "conspicuously contrived, counterfeit mythologies." Professor Chiera wrote that the Marduk myth was probably propagated with the help of the Babylonian armies and pointed out that the Ashur legend of supremacy was simply a reworked version of the Marduk myth. He also wrote that the myth of Adam and Eve had been "evidently produced in scholarly circles," and further explained that the Bible was subject to the censorship of priests who had the power of decision over "what was fit to be incorporated into the history of the founders of the race . . ." Professor Widengren also commented that the Bible as we know it ". . . has in many passages quite obviously been exposed to censorship and correspondingly purged."

Though many accounts of the Bible are probably based on actual historical events, confirmed in various ways by documents and evidence produced by archaeological excavation, it seems quite likely that the biblical Levite reports of the "pagan" religion in Canaan were presented from the point of view that was most advantageous and acceptable to the Levite theology, rather than as a totally objective historical record. Despite the various methods used to confuse the identity and gender of the Goddess as Ash-toreth or Asherah, even in the Bible as we know it today, passages and symbolism betray the influential and prevailing presence of the ancient worship of the female deity, while other Canaanite and Near Eastern artifacts confirm it.

In Egypt the Hebrews had known the worship of the Goddess as Isis or Hathor. For four generations they had been living in a land where women held a very high status and the matrilineal descent system continued to function at most periods. Judging from the numbers of the Hebrews who emerged from Egypt, as compared with the family of the twelve sons who supposedly entered it four generations earlier, it seems likely that a great number of those Hebrew people known as Israelites may actually have been Egyptians, Canaanites, Semitic nomads and other Goddess-worshiping people who had joined together in Egypt. Just to the east of Canaan, in Babylon, stood the temples of Ishtar. And in the land of Canaan, the land that the Hebrews invaded and made their own after their departure from Egypt, archaeological records and artifacts reveal that the religion of the Goddess as Ashtoreth, As-tarte, Asherah, Anath, Elat or Baalat still flourished in many of the great cities.

"YE SHALL DESTROY THEIR ALTARS, BREAK THEIR IMAGES"

The Levite writers of the Old Testament claimed that their deity had presented them with the land of Canaan as the "promised land." Yet it is clear, even in their own accounts, that Canaan was

not an empty land, even in the time of Abraham. In Num. 13:17-19 it was recorded that, upon the arrival of the Hebrew tribes, as they approached from the deserts of Sinai, they sent an advance envoy into the cities of Canaan. This was their report of the situation at about 1300-1250 BC: "We went into the land to which you sent us. It does indeed flow with milk and honey, this is its produce. At the same time its inhabitants are a very powerful people, the towns are fortified and very big" (Num. 13:28).

The Bible account admits that Canaan was already inhabited and that many of the people lived in great fortified towns. Despite this, we read of the intention of the arriving Hebrews not only to continue into the land of Canaan, but to purposely and violently destroy the existing religion and replace it with their own. This intention was presented by the Levites as the command of Yahweh, supposedly ordered before the Israelites entered Canaan:

Observe thou that which I command thee this day: Behold I drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Hittite and the Perizite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. Take heed to thyself lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee; But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images and cut down their groves, for thou shalt worship no other god, for the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God [Exod. 34:11-16].

With this order the Hebrew invasion of Canaan began. Though the Hebrew entrance into the "promised land" of Canaan is often imagined to be the arrival into a haven of peace after centuries of slavery in Egypt, according to the Bible its occupation took the form of a series of bloody sieges, perhaps much like those of the earlier Indo-European invasions.

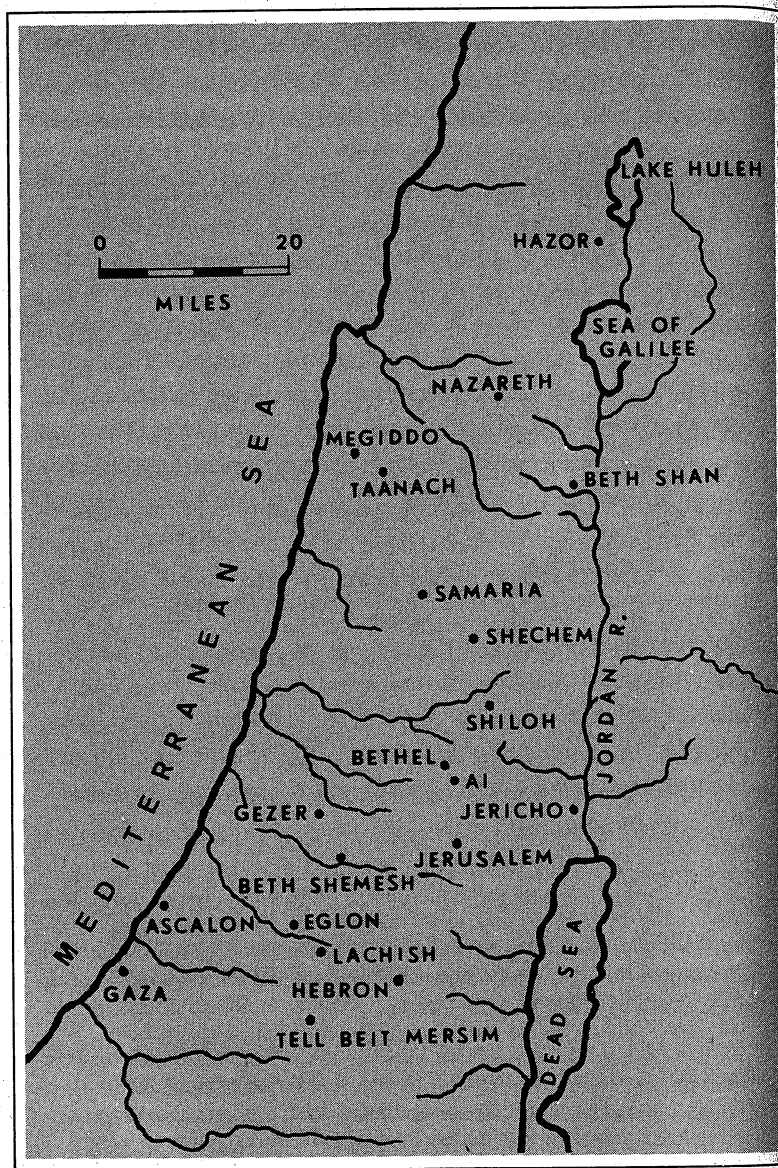
In Deut. 2:33 we read that, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, the Israelites met a king named Sihon at the town of Jahaz. The Levite accounts tell us, "The Lord our God delivered him into our hands; we killed him with his sons and all his people. We captured all his cities at that time and put to death every one in the cities, men, women and dependants; we left no survivor." When

they met Og, king of Bashan, we are told in Deut. 3:3-7 that "So the Lord our God also delivered Og king of Bashan into our hands, with all his people. We slaughtered them and left no survivor . . . in all we took sixty cities . . . Thus we put to death all the men, women and dependants in every city."

Both Aaron and Moses died in the desert. Joshua assumed command and the Israelites entered Jericho. We learn in Josh. 6:21 that "Under the ban they destroyed everything in the city; they put everyone to the sword, men and women, young and old . . ." But in this same siege we are told that "All the silver and gold, all the vessels of copper and iron, shall be holy; they belong to the Lord and they must go into the Lord's treasury" (Josh. 6:19). And in Josh. 6:24 we learn that these orders were carried out as "They set fire to the city and everything in it, except that they deposited the silver and gold and the vessels of copper and iron in the treasury of the Lord's house." In the battle of Ai we are told "the number who were killed that day, men and women, was twelve thousand, the whole population of Ai" (Josh. 8:25). And in Josh. 8:29 it claims that Joshua "hanged the king of Ai on a tree and left him there till sunset." Since in an earlier passage Joshua was told by Yahweh to do with the king of Ai as he had done with the king of Jericho, we may assume that this was the king of Jericho's fate as well, though the account of the event is no longer recorded.

We read in Joshua 10 that:

Joshua captured Makkedah and put both king and people to the sword, destroying both them and every living thing in the city. He left no survivor, and he dealt with the king of Makkedah as he had dealt with the king of Jericho. Then Joshua and all the Israelites marched on from Makkedah to Libnah and attacked it. The Lord delivered its king and the city to the Israelites, and they put its people and every living thing in it to the sword; they left no survivor there, and dealt with its king as they had dealt with the king of Jericho. From Libnah, Joshua and all the Israelites marched on Lachish, took up their positions and attacked it. The Lord delivered Lachish into their hands: they took it on the second day and put every living thing in it to the sword, as they had done at Libnah.



Map 4 Southern Canaan—Old Testament

Meanwhile Horam, king of Gezer had advanced to the relief of Lachish; but Joshua struck them down, both king and people, and not a man of them survived. Then Joshua and all the Israelites marched on from Lachish to Eglon, took up their positions and attacked it; that same day they captured it and put its inhabitants to the sword, destroying every living thing in it as they had done at Lachish. From Eglon, Joshua and all the Israelites advanced to Hebron and attacked it. They captured it and put its king to the sword with every living thing in it and in all its villages; as at Eglon, he left no survivor, destroying it and every living thing in it. Then Joshua and all the Israelites wheeled round towards Debir and attacked it. They captured the city with its king, and all its villages, put them to the sword and destroyed every living thing; they left no survivor. They dealt with Debir and its king as they had dealt with Hebron and with Libnah and its king.

So Joshua massacred the population of the whole region—the hill country, the Negeb, the Shepelah, the watersheds—and all their kings. He left no survivor, destroying everything that drew breath, as the Lord the God of Israel had commanded [Josh. 10: 28–40].

In similarly described sieges, Joshua and the Israelites destroyed the cities of Gibeon, Hazor and as far as Baal Gad in the Vale of the Lebanon under Mount Hermon. At the risk of being repetitive, I cannot help thinking of Professor Albright's comment that the "orgiastic nature worship" of Canaan "was replaced by Israel with its pastoral simplicity and purity of life, its lofty monotheism and its severe code of ethics." Rather than the image of poor downtrodden slaves with lofty ideals, entering the "promised land" to rest their weary bones and build a new and better life, we are more likely to be reminded of the description Professor Lloyd gave of the Luvian entrance into Anatolia and the pathway that was made as "their progress was marked by signs of widespread destruction."

As if in further refutation of this supposed "purity of life" or "severe code of ethics" we read that, although all the accounts state that the Israelites left no survivors, this may not have been the total truth. For in the book of Numbers (31:17) we read that after a battle against the Midianites, while still under the leadership of Moses and Aaron, the Israelites were told: "Kill every male dependant, and kill every woman who has had intercourse with a man, but spare for yourselves every woman among them who has

not had intercourse." In Num. 31:32-35, we read a list of the spoils and war booty taken by the Israelites at this same battle. In this order, they list sheep, cattle, asses and "thirty-two thousand girls who had no intercourse with a man."

In the book of Deuteronomy, also preceding the command of Joshua, we find:

When you wage war against your enemy and the Lord your God delivers them into your hands and you take some of them captive, then if you see a comely woman among the captives and take a liking to her, you may marry her. You shall bring her into your house, where she shall shave her head, pare her nails, and discard the clothes she had when she was captured. Then she shall stay in your house and mourn her father and mother for a full month. After that you may have intercourse with her; you shall be her husband and she your wife. But if you no longer find her pleasing let her go free. You must not sell her, nor treat her harshly, since you have had your will with her [Deut. 21:10-14].

Though once again the numbers may have been somewhat exaggerated, these passages suggest that many of the women who were later known as the wives of the Israelites may well have been the girls who witnessed the murders of all their families and friends and the destruction of their homes and towns. The combination of the fear and trauma they must have felt, having been taken into the Hebrew tribes in this way, along with their memories of their childhood customs and religions must have made their attitude and position in Hebrew life a most difficult one. Though the number of women in the Hebrew tribes is never listed, these passages also suggest that when the Hebrews first left Egypt there may have been a much greater percentage of men. Each of these factors may help to explain the Hebrew women's "acceptance" of the new patriarchal laws.

"AND THEY FORSOOK THE LORD AND WORSHIPED BAAL AND ASHTORETH"

Though according to biblical records the entire population of many towns and cities had been massacred, several great cities had not been touched, cities where Ashtoreth was still worshiped with great reverence. Once in Canaan, the captured lands were divided among the tribes, the Levites to live among each of them. From this point on we observe the lengthy and violent attack the Hebrews launched upon the Queen of Heaven and Her Baal. Despite all the warnings, the religion of the Goddess was a great temptation to the Hebrews who had invaded Canaan; to many of them it may have been the religion of their ancestors. References to the Hebrew people worshiping in the ancient religion repeatedly appear in the pages of the Bible, once again the accounts of the Levite priests:

Judges 2:13—"And they forsook the Lord and worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth."

Judges 3:7—"And the people did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, forgetting the Lord their God, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreth."

Samuel 7:3, 4—"Samuel spake unto the house of Israel, saying, if ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtoreth from among you and prepare your hearts unto the Lord and serve him only and he will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines."

The period of Samuel took place in the time of Saul, the first Hebrew king, about 1050 BC. Judges takes place before that time. According to the Bible, King Solomon, at about 960-922 BC, worshiped Ashtoreth as well as other local deities. He was eventually threatened with the loss of his kingdom for having forsaken Yahweh and revering the Queen of Heaven, Ashtoreth of the Sidonians. In I Kings 15:13 we find the report of the dethroning of Queen Maacah by her son (or grandson) Asa at about 910 BC—the crime, worshiping Asherah. The name Asherah was also used in the texts of northern Canaan, at times alongside Anath. They may have been