

BEFORE THE COMMON ERA

I am she that is the natural mother of all things, mistress and governess of all the elements, the initial progeny of worlds, chief of the powers divine, queen of all that are in Hell, the principal of them that dwell in Heaven, manifested alone and under one form of all the gods and goddesses. At my will the planets of the sky, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the lamentable silences of hell be disposed; my name, my divinity is adopted through-out the world, in divers manners, in variable customs, and by many names. For the Phrygians that are the first of all men call me The Mother of the Gods at Pessinus; the Athenians, which are spring from their own soil, Cecropian Minerva; the Cyprians, which are girt about by the sea, Paphian Venus; the Cretans which bear arrows, Dictynnian Diana; the Sicilians, which speak three tongues, Infernal Proserpine; the Eleusinians their ancient goddess Ceres; some Juno, other Bellona, other Hecate, other Rhamnusia, and principally both sort of the Ethiopians which dwell in the Orient and are enlightened by the morning rays of the sun, and the Egyptians, which are excellent in all kind of ancient doctrine and by their proper ceremonies accustom to worship me, do call me by my true name, Queen Isis (Graves, 1972, p. 72¹)

Pre-historical

The earliest expressions of Western religiosity are from the *Palaeolithic* era, when human society comprised small groups of hunter-gatherers taking advantage of what their environment had to offer for sustenance and shelter as they moved across the landscape. For thousands of years, survival of early human society in the Mediterranean regions depended on all members of small groups working together to provide their daily needs. The provision of food, clothing and shelter was not onerous, estimated to need about 14 hours a week, leaving a significant amount of time for other activities, including art and religious celebration (Pollack, 1997). Extrapolating from archaeological images, it was a time of social egalitarianism (Armstrong, 1993; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Diamond, 2007; Forth, 2008; Pollack, 1997) and this was reflected in spiritual beliefs.

Feminist archaeologist, Marija Gimbutas, has drawn from comparative mythology, early historical sources, linguistics, folklore, historical ethnography and pictorial sources of signs, symbols and images of divinities to paint a compelling, well-documented picture of the centrality of the Great Goddess in early spiritual and societal ideology. Unlike subsequent religious ideation where the divine was cast in human

¹ This is a quote from Apuleius' (c. 123/125-180 CE) *Golden Ass* or *Metamorphoses*, the only surviving work of fiction from Roman times, translated by William Adlington (1566).

then cosmic form, the Goddess was manifest in the flora and fauna of the natural world, and worshipped in related deifications such as of the serpent, owl, tree, fish, bee, water and so on. Some of these were fantastical creations that combined totemic features with the female form. The landscape itself, with its curves, mounds and peaks, was revered as the body of the Goddess (Pollack, 1997) and treated accordingly. Representations of Her body show a female form that is large, fleshy and fertile as might be expected of the essence of life.

The ubiquity of Her presence is explained by the notion of transformation through the feminine life force (Armstrong, 1993) in which life is forever changing through the cycle of birth, death and regeneration (Gimbutas, 1989). The cycle is reflected in the Goddess's triple aspects of maiden, mother, and crone that link to women's three menstrual life-stages that, in turn, mirror that of all life: birth and growth; maturity; degeneration and death then new life. The analogous relationships of corresponding lunar and menstrual cycles, and of the lunar cycle with women's menstrual life stages – that is, the new moon (newness and birth), the full moon (fullness/fertility), and its regular disappearance (waning/death) – were further evidence of a feminine cosmic order (Pollack, 1997). Time was originally measured in lunations, marked by important ceremonies linked to lunar phases (Graves, 1973), and for millennia the year comprised the 13 cycles that naturally envelop the seasons.

Without an understanding of the mechanics of reproductive biology, fertility, as observed through nature's cycling, was thought to be a parthenogenetic blessing from the Goddess, requiring no external agent. There is no trace of a father figure from this period (Gimbutas, 1989; Graves, 1973), nor images of war. Graves (1973) describes it as a time of female sexual emancipation, when kinship was matrilineal and paternal attribution had little meaning. This is not to say that the masculine was discounted. If the feminine principle was creation, the masculine was stimulation without which growth and prosperity were vulnerable. While the images of the era indicate social organisation and ideology dominated by the feminine, the observable practices of the divine in nature - sexual activity, task specification, physiological differentiation - meant it was understood the masculine had integral roles and functions related to secondary deities that were valued and celebrated.

Worship of the Goddess, in Her myriad forms, continued through the *Neolithic* period, when, increasingly, agricultural settlements provided the social framework with seasonal rhythms of planting and harvesting that confirmed nature's cycles. The Goddess's creative power began to be sexualised (Gimbutas, 1982). Images often show Her flanked by strong male animals; and phallic imagery, sometimes combined with the

feminine in the same icon, indicates growing appreciation of the male generative role. The bull was the dominant masculine image and Gimbutas (1982) presents evidence for an early Year-God (presaging and later morphing into Dionysus) as a dominant masculine deity, celebrated through seasonal festivals when His intercession might do most good. Graves (1973) emphasises that the ritualistic mating of the man chosen to be Year-God with a representative of the Goddess, a Queen or high priestess, was a ceremonial mechanism to ensure fertility and good harvests rather than orgiastic debauch.

Imagery shows women's prowess as gatherers then transformers of plants for food, medicine, and clothing. It was this, and their invention of much household and agricultural equipment, that continued women's dominance through mechanisms such as matrilocation, where husbands moved to their wife's house on marriage (Baring & Cashford, 1991). Without historical records, assumptions about social organisation can be made only on the evidence of artefacts and images from early times. While interpretation is always open to dispute, the corpus of academic work that supports the prominence of the Great Goddess and Her myriad manifestations is persuasive and compelling. There is little dispute about the power of female deities for peoples of the region, which, if analogous to validation of patriarchal ideology by a single male god, would indicate a public place for women as depicted in images of female agency that vanished over time.

However, acceptance of a *matriarchal* (rather than an egalitarian) pre-history, while widespread, is not universal among scholars of antiquity. There are three general oppositional positions: first, that without written records it is not possible to be definitive about social structure from interpretable images and artefacts (Pomeroy, 1995); second, such a radical antithesis to subsequent patriarchal social organisation and ideology is unlikely; and, third, resistance to any suggestion that patriarchy is an evolutionary progression from matriarchy, which would normalise male privilege as the natural order (Bahrani, 2001). One consequence of this disagreement is in interpretation of the figurines found in public and domestic settings that emphasise female secondary sex characteristics by triangular representation of genitalia and breasts. These are commonly held to be fertility icons, representations of the Goddess that served in daily worship. A alternative interpretation is that they, indeed all images of female nakedness including the naked breast of a nursing mother, were for male sexual pleasure (Bahrani, 2001). This interpretation seems more likely to be coloured by a twenty-first century perspective, where the use of female images to reinforce male privilege and the capitalist economy is ubiquitous. It is doubtful that the both schematised and realistic images

from antiquity, present in public and private settings, would be a function of male titillation across the millennia of Goddess worship, particularly in eras where women enjoyed equitable legal and public status with men. It should also be remembered that the representations of female fecundity bore little resemblance to the images of femininity common to our era that emphasise youth and physical beauty rather than power.

Gimbutas (1989) dates the beginning of the decline of the omnipotence of the Great Goddess to the westward spread from eastern Europe of the Indo-Europeans, who brought with them not only farming and animal husbandry but also a patriarchal social and religious order. Farming/husbandry innovation allowed accumulation of wealth and status through production and private ownership of resource surplus, and introduced social stratification as an organising principle. A warrior class, with notions of an aristocratic elite, evolved to not only protect this new wealth but to capture that of others. Another development was the creation of task specialisation to support agricultural and martial efficiency, and to manage the accumulation of property (Corcoran, 1970). The adoption of agriculture is considered by some to be the worst mistake humanity has made (e.g., Diamond, 2007), introducing a range of maladaptive changes that included social and sexual inequality emanating from private ownership of property and wealth, hierarchical power structures favouring the strong, and stratification of the means of production in a commodified economy.

The corollary of the growth of settlements was a displacement of the equality inherent in a nomadic way of life where everybody's contribution is necessary and valued. The hierarchical structure of agrarian social organisation demanded masculine strength and values to do with controlling the environment, and the economic management of personally, rather than collectively, owned resources. The family became a formalised, patriarchal entity, the repository of assets that needed certainty of family membership for distribution. Now, knowledge of paternity became of prime importance to ensure retention of family assets through the generations, which meant that women's sexuality had to be monitored and controlled.

Historical

Images of the Goddess were still the most frequent of deities in the *Bronze Age*, the greatest of these in Her manifestations as Inanna/Ishtar (Sumeria), Hathor/Isis (Egypt) and Cybele (Anatolia) (Baring & Cashford, 1991). Records from Mesopotamia and Babylonia in the Early and Middle Bronze Ages find no gendered distinction between private and public spaces (Bahrani, 2001) with reports of women owning and independently operating businesses (Forth, 2008) and enjoying a social

status on a par with men (Vivante, 2006). They could inherit property although daughters were not uncommonly committed to celibate service of a deity, to ensure retention of family wealth through their infertility. Many of these women (the *naditus*) became independent and powerful businesswomen and some, ironically, bequeathed their property away from their family to younger women (Forth, 2008) to support women's inter-generational independence. The most prominent institution in Mesopotamia at this time was the é-Bau, the house/temple of the goddess Bau (Bahrani, 2001). Essentially the household of the queen, Bau's mortal representative, this enterprise was administered and managed by women, and credited as having the first comprehensive management record system in Mesopotamia, with a large workforce employed in a range of non-gendered industries.

By the *Iron Age*, representations of male deities were dominant (Keel & Uehlinger, 1998). Female and male figures rarely appeared together and, where they did, no interaction was depicted. Representations of women were either as servants or absent. Scenes of loyalty and fertility-promoting heterosexuality had been replaced by military themes. Where earlier images of the Goddess had been on metal, they were now on terra cotta implying, tellingly, Her devaluation by the ruling classes and Her continued widespread private, domestic worship. The political and economic systems to manage accumulation of, and growth in, private property and ownership of the means of production, alien concepts in earlier eras, offer evidence of an increasingly misogynistic religious and social culture (Armstrong, 1993; Forth, 2008).

It was at this time that notions of oppositional forces were introduced to prevailing beliefs: for example, day-night, female-male, good-evil, white-black and, perhaps most radical of all, nature-humans. The new creation myths emphasised masculine separation from, and control of, nature and provided new explanations for seasonal and lunar cycling that, prior to this, had been perceived as complementary, part of the whole (Baring & Cashford, 1991). Images of the Goddess reflected a new bellicosity, depicting Her as a war or hunting deity, weaponed and in armour (e.g., the Greek Athene, the Canaanite Anath, and the Egyptian Isis in some manifestations). It was also in this period that "enthroned, clothed mother-with-child" (Keel & Uehlinger, 1998) and nursing mother (Nielsen, 1997) images became common, perhaps reinforcing women's increasingly limited, domestic status, although images of the Divine Mother and Child were sometimes found on artefacts from earlier eras. The prominence of these two images suggest another oppositional force, that of the feminine's fierce protection of family/peoples contrasting with nurturing maternity.

The polytheistic religions of the region's peoples were very similar (Keel & Uehlinger, 1998). Deities moved between cultures, their imagery and attributes adapted to meet local conditions and there is no evidence of exclusivity of any one pantheon or deity (Armstrong, 1993; Baring & Cashford, 1991). But of all the tribes and countries of the region, it is the religious development of the people of Canaan and Israel from the Middle Bronze and Iron Ages that is of particular importance for subsequent Western thought. It was from this lineage that the books of the Old Testament recorded the pre-Christian histories, parables and myths from which Christian dogma developed and which remain important to today's Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism).

The Hebrews. Today's Canaan would encompass Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel. Settled in the Neolithic era, it was a hub of commerce and trade (Baring & Cashford, 1991) when Semitic tribes arrived in the Bronze and Iron Ages and absorbed the prevailing religion. Keel & Uehlinger (1998) report a strong mutual Canaanite-Egyptian influence in the Bronze Age, with religious iconography depicting the feminine and the masculine, often in sexualised imagery. The major deities, among many, of the Canaanites were the mother goddess Asherah, the father god El, their daughter Anath-Ashtoreth and their son Hadad-Baal (Baring & Cashford, 1991). Amongst other attributes, Baal was a fertility god whose mythic death and descent to the underworld and subsequent rescue by his wife-sister Anath explained the seasonal cycles of the death and regeneration, a rhythm explained in Greek myth by Persephone's regular return to the world from Hades following her mother, Demeter's, intervention. The death of a god and his restoration by a goddess was a common religious theme as were the associated sex rituals celebrated annually, generally by members of the religious and ruling elites, to ensure continuing prosperous fertility (Armstrong, 1993; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Forth, 2008). Armstrong (1993) suggests this religion is likely to have been that practised by Abraham who settled in Canaan around the twentieth and nineteenth centuries BCE.

The evolution of Judaism is as much political as spiritual, with interpretations of the myths indicating their status as metaphor for the various allegiances, movements and national identity over many centuries (Graves & Patai, 1965; Keel & Uehlinger, 1998). For example, Jacob's twelve sons are suggested by Graves & Patai (1965) to actually have been tribes that federated to pursue common goals. The first major change to centuries of the Canaanite belief system is associated with Jacob-Israel, Abraham's grandson, whose descendents spent many years in Egypt. Guided home by Moses about 1200 BCE, they brought with them

Yahweh as the definitive God of Israel, a strengthened manifestation of the god El who had been worshipped by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Armstrong, 1993).

At first, Yahweh-El and Asherah maintained their consort relationship in Hebrew mythology but gradually Her status became secondary to His and She assumed a mediating role between the increasingly distant, detached Yahweh and the people of Israel, much as the Virgin Mary does today in Christian Catholicism. Asherah continued to be worshipped through the cult of the Queen of Heaven (Armstrong, 1993; Baring & Cashford, 1991; Keel & Uehlinger, 1998), as Mary has been in the Christian tradition. It is suggested that Her continued worship was influenced by the foreign Canaanite wives of the Hebrew kings who brought their religion to their new homes. It continued in outlying communities of Israel until about 500 BCE (Baring & Cashford, 1991), when the elite Jews, who had been exiled to Babylonia by Nebuchadnezzar II when he conquered Judah in 586 BCE, returned.

It was this latter group, the most prominent citizens of Judah before their deportation, who came to dominate Israeli culture on their return. They believed their misfortune had been caused by their failure to worship Yahweh as the one true god, as they had been instructed during their return centuries before from Egypt, and set about re-establishing Judah as a theological state with an underpinning patriarchal ideology (Hooker, 1996), imposing their reborn faith on the Israeli population who had remained in their homeland during the Babylonian exile (Armstrong, 1993; Keel & Uehlinger, 1998).

The prophets of Yahweh campaigned to overthrow worship of the Goddess. The image of Asherah was violently removed from the Temple in Jerusalem; the women of the sacred shrines, whose duties included sexualised rituals, were libelled as prostitutes; Old Testament stories recast the Goddess as the source of evil and the feminine as inherently shameful. The people of Israel became Yahweh's "bride" so that, whereas before it was of the divine, the feminine principle became secular and valuable only in relation to the masculine god. Baring & Cashford (1991), depth psychologists for whom the story of the Goddess runs parallel to the evolution of Western consciousness, note the fundamental change brought by this development and suggest that Yahweh's "holy war" against the Goddess became a cultural unpinning of a war of the masculine against the feminine.

Still worse, the paradigm of opposition, of good against evil, was also bequeathed down the centuries as, implicitly, the only way to progress... it is worth considering here whether the fact that the oppositional paradigm in general, and the opposition of masculine and feminine in

particular, has been accepted so uncritically owes something to the sacred nature of its origins: Yahweh, the Good God, fighting and overcoming the Evil Goddess; for, whatever the virtues of doing without the graven image, the actual form this took then was identifying the sin of the people of Israel as their worship of the goddesses represented in images: Asherah, her daughter Astarte-anath (Ashtoreth), together with her son Baal.... (Baring & Cashford, 1991, p. 461).

The creation myths now gave sole responsibility for heaven and earth to a male god, and had Him create the first man out of dust. In Hebrew mythology, Lilith was the first woman God created, out of filth and sediment rather than dust, to be Adam's companion but this was not a happy union (Graves & Patai, 1965). Lilith considered herself to be Adam's equal and took great exception to notions that she should be subservient to him, choosing instead to leave both him and Eden. She then tricked God into relinquishing power to her, refused His instruction to return to Adam, and flew to the western deserts where she consorted with demons and produced innumerable demon children, 100 of whom died daily as punishment for her independence. In the myths, Lilith became a force of evil, killing human newborn children (who were unprotected by not having the names above their beds of the angels unsuccessfully sent by God to order her return to Eden), and seducing men as they slept (Monaghan, 1990), so explaining the phenomenon of nocturnal emissions.

A second attempt to create a helpmeet was rejected by Adam and it was the third woman, created from Adam's body (rather than other materials that might corrupt His intent) who became Eve, the Mother of all living (Graves & Patai, 1965). Eve sealed women's fate to be forever responsible for humanity's mortality, sin and unhappiness by allowing her curiosity to overwhelm God's prohibition on eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, then prevailing upon Adam to share consumption of its fruit. Eve had been persuaded by a serpent, in some versions a manifestation of Lilith, that eating the fruit would give Adam and her divine knowledge of good and evil. Now understanding nakedness and sexuality to be evil, their first subsequent act was to make themselves aprons of fig leaves. God's response to their disobedience was to banish Eve and Adam from the Garden of Eden, condemning Woman thereafter to painful childbirth and subjection to Man who, in turn, became destined to a life of hard work. This myth may be understood as mandating the overthrow of the Goddess by the newer patriarchal religion. It also sanctified a social order predicated on the labour of the masses and women's subservience to, and dependence on, men. Both Graves & Patia (1965) and Baring & Cashford (1991) note its similarity to

stories in other sources and to the attributes of regional goddesses; for example, the name of the uninhibited Sumerian Queen of Heaven, Lil, meant 'air' or 'storm' (Baring & Cashford, 1991), faculties which would have characterised Lilith's flight from Eden.

According to Graves & Patai (1965), all pre-Biblical sacred texts of ancient myths were either lost or deliberately suppressed by adherents to the emerging One God although some myths may still be found in early chapters of the Old Testament. Certainly, from about 500 BCE, the prophets and texts of the Hebrew religion began to actively expunge the Goddess from their belief system. Keel & Uehlinger (1998) cite evidence that Her existence was denied because of the real risk Her worship posed to the now monodeistic Yahweh and no role was allowed Her in Judaic legal-cultic, historical, and prophetic traditions. However, references to Wisdom (also known as the Greek Sophia) in Hebrew texts have been interpreted as continued manifestation of the Goddess (Forth, 2008); sometimes as mother and consort of Yahweh (Baring & Cashford, 1991), sometimes with lesser, intermediary status such as that of the devalued Asherah (Armstrong, 1993). In the words of Wisdom, from the Old Testament, thought to have been written during the fourth century in the Common Era

*Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.
By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.
By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth.
I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me.*
(Proverbs.8:14-17)²

*The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old.
I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.*
(Proverbs.8:22-23)

*Then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his
delight, rejoicing always before him;
Rejoicing in the habitable part of this earth; and my delights were with the
sons of men.
Now therefore hearken unto me, O ye children: for blessed are they that keep
my ways.
Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not.
Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at
the posts of my doors.
For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.*

² All biblical quotations are from The Holy Bible (undated), London, Oxford University Press.

But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death. (Proverbs.8:30-36)

Although the Goddess as Wisdom had been acknowledged and worshipped in many cultures in earlier times, Her re-emergence as the *spirit* of wisdom may well have been intended to retain the feminine in the burgeoning monotheism, where worship of the image of any god other than Yahweh was sacrilege. Earlier attempts to expunge the Goddess completely had provoked a backlash, particularly from women, that demonstrated a real threat to Yahweh's primacy. For example, when the prophet Jeremiah remonstrated with the exiled Jews in Egypt about their worship of other deities, saying that they risked Yahweh's punishment "by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence" (Jeremiah.44:13), the response, based on a comparison between the quality of their lives when worshipping the Goddess then Yahweh, was

As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee.

But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil.

But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offering unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. (Jeremiah.44:16-18).

Armstrong (1993) describes the period 800-200 BCE (the *Axial Age*), when the monodeistic belief system was developing, as a time of radically changing economic and social conditions. A merchant class was taking the ascendancy with associated increases in inequality and exploitation. "Strange as it may seem, the idea of "God", like the other great religious insights of the period, developed in a market economy in a spirit of aggressive capitalism" (Armstrong, 1993, p. 27).

(Yahweh's) battle with the goddesses reflects a less positive characteristic of the Axial Age, which generally saw a decline in the status of women and the female. The prestige of the great goddesses in traditional religion reflects the veneration of the female. The rise of the cities, however, meant that the more masculine qualities of martial, physical strength were exalted over female characteristics. Women's position was particularly poor in Greece. After Yahweh became the only god, his religion was managed almost entirely by men

(Armstrong, 1993, p. 50)

Marriage and the family were regarded as holy in the Hebrew tradition, their proper conduct shaped in a legislative framework. Marriage customs included the leverite, where the widow is obliged to marry her brother-in-law to ensure continuation of the dead man's name by conceiving a male child, and the marriage of inheriting daughters without brothers to patrilineal cousins so that their inheritance remained in their father's family (Schwimmer, 1995). That there is little reference to unmarried women, other than in the context of their relationship to male relatives, indicates their invisibility in the social structure. This is perhaps not surprising in a society where the barren woman was considered accursed and the unmarried "pitied and shunned... for their sexual incompleteness" (Pagels, 1988, p. 15).

The Greco-Roman era. The Olympian myths that provided an explanation for the shift in power from the feminine to masculine deities for the Hellenic peoples were absorbed into the Roman belief system, following their conquest of Greece in the second century BCE. The two cultures became increasingly entwined, with Rome's elite adopting much of the Hellenic culture, including its pantheon of deities who were given Roman names (e.g., Demeter/Ceres, Hera/Juno, Athena/Minerva and Zeus/Jupiter), so perpetuating the cosmic validation of male dominance and privilege as well as national colonisation.

Athens. There were four main Hellenic creation myths - the Pelasgian, the Homeric, the Orphic and the Olympian (Baring & Cashford, 1991; Graves, 1973). In terms of impact on present-day Western thought, the Olympian myth is of most relevance. In this tradition, the first being that followed Chaos, the dark primeval void, was Gaia, the primordial goddess, Earth (March, 2001). Unaided, she conceived and bore Uranus, the sky, who became her son-husband and with whom she produced the 11 Titans, the three Cyclopes and the three hundred-handed giants. Uranus hated his children to the degree that, as they were born, he forced them back into their mother's womb, causing Gaia great pain. Eventually, she devised a plan to end this torment by castrating Uranus and prevailed upon one of her sons, Chronus, to help her. This he did, and released his siblings only to later imprison them because of the threat they posed to his aspirations to be king of the gods. Chronus married his sister Rhea but, following a prophecy that an offspring would overthrow him, he adopted his father's approach to paternity and, at their birth, he swallowed each child as a preventive measure. In response to Rhea's pleas, their mother, Gaia, replaced the youngest of Chronus' children with a rock that he swallowed without

noticing the substitution, and sent the child Zeus to Crete for a safe upbringing. In time, the prophecy came true, with Zeus first inducing his father to disgorge his siblings – Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Hades and Poseidon – then engaging him in a ten-year war before Chronus' defeat and imprisonment. Zeus, Hades and Poseidon then divided the universe between them, taking the heavens, the underworld and the seas, respectively, and agreeing to keep the earth and Olympus in common. The goddesses were denied property-owning status. Instead, they assumed responsibility for weddings, marriage and motherhood (Hera), hearth, architecture, the home and the state (Hestia), and fertility and harvest (Demeter) (Osborn & Burgess, 2004). Hestia's responsibilities are particularly interesting for the way the home and state are linked analogically, with one validating the other, sanctified by the Divine.

Also in the original family was Aphrodite, the Mother Goddess in many traditions (Baring & Cashford, 1991) but in Greek myth the goddess of sexual and social love (Cotterell & Storm, 2007), who was born from the severed penis of Uranus, nurtured in foam and washed up on a Cypriote beach. Artemis and Athena, both daughters of the prodigiously promiscuous Zeus, were associated with the hunt, childbirth and the new moon; and war and crafts, respectively. But

(i)t was by marrying or fathering the goddesses that Zeus annexed or appropriated their powers to himself. As the Great Father, he was the undisputed head of the Olympian family, though the goddesses continued to be honoured in their own particular right. But the structuring of the world had become patriarchal... when he marries the many different goddesses whose rule preceded him, he does not extinguish their powers but brings them under his ordinance.

(Baring & Cashford, 1991, pp 315, 318)

This sample sliver from the complexity of Greek mythology illustrates the shift from the feminine Goddess to a patriarchal socio-religious system as happened elsewhere in the region. Her powers were scattered across individual goddesses, originally major deities from the many cults absorbed into the evolving Greek culture (Laing, 1982), who now represented qualities largely relating to sexuality and fertility that had to be controlled, and those that legitimised sovereignty, such as family, wisdom and justice (Munn, 2006).

Hera, an indigenous, consort-free mother goddess prior to the patriarchal invasions of her territory, had a particularly stormy passage into the Hellenic cosmology, at one point being hung from the sky after a failed attempt to overthrow her new husband, Zeus (Monaghan, 1990). This probably reflected an unsuccessful insurgency led by the ordained of

the old religion against the patriarchal invaders. Graves (1973) describes the marriage of Hera and Zeus as analogous to those in the mortal Dorian Age, when only male gods were worshipped and women's status was reduced to that of chattels.

Another example of the legitimising power of myth is associated with the eponymous patron of Athens. In myth, Poseidon claimed possession of the city but this was contested by Athena who first made a gift of the olive tree to the city then, when the matter was put to an Olympian vote, won victory through her unanimous support by the goddesses that overwhelmed that of the gods. At a mortal level, it is likely that Athenians themselves held a referendum on which deity would preside and it was the women's vote for Athena that prevailed. In either event, while Athena won the city, Athenian women were required to sacrifice citizenship rights, including suffrage, and the tradition of matrilineal descent to assuage the rage of either, respectively, Poseidon or Athenian men (Graves, 1973; Monaghan, 1990).

These losses were possibly argued on the basis of Athena not being born of woman, having sprung from her father's head fully adult and armed: If Athena had not needed female intervention in her creation, then nor did her city in its management. Yet, despite patriarchal antagonism to Athena prevailing over Poseidon, her ascribed gifts to humanity offer further evidence of women's fundamental dominance in earlier times. Inventions attributed to her include "the flute, the trumpet, the earthenware pot, the plough, the rake, the ox-yoke, the horse-bridle, the chariot, and the ship" (Graves, 1973, p. 96). She introduced mathematics, and was the goddess of crafts, war and cities (Cotterell & Storm, 2007; March, 2001). Perhaps pertinent to its place in Hebrew texts, Athena was also linked with wisdom (Baring & Cashford, 1991), the capacity to reflect and the foresight to evaluate possible courses of action and their outcomes.

Again, similar to the Hebrew myth, the Athenians believed it was Woman who rendered life miserable on earth. According to this belief, at first men were the only humans on earth until, forbidden by Zeus, Prometheus gave them the gift of fire, originally taken from them when they tricked Zeus into accepting once and thereafter the poorer remnants of sacrificed animals. Enraged, Zeus ordered Hephaestus, god of fire and metalwork, to make the first woman, Pandora, out of earth and water as punishment for men's disrespect.

*He made this lovely evil to balance the good,
Then led her off to the other gods and men
Gorgeous in the finery of the owl-eyed daughter
Sired in power. And they were stunned,*

*Immortal gods and mortal men, when they saw
The sheer deception, irresistible to men.
From her is the race of female women,
The deadly race and population of women,
A great infestation among mortal men,
At home with Wealth but not with Poverty...
That's just how Zeus, the high lord of thunder,
Made women as a curse for mortal men...*
(Hesiod, c. 800-700 BCE)

Another version is that Pandora originally was “the earth in female form” (Monaghan, 1990, p. 272), providing all that was necessary for life. Her downfall corresponded with the rise of a patriarchy that devalued the feminine and attributed all sorrow, disease and conflict to the first woman. As with the Hebrew Eve, it was Pandora’s curiosity, perhaps interpreted as challenging masculine authority, that brought about the human condition when she defied the gods by opening her dowry of a sealed jar that contained the world’s woes (Cotterell & Storm, 2007; March, 2001).

It is the Classical Greek, actually Athenian, period (c. sixth – third centuries BCE), characterised by philosophy, art, and shared governance, that was so historically influential for Western culture. Yet it was an exclusively masculine period. Athenian women had surrendered, or had taken from them, civic participatory rights. Almost nothing is known about their legal status (Sartre, 2009) and discourse about women’s lives is from the perspective of the elite Athenian men who had a vested interest in rendering women invisible (Morris, 2001; Vidén, 1997). Misogyny was apparent in literary and dramatic discourse. For example

The god made women’s minds separately in the beginning. One he made from the bristly sow” (depicting filth and slovenliness) “another the god made from the wicked vixen” (an inconstant know-all) “another is from the bitch, a mischief-maker just like her mother... another (was) fashioned out of earth and gave to man with wits impaired... another is from the sea: she has two minds... another is from the ash-gray obstinate ass... another is from the weasel, a wretched, miserable sort... another the delicate, long-maned mare (who) turns away from menial tasks and trouble... another is from the ape.. the greatest evil that Zeus has given to men... another is from the bee.. the best and wisest wives (Semonides, c. 700 BCE).

The power of Classical Athens rested on patriarchy and enslavement. Recognised as the cradle of democracy, in fact only men born of Athenian citizens could participate in public life. Women, slaves

and foreigners were excluded from the benefits afforded full citizenship (Joshel & Murnaghan, 2001; Munn, 2006; Pomeroy, 1995; Sartre, 2009). Athenian philosophers established that free-born women were of higher status than slaves but the citizenship awarded them was sufficient only to allow their (i.e., their husband's) children to be born into the status. Although thought to be incapable of achieving true masculinity, male slaves had more freedom than Athenian women. It was not unusual to find them managing the family's business or estates. However, female slaves were subject to exploitation from every quarter. Their ownership was frequently the subject of dispute between Athenian men, and they were commonly ascribed blame for household tensions (Joshel & Murnaghan, 2001), although it is likely that enduring affectionate relationships grew between individual household members such as children and their carers.

Free-born women did not attain adult status (Munn, 2006; Vivante, 2006) and were always in the guardianship of father, husband, uncle, brother, nephew or son. There is evidence of female infanticide, resulting in an estimated sex ratio of five boys to one girl (Pomeroy, 1995). Both women and girls commonly were apportioned less food than men and boys (Vivante, 2006). The marriage contract was negotiated by the heads of two families, devoid of affection or consent (although these may have existed or developed coincidentally) and designed to further political, social, and economic status (Sartre, 2009). The average age of marriage was 14 years for girls. Should an unmarried free-born woman become sexually active, she could be sold into slavery by her guardian (Pomeroy, 1995). This was one of only two reasons for loss of Athenian citizenship, the other being when free-born men took a submissive (i.e., feminine) role in sexual encounters with other men. The disparity in sex ratios meant no free-born Athenian woman remained unmarried (Pomeroy, 1995). While Plato makes uncritical reference to lesbians in his myth about the origin of the species (Plato, c. 429-347 BCE), there is no indication as to whether they lived independently of men or, as with homosexual men, were expected to marry for the purpose of procreation.

Brides were welcomed to their husband's home with a shower of fruits and nuts that symbolised the good fortune they were bringing with them, the same ceremony enjoyed by newly-arriving slaves (Demand, 2001). The bride brought with her a dowry, representing the inheritance that she had no claim to on her father's death, but which guaranteed independent support throughout her life. During the marriage, her husband had access to the principle, maintaining his wife from its income. In the event of divorce, the dowry was returned to women's fathers. Where there were no sons to inherit family property, a daughter married a male relative from her father's line, similar to Judaic practice, to ensure

retention of family wealth. She was offered in predetermined order to first her paternal uncle then his sons, sometimes requiring the dissolution of existing marriages (Pomeroy, 1995; Sartre, 2009). Divorce was available, by mutual consent or legal action. In the very few cases brought by wives for adjudication, they were represented by a male citizen, generally a relative (Pomeroy, 1995). Wives could be bequeathed on their husband's death or given away during his life (Sartre, 2009).

Women's duty was to produce legitimate heirs (Pomeroy, 1995) yet their contribution in this, most fundamental, function also was devalued. For example, there was a view that women contributed nothing to pregnancy other than an incubating womb, that it was the man who gave life to otherwise inert matter (Winters, 2006). Indeed, a womb seemed to have been the defining quality of femininity. Although Hippocrates, credited with founding the science of medicine, understood there were differences in women's and men's ill-health and treatment needs, the medical institution then as in recent times (see Ehrenreich & English, 1978) reinforced ideology about female inferiority. Commonly, symptoms of ill-health reported by women were attributed to dysfunction of menses, menarche or the uterus (Demand, 2001). A common cause of women's ill health was diagnosed to be a "wandering womb", resolvable through heterosexual intercourse then pregnancy that secured the offending organ in its proper place (Vivante, 2006).

The most obvious signifier of the free-born man's denigration of Athenian women is the culturally-endorsed homosexuality. Fundamental to Athenian men's sexuality, and status, was their phallic – more than just penile - role of penetrator: Of women, young men and of male slaves (Joshel & Murnaghan, 2001). Sexually desirous heterosexuals were termed "lecherous" whereas boys who preferred men were

the best of boys and lads, because they are the most manly in their nature. Of course, some say such boys are shameless, but they're lying. It's not because they have no shame that such boys do this... but because they are bold and brave and masculine, and they tend to cherish what is like themselves... these are the only kind of boys who grow up to be politicians. When they're grown men, they are lovers of young men, and they naturally pay no attention to marriage or to making babies, except insofar as they are required by local custom

(Plato, c. 429-347 BCE).

One category of women who could independently accrue and control personal wealth, their earnings subject to a special tax, was that of prostitute (Pomeroy, 1995). It was possible for slave women to purchase their freedom, although not citizenship, through the proceeds of prostitution and it was not uncommon for strong attachments to develop

between these women and their clients. The highest stratum of prostitutes was the *hetairai*, companions to men, who were intellectually and artistically accomplished. Several of these women achieved fame for their contribution to Athenian public life through the men with whom they were associated (Pomeroy, 1995; Vivante, 2006).

Misogynistic discourse was apparent in literature and drama although it became less dominant towards the end of the Classical period, as illustrated by the following dramatic lines:

*On my own now I am nothing. But I have
often seen the nature of woman in this way.
I mean that we are nothing. While young in our father's
house, I think we live the most pleasant life a person can lead,
for naïveté always makes children grow up in constant bliss.
But when we reach adolescence, we understand.
We are kicked out and sold to different buyers,
away from our ancestral gods and parents,
some to strange men, some to barbarians,
some to joyless houses, some to abusive ones.
And after a single night binds us,
We have to praise it and believe that it is fine.*

(Sophocles, c. 495-406/5 BCE)

*In vain the criticism of men against women
shoots a pointless arrow and speaks ill.
They are better than men and I will prove it...
There is nothing more wicked than a wicked
woman but there is nothing better in pre-eminence
Than a noble one...*

(Euripides, c. 480-407/6 BCE)

There were other signs of free-born women's increasing status at this time. Plato argued that there was no inherent reason why elite women could not rule as well as men (Vivante, 2006). Possibly because of this sort of imprimatur, women became visible in philosophical communities, authoring works some of which survived to later centuries (Pomeroy, 1995). Aristophanes also illustrated women's capacity for political action in his comedy *Lysistrata*, the story of women forcing the end of national hostilities through withdrawal of sexual availability to their husbands. Women were prominent among the early Pythagoreans, writing on concepts of the soul, law and justice, or about women's ethical issues and appropriate virtues (Vivante, 2006). A perhaps perverse indication of women's greater social inclusion was the introduction of the

female nude in art. Prior to the Hellenistic period, the nude statue was invariably male. Female depiction was of heavily draped figures which gradually gave way over a couple of centuries to first that of women in transparent, wet, or clinging coverings then of nakedness in sculpture, paintings and as sexual objects decorating men's drinking cups (Pomeroy, 1995).

Coinciding with this shift in women's status was adoption of the Mother of the Gods as the "sublime and transcendent" (Munn, 2006, p. 358) sovereign of Athens. The cult of the Mother of the Gods was widespread in the region but had been violently rejected in Athens where Her emissary, come to Athens from Persia to seek reparation for past insult and recognition of Her sovereignty, and by extension that of Persia, was murdered (Munn, 2006). Continued hostilities between the two peoples, and associated Athenian defeats, caused greater appreciation of the Goddess's powers. In desperate propitiation, She was formally embraced in the fourth century BCE. Her cult was located in the Athenian Council House, the State archive of the laws and other documents that legitimised the Athenian state.

The abysmal position of Athenian women at the beginning of the Classical period had begun to improve by its end. Through-out this time, the cults of the goddesses had continued, particularly that of Demeter and the Eleusinian Mysteries (Carlson, 1997), yet the patriarchal citizenry suppressed and devalued the feminine in their society until its gradual, partial re-emergence in the Hellenistic period. While this was reflected in the adoption of the Mother of the Gods as the dominant deity, it was also accompanied by a sexualisation of the feminine that continued patriarchy's control of women's lives.

Rome. It was possibly the influence of Etruscan culture, another Roman conquest, that meant free-born Roman women enjoyed greater freedoms than their Athenian sisters (Cross, 2009). As a consequence, they enjoyed participation in public life, comparatively uninhibited interaction with the men in their lives, and inheritance and property rights, including those of minors in their guardianship (Setälä, 1997). Not only could a Roman daughter use inherited property from her father as she wished, she had autonomy over its bequeathal up to and including ignoring her husband in her will (Saller, 2001). Another example of women's independence is that of their participation in business. For example, in the second century BCE, women owned nearly half of the land from which materials for brick production were sourced; a significant number also took both owner and managerial roles in the brickworks (Setälä, 1997).

Despite having freedoms unknown to, perhaps even unimagined by, Athenian women, Roman women continued to be subject to their father's or husband's guardianship although this seems to have been more apparent in the statutes than in reality. By the first century BCE, when wealth could be measured in accumulated assets rather than only in land, guardianship of women after marriage lay with their father, a strategy to protect family inheritance from spousal control (Rei, 2001). As in Athens, marriage for elite Romans was for political ends, to create mutually beneficial alliances between families.

Marriage and maternity remained the social epitome of women's achievement, reinforced by penalties for those who had not achieved either by their twenty-first year. There is no record of never-married women other than Vestal Virgins (Pomeroy, 1995) although there are records of women who registered as prostitutes to escape patriarchal control (McNamara, 1985). The Vestal Virgins were committed from Rome's upper echelons to thirty years' religious service. They had privileges unique among Roman women, ranging from being able to make a will during their father's lifetime and autonomous management of their property, to entitlement to the best seats in the theatre, and moving among Rome's aristocracy (Cross, 2009). Vestals who became unchaste were punished severely, at one stage of their thousand year history they were buried alive if found to be sexually active (Pomeroy, 1995). At the end of their service, they were released from their religious vows and given a dowry to bring to a marriage. Yet, as with the Babylonian *naditus* committed to life-long religious service by their families in earlier millennia, ex-Vestal Virgins preferred independence and to manage their property themselves, and most did not marry (Cross, 2009).

Ideally, widows were expected to commit suicide rather than live without their husbands although re-marriage was not uncommon, particularly in the upper classes, where widows of child-bearing age could again be used to create strategic family alliances. Divorce was available, mostly negotiated and arranged by the men of both the conjugal and the birth families. While no reason was legally required, a significant incidence seems to have been associated with a woman's fertility: Either her failure to produce a legitimate heir or the threat of adultery to patrilineage. Domestic violence was a common feature of Roman households, sometimes with fatal effect (P. Clark, 2001; Saller, 2001). While there was some opposition to spousal assault, men's status depended to a large degree on their ability to manage a harmonious household, analogous to their potential to manage public life (P. Clark, 2001). By the era's end, women could initiate divorce, becoming, according to disapproving dramatist Seneca, serial brides (Carcopino, 1980).

Gender roles and mores were reinforced in the public discourse of literature and theatre, as evidenced by Seneca's marriage satires. Women empowered by personal property were caricatured as unattractive, domineering and abusive by playwrights such as Plautus who was antagonistic to women's independent control of their dowry (Rei, 2001).

While the lives of slave women had seen little improvement over the centuries since Athenian dominance, freed women enjoyed privileges such as the right to bequeath property above a certain value. Most commonly, they were members of Rome's working class and undertook a broad range of occupations, e.g., spinning, weaving, laundry, milling, shop/stall-keeping, brewing, butchering and fishing, waitressing, prostitution, domestic work (Pomeroy, 1995; Vivante, 2006). Spinning was specific to women in all Near Eastern cultures, so much so that archaeologists accept the presence in a grave of a spindle whorl as evidence that the remains are those of a woman (Pomeroy, 1995). The notion of a man spinning was such an insult that political propaganda depicted Mark Anthony with a spindle to signify his lack of strong, masculine character when he was seeking to rule the Roman empire (Lovén, 1997).

As in all cultures, there are instances of exceptional women in the public sphere. Rome's history includes Livia, wife of Emperor Augustus, who was credited with extraordinary influence on the religious and political affairs of her time (Cross, 2009), replicated later by her granddaughter, Agrippina the Elder, and great-granddaughter Agrippina the Younger (Vivante, 2006). There were also occasions when women of wealth joined together in protest against perceived injustice. For instance, in 195 BCE, the first recorded women's demonstration demanded repeal of the Oppian Law, introduced twenty years earlier to limit women's ownership and display of wealth (Pomeroy, 1995; Vivante, 2006). Cato is reputed to have said that having to push his way through the women's public protest made him blush and, using rhetoric familiar in recent times, warned that women's equality with men would turn them into the masters (Balsdon, 1980).

Women played a fundamental role in the creation of the Classical world, albeit indirectly. Legend has it that tyranny was overthrown in Athens after the last tyrant's brother impugned the honour of a free woman. The rape of the Roman Lucretia, at much the same time, is also credited with the creation of political freedom from imperial subjugation. Following the assault by the Etruscan king, Tarquin, Lucretia first explained her reasons to her male kin before publicly committing suicide to expunge her dishonour. The subsequent outrage saw the overthrow of the monarchy and its replacement by a republican system of governance. Even earlier, the legend of the abduction of the Sabine women by Roman

men, and the women's intercession with their vengeful relatives to protect their new husbands, underpinned the birth of the city of Rome.

As Athens had turned to the Mother of the Gods in its desperation to retain regional supremacy (Munn, 2006), so too did Rome seek the return of the ancient regional Mother Goddess, Cybele, as insurance against Hannibal's military advances (Butler, 2001). The Sibylline books cautioned that he would be defeated only if Her black stone was brought to Rome. This was achieved in 204 BCE with great ceremony, and some controversy surrounding Her celebratory rituals, particularly the self-castration by ecstatic initiates to Her priesthood. She was titled *Magna Mater* by Her hosts, and Her worship continued in Rome for some centuries into the Common Era (Monaghan, 1990).

For both Athens and Rome, women's morality was closely linked to political validation and stability as illustrated by their myths of civic origin and systematic control of women's behaviour. Yet, it is hard to know what to make of societies whose belief systems honour the feminine as the underlying life principle yet work so hard to devalue women. Although individual women were credited with great literature, scientific discovery and political acuity, Joshel & Murnaghan (2001) suggest maintenance of free-born man's privileged status in the Greco-Roman era rested on externalising everything he didn't want to be onto the Other: Women and slaves. It is hard to argue when Pomeroy (1995) condemns, as a devastating legacy to Western thought, Classical misogynistic literature and philosophical argument that women's natural, only sphere is the second-class domestic.

The Celts. The other important influence on Western culture is that of the Celts. While there was never a Celtic empire such as that of Rome, tribes inhabited large tracts of Europe, stretching at their peak from Turkey in the East to Ireland in the West, loosely united by language and shared cultural values (Cremin, 1997; S. James, 1993). They valued oratory and eloquence, which were prized above martial skill (Chadwick, 1970). Without a literary tradition, their entry to history is through chroniclers of Classical nations, beginning around 500 BCE (Chadwick, 1970; S. James, 1993). Known to the Greeks as *Keltoi* or *Galatae*, and to the Romans as *Celtae* or *Galli* (S. James, 1993), contact was first through trade then later through warfare when their reach extended to the sacking of Rome about 386 BCE (Jiménez, 1996) and the sacking of Delphi in 279 BCE (Ellis, 1997).

It was the Classical chroniclers³ who described Celts as tall, pale-skinned, blue-eyed and with long fair hair, aggressive and without fear

³ The descriptions of Celts and their way of life are from the same sources, e.g. Hecataeus c. 500-476 BCE; Herodotus c. 490-425 BCE; Diodorus Siculus c. 60-30 BCE; Livy c. 59/17

(e.g., Rankin, 1995). Jiménez (1996) and Filip (1977) are among many who describe their skills in farming and stock management, art and artefact manufacture, and technology. Inventions and/or developments such as the plough and the reaper, the wooden wine barrel and soap are attributed to Celtic culture (Jiménez, 1996), as are textile manufacture, ornamentation technology and wheeled vehicles including war chariots (Filip, 1977).

The chroniclers were sufficiently startled by the beauty, fecundity and courage of Celtic women (S. James, 1993) to contrast their appearance and behaviour with that of Greek and Roman women. A commonly quoted description, based on earlier sources, by Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus reports

Nearly all the Gauls are of a lofty stature, fair and of ruddy complexion: terrible from the sternness of their eyes, very quarrelsome, and of great pride and insolence. A whole troupe of foreigners would not be able to withstand a single Gaul if he called his wife to his assistance who is usually very strong and with blue eyes; especially when, swelling her neck, gnashing her teeth, and brandishing her sallow arms of enormous size, she begins to strike blows mingled with kicks, as if they were so many missiles sent from the string of a catapult

(Caldecott, 1992, p. 4; Chadwick, 1970, p. 50; Ross, 1986, p. 534)

According to Dio Cassius (c. 164-235 CE), Boudica, Queen of the Iceni, was very tall, with a huge frame and a terrifying appearance, fierce eyes and harsh voice. She had a mass of knee-length bright red/tawny hair and carried a spear to induce fear in all who saw her (S. James, 1993; Rankin, 1995; Ross, 1986). From the same source comes the response of a Celtic woman when teased by Julia Augusta, wife of the Emperor Severus (c. 200 CE) about perceived promiscuity: “We fulfil the demands of nature in a much better way than do you Roman women; for we consort openly with the best men, whereas you let yourselves be debauched in secret by the vilest” (Chadwick, 1970, p. 55; James, 1993, p. 66). While both Aristotle (c. 350 BCE) and Athenaeus (c. third century CE) report a prevalence of homosexual attachment among Celtic men (Rankin, 1995), and it was a gendered society (S. James, 1993), there was no accompanying denigration of women as there was in Greco-Roman culture. They were among the most independent women of their time, able to hold high office in religion and politics (Cremin, 1997). Bearing arms was not uncommon, and there are instances in Gaelic mythology of martial training schools run by women (Scáthach and Aífe) who also led

BCE/CE, Tacitus c. 56-117 CE, Strabo c. 64-24 BCE/CE, and others, repeated in the references for this section.

large armies (Ross, 1986; Savino, 2002). Gravesite evidence is that women of high status were buried with the same riches and accoutrement, including chariots, as were men (Corcoran, 1970; Filip, 1977).

Social structure was built around tribe and family, linked by collective responsibilities and obligations (Filip, 1977). It was a hierarchical system of clientship, headed by a king or chief whose power was determined by the amount of the land he could claim, the size of the tribe, and the number of clients, or fighting men, on whom he could draw. Below the king/chief were the nobles, including the priests, then the non-noble free-men such as gentleman farmers and skilled craftsmen (Ross, 1986). It appears young men of aristocratic families were reared in the households of more prestigious nobles and taught the masculine skills appropriate to their rank. It is suggested that girls also were reared away from their immediate families, learning sewing and embroidery (Ross, 1986), one of the few references to conventional feminine skills acquisition. There is evidence that, in later times, wives brought a dowry, matched by her husband, to their marriage (S. James, 1993). This was jointly owned during their shared life and inherited by the surviving spouse on the death of the other (Filip, 1977). Women could not be married against their will and marriage was much more of a partnership than in the Classical world (Savino, 2002). Women could own and inherit property and had legal and economic independence. Divorce was available and, while controversial, there is a suggestion, based on Caesar's observations, that women could have multiple husbands as men could have several wives (Savino, 2002). This is consistent with reports of women in early northern Europe who were not bound to monogamous marriages (Clover, 1993).

The Celts were a highly spiritual people, perceiving themselves to be part of nature which, in turn, was a representation of the Divine (Cremin, 1997). For most of their cultural presence, they made no temples or images of their deities although there is evidence of shrines probably marking centres of ritual (Chadwick, 1970) and, from Roman times, clay figurines placed in sacred sites such as wells or springs to facilitate healing (Cremin, 1997). Indeed, Diodorus Siculus wrote that the Celt leader, Brennus, mocked the images of deities in human form at Delphi during its sacking, saying "he laughed at them, to think that men, believing that gods had human form, should set up their images in wood and stone" (James, 1993, p. 89). Natural features such as rivers and springs, trees and groves were where the Celts sacrificed to their deities and undertook other religious rituals (S. James, 1993).

As with the other religious systems discussed, that of the Celts reflected, although did not seem to mandate, their political and social

structure. The only report of a creation myth describes the Mother Goddess, in her aspect of River Goddess, fertilising the sacred oak to conceive The Dagda, progenitor of all other goddesses and gods (Ellis, 1997). Belief was fundamentally embedded in nature, in the sanctity of the land, represented by a goddess of sovereignty (R. Stewart, 1990), the Mother of the Gods (Ellis, 1997; Ross, 1986). There seems little doubt that the majority of deities was female, whose primary functions were associated with fertility, sexuality and war (R. Stewart, 1990). Mirroring earlier concepts of the Great Goddess, Celtic goddesses commonly were linked in triads, or were a single, triple-faceted deity (Filip, 1977).

The Celts held the power of the Goddess in the highest esteem. Kings or chiefs took their authority from tribal father gods who mated annually with the Goddess to ensure the land's fertility, as had kings in earlier Mediterranean cultures (Chadwick, 1970; Ross, 1986; R. Stewart, 1990). Commonly, goddesses took precedence over their consorts and were awe-inspiring manifestations of the powerful, independent feminine. So much so, that early Irish Christianity adopted the triple goddess, Brigit - Brigantia in England, Bride in Scotland and Brigandu in France - whose responsibilities were smithcraft, poetry and inspiration, healing and medicine (Monaghan, 1990). She became St Brigid in Her Christian manifestation to facilitate assimilation of pagan spirituality into Christian myth (Chadwick, 1970; Cremin, 1997; R. Stewart, 1990).

From the Irish myths and legends, thought to be consistent with archaeological evidence from elsewhere in Europe, and the Classical authors, it is clear that, within a patriarchal context, Celtic women enjoyed freedoms and independence unknown to their sisters around the Mediterranean in the last centuries before the Common Era. Frustratingly, I found no reference to relationally independent Celtic women. The women are discussed as wives or daughters, possibly reflecting the lack of written accounts of daily life and the patriarchal prisms of their foreign historians. As noted by Clover (1993, p. 366), "from the outset of the scholarly tradition, readers have been startled and not infrequently appalled by the extraordinary array of "exceptional" or "strong" or "outstanding" or "proud" or "independent" women – women whose behaviour exceeds what is presumed to be custom and sometimes the law as well". That it is women who breach gender roles and expectations who enter the historical record deprives readers of any understanding of those who are conventional, marginalised or otherwise of little interest to the authoritative sources.

Summary

We have seen that, from a time when the feminine principle held an organising role in social structure, the rise of patriarchal interests

gradually subordinated women's participatory rights to, at their lowest ebb, those of slave. Supporting this political and economic bondage was a validating religious discourse that symbiotically assimilated, demonised, disempowered, domesticated and sexualised the feminine Divine, albeit returning to Her worship in times of dire need. In cultures where women enjoyed full participation, religious belief was in the life and death power of the feminine from which a non-exploitative patriarchy⁴ took its authority.

From the next chapter, our narrative turns to our more immediate antecedents in Northern Europe, specifically to England. Our shift in attention also is to the evolving Christian church where, again, a patriarchal hierarchy that reverted to the misogynistic discourse of previous traditions gradually replaced an early egalitarianism.

⁴ In this sense, patriarchy means the head of a family or tribe will be male rather than the systematic imposition of masculine interests.