

THE CREATION OF PATRIARCHY

Summarized from The Creation of Patriarchy by Gerda Lerner, PhD

Patriarchy was created at a specific time in history out of many complex processes involving demographic, ecological, cultural, and historical factors which developed as lifestyles changed and people adapted to new circumstances. These processes were dialectical processes which means they were mutually interactive, mutually reinforcing processes at the end of the Neolithic Era and the beginning of civilization. Some of these new lifestyles and processes, which eventually led to male dominance, were:

- Men in herder tribes learned to domesticate animals during the Neolithic era; this meant they realized it took male and female to produce offspring. It is thought these herder men were the first men to realize their role in paternity.
- These herder men were also the first humans to acquire the notion of private ownership - in this case the notion of private ownership of their own herds. (Before this time during the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras people had shared tools, land, and food.)
- Once these men acquired the notion of private ownership they wanted to pass their herds down to their own blood progeny, and this was when they insisted women be virgins when they married and refrain from adultery after marriage
- This began the first patriarchal families. Fredrich Engles, who set forth these ideas in his book written in the 1800's, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, called this the "historical defeat of the female sex."
- Life at the end of the Neolithic Era included a phenomenon called by eminent anthropologist, Claude Levi-Strauss, the "Exchange of Women". This represented forms of trade where women were a commodity. It took several forms: 1. Negotiated marriage alliances between tribes or villages meant the forceful removal of women from their homelands. 2. Women offered by tribal chiefs to sleep with visiting men as a gesture of hospitality; 3. Women forced to participate in ritual rapes in festivals to insure prosperity.
- These practices, characterized as the exchange-of-women, meant women were taught from a young age to consent to these patriarchal practices.

- At this same time in the Neolithic Era, women in the agricultural villages were needed for their hard work and for their life-giving capabilities. The more children they could bear the better because people were needed to cultivate the ever-expanding farmland. Women's reproductive ability was a village resource and her reproductive capacity became like a commodity or like a form of property owned by the rulers of the group. Children now became an economic asset.
- When intertribal warfare during times of economic scarcity resulted in larger scale war, women were captured during these early wars and enslaved. Women and children became the first slaves in human history. Women slaves were forced to become prostitutes, concubines, or domestic servants
- The Queen and upper class women had many privileges. The Queen served as Deputy and stand-in for her husband, had personal slaves and attendants, but even the Queen's sexuality and reproductive capabilities were controlled by men. Kings and warriors had harems and numerous concubines.
- Royal edicts and legal codes legitimized the patriarchal family. The patriarchal family was based on the father as the head of the family and he had economic and legal power over the family. He was obeyed by his wife and children. Adultery on the part of the wife was punishable by death in many edicts and codes.
- Legal codes differentiated between respectable and non-respectable women thus institutionalizing a ranking order for women which has divided women, prevented women from uniting, and blocking feminist consciousness. These male written codes caused women to compete rather than cooperate.
- Mother Goddesses, so common during the Paleolithic and Neolithic Eras, were demoted in the pantheon of gods with the rise of civilization and male Gods including male creator gods rose to the top of the pantheon of gods. Example: the Hebrew god Yahweh only communicated with patriarchs of the tribes including Abraham, Noah, Moses, Cain and Abel, but didn't communicate directly with women. The Greek god Zeus gave birth to Athena showing he was superior to her. Medusa's former image as a powerful fertility goddess was reworked into making her a monster with hair of writhing snakes and Pandora, another fertility goddess, became a demon with a box full of the evils of the world.

- Male historians, scribes, and scholars have created most of the belief systems, heroes, and explanatory systems in the various civilizations and women have been largely excluded from this process until fairly recently.
- The majority of women all over the world have been deprived of an education until fairly recently.
- Women have collaborated in their own subordination and have sometimes internalized values which have subordinated them.

DEFINITIONS:

Sex - a biological distinction between male and female

Gender - the culturally created roles assigned to each gender in a particular culture