

# **Historical Development of Patriarchy at the end of the Neolithic era and Beginning of Civilization**

A summary of a book by Margaret Ehrenberg, *Women in Prehistory*, 1989 Norman: University of Oklahoma Press

## **Hoe Plowing replaced by bronze plows pulled by domestic animals**

Margaret Ehrenberg begins by asserting that during the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras there was almost certainly equality between men and women. Research and circumstantial evidence reveals that women's roles were greater than historians had previously acknowledged. She also asserts that women's status depends largely on their economic role. The more important and independent their economic role, the higher their status.

In hunter-gatherer societies, women did most of the gathering and men did the hunting. Because hunter/gatherer women bore an average of 5 children, it would have been difficult for them to hunt. But this did not mean inequality for them; their gathering provided more than half of the food for the band. Their crucial role as gatherers was the main reason for their equality with men.

The development of agriculture and the domestication of animals (about 10,000 years ago) brought about significant social change. In the early stages of agriculture, women continued to have high status as they created farming as a result of their gathering role. Furthermore, they did the early farming themselves using hoes and digging sticks, while men carried on hunting.

By the time of the Bronze Age, around 2,000 BC, light-weight hoes were replaced by large bronze-tipped plows pulled by oxen. Men's strength was needed to handle large animals and heavier plows. Furthermore, men no longer hunted large beasts such as mammoth and bison; these beasts became extinct during a period of global warming when the tundra lands they lived on were overtaken by vast deciduous forests.

## **Beginnings of Warfare**

At this same time raiding and eventually warfare became common. Herders who might have lost their animals due to disease would be desperate for food and would have swept down on agricultural villages and plundered food. Early warfare,

defined as one entire group of people fighting another group of people, prompted the need for permanent military forces to protect villages. These forces were always prepared to drive out invaders.

Because defending villages, and later cities, was a necessity, and because men's strength was needed for this effort, warrior men acquired high status. When men fought wars women were forced aside in a subordinate role.

In addition, in another setback for social justice, the settled agricultural way of life and the rise of permanent military forces not only led to women becoming subordinated, it also paved the way for the development of social classes. Warrior men acquired high social status at the top of society, and these men eventually became the first ruling monarchs. The settled farming life meant lower class farmers would grow and store a surplus of food which enabled the ruling class of monarchs, emperors, scribes and warriors to live in luxurious palaces and large homes in the centers of power.

### **Long Distance Trade**

Men also handled increasing trade at the end of the Neolithic era and the rise of civilization. Merchants set out into the unknown, often traveling long distances to find resources and luxury goods for the ruling classes. These early trade missions, with camels or horses carrying goods, required strength and stamina. Women bearing and nursing children would not have been able to participate in long-distance trade.

Summary by Hope Benne