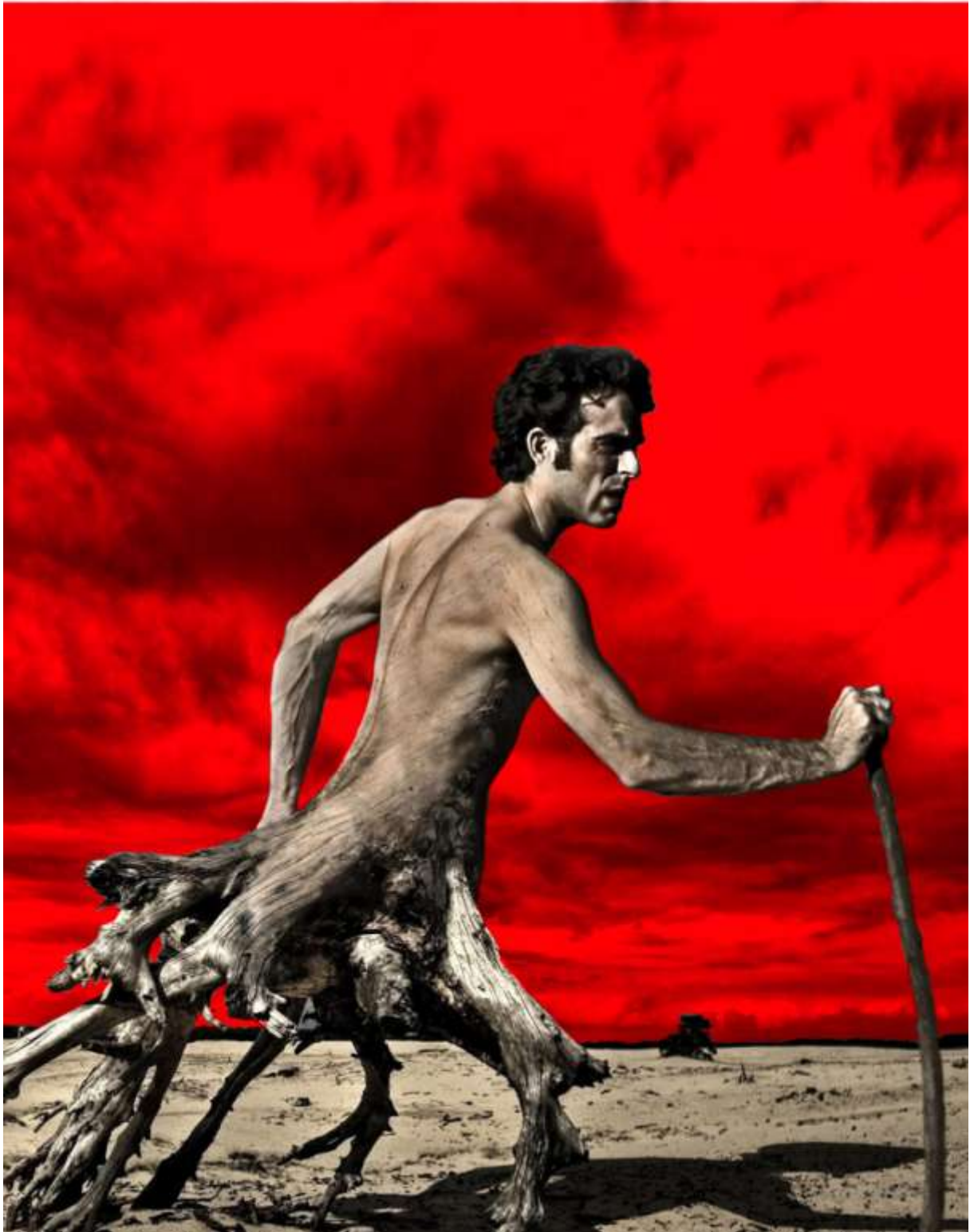


René Hirsch
THE MASCULINE CIVILIZATION



The Masculine Civilization

Metahistory

by Rene Hirsch



Cover: Men merged with nature

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Pretext

A few years ago, speaking at Leiden University, Professor Peter Akkermans reminded us how King Nabonidus (556-539 BCE [\[1\]](#)), after having plotted his way to the throne of Babylon, forged for himself a mythical past worthy of his status, and came to believe in it. This story does not only refer to an epoch and a personage, but also implies that the scheme conceived by this monarch impregnated the reality of his people and of his time, acquiring, as a result, a historical dimension.

Such phenomena abound throughout history, sometimes provoked by a traumatic event, but mostly surfacing during dictatorships, as Nazi Germany has shown. The myths it supported were accepted by whole populations who came to believe in the propaganda imposed on them. Affecting their perception of reality, it marked their judgments and opinions, and, ultimately, left its imprint on history. It is only when the deception collapses that people finally realize to what point they have been mystified, possibly triggering a collective trauma.

Eventually, the passing of time ineluctably relegates past interpretations into obsolescence, leaving as only accepted reading of the past the one bestowed by the present. The way historical events were perceived by the ones who have lived those events, who have been marked by them, is generally discarded as archaic and irrelevant. Manifest of this idea is the acknowledgment that societies and civilizations are to be appraised in the light of the “progress” they have achieved, regarding therefore most bygone cultures as “barbarian,” or even “savage” [\[2\]](#). And though the savagery of two world wars has somewhat toned down this point of view, the notion of progress appearing not as inexorable, we continue to support the idea that the knowledge and technology gathered by our industrialized civilization represents an apogee that no other culture has ever matched, even less surpassed. As a result, we tend to forget that choices were made every step of the way, choices that were influenced by the way contemporaries perceived their present, every trodden path leaving behind alternatives that are now lost in time, obsolete.

On the tree of human history, the diversity of cultures represents as many branches sharing a similar vein, fed by the same sap. It would therefore be beneficial for all of us to delineate the common denominators that reconcile all these impetuses born from an identical core that form the different facets of our humanity. In the words of Mircea Eliade, we should never lose sight “*of the profound and indivisible unity of the history of the human mind.*” [\[Eliade, 1976\]](#)

To recognize our human nature in the way other populations lived and interpreted their present – whether they preceded or paralleled our time – could help us understand our present in a manner closer to our nature, every explored path adding to our accumulated

experience. These principles remain even more valid today as our relationship to nature must be urgently reevaluated.

I propose we retrace here a path that was taken a long time ago, the path that led to the advent of the “masculine civilization.” Some of the choices made at the time were so decisive that they have alienated parts of our intrinsic human nature. Still today, despite all our progress, their consequences weigh heavily on our lives, our decisions, our goals.

Nature versus Culture

There was a time when men and women did not know what the purpose of sex was. While physiological evidence made women’s procreative responsibility indisputable, it was impossible to attribute any reproductive function to men, as long as the role of sex was not understood. There was thus a time when fatherhood did not exist.

The world before fatherhood was characterized by an all-encompassing nature, source of all life. The fact that the feminine, with its obvious fertile attributes, was nature’s representative remained a source of frustration for men who thought of their role as being a secondary if not a redundant one.

In an initial attempt to control nature, men will use the spirits to explain most of its mysterious manifestations. One of their main functions will be to provide pregnancy with its first comprehensive explanation, while endowing men with a primordial role in its process. The spiritualization of nature will eventually lead to the holistic conception of the universe that characterizes the primitive world.

Sedentarization and animal domestication will offer the likelihood to observe the consequences of the sexual act. However, the full integration of fatherhood will only come into effect after the collapse of the Neolithic society and the disappearance of its millennial traditions. From its ashes, new social and economic structures will emerge that in a very short time see villages become cities, kingdoms, and empires, while divinities replace the spirits that have lost most of their functions. In the new society, men occupy all key positions, their patriarchal principles implemented through ancestor cults at the household level and tables of law at the collective level.

In the Middle East, the masculine civilization will find its ideological climax during the Axial Age, with the precepts of the prophets and the advent of Levantine monotheism. The new divinity mirrors the position man has forged for himself in the universe, nature and woman both subjected to him. Replacing Mother Nature as source of all life, the Divine Father sits now at the summit of the creation.

Synopsis

This book is divided into four parts.

In the first part, we see why the spirits were invented and which roles were assigned to them. Their omnipresence and the functions they fulfilled allow us to reconstruct the way humans saw the world and the role they played in it.

The second part describes how the first sedentarized communities, despite the profound transformations brought by the Neolithic Revolution, kept most of their ancestral customs and values during the new era. Women remained the main contributor to the economy by playing a crucial role in the process of sedentarization and in the production of food (agriculture). Men, for their part, went on hunting, providing the community with meat while keeping nomadic and shamanic traditions alive.

In the third part, we see that the climatic and environmental deterioration at the end of the Neolithic era, combined with the discovery of fatherhood and the bull's domestication, precipitates a complete transformation of the society. The egalitarian tribal structure gives way to a hierarchized society in which men occupy all key economic and administrative positions, relegating women to a secondary role. Deprived of their main functions, the spirits are replaced by divinities that are organized in pantheons, mimicking the hierarchical structure in force in the urban society.

The last part depicts the introduction of Yahweh, a new divinity in the landscape of the Middle East. The functionality of its first manifestations, in full concordance with the prevailing polytheistic context, gradually becomes more abstract, influenced by the ideologies of the Axial Age. We see how the prophets adapt their divinity to the people they represent, a tribal community of nomadic pastoralists without religious or political organization. It is their oral tradition that the prophets use as background for their narrative of the creation: a people longing for a time before the revolution, for a paradise that has been lost.

The conclusion proposes a new division of human history in which the introduction of fatherhood serves as pivotal element to mark the start of the masculine civilization. Having dominated for the last 7,000 years, its ideology is confronted today with a major challenge, the resurgence of women's economic role and the notion that, for the first time ever, nature has to be protected from our own deeds. Both plead for the resumption of a more holistic vision of the universe.

Considering the extended period over which the events I relate are spread out, it has not been possible to take into account the numerous variations, the multiple exceptions, and the

innumerable nuances that characterize human history. Constrained by the objective of this work, my purpose is to refer to a general behavior and to retrace the well-trodden path.

Another fundamental bias of this work is that it sees history through the eyes of a male Westerner, voluntarily disregarding all other interpretations of the sources, for the simple reason that this narration is the result of a quest, whose resolution resides in the world that created it, in the world to which it belongs.



Knight

Why can't I kill God within me? Why does He live on in this painful and humiliating way even though I curse Him and want to tear Him out of my heart? Why, in spite of everything, is He a baffling reality that I can't shake off? Do you hear me?

Death

Yes, I hear you.

Knight

I want knowledge, not faith, not suppositions, but knowledge. I want God to stretch out His hand towards me, reveal Himself and speak to me.

Death

But He remains silent.

Knight

I call out to Him in the dark but no one seems to be there.

Death

Perhaps no one is there.

Knight

Then life is an outrageous horror. No one can live in the face of death, knowing that all is nothingness.

Death

Most people never reflect about either death or the futility of life.

Knight

But one day they will have to stand at that last moment of life and look towards the darkness.

Death

When that day comes...

Knight

In our fear, we make an image, and that image we call God.

[BERGMAN Ingmar (1957): *The Seventh Seal*]



Part One

To Be and To Have

In this part, we see why the spirits were invented and the functions that were assigned to them.

Most of the documentation used here comes from the ethnographical and anthropological literature.

This first part is divided into three chapters and a conclusion:

I. Of Sex and Procreation, which shows why procreation in most primitive communities has been the source of a gnawing mystery

II. Of Male Power describes why and how the spirits were used to explain nature's mysteries

III. Of Female Power sketches the misconceptions related to female sexuality and to pregnancy

To Be and To Have draws the conclusion that men, not knowing the function that nature had assigned to them, craved to possess what they did not have



The following text revives a discussion that began in 1865, when John Ferguson McLennan published [Primitive Marriage](#). In it, he sustained ideas that were, and still are revolutionary, proposing that somewhere in our past we, human beings, were ignorant of the relationship between sexuality and procreation. Besides, McLennan was also the first to imagine that a matriarchal organization of society had preceded the patriarchal system in force today. At the time, these ideas were certainly daring.

Moreover, this author also participated in the extended debate formed around the idea that sexual intercourse in primitive societies was characterized by promiscuity, a standpoint he defended with other renowned researchers such as Lewis Henry Morgan, Johann Jakob Bachofen, and James Frazer. Supporting McLennan's theory, Frazer concluded that there was a time when all people were ignorant of physiological paternity.

However, the interventions of Sigmund Freud and Edvard Westermarck imposed the idea that human society was, since its very beginning, structured around the father and the monogamous family. For a while, their standpoint silenced the discussion.

In 1966, Edmund Leach reawakened the debate by announcing that physiological paternity was recognized as a cultural fact everywhere in the world, and that to speak of ignorance on this topic inferred that one considered the natives as "*childish, stupid, superstitious.*" [[Leach, 1969](#)]

In her answer, Suzan [Montague](#) contrasted the nature-culture dichotomy of our Judeo-Christian universe with the conception of the Trobrianders (Papua New Guinea), a people who, until recently, did not know the facts of procreation as we understand them, its conception resting on a totem-rank dichotomy. Therefore, establishing physiological paternity was not of relevance for the Trobrianders, since the structure of their society did not take it into account. On the other hand, the social father – who does not exist or has a very marginalized function as a godfather in our societies – played a decisive role in theirs: around him was the relationship father-child organized. Through him, the heritage of the clan and the totem were also transmitted, determining elements for possessing land. As Torben Monberg summarized, every culture develops the logical markers that are necessary for framing its vision of the world [4].

In this first part, we go back to the time when all humans lived as nomads, completely dependent on nature that provided them with their sustenance. In the remnants of those bygone worlds, we discover which functions these populations attributed to sexuality, and how they considered their procreative role. However, the scarcity of information we possess on these people has made it necessary to approach the subject from another slant.

During the last few hundred years, travelers, explorers, missionaries, ethnologists and other scientists have described the lifestyles and customs of communities around the world that were isolated from Western civilizing currents. Some of their ancestral beliefs, kept intact and perpetuated from generation to generation, will allow us to retrace the state of knowledge of their forefathers. To this journey in time and space, this initial part is dedicated.



I. Of Sex and Procreation

During the Paleolithic era, humans lived in hordes or bands. The size of these bands was determined by the access they had to food. Plants were generally the domain of women, who supplied the nutritional needs and determined the camp's emplacement. Meat was provided by hunting, traditionally in men's hands, while fishing was usually done by both sexes, these last two activities contributing less regularly to the group's diet. It was a life of predation, the organization of which was dictated by the environment and was defined by the following features:

- 1) Humans, like all other species, obtained their means of subsistence out of what nature produced
- 2) Food abundance or shortage determined the degree of nomadism of these populations that had to move according to nutritional resources, animal migrations, and the degree of maturity of seasonal plants
- 3) Caves and other natural shelters offered the only alternative to life in the open air
- 4) The possessions of the group were strictly limited to what every individual could carry when changing location (material and tools necessary for the camp, for picking, fishing, hunting, etc.), making trade by barter very limited, and the creation of an exchange economy impossible

Living in an unforeseeable and dangerous nature, humans were prey to illness and accidents, to wild beasts and unknown plants, to the inclemency of the weather, as well as to internal struggles and to conflicts among hordes.

This Stone age will last a very long time during which humans will develop specific techniques and tools, and accumulate observations on their environment. With the passing of time, they will build up a tradition that will form a cultural heritage specific to each group.

Observing nature around them, these populations tried to understand its manifestations, and to relate them logically to their knowledge, to the way they understood the world. However, many of these manifestations seemed to occur without any reason, regardless of any logic that could justify their occurrence. Where did the clouds, the rain, the storm, or lightning come from? Why was the sky sprinkled with small lights, not always the same, and why did some of them move? Why did cataclysms destroy their food? Why did epidemics decimate so many of them?

Among all those mysteries, death certainly was the greatest of them all, with its incomprehensible rules, yet everywhere present. Irremediably anchoring humans into nature,

death was not only the most important event occurring in an individual's life, but was also a very prominent event within the group, especially when its size was modest.

Another most incomprehensible mystery to the people of those faraway times was pregnancy. They did not know how children were conceived, why the belly of women suddenly began to grow, and why, after a few months, women gave birth to one, and sometimes several children. They could not explain why one gave birth to a boy, the other to a girl, a third one to twins, and a fourth to a stillborn baby [6].

Of course, they had observed an identical phenomenon in the animal world where females deliver and nurse their offspring just as women do. Even so, one thing humans could not understand, could not even imagine, was the role that men played in this process. How could they have established a link between the sexual act, in which man seems to be the main actor, and the physiological conditions characterizing pregnant women?

Let us put into context a few aspects of this relationship.

First, the discontinuity of menses, a primary indication of a possible pregnancy, occurs weeks after the sexual act. Furthermore, women who breast-feed their baby are not submitted to the menstrual cycle, which does not mean they are pregnant. Besides, the menstrual cycle lacks regularity, especially for women who are often on the move or are subject to a rough life: *"The menses commence to flow among the native females at an earlier age than among Europeans, frequently beginning at about twelve; they are also subject to many irregularities in their periodical return, arising probably from the kind of life they lead and the nature of the diet upon which they live. I have known cases where this irregularity has extended to three months. Child-bearing does not commence often before the age of sixteen, nor have I ever noticed pregnant women under that age."* [Eyre, 1845]

We will further see that, even though humans had certainly noticed that pregnancy does not occur before the first menstruation, the function of menstruation has only very recently been understood. Second, the frequency of sexual intercourse exceeding by far that of pregnancies, and pregnancy becoming visible a few months after the sexual act, it was practically impossible, for men as well as for women, to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the two events.

Finally, the important number of sterile and crippled women, and the frequent miscarriages made establishing such a connection even more difficult.

In addition, two elements that would have simplified the observation of this relationship were missing. Domesticated animals, with their shorter procreative cycle, were only integrated into human society during the Neolithic era, around 8,000, except for the dog who sporadically appears a few millennia earlier. More significantly, the monogamous relationship between

men and women, with its strict copulating discipline, was not characteristic of these populations' sexual practices. On the contrary, promiscuity was the rule, which made observing the potential consequences of sex practically impossible.

Of Sexual Promiscuity

Many factors influence the procreative behavior of primates, the most important being the demographics and the way food is harvested and distributed. The sexual life of primates is organized around one of three forms of relationship.

Serialized monogamous relationship, the most infrequent of the three, is found among gibbons and some lemurs, and takes place when females gather food on their own: the males divide the isolated females among themselves and mate with them.

Single polygynous relationship, practiced by baboons and gorillas, is a sort of polygamy in which one male establishes a relationship with a small group of females when they collect food and search for protection. The male has to prove his strength and aggressiveness by chasing other males from the territory where females are harvesting. Having to compete to get access to the best male, sexual rivalry among females is rife.

Multiple polygynous relationships are practiced by macaques, chimpanzees, some lemurs and some baboons. In this organization, females form an important group (ten individuals or more), and several males make an alliance to get exclusive access to them. Inside the male group, competition is intense and appears at different levels: hierarchy, domination, violence, but also strategic partnerships and group tactics. Females' preferences and the need for variety add a supplementary degree of complexity to this structure of highly politicized relationships.

Female primates play a dominant role in the sexual organization within the group, as among chimpanzees where a female motivated for sex attracts all the males. In a multiple polygynous relationship, she indicates her preference for a particular male by joining the group in which he is, by having sexual intercourse with him during her fertile period, by displaying her support at times of conflicts with other males, and by developing social relationships with him. In the same way, she rejects a male who displeases her by refusing to mate with him, by trying to expel him from her group, or by leaving the group in which he is.

Females encourage males who best assure their protection and that of their offspring. Males with whom they develop a social relationship can win their favor as well. However, sexual intercourse does not limit itself to males they know: newcomers into the group are also accepted by them, not only for the renewal they represent, but also to make sure that they will not attack their young.

Moreover, adding a supplementary layer of complexity to these relationships, males display a marked preference for mature females who possess an extended network, and who have, time and again, proven their fertility and their capacity to survive, all these aspects exercising an obvious influence on their social status. A relationship with a teenage female who has no experience and who has not proven her fertility is exceptional.

For humans, the conditions of life during the Paleolithic era plead in favor of relationships based on promiscuity rather than on serialized monogamy. First, Paleolithic bands were composed of twenty to fifty individuals on average, which made serialized monogamy not viable [7]. Secondly, the clear distribution of tasks between men and women predisposed them to an organization of their sexual life similar to the one existing among chimpanzees. Furthermore, a multiple polygynous structure encourages the development of a social organization on two levels: it favors a wealth of nuances in the relationship between the sexes, and it increases politicization inside each group.

Other demographic data reinforce this idea. Skeletons excavated by archaeologists reveal a considerable disparity in the adult population of the Paleolithic bands, generally indicating that there were two women for three men. In addition, women lived on average eight years less than men did. The shortage of women made monogamous relationships impossible. What's more, such a demographic imbalance between the sexes must have deeply influenced the way sexuality was experienced, especially for men: placed in a chronic state of shortage and insecurity, they were obliged to adapt their aggressiveness and their capacities for socialization for the sole purpose of securing their sexual survival. The anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon who studied the Yanomamö (Brazil) noted that the wars this people waged almost always had women for object. Raids were organized to kidnap the women of another village, the rest of its inhabitants being simply slaughtered. The captured women were first raped by all the members of the expedition, then by all the men who had remained at the village, before finally ending up being incorporated into the community and taken as wives.

It does not belong to our present scientific capacities to reconstruct the daily life of a period that has only left us bones, sets of teeth, and a few usual objects for inheritance. Closer to us, however, within reach of contemporary scrutiny, communities have lived, and for a few, still live today isolated from the civilizing current, throwing a more direct bridge between our time and our distant prehistory. The lifestyles, traditions and beliefs they have maintained throughout time give us a potential picture of the world of humans before history, before civilization erased most of its traces.

Sexual freedom – certainly applied in different degrees and forms – is one aspect that has been observed by many travelers all over the world, allowing us to say that casual and indiscriminate sexual relationships were still the general rule, and not the exception, for most indigenous people a few centuries ago.

The Caledonian (New Caledonia) shared their women, and each child belonged to the whole clan. The Nayar (India) also lived in complete promiscuity. The Boschisman (South Africa), as well as most Indians of California, had no word for marriage, and jealousy arose only when a woman gave herself to someone from another tribe. For the Massagetean (Iran), marriage did exist but to have sex with someone else was possible. [Herodotus](#) [1850] writes that if a man desired a woman, he hung his quiver before her wagon and had intercourse with her “*without fear.*” Free sexual access was also an institution for the Nasamon (North Africa) and the Agathyrsi (Romania), whose men wanted to share like brothers and avoid all sources of envy or hate. The Ausean (Libya) practiced promiscuous sexuality publicly: “*they do not cohabit but have intercourse like cattle.*” [[Herodotus](#), 1850] When a child reached three months of age, it was declared the son of the man to whom he most resembled.

In the Andaman Islands (as well as in California), a woman who resists a man who makes a pass at her is considered to be offensive. As for the Cafres of Madagascar, they do not have any word to express virginity. When a girl becomes pubescent, it is publicly announced and a feast is organized during which everybody can possess her. In Darfur (Sudan), the girl gets a separated hut where everyone can spend the night with her. In Central Australia as well as by the Inuit (Arctic), a woman whose husband is absent can give herself to whoever she wants.

Gindane women (Libya) carried around their ankles as many ornaments as the number of men with whom they had sex. Similarly, Egyptian women carried distinctive signs that showed the number of men they had: the one with the most lovers possessed the highest status. In Tibet, it is a ring around their neck that girls get from their lovers: the more rings a girl has, the more famous her wedding will be.

In Taiwan, Ami girls went on board European ships and gave themselves to the sailors. When leaving, they said they would come back the following day, to the delight of the crew. The same custom has been observed in the Marianne Islands and in the Philippines by the men of Otto von Kotzebue, and in Mauna (Hawaii) by the slave on board La Perouse.

Indigenous women of Panama would consider themselves unworthy if they refused a demand to have sex. A Nadowessie Indian woman (United States) who organized a feast and gave herself to forty of her tribe's main warriors received much consideration.

The very common practice allowing women to offer themselves (or to be offered) to their host has been observed in many different places such as Sri Lanka, Greenland, the Canary Islands, and Tahiti. Refusing a woman was considered an offense by the indigenous people, while European travelers falsely called it “hospitable prostitution.” In Nukuhiva (French Polynesia), a missionary who did not accept the traditional offer was surprised in his sleep by a group of women who came to verify if he really was a man. In Assinise (Ivory Coast), the family's chief sent his daughter to his host. In the 1870s CE in Japan, Georges Bousquet who was drafting the civil code was offered a woman by her father in presence of her husband.

The British consul John Petherick wrote over the Hassaneyeh of Ethiopia that “their habits are certainly most peculiar, for they consider the marriage-tie binding but for four days in every week, namely, from Monday to Thursday inclusive, while during the remaining three, both husband and wife are independent of each other, and sans reproche.” [[Petherick, 1861](#)]

The Mysteries of Procreation

Reading testimonies from explorers, ethnologists and other travelers who have observed various populations living outside modern society, one can only be impressed by the diversity and wealth of interpretations that these people have attributed to the sexual function, and by the way they have explained the principles of procreation. The examples that follow illustrate to which point sexuality and procreation have rarely been associated.

During a journey in the Trobriand Islands (New Guinea) in the 1910s, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski asked a man who just came back home after two years of absence why he was not annoyed to find out that his wife had had a child while he was away. But the man did not answer the question, for this question made no sense to a people that had not established physiological paternity. Indeed, for the Trobrianders, children are introduced in the mother's belly in the shape of very tiny spirits, generally through the intermediary of the spirit of a deceased maternal parent. The husband's role consists of receiving the child into his arms when it is being born, protecting it and pampering it. But the child is not his; he did not play any role in its conception.

Maurice Godelier summarizes this vision of procreation in the following terms: “For the Trobrianders indeed, the fetus is formed in a woman's belly by the meeting and conjunction of a child-spirit and this woman's menstrual blood. Child-spirits are spirits of the deceased (Baloma) that want to be born again in the body of one of their descendants. The dead live in Tuma, a small island off the shores of Kiriwina, under the authority of the divinity Tupileta who reigns over the world of the dead. When someone deceased wants to be born again, it

then changes into a child-spirit (Wai Waya) and gets carried by the sea to the island of Kiriwina. There, it finds its way into the body of a woman of its clan. But it can get there only if guided by the spirit of a living member of the woman's clan. All deceased children, therefore, are reincarnated spirits, but they keep no memory of the life led by the ancestor who is reincarnated in them. For the Trobrianders, the woman must be pierced before getting pregnant. For that reason, she must mate, and young people practice sexual intercourse at a very early age and have an intense sexual life before getting married. But to make love is not sufficient to make a child, because a woman doesn't get pregnant by the semen that a man deposits in her, she becomes mother through the intervention of spirits that discover she has been opened and give her a child-spirit. Mingled with her menstrual blood, it becomes a fetus, a liquid and formless mass that is not yet a child. The woman's blood then produces the flesh, the bones and the skin of the fetus. The woman is the only genitor of the child. As soon as the woman has announced that she is pregnant, her man multiplies sexual intercourse. This repeated coital activity has three effects: it creates a plug that will stop the woman's blood from flowing out; it then coagulates the formless mass of the fetus; it imprints a shape that will later make it look like its father. Besides, the supply of semen regularly feeds the fetus during pregnancy. The man pierces and plugs the woman, he models and feeds the fetus." [Godelier, 2003] "Trobriand children receive two contributions from their mothers, one substantive (blood), the other non-substantive (spirit), and from their fathers they similarly receive two procreative contributions, one substantive (feeding) and one non-substantive (forming)." [Mosko, 1998]

In 1937, a few thousand kilometers south of Kiriwina, Ashley Montagu observed identical ideas in several aboriginal communities of Australia. Not having established the link between sexuality and pregnancy, these populations considered all sexual activity as playful and allowed their children to participate in it: sexual intercourse between adults and children was socially integrated. Baldwin Spencer already mentioned some expression of this ignorance when talking to mothers of half-caste children: "*the chief difference that they recognized between their life before and after they came into contact with white men was not the fact that they had intercourse with white men, instead of or side by side with blacks, but that they ate white flour, and that this naturally affected the color of their offspring. I have seen old natives in Central Australia accept, without question, their wives' half-caste children, making no difference whatever between them and the pure bred ones.*" [Spencer, 1914]

Just like the Trobrianders, numerous aboriginal communities think that pregnancy is due to the introduction of a child-spirit in the woman's body. The child-spirit is associated with the spirits of the forebears of the totem to which the woman belongs. The man does not participate in the child's conception in any way.

Charles Mountford and Alison Harvey recount that the Adnjamatana of South Australia “appear to have had no knowledge of physical paternity before the coming of the white man, and certain features of Adnjamatana theory... suggest also the non-recognition of physiological maternity.” [Mountford & Harvey, 1941] The conception and the formation of a child are thus entirely due to the convergence of totemic powers: “neither male nor female parent contributes anything whatsoever of a physical or spiritual nature to the being of the child.” [Montagu, 1937] [8]

For most aboriginal communities, the child-spirit exists as an independent being, mainly found around ancestral places like the well of the clan: “*the child is not the direct result of intercourse, that it may come without this, which merely, as it were, prepares the mother for the reception and birth of an already-formed spirit child who inhabits one of the local totem centers.*” [Spencer & Gillen, 1899] A woman who does not want to become pregnant avoids these places, or on the contrary, frequents them if she wants to have a child. She will be seen hitting a tree that shelters child-spirits in order to scatter its fertilizing power. Another one will bathe in a river, or eat fish, snakes, or other animals or plants. Some communities have even established a link between eating human flesh and pregnancy.

The Kakadu (Australia) believe in a double spirit: Iwaiyu, who enters the woman as a child-spirit, and Yalmuru, who appears at night to the “father” and tells him that his wife is pregnant, naming the ancestor whom the child-spirit reincarnates and saying to which totem it belongs. In his notes on [North Queensland Ethnography](#), Walter Roth inventoried the main reasons of pregnancy according to the Tully River Blacks (Australia). A woman gets pregnant a) when she sits down on a fire on which she has grilled a fish offered by the man who is going to become the father of the child; b) when she goes hunting and catches a particular sort of frog; c) when a man tells her that she is in an “interesting condition;” d) when she dreams that a child has been placed in her. A woman having dreamt of being told to be in an “interesting condition” by two different persons will have twins, while a child's congenital deformity is due to the wrong man having told the woman that she was expecting, or to the forbidden food she has eaten.

The child-spirit can enter the mother by her mouth, by her vagina, or by any wound. It can also slip under the nail of her big toe. Most of the time, a man will announce the pregnancy, saying that a child has been “found.” It allows the introduction of the social father, but does not imply it necessarily: besides the fact that the child's “discovery” can be announced by the mother, it also happens that a man “finds” a child without becoming its father.

The intervention of spirits in the procreation process has been repeatedly observed. For the Asmat, a people of New Guinea that has lived isolated until 1950, pregnancy occurs when a

frog (the green tree frog) lands on a woman's shoulder. This frog represents an ancestor's spirit that tries to be reincarnated and wants to find a good mother. The newborn will have the same sex as the ancestor who impregnated the mother. Sometimes, to come close to a whirlpool formed at the junction of several rivers, or to drink water from one of those whirlpools is enough to get pregnant, because it is there that the spirits live. The spirits are therefore at the origin of procreation and maintain the primordial balance that must reign between the world of the living and their own world, an extremely important feature in Asmat cosmology. It is also the interaction between those two worlds that explains infantile mortality, which is particularly elevated but not surprisingly so when one considers the hostility of the environment in which these cannibal headhunters live: marshes, dangerous animals, hostile tribes, etc. As a result, the Asmat think that the child who has been mistreated, or who is not satisfied with what it has seen or experienced in the world of the living, decides to return to the world of the spirits. On average, only 4 out of 10 children think that life is worth living and decide to stay.

The Asmat, however, have established a link between the sexual act and procreation, since they think that it is the male semen that feeds the embryo, while the penis gives it its human shape. After childbirth, the mother has to wait until her child can walk before having sexual intercourse again. The purpose is not to limit the number of pregnancies – which would not fit this people's vision on procreation – but to protect the newborn baby from the energy liberated by the sexual act.

An identical line of thought is found in other communities in New Guinea. Elisabeth [Badinter](#) recounts that the Sambia or the Baruya father must avoid mother and child for two reasons: first, because the contaminants of the mother could pollute him (we will see later why), but foremost because the excitation provoked by seeing the mother breastfeeding her child could make him infringe sexual taboos and provoke the death of the baby.

Let us finally note that the Washkuk (Papua New Guinea) do not make any difference between boys and girls during childhood. It is only through secret rituals and ceremonies of initiation practiced during puberty that the child's sexual identity is revealed. As for the Tswana (Botswana), all children are born girls. They are, therefore, incomplete, and only boys will reach completion by becoming men, whereas girls will remain “unfinished” all their life [\[9\]](#).

Identical conceptions about sexuality and procreation are found in other parts of the world. The inhabitants of Bellona (Solomon Islands) thought that children were sent by the ancestors of their social father: sexual intercourse was uniquely considered as a source of pleasure. Remarkably, the manner that the child is introduced in the mother's womb was of

absolutely no concern to them. Having spent several years among them, Torben [Monberg](#) conducted numerous investigations to understand their vision of procreation, very suspicious of the fact that they did not know its cause while their society was organized around patrilineal filiation. To the question “*what shall a woman do to make sure that she does not get pregnant,*” the unanimous answer was that her husband had to ask his ancestors to stop sending children. If this failed, they had to resort to abortion. To the question “*who is the child's father if the mother has had sexual intercourse with several men,*” the unanimous answer was that nobody else but the husband could be the father. In the 1930s, the missionaries who converted them to Christianity promptly rectified their erroneous conception of procreation, revealing to them the biological function of sex in order to implement the couple husband-wife as the fundamental unit of society, and to make the notion of a fatherly creator ultimately acceptable.

Very interestingly however, in a few communities, discrepancies appear between the conception women have of procreation and their male counterpart. A remarkable example is found by the Tiwi (Tiwi Islands, Australia), whose women deny the very notion of child-spirit. They clearly point out that the man with whom they have a sexual relationship is the “true” father of their child, distinguishing him from the social father imposed by the tradition. We shall later see how such a difference could arise.

Procreation and Household Organization

In China, the Mosuo live in large households that gather three or four generations of individuals without any conjugal ties: their affiliation rests exclusively on matrilineal relationships. Mosuo women receive their lovers at home. The only condition regularizing sexual intercourse is one of common agreement, the famous *tisese*: no contract of exclusivity, no obligation for any side, and no consideration for hierarchy.

The Na of Yunnan (China) have developed an identical social structure in which all lineages go back to a female ancestor. Their language has no word to designate the husband or the father, and they refer to semen and to urine with the same appellation, the “water of the penis.” The semen possesses the function of rain on plants, watering the fetus and allowing it to grow. Sexual intercourse is therefore necessary for procreation, but not its cause. As for the fetus, it has been deposited by a spirit in the woman's belly. For this people, the female sex is anterior to the male sex, since all men are born of a woman, and never the opposite.

As for the Hua (China), men can get pregnant as well, but they cannot give birth. This particular point of view has been explained by the fact that men were sometimes affected by

kwashiorkor, an illness due to malnutrition that provokes the ballooning of the stomach and leads to death.

Another commonly accepted household structure throughout the ages is polyandry, in which a woman is shared by several “husbands.” For the nomadic Cimmerian (Caucasus), as well as for some Arabian tribes, a woman is common to all family's members. In Tibet, a woman is the wife of all her husband's brothers, but the eldest is the father of all her children. The Irava of India practice a more egalitarian form of polyandry, in which all brothers possess the same rights, the firstborn being only the family's representative. At the Toda (South India), a woman becomes the wife of all her husband's brothers. Each brother gets to be the “father” of one of her children by giving a bow and arrows to the child. Still in India, a Nayar woman has five to six husbands, but she can marry up to ten men, cohabiting approximately ten days with each one of them. For them, marriage between women is also possible, and the notion of fatherhood does not exist. The man who pays for the expenses associated with birth endorses the child. It is not a question of responsibility but of status, the man playing no further role in the life of the child. Similarly, the Khasi “father” (India) has no kinship whatsoever with his children who all belong to their mother's clan [10].

Accepted Wisdom

Before the Germans occupied the Caroline Islands at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Yap had not established any link between sex and pregnancy. Conception was a reward bestowed by the husband's ancestral spirits to show their satisfaction with regard to their daughter-in-law. In 1947, after years of contacts with the German, Japanese and American administrations, the belief among this people on this topic was not fundamentally altered. The Yap considered the ideas of the occupying forces as interesting, and imagined they could even be true. However, their conclusion was that they were not relevant for them. Their arguments indicated to what point their logic, and their references remained impervious to scientific argumentation. For example, to the question “*how does a woman who has no husband get pregnant,*” [Schneider and Leach, 1968] the Yap answered that, in the absence of the husband's ancestral spirits, the woman's ancestral spirits played this role!

These few examples show that ignorance of paternity is not due to a form of illogicality or to an inability to rationalize. The manner with which every community explains procreation shows that these people use logic as well as we do. As Melford Spiro and Ashley Montagu pointed out, their ignorance does not reveal a pre-logical state in the way these populations think, but indicates the use of different premises that are adapted to a distinct context [11].

In Western societies, it is only very lately that the way sex and procreation are correlated has been understood. In 1517, a case of pregnancy *in absentia* was presented before the magistrates of Grenoble who declared legitimate the child that Mrs. Montleon gave birth to, four years after her husband's departure. They accepted the woman's assertion that she had conceived the child with her husband in a dream. To judge this case, the court heard the deposition of scholarly doctors of the University of Montpellier that affirmed the thing to be possible. Four women were also called to testify, and they all confirmed to have similarly conceived a child with their husband, not by copulation but in imagination. During eighteenth-century Enlightenment, Diderot could still write that a woman has the same reproductive organs as a man, the difference simply being that his are hanging outside, while hers are inside. Later, in nineteenth-century England, the most advanced nation at the time, a court judged that a pregnant woman could not have been raped since only consensual sex could have caused a pregnancy [12].

In 1880 was established that fertilization is the result of the fusion between the spermatozoid and the core of the ovum. Nevertheless, it was still commonly admitted at the beginning of the twentieth century that the man introduces the embryo in the woman's body, and that her function is to nurture it and bring it to term [see Part Three and Part Four].

The previous examples describe a world with two facets: on the one hand, a certainty, the inescapable role that women play in procreation; on the other hand, an ignorance, that of men's procreative function. The reasons that allowed this ignorance to persist for so long do not have anything to do with the I.Q. of these populations, but are correlated to their lifestyles:

- 1) Sexual promiscuity prevented any observation of the link existing between sex and pregnancy
- 2) The nomadic lifestyle did not facilitate the observation of a process that takes place over several months [13]
- 3) The numerous pregnancies, the following periods of nursing, and the rough, unstable and eventful life women led in those days, made it impossible to establish a connection between menstruation and pregnancy

However, as the examples mentioned above show, most of the communities that still recently had not discovered male procreative function have been out of reach from the civilizing currents taking place on the Eurasian continent through the millennia. Analyzing the way these people have migrated can help us explain why their stance on procreation might represent an original state of our ancestral knowledge.

Of Migratory Movements

In [Guns, Gems, and Steel](#), Jared Diamond attempted to determine when different parts of the world were first colonized. Leaving the Eurasian continent southeastward, human groups colonized Australia and New Guinea about 40,000 years ago, while the Polynesian islands were occupied around 1,200. Hawaii was settled around 500 CE.

Toward the northeast, humans arrived about 20,000 in Siberia. Around 14,000, the deglaciation of the Bering Strait allowed them to colonize the Americas. That brought them to the Tierra del Fuego in approximately 10,000. Greenland will be settled around 2,000.

If we look at the geographical distribution of the communities that had not yet established the relationship between sexuality and procreation in recent times, we note that New Guinea and Australia possess by far the largest number. According to the above-mentioned dates, we can say that this relationship was not known 40,000 years ago, when humans left the Eurasian continent to colonize Australia and its surrounding islands [14]. The acquisition of this knowledge was also belated on the continent, as different examples in China and in India point out.

When the hordes crossed the Bering Strait to conquer the Americas, they took with them the cultural context that prevailed at that time on the Asian continent. However, from the sixteenth century CE onward, European colonizers, impregnated with religious blindness, ensured that the traditions and ancestral culture transmitted orally for thousands of years be erased. During this process of cultural homogenization, missionaries were keen to teach the role of sexuality to the “savages” in order to impose the primary notion of a “fatherly” god.

Nevertheless, in the [Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France, en l'année 1636](#), the Jesuit father Jean de Brebeuf who was at the time stationed in Canada wrote that the Huron trace their origin back to Aataentsic, a courageous and autonomous woman who, pregnant, fell on the uninhabited earth and delivered a girl. Her daughter was with child as well, without any male intervention. Such a legend could have also been found by the Na of China.

Another tradition mentioned by Brebeuf confirms the ignorance of fatherhood at that time, for babies who died when they were two or three months old did not get a regular funeral, but were instead superficially buried in the embankments bordering the pathway. It allowed them to slip secretly back into the belly of a woman passing by, and provided them with a chance to live again. This recalls the customs and beliefs of Aboriginals and other indigenous people of Asia. A few years later, Du Peron writes that the Huron Indians “*believe that souls enter other bodies after death.*” [Du Peron, 1639]

Moreover, it is interesting to note that, in his attempt to convert the Huron, Brebeuf adopts their perspective on procreation, while assigning to God the role of procreative spirit: *“Among other things which made them acknowledge the truth of one God, Creator, Governor, and Preserver of all things, was the illustration I employed of the child conceived in its mother's womb. ‘Who,’ said I, ‘but God forms the body of this child; who out of one and the same material forms the heart, the liver, the lungs—in short, an infinite variety of members, all necessary, all well-proportioned, and joined one to another? Not the father, for these wonders take place in his absence, and sometimes after his death. Nor is it the mother, for she does not know what takes place in her womb. If it be the father or the mother that forms this body at discretion, why is not a son or a daughter begotten at will? Why do they not produce children, handsome, tall, strong, and active? And, if parents give the soul to their children, why do they not impart to all of them great minds, a retentive memory, and all sorts of noble and praiseworthy qualities, seeing that there is no one who would not desire to have such children if this were in his power?’ To all this the Huron, full of wonder, make no reply. They confess that we speak the truth, and that indeed there is a God...”* [Brebeuf, 1636a]

Although the systematic acculturation of indigenous populations in America eradicated most of their ancestral knowledge, these examples – to which can be added their holistic vision on nature and the importance of the totem, similar in its function to the one it has for aboriginal communities of Australia [15][see also Appendix Lang, [Totemism](#)] – sustain the idea of a commonly shared knowledge with the early populations of the Eurasian continent. It also allows us to conclude that the first populations that left Asia to the north to colonize the Americas had not yet made the relationship between sex and procreation. We can therefore assume that the procreative function of men was discovered after this date on the Eurasian continent, and while it spread without difficulty across the continent, it was only brought to the Americas and to most of Oceania and Australasia by European colonizers during the last 500 years.



Spirits have played a crucial role in explaining pregnancies: through their intervention, humans have been able to endow the mystery of life with a logical explanation, and to bind it to death in an eternal cyclical process. This conception has dominated many beliefs around the world ever since. It marks one of our earliest steps to take control of nature, the spirits providing men with a function in a process that was perceived as biased towards the feminine.

II. Of Male Power

Humans hold a unique place in the living universe: they possess a conscience that allows them to think, to understand, to believe, to hope. Combined with the dangerously efficient weapon called language, it gives them the faculty to detach themselves from a situation, from a context that they can then observe, examine, analyze, compare, associate, and eventually use to their profit. They can also apply this faculty to themselves and become the object of their own observation, of their own analysis.

These faculties allow them to exercise a certain control on the world around them, a control supported by the desire to understand, to explain and to integrate events and situations to which they are confronted. In this everlasting quest on which humans have anchored their survival, the spirits will emerge as a leading concept.

The Spirits: their Origin, their Function

The spirits are born of our drive to endow events that escape our understanding with features that make them intelligible to us. By spiritualizing the various manifestations of nature, we have not only found a cause to all its manifestations, but we have also invested them with intentions and goals similar to our own.

A spirit can be roughly defined as an invisible living entity possessing the faculty to inhabit a body or an object, and to leave it at will. An example of this duality body-spirit is found by the Penobscot Indians of North America for whom human beings are characterized by two aspects: the body and the *vital me*. The *vital me* depends on the body, but has the faculty to detach itself from it and to spend short periods of time outside the body in which it lives. Once outside its body, the *vital me* can come into action. It can also meet other wandering *vital me*. Some of its activities become visible when we dream.

When the body dies, the *vital me* is liberated and continues to live in an invisible world, except when it appears in dreams. For the Penobscot, these spirits are those of ancestors, and they exert a considerable influence on the living, sometimes in a positive way, but sometimes negatively too. Many (mis)deeds are caused by these roaming spirits.

Spirits are the very essence of the manifestation they represent, and possess its attributes. Humans will use these attributes to explain what they do not understand: with the spirits, all events that until then seemed incomprehensible get now an explanation, in accordance to the logical framework and the knowledge acquired by each community. Besides, conferring "life" to every animated and unanimated object, endowing with a common denominator all

natural phenomena that had, so far, no connection with one another whatsoever, the spirits will form a unifying principle on which humans will develop a holistic vision of the universe [16].

The introduction of the spirits marks a point of no-return in our history, deeply transforming the manner we consider life. Let us outline here some of its consequences.

- 1) Creating a link between the world of the living and the world of the dead, the spirits give a function to death
- 2) They introduce a principle of cyclicity in the natural world, and with it the (first) notion of immortality
- 3) They substantialize life
- 4) They spiritualize nature

The Spirits and the Dead

The first spirits were those of the deceased, those that everyone knew, those whose exploits, angers, misdemeanors, fears or strengths were still talked about. Their spirits symbolized their presence: their deeds, their mischief, their wrath, their malice, their jealousy, or their non-consummated vengeance remained present in all aspects of daily life, transmitted from generation to generation.

Studying the rituals and beliefs of the Aborigines of Australia, Emile Durkheim described these spirits as follow: "Separated from the body, the spirit [17] doesn't move immediately away; it continues to flutter, so to speak, around the dead body; it haunts the places where the body lived, prowls around the tomb, penetrates the camp at night to look if one is mourning accordingly. This tie is so strong, that time is not sufficient to completely undo it; practices and rituals are necessary; for example, one dries the flesh, one even pulverizes the bones; in other cases, one tries to chase the spirit away from the camp by screaming, by making noises and violent movements, and by putting it in a grave from where it goes to the land of the spirits. This land is sometimes underground, where one believes that the founders of the tribe have disappeared; sometimes, it is an island where all the spirits go; finally, some other times, the land of the spirits is situated in the sky, above the clouds. In these regions, the spirits are organized, as the living, by clans, by totemic groups. The primitives therefore believe in a future life that doesn't end.

[The primitive] doesn't believe that there is creation of a new spirit for every birth. For every clan, a determined amount of spirits exists that cannot increase or decrease. When a man dies, his spirit goes to the land of the spirits; but, after a while, it comes back to be embodied

in another body. These spirits are those of the first beings that formed the clan at the origin of times. These first beings came out of the earth and were born of nothing; they lived a mythical life, and then they died, that is they disappeared into the ground; their spirit continued to live, in part under the ground, in part above, around the sacred places where the men finished their terrestrial existence. If a woman passing close to these places seduces one of these spirits, this spirit enters in her: birth is explained this way. The newborn is therefore only a new avatar of ancestral spirits.” [Durkheim, 1907]

For the Aborigine, death is not separated from life, it does not represent the end of life, but it is considered as a transitional stage during which a new life is in the making. The transformations taking place in the body after death confirm that the passage from life to death is a gradual one, the deceased staying in an intermediate zone for a certain amount of time. A parallel has been drawn between the transformations of the body in decomposition and the wanderings of the spirit that in its suffering can inflict all sorts of illnesses and disasters on the living [see Appendix Dobrizhoffer, [Of illness](#)].

Mortuary rituals aim at pacifying the spirit during this tormented period and at bringing it to rest. One will provide food and drink for the dead, while a mother will give milk to her deceased infant; and under less lenient skies, an umbrella will be placed beside the departed.

When the process of decomposition is complete and all life has definitely left the body, the spirit can reintegrate the world of spirits. A feast puts an end to this period, since the malevolent conditions that had arisen at the moment of death have now disappeared: “*Generally, the spirits leave their parents in peace, once they have fulfilled their last duties towards them.*” [Hertz, 1928]

Examples abound that show the interaction between the world of spirits and that of the living. One of them is the custom of closing the eyes of the dead, a custom originally intended to shut an open “window” between the world of the living and that of the dead [see also Appendix Tylor, [Of spirits and yawning](#)]. In the same way, covering the face of the dead with a cloth is meant to stop the spirit from returning to the corpse it has just left. Some people will burn the dwelling and things of the deceased in order to destroy everything that could tempt its spirit to come back and haunt the place. Elsewhere, for the same reason, the possessions of the departed are buried with the body. Others still open doors and windows to ensure the spirit's departure.

To make sure that the spirit leaves the place, some rinsed the body, while others beat the walls (Canada) or the floor of the room (China), especially when bad weather could have incited the spirit not to leave the house (Madagascar). In Scotland and in Germany, chairs on

which the coffin had been laid were turned upside down to force the spirit to leave. Some people like the Dakota Indians (United States) and the Karen (Thailand) asked the deceased to behave properly, to go to its grave and to remain there. Others, anxious that the deceased might come back to bother the living, went as far as to divert the bed of a river to bury their dead. Once buried, they would return the river to its original bed [18]. [For more examples see Appendix *Spirits and Funeral Practices*]

Besides the rituals surrounding the death of an individual, many communities also require an act of purification on behalf of the one who has killed. The Pima Indian (North America) who has taken the life of an enemy must isolate himself in the woods for 16 days. The Bechuana warrior (South Africa) must purify himself as well as his weapons after the fight. These practices also apply to the killing of an animal: the Damara hunter (Namibia) rinses his mouth three times when he comes back triumphant from the hunt. For the Xhosa (South Africa), a man who has been wounded by a lion becomes a hero, but must purify himself, his injury indicating that the lion had to settle the score with him: he will be locked up in a small hut for four days, before receiving the honors of the community. The purification aims at pacifying the spirit of the lion that would otherwise persevere in its vengeance [19] [see also Appendix Lang, *Totemism*]. In his work on primitive cultures, Edward Tylor wrote that “*savages talk quite seriously to beasts alive or dead as they would to men alive or dead, offer them homage, ask pardon when it is their painful duty to hunt and kill them.*” [Tylor, 1920]

The close relationship existing between the spirits and the dead reveals the need humans have to give a meaning to death, need that motivates practically all beliefs and that will give rise to the most complex religion.

Spirits and Procreation

Another important function attributed to the spirits concerns procreation. With the spirits, pregnancy receives its first satisfactory explanation: “*the primitive believed that the spirits continued to live because it was for him the only means to explain new births.*” [Durkheim, 1907] Furthermore, they provide men with a role in a process from which they were excluded until then. Essentially, the spirit chooses the woman who is to become a mother, and introduces itself in her womb as a child-spirit, determining the sex of the child to be born. Though men’s physical contribution remains, in most cases, of no relevance, the spirits’ intervention adds, however, a new dimension to the procreative process: the fact that the spirits determine the sex of the newborn child entails that only male spirits can generate boys [20].

As for women who did not become pregnant, it was concluded that they had offended the spirits in one way or another, and had been judged unworthy to carry their child.

The fact that the number of spirits remains permanent and unalterable, each spirit being eternally recycled, ensures continuity between life and death, weaving those two worlds one into the other, each explaining and legitimizing the other while maintaining the universe in balance. It also explains the total absence of scruples regarding infanticide, as the spirit inhabiting the defunct child will eventually return as a child-spirit and reinvest a new body. For this reason, twins in Bellona (Solomon Islands) were seen as a punishment from an ancestor – except, of course, if the mother had contravened a taboo by eating twin fruits. The twins were immediately put to death and buried under a heap of stones.

The Spirits and the Shaman

The influence of the spirits was not limited to the sphere of birth and death. They invested the whole of nature and empowered objects, plants, and more especially animals since men depended so much on them. They also played a primordial role in the development of the totem.

The spirits became the reason for all inexplicable phenomena in nature, for its incomprehensible manifestations as for its unforeseeable changes. They were the source of all pains, all sufferings, but also of all pleasures and all joys. Being spiritualized, natural events were attributed expressions of wrath or of anger, of offense, of violence, even of madness [21]. Consequently, not much was necessary to associate to their manifestations an idea of reward or of punishment.

On these premises, a new personage emerged, the shaman, who had for function to read, interpret, and translate the message from the spirits, and eventually to send them requests, establishing himself [22] as a mediator between them and the community. This mediator's role was the result of a very long process that profoundly affected the life of these populations. Communicating with the spirits, structuring and interpreting their manifestations, determining which actions had to be taken, and defining the adequate response, endowed the shaman with a particular status and special powers within the community. Using his ascendancy, this influent personage gradually built a monopolistic control on information on which the community became dependent.

The Keys to Power

In the ignorance of their procreative function, men did not understand what their purpose in the world was, to which function they were destined: they could not create children, they

could not bear them, they could not nurse them. As to supplying the camp with meat, it represented a function of mediocre status compared to what nature had granted to women on whom the survival of the group and, ultimately, of the species depended [23]. Women had deeply anchored certainties, acquired first with the physical transformation of puberty and the start of menses, and later with pregnancies and the fact that they could give birth, apparently without any male intervention. But their maternal functions did not stop there, continuing long after having given birth to their children who depended on them during the first years of their lives. That made the situation of men more incomprehensible still, and they left this world without ever knowing why they were brought into it in the first place.

This incomprehensible imbalance haunted them, having, like an unhealed wound, a profound impact on the collective consciousness [24]. It gave rise to a sense of injustice and of humiliation that turned into a deep and lasting feeling of frustration and jealousy. Later, much later, when men will discover that a function of the utmost importance has been assigned to them, they will utter such a cry of victory that its echo still reverberates to the four corners of the earth to this day. But we are not there yet, and for men of those remote times, ignorant of it all, the wound – as symbolic as Bruno [Bettelheim](#) might have considered it – was deep and biting: how could they accept such an imbalance, such an inequality, such an injustice?

With the passing of generations, men are going to work out answers to these questions that gnaw at them, trying to re-establish the balance, to rectify the inequalities, to repair the injustices. The spirits will be their first global answer – a primary and necessary element to the forming of the primitive holistic vision of the universe, – opening the way to a masculine representation of the world, in which their sharpened desires, the multiple forces that motivate them, their accumulated frustrations, and even their thirst for vengeance will find their expression. This representation will help them claim monopolies and powers that are still in force today.

Interacting with the Spirits

The following two examples show us how power has been assigned to the spirits. In the first one, their function is directly connected with the level of knowledge acquired by the community; in the second one, their function is bound to an expression of will.

The fact that the spirits were endowed with the faculty to provoke pregnancies and to determine the sex of children influenced the way most communities conceived the world, as we have seen in the example of the mother of half-caste children who thought that the color of their offspring was due to the white flour introduced by Europeans. *“It is clear that the procreative beliefs of the Aborigines constitute the foundation stones of their cosmogony,*

kinship system, religion, and social organization and possess a significance the ramifications of which far exceed in importance any question of whether or not the Aborigines are in some cases ignorant of the fact of procreation.” [[Montagu, 1974](#)]

The spirits will play this role until humans discover the generative function that nature has assigned to men. From that moment, this attribute will be withdrawn from the panoply of powers granted to the spirits: once the mystery revealed, the procreative function of the spirits became redundant [[25](#)]. In this example, the powers attributed to the spirits are directly associated with the way humans understand and interpret the world around them: new knowledge that corrects previous “erroneous” interpretations reshapes the beliefs and, as a result, the system that concretizes them. As we will see, the discovery of paternity will cause the demise of the world of spirits.

Carving his shield is one of the most important activities of the Asmat warrior. By doing so, he endows it with a spirit – or a combination of spirits – that renders him invincible: invincible in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of others, whether allies or enemies. His invincibility will remain irrefutable until he is defeated. However, once defeated, his death will not be assigned to the enemy – which would discredit the principle of invincibility of the spirits and, therefore, their very existence – but it will be attributed to the spirit used by the enemy, a spirit powerful enough to annihilate the invincibility of his own spirit [[26](#)]. [See also Appendix Dobrizhoffer, [Of death and eclipses](#)]

In the first example, the spirits provide a logical explanation to what humans do not understand. As their knowledge of the world around them increases, the functions and powers of the spirits decrease. In our second example on the other hand, knowledge does not alter in any way the powers attributed to the spirits. The fact that the warrior has been defeated does not lessen the belief in the spirits’ capacities. These capacities are determined by humans and remain under their control.

Shamanism and Animism

Communicating with the spirits will revolve around one of two approaches, depending on the type of functionality that has been accorded to them. The first approach, found in animism for example, is characterized by a spiritualized nature whose “will” is read and interpreted. Any human request might be formulated, but nothing guarantees that the spirits will take notice. In this “integrative” approach, humans have to share the world with different vital forces, and their influence and power are extremely limited. These limits reveal and mirror the state of human knowledge.

In the second approach that is found in shamanism and in magic, humans take an active part in the world of spirits, and their influence on them is decisive. Our example of the Asmat warrior belongs to this “dominative” approach. Another example refers to hunting, men’s principal activity: “*The hunter has to make a pact with the ‘master of animals’ who grants him a beast, asking in return for a sacrifice. The shaman marks the game, because he has been an animal himself, and he negotiates his prey while offering the spirits of those who will die in the year – generally he offers the spirits of an enemy tribe.*” [Delumeau, 1999] Shamanism establishes a real exchange between humans and spirits. [See Appendix Dobrizhoffer, [The wizard's power](#)]

Both methods will be exploited according to the needs, each system being used to escape the limitations of the other. With the passing of time, rules attached to exchanges with the spirits will get a better definition, will become codified. To secure their grip, to ensure that the reins of power will not slip out of their hands, men will build an almost complete monopoly around the means of communication with the spirits. In most cases, the tools being used to communicate with them and the places where men officiate will be forbidden to women. Access to the world of spirits will be mined with multiple dangers – frightening specters, malevolent powers, deadly perils – that only insiders having acquired a very specific knowledge anchored in a secret tradition will be able to face.

However, there is one approach to the world of spirits that seems to have been under the control of women since the earliest of times.

The World of Magic

Magic rituals are one of the most widespread means of communication used with the spirits. Magic stages the balance of power that opposes humans to their environment, allowing them to face the forces of nature with “*the attitude of command.*” [Hegel, 1963] The hunter who eats the flesh of an animal he has just killed, the warrior who devours the enemy he has defeated, represent as many attempts to get hold of a hostile context. When devouring an animal or an enemy, man kills two birds with one stone: he makes it definitively disappear, and he acquires its spirit, its powers. In the magic world of the Guarani (South America), all misfortune finds its origin in a spell and has to be avenged. Vengeance is ineluctable and can last indefinitely, anchoring this way animosity between neighbors into a timeless tradition. There will be no respite before the process of re-balancing is completed and that the community has regained what had been lost. There is no forgiveness, no possibility of avoidance: the powers in presence are extremely real and no one can escape them. However, it does not mean we have to deal with fatality. Magic gives the necessary weapons

to defeat or tame forces that humans do not dominate. Magical powers are controllable with well-defined weapons.

Magic operates in a contextual world. It is the warrior and his shield; it is the hunter and the animal he has killed; it is a special spell that a wizard casts on a tribe: it is a knowledge placed in specific hands for a definite goal. Bronislaw Malinowski explained that “*magic constitutes a particular aspect of reality. In all important activities and enterprises in which man has not the issue firmly and safely in hand, magic is deemed indispensable. Thus, appeal is made to it in gardening and fishing, in building a large canoe, and in diving for valuable shell, in the regulation of wind and weather, in war, in matters of love and personal attraction, in securing safety at sea and the success of any great enterprise and last but not least, in health and for the infliction of ailments upon an enemy. Success and safety in all these matters are largely and sometimes entirely dependent upon magic, and can be controlled by its proper application. Fortune or failure, dearth or plenty, health or disease are felt and believed to be mainly due to the right magic rightly applied in the right circumstances.*”

Magic consists of spells and rites performed by a man who is entitled by the fulfillment of several conditions to perform them. Magical power resides primarily in the words of the formula, and the function of the rite, which is as a rule very simple, is mainly to convey the magician's breath, charged with the power of the words [27], to the object or person to be affected. All magical spells are believed to have descended unchanged from time immemorial, from the beginning of things.” [Malinowski, 1929; see also Appendix Spencer, Of sacred objects]

Extremely ritualized, with its practices anchored in tradition, magic serves precise goals and solves concrete problems: a world of manipulations in which impersonal powers are exhorted with the help of an initiated language.

Magic will frequently be used in conjunction with spirits, as we saw in the example of the Asmat warrior who invokes a spirit for his protection and uses magic rituals to fix the invincibility that this spirit confers on his shield. [See Appendix Spencer, [Of magic](#)] [28]

The origin of magic has very often been attributed to women. There is no doubt that women have participated in the development of magic rituals and traditions since their inception. It is also very likely that they were the first to systematize their use: the “Venuses” of the Paleolithic era (fig. 1) were probably made by women who used them in fertility rituals or during pregnancy. Their implication with regard to occult powers is frequently stated.

Marcel Mauss wrote that in Australia, while most cults are reserved for men, funerary cults are almost entirely in the hands of women. This distribution is explained by the fact that

women are suspected to be in relation with pernicious powers. Besides, the widow is thought to be somewhat responsible for her husband's death: her menstruations, her magic, her mistakes, make her guilty. For the Khasi (India), the powers of sickness and death are all female. In China, people thought that a woman could steal a man's Yang essence while seducing him during his sleep. The man who notices that he has lost semen during the night holds there a proof of her passage [29].

In the mythologies of the Selknam and the Yamana (Argentina/Chile), magic powers were first in the hands of women, but they were eventually dispossessed of these powers by men. Munduruku legends (Brazil) also refer to a time when women dominated men because they gave life, and therefore, possessed the sacred wooden trumpets. However, they could not hunt and were not able to supply the spirits of the trumpets with the meat that they sometimes required. Men used the situation to their advantage and removed the trumpets from the women's hands. Since then, the sacred trumpets have been kept in a safe place in the men's house where no woman can enter at the risk of being raped by the whole community. One finds a similar story among the Pygmies (Congo) where women originally possessed all the sacred objects. These are now forbidden to them.

For the Jale of New Guinea, the house at the center of the village is where the initiated men live. Women, girls and uninitiated boys do not have the right to come into this 'temple' of the masculine. Inviolable place, even enemies respect it since they will never attack the ultimate shelter of the warriors who have lost. Their most sacred initiation rituals take place in the greatest secrecy in the *móróal*, an isolated hut where only the initiated men can penetrate. Yet, a Jale legend curiously says that all women know the art of magic and of divination!

The Washkuk (New Guinea) too attribute magic powers to women, powers that they have acquired at the dawn of times, when humans were created. These powers relate to fertility and have always remained under the control of women. Nevertheless, the more recent rituals, like those attached to ancestor cults, belong to the domain of men. Only men have the right to penetrate into the "house of spirits" where the sacred objects are deposited, objects that women and the uninitiated will never see. [See Appendix Spencer, [Of sacred objects](#)] The consecrated gardens are also a domain reserved for men. The yams they cultivate possess an important social and mystical role in Washkuk society. Only the purest men – those who did not have sexual intercourse during the last six months, the time it takes for the yams to grow – have the right to set foot in the ritualized enclosure from which women, judged impure, are excluded.

Considered by some to be egalitarian, the Washkuk society is, however, organized around a hierarchical structure in which men are authorized to penetrate the world of magic of women

– what they traditionally abstain from doing – whereas men's world of magic is simply prohibited to women.

Of Masculine Power

Whatever role women could have played in a very distant past, the monopoly that men have implemented around all activities dealing with the spirits has been ascertained all over the world. For the Akha, people living in the famous Golden Triangle at the crossroads between Myanmar, Laos and Thailand, a man, the *pima*, accumulates several functions: he is in permanent contact with the spirits, and has also the task to preserve and transmit the knowledge and culture of the community. Opium, the exclusive domain of men, is used for transactions with the spirits. Women cultivate the fields and smoke the pipe, but do not have access to opium, nor do they have the right to contact the spirits.

In the north of Pakistan, the life of the Kalash is regulated by the *dehar* who deciphers during ecstatic trances the will of the spirits. For the Cunha of Panama, the *nele* organizes the spiritual life of the community, mingling daily activities with magic and rituals. He is the only one capable of communicating directly with the spirits. He possesses the magic statuettes and knows the secret rituals that keep bad spirits away. Through him, everyone in the community recovers its *purba*, a protective spirit that evil spirits can take possession of. The power of the *nele* extends to every home, since he designates the place where the hearth should be, a sacred place that he will point out to the spirits. For the Chipaya (Bolivia), the initiated wizard-healer has the power of decision on all aspects of life.

An identical phenomenon is found at the Colorado of Ecuador where magic is part of daily life and grants the wizard-healer the most elevated status in the community: he lives separately, in constant communion with the spirits of nature and with the ancestors whose secrets were revealed to him. He dedicates his life to the practice and transmission of magic, while the community provides to his material needs and cultivates his land. As is the case in most communities, this shaman cumulates the function of chief, second to the shaman in the social hierarchy. His position as a shaman is hereditary and confers him with extraordinary powers since it is an ancient shaman, of whom he is the descendant, who created the world of spirits. Women do not have access to the function of shaman or of *gobernador*, and are not allowed into the house of the council where decisions are made. [See Appendix Dobrizhoffer, *The wizard's power*]

In Dogon society (Mali), man has imposed himself as the absolute master: his word is law and he alone has the right to possess land and granaries. Besides, he reigns on the

domestic altar and on the sacrificial rituals, and he retains a monopoly on all relationships with ancestors and spirits: the use of the sacred mask is forbidden to women.

In the most systematic manner, women have been excluded from all contact with the spirits and from most practices of magic and divination. Before we further see how such segregation along the gender line could emerge and how men have justified this anathema, let us note that these functions man has forged for himself will not affect in any way the reality of woman's attributes, and the status that these confer on her. Drawing on the certainty that the group's survival rests in her hands, she will not experience the unbalance that keeps gnawing at her male companion. The invention of the spirits, however, represents the first expression of the establishment of the "masculine civilization," an enterprise that neither he nor she are yet aware of.



III. Of Female Power

“The belly of women has always been a magic and demoniac mystery. It makes children and loses blood, it gives pleasure and imprisons. This area of women that produces orgasm and from where children come out possesses the fantasmatic power to destroy and to devour, like the corrosively acid vagina imagined by so many men that are afraid of such a feminine power.” [\[Cyrulnik, 2001\]](#)

The distribution of power between men and women is a game of balances – or should I say, of imbalances – that is the result of a long evolution, tiny tip of an iceberg deeply buried in our history, of which only a meager 0.1% has emerged to the light of human conscience.

What we do know about Paleolithic communities does not sustain the idea of a weak and dependent woman, a picture that has more to do with a retro-projection of our patriarchal vision of the past than with any reality. In fact, nothing authorizes us to suppose that the woman of that time was submitted to the man.

Generally considered as “egalitarian,” the economy of most hunter-gatherers’ communities actually was in the hands of women since their work provided about 70% of the food supply and calories of the community. Not only was the nutritional contribution coming from the hunt most irregular, but hunters had often swallowed their take before returning to the camp.

Besides, women, having to care for children, stayed near the camp, whereas men were gone sometimes several days in a row in pursuit of game. Forming the base of the community, women knew how to organize the camp. The primary significance of their economic and social role gave them an authority that grew stronger through time. In the absence of men, the defense of the camp was incumbent on them, and they survived through strategically organizing the protection of their interests.

Such an organization has been found in communities that have kept a matrilineal structure. In these, power – whether economic, legal, political or social – is transmitted down the mother’s line, such as is seen by the Ashanti of Ghana, the Iroquois, the Athabaskan, the Haida or the Hopi of North America, the Nayar of India, the Minangkabau of Indonesia, or the Mosuo of China. Other examples have been noted by various explorers, travelers, and ethnologists. Describing the Montagnais and the Naskapi Indians of Canada, Paul Le Jeune, a Jesuit stationed in Quebec in the seventeenth century CE, remarked that the women of those communities possessed a significant power. He was notably offended by the way they voiced their opposition to men, and by the language they used, as coarse as that of men.

Taking no account for their economic and social structure, this priest tried to convince the men of these tribes to make their wives more obedient.

For the Iroquois (North America) and for the Madi of Sudan, women played an influential political role in the community: they decided if and when to go to war or when to launch a campaign of reprisals. They could also name or dispose of the chief.

In Australia, Phyllis [Kaberry](#) reported to have seen numerous women attacking men with a tomahawk, and even with a boomerang. During a journey in New Guinea, Luigi d'Albertis noted that *"In some villages, they [women] exercise much authority and supremacy. In war, they are respected even by the enemy. From what I have observed, I am inclined to believe that a community partly composed of women would never be attacked by another tribe. Women, in short, act like a banner of peace."* [[Albertis](#), 1880]

Finally, in the Trobriand Islands, the generally balanced distribution of power between the sexes led sometimes to excess: "All districts in the Trobriands have the economic custom of female communal labor in the weeding of gardens. Since it is a tedious, monotonous activity, which requires little skill and not much attention, and can be best enlivened by gossip and company, the women work together at each garden in turn, until all the village plots are weeded over. As in all other exclusively feminine occupations, it is bad form for any man to come near them while they are working, or to pay any attention to them save on a matter of business.

Now this communal weeding when practiced by women of the villages of Okayaulo, Bwaga, Kumilabwaga, Louya, Bwadela, or by the villages of Vakuta, gives the weeders a curious privilege. If they perceive a stranger, a man from any village but their own, passing within sight, they have the customary right to attack him, a right which by all accounts they exercise with zeal and energy. The man is the fair game of the women for all that sexual violence, obscene cruelty, filthy pollution, and rough handling can do to him. Thus first they pull off and tear up his pubic leaf, the protection of his modesty and, to a native, the symbol of his manly dignity. Then, by masturbatory practices and exhibitionism, they try to produce an erection in their victim and, when their manoeuvres have brought about the desired result, one of them squats over him and inserts his penis into her vagina. After the first ejaculation he may be treated in the same manner by another woman. Worse things are to follow. Some of the women will defecate and micturate all over his body, paying special attention to his face, which they pollute as thoroughly as they can. 'A man will vomit, and vomit, and vomit,' said a sympathetic informant. Sometimes these furies rub their genitals against his nose and mouth, and use his fingers and toes, in fact, any projecting part of his body, for lascivious purposes." [[Malinowski](#), 1929]

Though in a very peculiar way, this example highlights how economic function and power can be correlated inside a community [30]. [See Appendix Dobrizhoffer, [Of men and women](#)]

Outside the social and economic realm, the mystery surrounding their physiological attributes and their inescapability has endowed women with an inherent power: the blood they lose at the time of menses, symbol of death like all lost blood; the life they give, until very recently one of the great mysteries of our history [31].

This last aspect, we have already mentioned, has been an enormous source of frustration for our male ancestors, ignorant of their own procreative function. With the intervention of the spirits, their newly acquired role has somewhat straightened the balance of power that was until then in their disfavor. As for the imbalances deriving from other female physiological attributes, men will handle them in a very peculiar manner.

Diabolus in Femina:

From the Estrogen Cycle to the Monthly Cycle

In a faraway past, and very gradually, women's estrogen cycle became a menstrual cycle. The estrogen cycle, found among most primates, regularizes and concentrates female sexual receptiveness around ovulation, all sexual activity depending on it. The menstrual cycle, on the other hand, allows females to pair off at all times, regardless of their procreative cycle. Among primates, only the gibbon and the human female are submitted to the menstrual cycle.

Another specificity of woman's sexuality is that her ovulation is 'hidden': she is the only one to possess this characteristic that makes her periods of fertility invisible, contrary to all other mammals whose females signal their receptiveness: heat, coloration and/or inflation of the genital parts. This absence of marker allows repeated sexual contacts, in total independence of the procreative cycle [32].

Women's increased opportunities to pair off represented a certain advantage, if one considers the high rate of infantile mortality: of an average of six to eight pregnancies that a woman could have during her lifetime [33], only two of her children reached adult age [34]. Besides, a man who had sexual relationships with a woman was less prone to attack her children. With hidden ovulation, men did not have to take into account the state of receptiveness of their partner, but could have sex whenever they wanted, and not whenever she could.

In the ignorance of his procreative role, it was not in man's best interest to restrict his options by imposing limitations on the field of his sexual activities through establishing an exclusive

or monogamous relationship with a woman. On the contrary, the unlimited access offered by women has certainly marked the character of his sexuality, his impulses still being stimulated today by variation.

Freed from the estrogen cycle, sexual relationships between men and women have long been practiced under the sign of multiple polygyny, males pairing off with all available females, the number of their partners establishing their social status [see Appendix [Lee](#)]. Regularizing and limiting sexual activity towards a monogamous framework will not be the achievement of women, but that of men when they finally realize the function that nature has accorded to their sex, and will want to establish, to institutionalize fatherhood [see Part Three].

The Mysterious Blood

Not knowing what the function of menstruation was [\[35\]](#), most human societies have considered it, and still consider it today, as an extremely negative phenomenon. Men interpret it as a demonstration of women's impurity, while women, just as ignorant, corroborate this ostracism with their passivity. However, things are not that simple. While men from all corners of the planet reject this entirely natural phenomenon as an impurity, a disgrace, a poison, a perversity, a calamity, the same men have introduced rituals for boys that imitate the very loss of blood they condemn in women. The ritualized bleedings performed on boys carry however no sign of disgrace, but are, on the contrary, regarded as proof of courage that confirms the strength of character of the male individual.

How can one explain a contradiction that is found throughout the millennia all over the world? Rather than an aberration, might one interpret this seeming incongruity as men's determination to compensate for a lack of "natural" purpose with a "cultural" expression?

Blood has always possessed a symbolic value. Blood is associated with life, suffering and death: when animals or humans lose it, their life dies out. It is the most important, the noblest, and the most mysterious substance in the body. The fact that women can afford to lose it without dying has long been a source of enigma and of jealousy, and will serve to build an exclusively masculine contradiction: on the one hand, men are going to treat women as impure during the periods when they lose their blood; on the other hand, they will impose on their own sex tests related to losing blood that will prove male courage and value.

Menstruation

Numerous societies have forbidden – and still forbid – all activity to women during menses. Taboos referring to this prohibition are innumerable. In New Ireland (New Guinea), one of the

names given to menses is *samsilik*, meaning 'sick blood'. Still in New Guinea, the young Huli men avoid sexual intercourse before marriage by fear of the damages that menstruating women can inflict on their masculinity. The initiation rituals that all married men receive will protect them from these dangers.

Several tribes of South Australia request that a woman having her period must isolate herself and should scream if a boy or a young man approaches her: if they happen to see her, their hair will turn gray, and they will become impotent. Other tribes like the Diyari think that if a menstruating woman bathes in a river, all fish die and the river goes dry. For the Aranda, a woman having her period must not touch the bulbs of the *irriakura*, the basic food of this people. A Wakelbura woman who is "unwell" cannot take the same path as that of men. If she contravenes this rule, she can be put to death. She is also obliged to isolate herself, because the man who sees her will die. When her period reaches its end, the woman is painted in red and white, her head is covered with feathers, and she can reintegrate the village.

In fact, many people have assigned magical powers to women because of their capacity to lose their blood. In the Marquesas Islands, men thought that women having their period could curse an object by placing it between their buttocks, or merely by pronouncing its name in front of their sex. For numerous tribes of North America as the Omaha and the Ponca, the menstruating woman must isolate herself in a hut or in a tent specially constructed for this purpose where she will spend four to five days. Ojibwa women had to be isolated and were not allowed to touch anything that could be touched by a man thereafter: the unfortunate man who would lay a hand on these objects could get sick, and even die. In one Canadian tribe, girls who began to menstruate had to spend three to four years in total reclusion: they were considered a danger for whoever would see them, even for those who would walk in their tracks. In another tribe, a menstruating woman who stumbled on arrows made them unusable, and could even provoke the archer's death.

Among the Zulu of South Africa, the girl who feels her period coming must protect herself from the look of men and from the sun [37]. She is locked in a hut for fifteen days. A similar practice is found by the Bushmen (South Africa) who risk being transformed into a talking tree if their eyes fall on a menstruating woman. For the Kikuyu of East Africa (Kenya), if a woman has her period in a hut that has just been built, the hut must be demolished.

Isolation is found by the Kalash of Pakistan as well, who believe in a strict separation between the pure and the impure. During their menstruation, women must live in the *bashali*, a house that is also used for childbirth and in which men cannot penetrate under any

circumstances. When this house has to be repaired, the Kalash ask Muslim workers from outside the community to do the job.

Islam forbids women having their period from touching the Koran, going to the mosque, or participating in the Hajj [38]. A German text of the seventeenth century CE recommends that menstruating women avoid “*touching and kissing children, touching dishes in the kitchen, approaching a barrel in the cellar, staying close to the shrubs in the garden, or looking at herself in a beautiful mirror.*” [Bonnet, 1988] Even today, women having their periods are accused of making emulsified sauces fail, or of having a bad influence on salting, on wine making, or on the culture of mushrooms. In India, the practice of chaupadi, although banned since 2005, is still widely performed: menstruating girls, considered unclean, are banished from some parts of the house, are not allowed to touch kitchen utensils or to use the same water source. They may not go to school, and have to sleep in huts, in barns, in caves or even in the open, where they often get raped. [39]

Pregnancy

The ostracism against menstruating women very often applies to pregnant women, as well as to those having just given birth. For the Guarani (South America), menstruating or expecting women, both dominated by malevolent spirits, are not allowed to participate in the preparation of curare by fear that they will waste the virtues of this poison. Legends warn the Guarani warrior that he must never allow a pregnant or indisposed woman to approach his weapons. Babylonian women who were “unwell,” expecting or had given birth were considered impure and capable of contaminating everything that they touched – food as well as men. By decree, it was forbidden for these women to approach the king.

We find a similar situation in Bali (Indonesia) where pregnant or indisposed women may not take part in ceremonies. They cannot penetrate into the temple ground, not even approach the small private temple that the Balinese have on the patio of their house. During and just after their pregnancy, they may not approach a priest in order not to alter his purity. For the Huron (or Wyandot) Indians of Canada, pregnant women are the cause of numerous misfortunes: in their presence, the one who eats gets sick, while the state of someone already ill worsens. They especially embarrass the hunter since it is sufficient for them simply to look at a hunted animal to ensure that it cannot be captured anymore. On the other hand, their presence is required when extracting an arrow from a warrior's wound. For the Seminole of Florida and for the Inuit (Arctic), the pregnant woman must be isolated a few days before giving birth. She will leave return to her daily activities when her child is born.

Finally, the Old Testament prolongs this tradition of ostracism: “If she gives birth to a girl, she will be impure during two weeks, as in the time of her menstrual indisposition; she will remain sixty-six days to purify herself of her blood.” [Le 12:5]

Experienced as a punishment, a sin, or a shameful state that must be hidden, this anathema has had deep repercussions on women’s psyche: “*When thirty-five, she finally understood why and how she menstruated. Until that time, she was persuaded that she had a ‘personal’ illness that could not be mentioned to anyone, not even to her husband.*” [Chraïbi, 1972]

Of Feminine Rites of Passage

Rituals marking the girl's entry into the community of women take on various forms. The most frequent of them is female circumcision that refers, in reality, to a defloration – a ripping of the vaginal membrane – or to a real mutilation of the genitalia of the girl or of the woman. One can compare the ablation of the clitoris (excision) to a partial ablation of the penis, an intervention in no way analogous to masculine circumcision. Besides, the various mutilations applied to women – ablation of the clitoris, ablation or sewing of the lips, etc. – have for goal either to reduce their sexual impulses, or to guarantee the virginity of young girls or the fidelity of married women [40]. This guarantee, imposed and required by men, forms an integral part of the beliefs of the community, and is fully ratified by its women [41]. We are far from the initiation rituals that characterize masculine circumcision.

Other violent practices are part of an identical process, such as the incision of teeth, or of the lobe of the ears and lips that Mursi girls of Ethiopia undergo between their tenth and fifteenth birthdays. They make possible the introduction of disks and trays, characteristic attributes without which women are not recognized nor accepted by the community.

Contrary to rituals found all around the world that mark the accession of boys to manhood, very few rites celebrate the arrival of the girl's first menstruation. Let us mention the rituals of the *Dipo* that the Krobo girl (Ghana) must accomplish after her first menstruation: moved to a place where no man can see her, she is instructed in the arts and crafts that all Krobo women must possess. At the end of her initiation, very richly dressed and ornamented, wearing the white tunic that confirms her virginity, she will be the center of attention in a big ceremony during which she will find a spouse, if she is not already promised to someone.

More festive, the Mbuti (Congo) mark the first apparition of a girl's period with a real celebration during which the girl becomes the center of attention of the whole community. Colin Turnbull relates how the pubescent girl with a few friends moves to a house especially destined for this ceremony. Young unmarried men coming from neighboring villages wait for the girls to leave the house, and start singing and flirting with them.

Notwithstanding these very exceptional examples, the condemnation of everything that characterizes the feminine has been a universal rule, revealing the widespread imprint of ignorance and incomprehension. However, most contradictorily, men have taken over most of these distinctive aspects to empower themselves with a seminal role in the process of coming-of-age, both for boys and for girls.

Of Men Making Women

At the time of his stay in New Ireland (New Guinea) during the last decades of the nineteenth century CE, the missionary Benjamin [Danks](#) observed that Siar girls were locked in narrow cages at the age of eight or nine until they reached the age of fifteen when they became marriageable. During this period, “spirits” paid them a visit by taking either a symbolic appearance – snake, moon – or a human shape. Spiritually as well as physically, the young girls were deflowered. In the vision of the Siar, this sexual activity caused the first period to appear, the male semen being converted into menstrual blood. Older women prepared the girls for this ritualized defloration by telling them that they will be taken by the moon before being taken by their husband.

For the Tswana (Botswana), the hymen is pierced with the help of a tuber. The defloration is done by one or several men who represent the spirits, as it is also the case by the Banaro of New Guinea. The Manus of the Admiralty Islands maintain that sexual activity provokes menstruation. They believe that the girl's first period is due to the breaking up of her hymen, and that her following periods are provoked by men's insemination.

A similar point of view is found among the Warí of Amazonia who think girls cannot menstruate as long as they are virgin. For the Lepcha of India as well, girls mature through sexual activity. The fact that older men have sexual intercourse with eight-year-old girls is not condemned, but rather considered with amusement [\[43\]](#).

The same line of thought is found in numerous aboriginal communities throughout Australia: “We find it reported across the continent that female sexual maturity is attributed to the actions of men, either through intercourse, the performance of rites, or both.” [\[Merlan, 1986\]](#) The Walpiri, the Murngin, the Anbarra, the Tiwi, and many others think that men's sexual activity transforms girls into women, provoking the first menstruation and even the appearance of their breast and pubic hair.

Most initiation rituals marking the coming-of-age of girls lay in the hands of men who have assigned to themselves a crucial but very pleasurable role. In this way, they have become the agents who allow girls to become women, influencing a process that eluded

them. Initiation rituals that boys have to follow in order to become men are another expression of this will to counterbalance women's natural attributes.

Of Men Making Men

We have seen the generalized and extremely negative attitude that men have towards menses. At the same time, in an apparent contradiction to their rejection of feminine blood, men have conceived rituals to mark the entrance of boys into the world of men that are mostly connected with blood.

Even more contradictory, these rites of passage signal the arrival of puberty for boys, whereas few societies judge necessary to mark this phase for girls. Clearly establishing the moment when boys become men, these rituals seem to have been introduced to compensate for the absence of signs that indicate this transition. For girls, on the contrary, this moment is unambiguously marked, the day of their first period signaling their accession to the world of women. As we will see in the following examples, masculine rites of passage have been introduced to compensate for this imbalance, bestowing on boys what nature has not given to them. To make the parallel with girls even more unmistakable, some of these rituals are going to imitate the bloody flow of menses.

Numerous tribes mark the arrival of puberty for boys by performing an incision on their penis, as that was still practiced last century in Australia and in New Guinea. Starting from the scrotum, an incision is made under the penis, sometimes hardly a centimeter long, sometimes on the whole length of the penis. The blood that flows out of the wound is regarded as a masculine menstruation, certain tribes going as far as to apply to their "menstruating" boys the taboos and restrictions they request from girls during their periods. The Washkuk (New Guinea) practice this incision with a sharp stone: the blood that flows out of the penis for the first time – and, more notably, for the last time – transforms the boy into a man, this "impure" blood allowing him to evacuate the feminine world in which he has lived until that day. A similar ritual imitating the first loss of blood by girls is also practiced by the Yurupari of Colombia.

Belonging to an identical register, masculine circumcision is practiced by many people around the world: Maya and Aztec, Tahitian, Diola of Senegal, Bovale and Zulu of South Africa – where boys practice this operation themselves – Gogo and Maasai of Tanzania, in Ghana, in Nigeria, in the Philippines, etc. [\[44\]](#)

However, the rites of passage are not always concentrated on the penis. For the Kikuyu of Kenya, boys become men when they drink the blood that gushes from a cut made in the arm of "nutrient" adult males. For the Colorado of Ecuador, piercing the nasal septum allows them

to place the *chonta*, a piece of wood that signals the boy's new status. For Keraki boys of New Guinea, it is through homosexual sodomy that they become men.

A fundamental difference between the rites of passage for boys and those for girls is that the girl is never pulled out of the feminine world in which she lives. On the contrary, the rituals marking her first period, whether celebrating or condemning it, establish that the girl belongs to the world of women. On the other hand, signaling the start of puberty for boys has for function to show that the boys – if they survive the rituals – are about to enter the world of men, which does not prolong the world of boys, considered by most as being part of the world of women. Boys have to be removed from the world that they knew, and be introduced to their new world, that of men, a world often unknown and mysterious.

For the Jale and the Medlpa of New Guinea, boys live with women and girls until their initiation. Only after that are they allowed to penetrate the houses of men. As for the Sambia, they have developed complex, and sometimes excessively violent rituals to take the boy away from the world of women, more particularly, from the arms of his mother, and to prepare him to enter the world of warriors. [For a detailed description of these complex rituals, see Appendix [Blood Rituals](#)] Rituals that are just as terrifying for the non-initiated, but not always as violent, are also found in different regions of Africa, as by the Sereer and the Diola of Senegal or in the Ivory Coast (ritual of the *poro*) [\[45\]](#).

Why implement rituals to unequivocally mark the accession of boys into the world of men by using blood as required symbol, if not with the desire to imitate the natural first flow of female blood? How to explain the abundance of masculine rituals, the mystery they are surrounded with, compared with the discretion, even the absence of ceremony for girls, whereas it would just seem more appropriate to celebrate the beginning of their fertile period and their capacity to procreate? Can we not read there the expression of a sense of deficiency felt by men, who consider themselves superfluous in a world where women are invested with a determining role, the survival of the community and of the species resting in their hands?

While some see in these rituals a demonstration of men's domination, it is, in fact, the opposite that they reveal: they are signs of weakness, they express a frustration, they manifest a will to offset the evident bias that nature has for the feminine. Masculine initiation rituals serve to compensate for a feeling of inferiority of the masculine, whose role appears uncertain, indefinite, and even useless when compared to that of women who possess the secret of life. With these rituals, with the numerous laws and taboos they have elaborated, men have counterbalanced nature's prejudice by granting to themselves a role of seminal power: although women make children, men have the capacity to transform these children into men and women. [See also Appendix Spencer, [Masculine initiation](#)]

Of Fertility

After more than four centuries under Christian rule, the Chipaya (Bolivia) revived pagan rituals and traditions by re-establishing the cult of Pachamama. The Goddess-mother venerated under this name was the most important divinity of the old world: uniting the fertility of women and that of nature, she symbolized the source of life. In the following parts of this book, we will further see the influence that fertility cults have had on the course of our history. Let us here briefly mention that the discovery of Paleolithic figurines devoted to fertility in different regions of Europe and Asia has shown that fertility was an important component in the life of those populations. The quantity of female figurines found supplanting by far any other representation indicates a strong pre-eminence of rituals dedicated to what these 'Venuses' (fig. 1) symbolized, woman's fertility.

Parallel to the work of archaeologists, anthropologists too have described the extent of the cults dedicated to fertility. Like the Chipaya, the Kogi of Colombia have also chosen a goddess-mother as the most powerful figure of their pantheon. Nevertheless, the only person authorized to receive and implement her law is a man, the *mam*. At the summit of the temple dedicated to this goddess, a sort of nest reproduces the shape of the female sexual organs through which cosmic powers pass to fertilize the blessed earth. Attached to it, a rope made of lianas functions as an "umbilical cord" used by the *mam* to communicate with the spirits. From them, he receives the law that helps his people reach the ideal balance between good and evil. The building that acts as a house of ceremonies and as a meeting place is strictly reserved for men: women, judged impure, are not admitted inside.



Fig. 1 Venus of Willendorf, Austria, toward 24,000-22,000
Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

The importance of fertility cults rests on the realization that the survival of the individual, and of the group depends on the fertility of nature and of women. Contrary to menstruation and the negative image it carries, no society anywhere in the world has jested with fertility: its cult expresses recognition and mystery all at the same time.

Figurines like the Venus of Willendorf have probably been used by women when they wished to get pregnant or during pregnancy. However, women do not seem to have been actively involved in the elaboration of the cults dedicated to fertility, as we have seen for the Kogi. In fact, all sources, whether historical, archaeological or ethnological, indicate that fertility cults were in the hands of men: here as well, men have consecrated the feminine.



Conclusion: To Be and To Have

“All interpretations of myth have been formed in accordance with the ideas prevalent at the time of the interpreters.” [\[Lang, 1887\]](#)

In a very distant past, the spirits were created to give humans an edge on the manifestations of nature they could not explain. The functions attributed to the spirits provided explanations that allowed humans to integrate what they did not understand to the knowledge they already possessed, within the logical framework acquired by each community.

While women, in the very early stages, seemed to have controlled the forces of magic and their spiritual component, men, at one point, took this dominance away from them. Developing means of communication and rituals to interpret and translate the messages of the spirits, men have established an exclusive relationship with them, and by monopolizing all paths that led to their world, they have become their unavoidable intercessors.

The functions attributed to the spirits, and the mysteries they explained reveal the manner these populations saw the world and the problems they were confronted with, mirroring at the same time the solutions they could logically endorse. Fulfilling one another in a near-perfect symbiosis, every conquest of humans' knowledge, every new element added to the pyramid of their wisdom was withdrawn from the mysteries of nature, and eliminated from the panoply of the powers granted to the spirits.

Of the many mysteries that nature shelters, one that has particularly affected and obsessed men is the discrepancy existing between the procreative function nature has attributed to women, and the apparent absence of any significant role men play in this process. A source of incomprehension and of frustration for them, they experienced this imbalance as an injustice that motivated their quest: not knowing who they *really* were, they attempted to acquire what they did not have. Dividing the world between the powers that they could control, and those from which they could not escape and to which they must submit, they circumscribed the essence of women to its bare minimum and extended the influence of their gender by taking control of all feminine attributes they did not possess.

On the one hand, not being able to remove from the female realm the fertility they embodied, men empowered the spirits to rule over its processes. While minimizing the importance of women's role, they endowed themselves with a procreative function that they did not have before.

On the other hand, while condemning all specific aspects of female physiology, they took over its symbols and invested them with a purely masculine content. The Sambia boy, for

example, is taken away from the world of women and enters the world of men because of the blood he loses – mirroring girls' first period – and the spermatic milk he swallows – a male counterpart to breastfeeding [see Appendix Blood Rituals].

In addition, by activating the menstrual flow through sexual intercourse man became the chief instigator to female fertility, expanding this way the scope of his power while further reducing the importance of her natural attributes.

Redistributing and reinterpreting the equilibrium imposed on them, men challenged the natural order in which they could not find their place. With the spirits, men have invested themselves with a transcendent power that compensates for the immanent powers possessed by women.

With time, spirits will animate the whole of nature, making of its different components a unified and homogenous world. Ultimately, a holistic vision of the universe will arise that will characterize the *weltanschauung* of the primitive world: “*The savage draws no hard and fast line between himself and the things in the world. He regards himself as literally akin to animals and plants and heavenly bodies; he attributes sex and procreative powers even to stones and rocks, and he assigns human speech and human feelings to sun and moon and stars and wind, no less than to beasts, birds, and fishes.*” [Lang, 1887, I, 47; see Appendix Lang, [Of the unity of the animate and inanimate world](#)] This conception of the world represents the extremely stable context in which Paleolithic populations lived for millennia. It also forms the heritage with which they enter the next important phase of their history, the Neolithic era. In the following part, we will see that the “Neolithic Revolution” and its innovations – plant and animal domestication, sedentarization, the first architectural steps, and the discovery of paternity – will not directly affect the lifestyles of the people involved in its processes. On the contrary, the Neolithic era prolongs most of the norms and values inherited from the preceding period. Strikingly, men's role will remain subdued in most domains, women still representing the economic and social core around which the life of these populations revolves. It is only at the end of this period that the deterioration of environmental and climatic conditions combined with the introduction of new technologies will favor the advent of a male-dominated society from which the masculine civilization will thrive.





Ramu River (Northern Papua New Guinea) Carved wood totem with various avian and canine figures and a strong ancestral face, adorned with multi-colored grasses and cassowary bird feathers. 20th century CE

Part Two

The Neolithic Transition

In the first part, we saw why the spirits were invented and the functions assigned to them.

The second part takes place in the Middle East during the Neolithic era. It describes the passage from nomadic to sedentary life, the introduction of agriculture, our first steps in architecture, and animal domestication that will lead to the discovery of the relationship between sex and procreation.

Most of the documentation used here comes from archaeological research.

Prolonging the traditional distribution of tasks that were in force during the preceding period, most of the innovations that mark the new era are distributed along the gender line, sedentarization and agriculture resting within the competence of women while animal domestication being incumbent on men. The abundance of game in the region will have for consequence that men will continue to hunt to provide the community with meat. This way, they will keep nomadic traditions a long time alive. As a result, the full introduction of animal domestication in the economy of these communities will be retarded.

Among the meager vestiges that these populations have left behind, their architectural expression and the way they disposed of their dead will help us discover a few features of their social organization. Our first architectural steps show how these populations translated into space the norms and values inherited from the previous era, while the lack of uniformity in their funeral practices indicates the relevant role that spirits still play.

A very stable period of our prehistory, the Neolithic gives rise to a new lifestyle while preserving most of the values inherited from the preceding era. However, the profound changes that mark its end will erase most if not all of these ancestral traditions and the social structures they brought with them.

The Neolithic Transition is divided into six chapters:

1. The Neolithic Revolution
2. Sedentarization and Demography
3. Habitat and Community
4. Funerary Rituals

5. Animal Domestication

6. The Neolithic, a Bridge between Two Worlds



“Switching to a new type of economy does not immediately delete what has been imprinted in the human psyche over millennia.” [[Minkov](#), 2009]

About 13,000 years ago ended the last period of glaciations. A time of climatic instability followed. Adding to the melting ice, torrential rains provoked a rise in the sea level and numerous flooding in Asia Minor and the Middle East.

At that time, all human communities were nomadic or semi-nomadic hunters-gatherers, living according to a lifestyle that had existed for tens of thousands of years. Depending on nature for their survival, they had to move on when local resources were exhausted. [See Appendix Dobrizhoffer, [Of nomadic life](#)] Let us consider here some of the geographic, demographic and economic consequences of nomadism.

First, in their constant quest for food, humans ended exploring all four corners of our planet, developing a natural predilection for the most hospitable regions, those rich in game.

Secondly, the demographic growth of these communities was limited in two ways: 1) the amount of food that was available determined the number of mouths that could be fed; 2) women had to space out their pregnancies, since they could not carry more than one child during their displacements. For this reason, these populations imagined all sorts of ways to limit the number of births: besides natural methods such as prolonging breastfeeding, they resorted to abortion, to infanticide, and to sexual abstinence as we have seen in the case of the Asmat mother (New Guinea) who waited until the last-born could walk before having intercourse. Not because sex had anything to do with pregnancy, but because this people believed that the energy emitted during the sexual act was so harmful for the new-born baby that it could provoke its death.

Some other aspects linked to the harsh nomadic life – the continuous physical exertion, the long displacements, a diet deprived of the necessary fats or of the minimum quantity of calories – influenced the fertility of women as well.

Beliefs were also used to regularize the size of the community. Most communities thought that the number of spirits for each clan was limited and could not increase or decrease: every death freed a spirit that could reincarnate into another body, limiting this way the number of individuals to the quantity of spirits available.

This limitation throws a particular light on the practice of infanticide, the most frequently used means of demographic control. For these people, the spirit was the most important entity, and not the body the spirits inhabited. It was, therefore, not difficult at all to kill babies – at times of famine, for example – since according to their beliefs, their death would free a number of spirits that would reinvest new bodies when food would be sufficient again [[1](#)].

Besides, infanticide offered the possibility to choose the sex of the child who had to be eliminated. Female babies were the first victims, allowing to reduce the demography of the community in the short as well as in the long run. [See also Appendix Dobrizhoffer, [Polygamy, infanticide, and demography](#)]

Infanticide has been practiced very extensively throughout history. In Australia, certain tribes devoured one child out of ten to contain the development of their population [1a]. More recently in China where couples are limited to only one child, the ancestral predilection for boys has condemned numerous baby girls to death. Similarly, in India, the infanticide of girls represented 16% of female infantile mortality in the Tamil Nadu province in 1999 CE [2].

Beside the geographical and demographic aspects, a third element concerns the economic conditions prevalent for these nomadic populations. The fact that they depended on what nature had locally to offer, and that they were not equipped to manage any food surplus implied an economy of predation in which each able member of the community had to participate. This, combined with the small size of the communities (between 30 and 50 individuals at most), prevented the creation of a public function: in most cases, shamans and chiefs had to bring back their own quota of food, as everyone else did. Consequently, the political and social structures remained extremely rudimentary.

Because of the frequent displacements, only objects that were strictly necessary and that could be transported were kept, which made the introduction of an economy based on exchange impossible [3]. Furthermore, entirely autonomous – those that were not, did not survive – these communities had no reason to develop a commercial structure, and contacts with other communities remained minimal.

As a result, technological development was considerably slowed. Yet, the knowledge accumulated by these populations throughout the millennia allowed one of the most important revolutions in human history, setting the first stone on which civilization will be built.



1. The Neolithic Revolution

Introduced in the 1920s CE by Gordon Childe, the term “Neolithic Revolution” gives the deceitful impression that the events that marked this epoch of our prehistory occurred in a short and concentrated period, as has more recently been the case, revolutions transforming a whole world in a few months.

Depending on the benchmark used, it took several hundred to several thousand years for these events to develop and spread. However, the term “revolution” is fully justified if one considers the fact that it profoundly transformed a lifestyle that had dominated for tens of thousands of years. That several hundred years were necessary for this revolution to find its realization shows the depth of the transformations that took place, and reveals the slowness with which these events occurred, due in part to the absence of contact and communication between the communities involved in its movement. Nevertheless, it will spread across the globe through the millennia, appearing in a few places “spontaneously” – the Levant, China, Mexico, Peru, New Guinea, the Sahel – though not at the same time [4], and from there being imported to the rest of the world.

First, this revolution sees human communities abandoning the primitive and seemingly inescapable economy of predation that ensured the survival of all species until then, to implement an economy of production. It revolves around two main innovations: the introduction of agriculture and of animal domestication. The innumerable consequences of these two discoveries will transform deeply and irreversibly human life. Essentially, it will allow them to control food production, and to create food surpluses that will make sedentarization possible. Sedentarization will in turn open the door to all sorts of structural developments, whether demographic, economic, political, social, technological, or cultural.

To summarize, we can say that the introduction of an economy of production and the creation of food surpluses have started a chain of events around two axes: sedentarization and demographic expansion, giving birth to the first hamlets that will become villages, and later, cities, kingdoms and empires; the apparition of castes of specialists, which will accelerate technological development and the rise of political structures.

More recently, historians have preferred the term “evolution” instead of “revolution” with its too brutal connotations. It does not, however, imply a process that has been inexorable, whose causes could neither be controlled, nor changed. When we speak of the introduction of agriculture and, therefore, of the domestication of plants, we do not talk about all the plants, or about just any plant. We talk about plants possessing the nutritional qualities that could provide humans with a balanced diet, and that allowed the production of a surplus. In

addition, when we speak about animal domestication, it is not about domesticating the dog (toward 14,000) [5] or the cat (toward 6,000), which are animals that could never feed a large population. Still today, the essential part of our meat diet rests on the first mammals that were domesticated around 8,000: the sheep, the goat, and the pig. The cow will be added to our livestock a few millennia later, and the horse, the last of the big mammals, will be domesticated around 4,000.

Nevertheless, taking control of food production certainly represents the starting point of an incontestable evolution, in which demographic growth, work specialization, and the development of means of communication, of transport, and of commerce all find their origin. The following numbers bring this evolution into perspective: whereas all humans lived as hunters-gatherers before the Neolithic Revolution, only 0.002% of the world population lives this way today; ninety percent of all humans that have lived to this day were hunter-gatherers!

The next table gives an overview of the time frame during which the main events characterizing this revolution take place in the Middle East:

between 12,300 and 10,800	first attempts of sedentarization (Natufian)
between 10,800 and 9,600	climatic changes of the Younger Dryas (cold and dry)
around 9,600	first traces of agriculture, apparition of the first villages
around 8,000	first signs of animal domestication
between 7,000 and 6,000	introduction of pastoralism

Although the introduction of agriculture and animal domestication are the most famous features of the Neolithic era, its lesser-known facets will help understand how the civilizing process developed itself.

A direct consequence of sedentarization was the birth of architecture. The initial architectural steps were taken by the Natufians [6], the first populations to have attempted to control their food production by storing wild cereals (wheat, barley) while constructing the first permanent habitations. Very curiously as we will see, nomadic people settling down will all apply the same architectural concepts in their first endeavor throughout the millennia.

Another aspect that sedentarization brought in its wake was to transform funerary traditions. Although burials existed during the Paleolithic, disposing of the dead will become an obligation for settled populations, the first villages having to learn to cope with their dead.

Finally, sedentarization made the accumulation of objects possible, increasing social differences between individuals.

However, despite of these changes, we will see that the traditions and beliefs of the Paleolithic still dominate the new period. Spirits represent one of the factors contributing to the stability between the two eras, their powers and functions remaining unaltered. Another factor of stability is the way tasks were distributed: women organized settled life and supplied the community with cereals, vegetables, nuts and fruit, while men, backed-up by the shaman, went on hunting. In fact, nothing allows us to think that sedentary life has transformed the vision of the world of these communities: on the contrary, despite the profound transformations, very little has changed during most of this period.

Nevertheless, the end of the Neolithic era will be marked by deteriorating climatic and environmental conditions that will bring this long period of stability to a close. Most of the sites – some occupied for thousands of years – will be abandoned, and many communities will have to return to a nomadic lifestyle.

Precipitating further the fall of the ancestral world, the discovery of men's sexual function and the domestication of the bull, the last bastions of shamanic powers, will mark the end of the world of spirits.

Ultimately, an entirely new world will arise from the ashes of the preceding one with the advent of cities, kingdoms, and empires, and the birth of political and religious institutions that fund our Antiquity.



2. Sedentarization and Demography

About 13,000 to 14,000 years ago, the process of sedentarization started in the Middle East, its populations abandoning progressively their nomadic lifestyle. With the amelioration of climatic conditions, food became more abundant, allowing them to settle down. In the Levant, the first hamlets appeared around 11,500 and were semi-permanent sites occupied by the Natufians. However, this tentative of sedentarization will be short lived, since a colder and dryer weather, the so-called Younger Dryas (10,800-9,600) [see the Chronological Table], will force these communities to return to nomadism. This period of colder weather will be of relatively brief duration, and with the return of a warmer and wetter climate, sedentarization will start again.

Though climatic conditions were determinant for sedentarization, the process itself has not been uniform in any way. In the first instance, geographical factors played an important role, some soils being more fertile and some regions more habitable than others did. In some cases, the scarcity of wild food accelerated the development of an autonomous food production. In other cases on the contrary, an area rich in plants facilitated the sedentarization process but delayed the passage to controlled food production.

Another important factor has been demographic growth. While an increase in population obliged some communities to expand the nutritional capacities offered by their environment, motivating the development of a more efficient food production, the opposite has been observed in all cases: an increase in nutritional possibilities has always provoked demographic growth. Occupying a surface of 100 to 150 square meters at the beginning of their sedentarization, most settlements will become hamlets of 2,000 to 3,000 square meters, and then big villages of 2.5 to 3 hectares. In turn, demographic growth will have important repercussions on the environment, transforming the natural balance that prevailed until then.

Gender and Sedentarization

In most hunter-gatherers communities, tasks were divided along gender lines, with women organizing the camp and gathering fruit and cereals, while men were hunting. In most cases, this lifestyle will still prevail during the Neolithic.

Possessing a profound knowledge of plants built on generation after generation, women put their expertise into practice when they settled down. Hence, it is no exaggeration to say that women played a major and probably unique role in the development of agriculture. [See Appendix Lee]

Besides, being responsible for the setup of the camp and barely mobile because of the children, they were the first to adapt to the new sedentary lifestyle, and to give it its features and its definitions [7].

On the other hand, men continued to hunt to supply the community with meat. Their lifestyle remained, therefore, as it had always been, as it was at the time of nomadism [8]. Gone hunting most of the time, they were not there to help women solve the problems that sedentarization and agriculture brought with them. It will take many centuries before depleted game resources oblige these populations to turn to domesticated animals for their source of protein, marking men's integration into the communal economy of production and their definitive sedentarization.



3. Habitat and Community

From the first dwellings at the beginning of the new era (around 11,000) until the apparition of the first villages, one finds overall, in this region and beyond, an identical architectural development. The first constructions that the Natufians have built were round houses with diameters ranging from three to six meters. Semi-subterranean construction with stone foundations and a wooden upper structure, each “pit-house” possessed in its center a fireplace and had no subdivision (fig. 2 and 3). The houses were often disposed circularly, with a separate edifice meant as communal storage for cereals.

This circular architecture is found in all first settlements, not only in the Fertile Crescent but in many other regions around the world as well, from the teepee of the nomadic Indians of North America and the igloo of the Inuit to the wooden constructions of the Ifugao (Philippines). We find the same pit-houses in China around 4,000 (Banpo Cun), in Egypt a few centuries later, and later still, between 200 CE and 500 CE in the southwest of the United States, in the Indian Shabik'eshchee and Mogollon villages. In Arizona, the Homolovi have used this architecture until the thirteenth century CE. The common trait to all these people is that they were emerging from a nomadic lifestyle, giving form to their sedentary life all in an identical way.

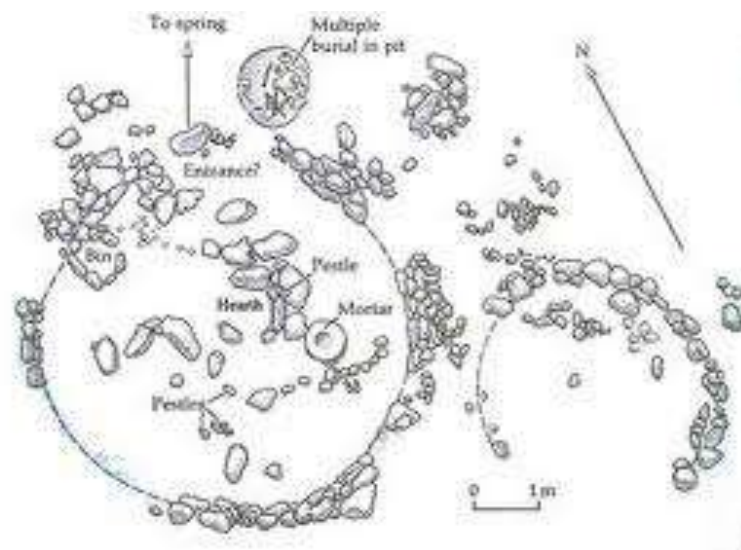


Fig. 2: Circular architecture at 'Ain Mallaha (Palestine)

When their sedentarization process began, all these communities implemented the social structures inherited from the previous period, from the time of nomadism. Rather than a rupture, the new lifestyle certainly extended the nomadic communal traditions, even more so as hunting kept them alive.

Furthermore, in the Levant, there is no evidence of a brutal break with the past. On the contrary, everything seems to indicate that the transformations marking the beginning of the Neolithic era have gradually been put into practice. This allows us to conclude that the social and economic structures found in the first settlements of the Natufian period were the same as those existing at the end of the Paleolithic. The new habitat materialized some of these structures. Hence, the circular pit-houses embodied the architectural expression of these ancestral traditions. This explains why most nomadic populations use for their first architectural steps an identical structure that reflects a similar background.

Nomadism is characterized by a weak degree of differentiation: the relationships within the community are “egalitarian,” implying that all goods necessary for the survival belong to the community, personal possessions being limited to what each can carry during displacements. The fact that everyone has to collect food and the impossibility to create surpluses also minimize any hierarchical differentiation. Obviously, social cohesion has been the cement that allowed these communities to survive [9].

The non-differentiated architecture of the Natufian village mirrors this social and economic egalitarianism. The absence of division and the communal storage installations confirm the absence of a privatization of space and property. Besides, disposing their houses in a semi-circle surrounding a central space reveals an organization centered on the community, its size being sufficiently restricted to ensure that everyone would have its place in the common space: the habitat was meant to create a non-individualized social environment, egalitarian, public, and open.



Fig. 3: Circular agglutinated houses in Jerf el Ahmar (Syria)

Early Neolithic Architecture

Around 9,600, the climatic improvement that follows the Younger Dryas announces a fresh start for the sedentarization process. While some Natufian sites are reinvested, new ones appear. Their size is three to eight times the size of the most important sites from the Natufian period, some of them like Jericho (Palestine) and Mureybet (Syria) becoming real villages [see the map of cited sites]. Everywhere, we find pit-houses, round or oval, sometimes separated by a space, but at other times agglutinated together like in Jerf el Ahmar (Syria) (fig. 3) or in Jericho, which was an amalgam of circular and oval dwellings of three to five meters of diameter. The communal silo becomes a constant element of these sites.

Around 8,000, architecture in the Levant changes: the round pit-houses make room for rectangular houses built of bricks on ground level. The internal subdivisions that appear clearly indicate the beginning of a privatization of space.

Although it is impossible to determine the reasons for this transformation in the habitat, we are inclined to think that demographic growth deeply modified the social structure of these communities, and that the new architecture reflects a change in their population.

The reasons behind demographic growth are multiple:

- 1) The number of pregnancies of settled women is double that of nomadic women
- 2) The stability brought by the new lifestyle increases the chance that the children will survive, and prolongs the lifespan of adults, compensating for the epidemics that appeared at the beginning of sedentarization
- 3) The increased need for labor force and the possibility to feed it allow non-settled foreign individuals to enlarge the ranks of the village

Demographic expansion will require transforming the traditional habitat. It will be necessary to increase the number of dwellings and to adapt them to accommodate more people, which rectangular architecture facilitates.

The traditions of the community will be shaken by this population increase. The ties that clearly connected all its members until then are now becoming opaque, slowly eroding communal identity [11]. In addition, the economic homogeneity that prevailed in the restricted community is gradually dissolving, letting the first inequalities appear. The disappearance of the communal silos and their apparition inside each dwelling confirms the introduction of a form of private property.

Late Neolithic Architecture

The size of the houses does not vary much during the first part of the Neolithic. However, the habitable surface becomes considerably bigger toward the end of the PPNB [12]. At 'Ain Ghazal (Jordan) for example, during the second half of the seventh millennium, the dwellings can accommodate up to 20 people under one roof. With several kitchens, hearths and rooms for storage, they reveal a change in the social and economic organization of these communities. In fact, the stability that characterized the first half of the Neolithic has now disappeared, due principally to the deterioration of the climatic conditions, and to soil exhaustion and erosion. Having to diversify their economy to compensate for the poor yields of their impoverished land, most communities will introduce pastoralism. The transformation in the habitat indicates that a different social structure has been introduced, better adapted to cope with the new economic conditions: each household had to be large enough to provide for its members, and to be represented in all activities at the same time.

We also witness the reemergence of a semi-nomadic lifestyle, partly due to the introduction of pastoralism, but also because some communities will begin abandoning the site they have occupied for centuries. With the return to nomadism, circular architecture most curiously reappears, a long time after this style has been replaced by rectangular architecture. In Syria toward 6,300-6,200 for example, small round dwellings resurface after having been abandoned for more than 2,500 years, while a fall in temperature and in precipitation transforms regions that were naturally irrigated into desert zones.

The reappearance of circular architecture with the return to a (semi-)nomadic lifestyle corroborates the idea that this architectural form was related to a specific way of life and to the prevalence of a community-centered economy, suggesting that these ancestral traditions had not been erased from the collective memory [13].

Gender and Habitat

As we have seen in the first part, most primitive communities that had not yet discovered the procreative role of men were organized around the matrilineal family, composed of the mother, her children, and their maternal uncles and aunts, as well as their children. Although ill adapted for the Paleolithic hordes, those "*fragile and temporary aggregations of individuals*," [Wilk & Rathje, 1982; see also Part One, endnote 7] matrilineal lineages were gradually introduced to organize settled life in large Neolithic communities, the social and economic life of which rested in the hands of women. Hence, the first subterranean pit-houses embodied the Paleolithic heritage: they could accommodate two to three individuals and were distributed according to gender, women and children separated from men, as was

recently practiced by the Bedouins (Middle East) and the Munduruku (Amazon) [14]. Even more so since such a distribution perfectly integrated the negative representations attached to women: under no circumstance would the Asmat warrior let a woman approach his shield, or would the Sambia man risk being contaminated by female elements. It seems definitely improbable that men who thought the proximity of menstruating (or pregnant) women to be ominous or even fatal would share with them the place where they rested and the moments when they were the most vulnerable. We can therefore conclude that these populations, at the beginning of their sedentarization process, distributed the habitat by separating rather than by mixing the sexes [15].

It is only later, when the houses become bigger and possess several kitchens and storage rooms, that we can definitely establish the implementation of a distribution around the extended family based, during most of the Neolithic era, on matrilineal lineages. This distribution also fits the growing difficult conditions of the last period of the Neolithic during which the communities had to diversify their activities.

Let us cite the recent example of a Brazilian tribe that combined an extended family structure with tribal values and promiscuous relationships: *“The Zo'é live in large rectangular thatched houses which are open on all sides. Here several families live together, sleeping in hammocks slung from the rafters and cooking over open fires along the sides... The Zo'é are polygamous, and both men and women may have more than one partner. It is fairly common for a woman with several daughters to marry several men, some of whom may later marry one of her daughters.*

Everyone is equal in Zo'é society. There are no leaders, though the opinions of particularly articulate men, known as 'yü', carry more weight than others in questions of marriage, opening up old gardens or establishing new communities.” [Survival International, April 2013]



4. Funerary Rituals

Another characteristic element introduced by sedentarization is the huge increase in the number of burials, which has led many authors to confer on the Natufians a religious aura.

It is true that many graves dating from the Natufian period have been found. At the time professors Anna Belfer-Cohen and Erella Hovers wrote their study on the burials in the Levant during the Paleolithic and the Natufian, 417 bodies had been excavated that had been buried during the 1,500 to 2,000 years that the Natufian lasted. This number starkly contrasts with the 59 unearthened bodies that belonged to the Paleolithic, a period spreading over 60,000 years! Besides, the burials from the Natufian period can be described as intentional, whereas nothing allows us to read a similar purpose in the way the dead were dealt with during the previous period, corpses being often left to the caprice of nature. Things changed when the camp became permanent, the community having to decide in which manner it would dispose of its dead.

Early Natufian Funeral Practices

Yet, not only did the Natufians use a great variety of burial methods, they also showed little respect for the body of the deceased, indicating the absence of any real funerary tradition. The excavations at 'Ain Mallaha (Palestine) and at Hayonim Hollow (Israel) show that some burial pits were dug in deserted dwellings and others outside the village. The depth of the pits was variable. Actually, the pits were not all meant to receive a body. The fact that, in 'Ain Mallaha, numerous empty pits were found next to pits containing several bodies led archaeologists to conclude that the pits had another function before being used to bury the deceased. This conclusion is supported by the fact that new pits were dug where empty pits already existed.

Besides, while it was the custom to bury several bodies in one pit at the beginning of the Natufian period – some pits being even reopened to add another body – the majority of the fifty pits recovered in Nahal Oren (Israel) was used for individual burials.

Furthermore, nothing reveals a particular disposition or treatment of the dead during the Natufian. It seems that the bodies have been buried in a chaotic way, with neither age nor sex of the deceased, nor the position or orientation of the body indicating that these communities were applying a specific custom. Even the fact that ten percent of the bodies were accompanied with ornamental objects (necklaces, bracelets, tiaras and other jewelry in dentalium) cannot be considered as intentional, because these objects were only found in

young adults' graves, more revealing of a custom practiced when these individuals were alive than of a mortuary ritual.

All in all, the total absence of unity in their funeral practices, the fact that very few burial sites had been marked, the great variations shown in treating the dead – from one village to the other, from one burial site to the other, from one pit to the other – lead to conclude that the Natufians did not inherit any particular burial tradition from the Paleolithic era. On the contrary, disposing of the dead was a problem specifically brought by sedentarization, and that each community had to solve it the best way it could. The Natufians were, in fact, the first people who had to bury their dead in a systematic manner over a long period. In addition, the little concern they showed for the body of the deceased indicates that they probably considered death as part of the cycle of life, the body being just a vehicle for a spirit that will reinvest another body later.

Late Natufian and Neolithic Funeral Practices

Important differences appear between the funeral practices at the beginning of the Natufian period, and those at its end, when less-favorable climatic conditions oblige these communities to return to a nomadic lifestyle. It is during the late Natufian that secondary funeral practices make their appearance, the custom of separating the skull from the rest of the body being one of its most distinctive features.

Primary and secondary funeral practices relate to the treatment that the deceased undergoes: the first one occurs immediately after death, whereas secondary funeral practices take place a long time after one's death, and are inevitably ritualized. The funeral rites of the Bara (Madagascar), for example, include three stages: the body is buried; a big feast is organized after the harvest that follows the death; once the process of decomposition is completed, the body is exhumed and buried again. Another example is that of the Hokkien (Taiwan) who bury their dead in a coffin and wait six to seven years the auspicious moment (determined by an oracle) to unearth the body. The bones are cleaned and are buried again in a ceramic urn. In a Berawan village in Borneo, the last rites to conclude the funeral ceremony of a chief who died in 1940 had to be postponed year after year, the Japanese occupant requisitioning the rice that was set aside for the occasion. It finally took place in 1946.

Overall, mortuary practices introduced during the late Natufian became standardized during the Neolithic: bodies were buried individually, multiple burials reappearing later; pits remained very simple; ornaments and funeral objects were absent; bodies were often buried

beneath the floor of dwellings; the skull was sometimes separated from the body, but was not always plastered (fig. 4).

Numerous variations exist, not only from one site to the other, but also within the same site. At Jericho (Palestine), we find bodies buried under floors or between walls. At 'Ain Ghazal (Jordan), some were thrown on a heap of residue, while others were buried under a dwelling, and others still were left in an open space. Some were buried with folded legs, others out-stretched.

Many variations also apply to the custom of decapitation. Some were decapitated and buried under a plastered surface; others were buried with their head on. The skull, stored in holes made in the walls or under the floor, was sometimes separated from the body at the time of death, sometimes a long time after [16]. [See Appendix [Decapitations and Plastered Skulls](#)]



Fig. 4: Plastered skull (PPNB). Kfar HaHoresh, Israel © Nigel Goring-Morris

Finally, a few sites possessed real cemeteries, like at Tell Aswad (Syria) where the last excavated levels of the Neolithic era reveal cemeteries constructed outside the village, just before the site was to be abandoned by its inhabitants. As for the site of Kfar HaHoresh (Israel), it seems to have functioned as a cemetery for several villages throughout the region. However, these sites remain exceptional. Furthermore, the introduction of cemeteries does not imply the establishment of strict funeral customs, as the description of the excavation at Tell Aswad plainly states: “*The dead (around sixty) were buried in pits of varied types (plural or simple, in primary or secondary burial), with an unequal level of development, and they underwent varied treatments.*” [[France-Diplomatie](#), Tell Aswad]

Clearly, practices begun during the Natufian period were further developed after the interruption of the Younger Dryas, without ever finding an unity that would characterize them as a cultural feature of the Neolithic era in this region. In addition, the way agriculture and animal domestication propagated shows that communication between the different sites existed. However, these exchanges did not apply to funeral practices, implying that they did not possess a determining cultural value for these populations: every community dealt with its dead the best way it could, and even the apparition of cemeteries did not encourage the introduction of a really unified funeral culture. This absence of unity can be explained by the fact that most primitive cultures considered death as an intermediate stage in the cycle of life. Inherited from the Paleolithic, the notion of nature encompassing all things in an eternal cycle dominated the beliefs. Funeral rituals had for unique purpose to ensure a peaceful transition to the spirit of the deceased.

Eventually, most funeral customs of the Neolithic were abandoned by the second half of the seventh millennium (PPNC). Burials became extremely rare and of a great soberness, if compared with those of the PPNA. Decapitations, like all other secondary funeral practices, disappeared. It would be difficult to explain and justify the abandonment of those millennial traditions, if they had been, one way or the other, related to an ancestor cult in which every individual would find its origins, or to the notion of an "afterlife" as the one religions and philosophies of the Axial Age will introduce later [see Part Four]. [See also Appendix [Spirits and Funeral Practices](#)]



5. Animal Domestication

Around 8,500 in Abu Hureyra (Syria), cultivated walnuts and fruits were added to a basis of cereals and pulse. For this community, the passage from nomadism to sedentarism was realized by progressively integrating cultivated products into the traditional fare of wild plants, before definitively toppling toward an economy of production. It was also at that time that the first traces of animal domestication appeared, game (gazelle) remaining the main source of meat. During the seventh millennium however, wild game did not suffice anymore to feed the two to three thousand inhabitants of Abu Hureyra, and it disappeared from their menus. From that time on, domesticated sheep and goats became the main source of protein.

Many communities have developed the way Abu Hureyra did, sharing two salient aspects: animal domestication was introduced after agriculture was firmly implanted in the daily economy and in the eating habits; hunting provided these communities with meat until game had disappeared.

Too often considered as a byproduct of the agricultural revolution, as being an application of the world of plants to the animal world, animal domestication has had very specific and crucial consequences on our history. First, the animal world was linked to the world of men through hunting on which many shamanic activities were focused, as the site of Göbekli Tepe (Turkey) shows [see Part Two, endnote 8]. Because animal domestication led to a gradual erosion of the shaman's powers, its introduction in the economy of the community will more often than not be restrained.

A second repercussion of animal domestication will be the discovery of the relationship between sex and procreation. In a short time, two elements founding the world of the spirits, and therefore, the universe of the shaman, disappear: the mystery of procreation that provided one of the main functions to the spirits, and the domestication of the most symbolic animal of the Neolithic era, the bull.

Domestication and Sedentarization

The reasons at the origin of animal domestication are obscure. It is commonly admitted that in some regions, game became rarer, obliging the populations to find alternative sources of meat and protein. However, the fact that animal domestication appeared 1,500 years after the beginning of agriculture suggests that the richness in game made it a long time superfluous. Furthermore, it took another thousand years before domesticated animals were really introduced in the economy of most communities, showing the importance hunt had for these people, and their preference for game. In fact, domesticated animals will only be

integrated into the daily fare when game will not suffice anymore to feed the growing populations.

With hunting, men prolonged in a very natural way the ancestral lifestyle to which they were accustomed. The traditional division of labor along gender lines created thus a two-tiered society with women on one side, actively involved in the development of agriculture and building up sedentarized life, and men on the other side, having barely changed their way of life by preserving their profound and almost exclusive attachment to hunting [17]. Logically, due to their knowledge of the animal world, men will play an active role in animal domestication, though it is not until the introduction of pastoralism at the end of the Neolithic era that men will be fully integrated in the economy, when they take care of the flocks in transhumance. Until then, their hunting lifestyle will keep them away from the sedentarization process, with the full support of the shaman whose existence depended on his function as a mediator between the entities making up the natural world: humans, animals and spirits.

Domestication and Procreation

The analysis of goat bones excavated at mount Zagros (Iran-Iraq) and dating from around 8,000 shows that only a few male goats reached adult age, being kept alive for procreative purposes. The rest of the males was killed when they were still young. Conversely, almost all females arrived at adult age, presumably used for procreation and for nursing. The same technique is still applied today.

Similar observations made in Beidha (Jordan) by Diana Kirkbride led to conclude that male procreative function was understood during the eighth millennium, at least as far as it concerned the animal world [18].

Passing long hours with their flocks, these people could have observed animal behavior at leisure [19], and would have noticed their procreative cycle, shorter than the human one (about 5 months for sheep and goats). Having linked copulation with pregnancy, they were only one-step away from realizing that the same principles were applicable to human beings as well.

Of course, other hypotheses could be imagined. For example, it would not be the observation of animal but of human sexual behavior that made clear the role nature has assigned to sex. The fact that sedentarization resulted in a more regular menstruating cycle, and that pregnancies were less perilous than at the time of nomadism could have allowed this discovery.

Different scripts may have been used in different places in a multitude of variations that lost their specificity as exchanges between communities developed, the fragmented knowledge

becoming more coherent with time. However, whatever the scenario, sedentarization certainly favored the realization of male sexual function.

Although incalculable, the implications of this discovery will very slowly penetrate the social structures and mentalities, filtered and adapted at the beginning to what the traditions could accept. The group that offered the most resistance was that of men, concerned that they would lose the sexual privileges they had granted to themselves [see Part One], without knowing what they would get in return. They were supported by the shaman who had to preserve the customs and traditions of the community to protect his power and status [20].

However, the notion of paternity will gradually impregnate the relationships between men and women, both realizing that it is *his* seed, once introduced into her body, that triggers the birth of *his* child after a few months of gestation. Filiation will be one area rapidly affected by this realization, communities transforming their matrilineal structure into a patrilineal one. This will ultimately give rise to ancestor cults.

Domestication of the Bull

Finally, a second factor will have a profound repercussion on the beliefs of Neolithic communities: with the domestication of the bull, the last symbol of the world of wild animals on which shamanism thrived disappears.

During the second half of the Neolithic era, the depletion of game resources and animal domestication gradually reduced the importance wild animals occupied in the life of these populations. Furthermore, pastoralism, deprived from any shamanic content, played an increasing role in their economy. But the domestication of the bull, around 6,000, and the introduction of the plow, shortly after, profoundly changed the distribution of the tasks inside the human couple. Bringing an end to an ancestral economic model in which the world of plants was assigned to woman, the work in the fields with plow animals, too heavy for her, passed in the hands of man. The economic role of women was at the eve of a very long period of decline. [See Appendix Lee, [table 4](#)]



Fig. 5: Warka Bull, Louvre. Djemdet-Nasr, around 3,000. Warka, ancient Uruk

Another domain in which the bull's domestication had a decisive influence was the beliefs. It is difficult for us to imagine the role such an animal played in the relationship between the animal world and the human one, more especially that of men. In this region, the bull symbolized physical power, but also sexual vitality and ferocity. While his conquest represented one of men's greatest victory on nature, and removed a most vital foundation from their beliefs. Indeed, by submitting the bull – and later the horse, the last of the big mammals to be domesticated – man erased from the animal world all the mysteries that founded the universe of shamanic beliefs. With the animal world conquered, the holistic vision of the primitive world collapsed and definitively disappeared.

A long time after his domestication, the bull will continue to fascinate people (fig. 5): he will be present in all the mythologies of Antiquity and beyond [21].



6. The Neolithic: Bridge between Two Worlds

Supported by a stable climate, the “climatic optimum” [Perrot, 2003] that will last more than 3,000 years, the Neolithic Revolution in the Middle East saw the emergence of sedentarization, made possible by the introduction of an economy of production that resulted in a demographic growth without precedent in human history. This revolution, however, was not marked by any irreversible break with the past, but evolved very steadily. In fact, the collective and egalitarian values of nomadism were still prevailing long after these populations were settled, giving Neolithic society a character of stability and homogeneity.

The Social Organization of the Neolithic

It is true that data excavated to this day leave extended zones of darkness. Nevertheless, a few aspects present throughout this period let us discern some particularities of these populations' beliefs. One of them, the funeral practices, reveals that the notion of an eternally recycled natural world still dominated the beliefs of that era, the spirits playing a determining role on how these people considered the universe.

A second aspect, the architectural vestiges, brings into light some of the norms and values that these populations possessed at the time they settled down, and gives us some hints about their social organization. Opening the new era, the circular architecture with its communal storage facility illustrates the egalitarian heritage of these communities. Later, the appearance of rectangular constructions, of inside partitions and of private silos imposed by an explosive demographic growth implies a shift towards an increased perception of property. However, the absence of monumental architectural and the lack of signs of wealth in graves show that social differentiation and hierarchization remained very subdued [22].

The population, first distributed along undifferentiated gender lines, will gradually endorse simple matrilineal lineages. Later, the economic challenges of the last phase of the Neolithic era will impose the formation of larger domestic units, the extended matrilineal family. In time, the first patrilineal lineages will make their apparition as the discovery of paternity is slowly absorbed in the social structures.

Aggregates of these lineages will create tribal structures that will maintain the egalitarian principles anchored in their ancestral traditions. In this structure, everyone is defined by the place it occupies inside its parental group, the identity of the group always preceding the identity of the individual. Chiefs and shamans possess weak and ephemeral powers, because their position has to be earned, acquired, and maintained. As it has been observed by the Iroquois (North America), this social structure could reach a high degree of

complexity: *“Among the Iroquois, the individual was part of a nuclear family, which belonged to a household, which lived with other households in a long-house, which constituted part of a clan, which belonged to a moiety, which made up a tribe or nation, which in turn was part of the Confederation. Within this complex, overlapping set of relationships, a royaneh would be a family unit defined by a ‘fire-side.’”* [Lutz, 1998] Furthermore, it is important to note that this tribal organization allowed the decoupling between settled women and nomadic men that characterized the first half of the Neolithic era in this region.

The Demise of the Neolithic Economy

Toward the end of the seventh millennium, sites that have been occupied for centuries, and, in some cases, for millennia, are abandoned. The reasons for this exodus are twofold. On the one hand, the “climatic optimum” that prevailed until then comes gradually to an end. The period of more unstable weather that follows will have a profound impact on the economies in this part of the world.

A second and more direct cause is the erosion and exhaustion of the soils, the result of centuries of intensive agriculture. Declining yields forced these communities to diversify their economy, giving birth to pastoralism. Ultimately, most of the sites throughout the region were abandoned. In a very dramatic manner, Steven [Mithen](#) recounts that, by the end of the PPNB, all the trees around the site of 'Ain Ghazal (Jordan) were decimated, its inhabitants having to walk further away every year to plant their seeds and feed their flocks. Infantile mortality, already high, reached alarming proportions. Many were thus obliged to leave their land and settle elsewhere, while others had no other choice but to return to nomadism.

This description applies to all the sites of the Jordan Valley and beyond. It is during the same period that the site of Çatalhöyük (Turkey) is abandoned. In the Balikh valley (Syria), at least 10 sites that were continuously occupied for several centuries cease to exist between 6,300 and 6,200. It is also around that time that plastered skulls disappear at 'Ain Ghazal.

The Return to a Nomadic Lifestyle

All these changes point to the demise of what characterized Neolithic social and economic structures in the Middle East. However, it is important to note that the nomadic lifestyle and customs were not forgotten, still present in many aspects of the life of these populations. First, during most of the Neolithic, this region provided hordes of hunter-gatherers that lived beside settled populations with sufficient wild food to ensure their survival. Besides, within the settled communities, men were not fully integrated into sedentary life, this lifestyle offering too few outlets of value for them. Through their favorite activity, hunting, they kept

the customs and beliefs of nomadism alive, transmitting them from generation to generation. Only the deterioration of the conditions of life – deterioration certainly affecting the wild fauna as well – will bring them to participate in the communal economy.

The implementation of an economic duality – agriculture and pastoralism – will have for consequence that a part of the population will live sedentarily while the other will take the flocks in transhumance and live as nomads. It is with the return to nomadism that circular architecture reappears. As we will see with the Israelites, pastoralism will keep nomadic traditions a long time alive.

The Collapse of the Neolithic Society

The deterioration of climatic and environmental conditions has played a key role in the demise of the Neolithic economy. Yet, this would not have been sufficient to eradicate the Neolithic culture as a whole, some of its traditions inherited from ancestral times. It will necessitate a profound overhaul of human knowledge and technology to eradicate its cultural values and ensure the complete collapse of this millennial society.

We saw that the primitive perception of the universe rested on humans sharing nature with the animal world and the world of spirits. The domestication of the bull and the discovery of man's procreative function brought this conception to an end, disintegrating the foundations that underpinned the shamanic universe.

The holistic approach will be replaced by a pyramidal vision of the universe, with man reigning at its top, reflecting the new image he has forged of himself. In the new society, the egalitarian tribal structures make place for chiefdoms that are based on hierarchy and social differentiation. As for the spirits, they are invested with new roles – implementing the hegemony of the father in the social fabric through ancestor cults – and are endowed with new powers as they become divinities.



Eagle and headless men. Çatalhöyük (Turkey)

Part Three

The Urban and Religious Society

In the first part, we saw why men invented the spirits, and the functions they assigned to them. In the second part, we discovered the process of sedentarization around the norms and values inherited from nomadism. With sedentarization, the loose relationships of the hordes will congregate around matrilineal lineages, which in turn will give form to tribal structures. We further described the profound but delayed influence animal domestication has had on the world of spirits, announcing the end of shamanism.

The third part covers the Chalcolithic era and the Urban Revolution, a period that spreads from 5,000 to approximately 2,500. The profound changes that take place at the end of the Neolithic oblige most communities to abandon their traditional lifestyle. Tribal egalitarianism is replaced by the hierarchical structure of chiefdoms [see Appendix [Flannery](#)]. Villages become cities, organized around the palace and the temple. The authority rests on two specialized castes, the priests and the soldiers. The latter makes conquests possible, and with these, the first kingdoms and empires appear.

Having lost their main functions, the spirits become divinities whose world reflects human society. The religious institution arises as a mirror of the political organization. The myths on which it leans still testify to the strong influence that nature, women and fertility exercise. Yet, the role of women is seriously marginalized, power and authority clearly lying in the hands of men.

This third part is divided into two sections:

The Urban Society:

- 1. From Chiefdoms to the Urban Revolution** depicts the new society and its organization that introduces economic differentiation and social hierarchy
- 2. The Urban Revolution**, in which the first writings establish the state of political and religious structures
- 3. The Masculine Paradigm** concludes this part by showing how the codes of law convey the difference in status that men and women possess in the new society

The Religious Society:

- 1. The Birth of the Divine:** the spirits become divinities that are assembled into hierarchized pantheons

2. The Birth of Religion: in the footsteps of civilian authority, the religious institution is organized around its representatives, the priests



I. The Urban Society

The end of the Neolithic in the Middle East brings the prehistoric period of this region to an end. All structures and ancestral values that had been passed through generations since immemorial times have been wiped out in a matter of a few centuries. A radical change ensued that gave rise to a completely different society, in which very few elements of the old world survived. However, many signs point out that the past has not been forgotten, but most of what characterized it underwent drastic transformations to fit the new society. A few examples will suffice to illustrate the depth of these transformations:

- 1) The social organization, at the time egalitarian, is now hierarchized and differentiated
- 2) The economy, then in the hands of women, rests at present on men
- 3) The procreative forces, once all attributed to women, are, at present, controlled by men; even fertility will become a male attribute
- 4) Spirits that embodied the manifestations of nature have been transformed into divinities that are freed from any representation

Some of these transformations, as we have seen, were already in the making during the last phase of the Neolithic, whereas others will need more time to develop. Ultimately, the new society will reach its apogee by the time Antiquity ends.

From Pre-History to Proto-History

The very difficult and unstable conditions that reign at the end of the Neolithic era have put an extraordinary strain on the chief, left with few traditions and beliefs to support his decisions, and confronted with an increased demand as to his leadership and his authority, the community relying on him to bring prosperity back. This will create a new political and social order characterized by a centralized and hierarchical power, the chiefdom. Dethroning the tribal organization and definitively dissolving the ancestral egalitarian values that were in force [see Part Two, endnote 9], the renewed structure will be better adapted to accommodate the expansion of a much more heterogeneous population.

Furthermore, the traditional division of tasks will permanently disappear, men taking over the work in the fields while women are relegated to secondary tasks. More divisions in the distribution of labor will appear and give finally birth to castes of specialists, such as that of the priests and of soldiers.

All in all, the Chalcolithic era (around 5,500-3,500) sees the introduction of new social and economical structures. Monumental architecture, public sanctuaries and cemeteries; the

emergence of castes of specialists in activities such as handicraft and metallurgy, whose occupation is not directly related to the production of food; the distribution of residential zones according to social or economic criteria, are all witnesses of a society that, in a relatively short time, makes an enormous step forward.

On the technological front as well, the Chalcolithic is the scene of numerous innovations. Beside the introduction of the plow and of plow animals in agriculture, irrigation systems are created that imply the cooperation of several villages and the formation of a political organization that coordinates them. In addition, the domestication of the horse and the invention of the wheel will have meaningful consequences in domains as diverse as transportation, communication, and conquest. Last but not least, the end of this period sees the introduction of writing that marks the beginning of recorded history.

Accompanying and mirroring the new lifestyle and world view, a brand-new system of beliefs will arise from the debris of the previous one. The spirits will become divinities, who, assembled in pantheons, will spread throughout the Middle East to form the first cultural empire of our history, the polytheistic culture.

Finally, the adverse climatic conditions that played an important role in the demise of the Neolithic society will further affect the new period. Floods and other calamities, such as the rupture of the Bosphorus, will regularly break out in the region, until the last deluge that will flood the plains of the Tigris and the Euphrates around 3,500, having a profound impact on the collective memory since it has been recorded in all mythologies of the region.

Of this proto-history, very few elements have been uncovered, and as the Chalcolithic ends, the scene of the Urban Revolution is already set, the life of its people and their social organization “frozen” in the first writings. But in the light of our Neolithic heritage, we can discover and understand on which foundations and armature the new society has been built.



1. From Chiefdoms to the Urban Revolution

“It is in the very nature of things human that every act that has once made its appearance and has been recorded in the history of mankind stays with mankind as a potentiality long after its actuality has become a thing of the past.” [[Arendt](#), 1963]

Chiefdoms appear around 5,500 [1] in the Middle East. The social structure on which they are organized is the clan and the extended family, developed to palliate the economic difficulties to which the populations were confronted at the end of the Neolithic era. The emplacement of the site of Hassuna (Iraq) shows the important role economic diversification plays at the beginning of the Chalcolithic. This village is located at the crossroad of the arable land of the Assyrian plain, irrigated by tributaries of the Tigris, and the more arid grazing zones of Al Jazireh. This situation highlights the mixed strategies of the communal economy, allowing specialized horticulture (culture of the olive, for example), as well as breeding, of which secondary products such as milk and leather are now used.

Diversification of production entails an increasingly composite economic management. Each clan will be obliged to have enough members to represent it in the different zones of activity of the community. Because of the complexities brought by economic diversification and demographic development, and the necessity to organize public works, the chief will have to be endowed with powers that will enable him to take decisions in behalf of the whole community. Such a centralized authority will be especially necessary to the construction and maintenance of irrigation systems that will require the cooperation of several villages. To ensure the future of their community, the clans will agree to limit their powers and sacrifice some of their liberties accordingly, giving birth to the hierarchies that will structure the chiefdoms.

The New Chief

The egalitarianism that characterized social organization and relationships until then did not disappear overnight, maintaining, at the beginning, the powers of the chief within acceptable limits.

In the traditional tribal organization, the chief was chosen for his capacities [3]. The exercise of his function did not give him any privilege that would have manifestly distinguished him from other members of the community, whether through possessions or through exemption from communal activity. The restricted size of the communities, the weight of the traditions, and internal competition limited any abuse, eventually bringing back any excess to a more

balanced equilibrium [4]. Besides, the chief was not an authority imposed on the community, but was rather seen as a personage capable of balancing the different poles of interests, without losing sight of the traditions and the well-being of the community. In the highlands of New Guinea, Jared Diamond observed village meetings in which all adults participated, and was astonished by the fact that no one seemed to preside over those meetings, everyone being able to speak freely [5].

With chiefdoms, the first elements of social inequality appear. The chief is exempt from work, albeit sometimes only partially, and he accumulates possessions, clearly differentiating himself and the members of his family. He accentuates these differences by wearing and using distinctive signs: clothes, ornaments, headdress, accessories (jewelry, feathers, crown, throne, etc.) To mark the difference in status, some chiefs adopted an exclusive reverential code that varied greatly from one place to another: whereas some asked that one slightly bowed before them, others required from their people to lie face down on the ground, transforming a mark of respect into a sign of submission. The chief's status is frequently indicated by his physical elevation, being transported on a shield as the Gaul practiced, on a litter such as Inca and Aztec emperors did, or being seated on an elevated throne. The language used to address him was often distinct from the common language [6].

Another important change is that his function was not assigned according to individual qualities anymore, but had become hereditary. One of the first occurrences attesting to this inherited transmission is a child's tomb discovered at Tell es Sawwan (Iraq) containing statuettes, turquoise, and decorations, a wealth showing that this child acquired a different status at birth.

As in the past, the chief is called to solve litigations occurring between members of the community. But as the village where everybody knows everybody gets bigger and its population becomes more multi-faceted, his role as a mediator gradually turns into that of a judge, which will result in the emergence of codes of law during the third and the second millennium.

Generally, his main task is to organize and manage the different facets of a diversified economy. His status is directly associated with the way production is distributed, and land is assigned. Describing the family of a chief from the island of Naroï (Fiji), Marshall [Sahlins](#) noted that it was more than double all other families in the village, allowing the chief to produce, accumulate and distribute like a chief.

Demographic Growth and Integration

Demographic growth played a crucial role in strengthening the chief's authority, since chiefdoms allowed the integration of strangers into the social fabric, forming this way a population of several thousand, and even tens of thousands of individuals. A population growth of this magnitude multiplied the hierarchical layers, increasing the distance between the people and the authority. It also conferred a more important role to the distributive economy, if only because the income at the top increased as production grew. The redistribution of the production, controllable and transparent when the community was restricted, became opaque and prone to abuses, from the simplest form of corruption to kleptocracy.

Another important development that will build up the structure of power is the social integration of the different castes of specialists. A consequence of economic diversification and differentiation, the castes of bureaucrats and of soldiers will fortify and maintain the power in the hands of authority. The constitution of an army will open the door to conquests, profoundly marking our history, from the formation of the first kingdom by Lugal-Zage-Si until today. Furthermore, two other castes will play a major role in the nascent society: the priests and the slaves.

Finally, demographic growth will transform the way information is distributed, reinforcing the authority that controls it. Whereas in tribal communities, all information is shared, the size of the chiefdoms makes its redistribution more problematic. Adapted to the new structure, information is now concentrated at the summit of the hierarchy, and is only redistributed to members of the community to whom this information is deemed necessary. Controlling the information will become an important tool in the exercise of power [8].

Although few traces of the far-reaching transformations that sweep the Chalcolithic have been recovered, their results remain, however, visible in the organization, structure and norms of the kingdoms and empires that appear at the end of the third millennium.

It is, first of all, in the economic domain that the deepest changes occur. While women largely dominated the economy during the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras, the introduction of the plow and of plow animals into agriculture, allowing a larger population to be fed, relegated women to domestic horticultural production. Besides, the domestication of horses not only bestowed on men the means to control transportation, but also gave them an extraordinary instrument of conquest.

Furthermore, the big castes of specialists – bureaucrats, artisans, soldiers and priests – around which most activities of the city were organized were only comprised of men, while

the economic contribution of women, however active they were in most businesses, became marginal. In fact, men ended controlling all domains of production and administration, aspects that characterize the Urban Revolution: the keys of power were in their hands and have remained there until today.

The New Procreative Credo

The Chalcolithic sees a complete reversal of the economic and social position of men and women: the primordial function and status that women possessed have passed in the hands of men who now dominate the new society, defining its norms and structures.

To comprehend fully how such a shift in the mentalities could take place, it is important to realize how the discovery of paternity was understood and integrated in the context of the time. As we have seen, building the idea of fatherhood has followed a slow process that was accompanied with a parallel deconstruction of the myths surrounding motherhood. But while man's biologic role was becoming relatively clear, woman's contribution remained totally misunderstood. In fact, the new procreative equation was inspired by agriculture, its processes being simply applied to procreation.

In the agricultural world, two elements dominate: the seed that determines the plant that will germinate, and the soil that receives the seed and ensures its growth by feeding it. Transposed into procreative terms, the seeds of the male element are introduced in the female body whose task is to nurture them and make them grow: "*By the sacred tradition the woman is declared to be the soil, the man is declared to be the seed; the production of all corporeal beings (takes place) through the union of the soil with the seed.*" [[Laws of Manu](#)] According to the new insight, the seed of the man determines the features of the child to be born, whereas the woman is the soil feeding it. The fact that this nursing role can be performed by any woman transforms her, in man's eyes as in her own [9], into a secondary, replaceable element that wields no influence at all on the child she carries – the soil not determining in any way what will grow, only how it will grow. A few millennia later, Aeschylus voiced this standpoint on procreation in the following terms: "*The mother of her so-called child is not parent, but nurse of the young life sown in her. The male is parent: she, but a stranger to him, keeps safe his growing plant, unless fate blight it.*" [[Aeschylus](#), 1920] This stance will dominate the way humans understand procreation until the discovery of the ovum by Karl Ernst von Baer in 1827 CE.

The new procreative roles will exert a considerable influence on the way humans perceive their function in nature: man has now become "creator," whereas woman only exists to serve

him. As we will see in the last part of this book, this principle will be affirmed and magnified by most philosophies and religions of the Axial Age.



2. The Urban Revolution

In the course of a few millennia, the Urban Revolution leads us from the abandoned villages at the end of the Neolithic, characterized by architecture and urbanism in their infancy, and by an almost total absence of institutions, to the establishment of the first cities, kingdoms and empires, in the traces of Lugal-Zage-Si and of Sargon of Akkad.

The first Mesopotamian cities, as archeology has uncovered them, are the results from the adaptation of a society that is growing in complexity, having to integrate economic diversification as well as social hierarchy. This development will happen in stages, from the simple chiefdoms to the state-controlled structures that one finds in the city-states and kingdoms.

The factors that were at the origin of the Neolithic Revolution – economy of production and demographic growth – also preside over the development of chiefdoms and, ultimately, over the apparition of the first Mesopotamian cities. Integrating an increasingly heterogeneous population in an expanding economic system, the chiefdoms will give rise to a differentiated and dynamic social structure that will in turn accentuate social and economic disparities.

Urbanization and Power

The term of “Urban Revolution” by no means exaggerates the size and importance of the transformations that take place, first of all, with the introduction of a new concept, the one of monumental architecture. In the Neolithic, the construction of important buildings intended for other functions than that of dwelling were very exceptional, allowing us to conclude that no political or religious structure had been built on a permanent basis during that period. We will have to wait for the Obeid 3 culture (5,400-5,000) to see the first witnesses of a truly monumental architecture appear [10]. Everything seems to indicate that these buildings combined political and religious functions. The palace built in Uruk at the end of the fourth millennium possessed different elements that are not yet integrated, while the Ziggurat of Anu, known as the White Temple, “*corresponds more probably to a big council hall than to a temple.*” [Forest, 2002] It is at the end of the Obeid period that the first “real” temples like the one in Eridu appear.

In the same way, while traces of urbanism can already be found in the eighth millennium with the walls of Jericho [11] and of Beidha, with the apparition of cemeteries as in Tell Aswad, or later still with the very special urban arrangement of the site of Çatalhöyük [12], it is only with the first cities that council halls appear, constructed on a high terrace dominating the city,

and that cemeteries are relegated outside its walls [13], all this indicative of a will to organize and delimit the space.

Finally, the disappearance of private silos points out that a centrally controlled redistribution of production is now in place.

Kingdoms and Empires

With the spatial organization of urban populations, a social structure arises that, for the first time, introduces the notion of State. The privatization of property and the formation of castes of specialists combined with exogenous demographic growth lead to new areas of differentiation between the members of society. The greatly ritualized and hierarchized castes of soldiers and of priests help the state-controlled structure expand while legitimizing it. The codes of laws, such as the one of Hammurabi dating from the beginning of the second millennium (fig. 6), confirm this will to rule and to legalize, and are the principal witnesses of these initial state-controlled frameworks.

The honor to have founded the first kingdom must be attributed to Lugal-Zage-Si, last king of Sumer, who unified the south of Mesopotamia. Sargon prolonged his work of expansion and territorial unification, from Akkad to the north to Sumer to the south. Akkad became the capital of an empire that dominated the whole Middle East (2,335-2,154), spreading from Lebanon and the south of Turkey to Iran [14].



Fig. 6: Code of Laws of Hammurabi (replica) Babylon 1,750-1,700.
Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, San Jose, California

The conquests started by Sargon were continued by his sons and his grandson, Naram-Sin. Under his reign, Akkad reached its apogee. Possibly motivated by the feeling that his authority and power spread over the whole world as it was known at the time, over all the lands situated between sunrise and sunset [15], Naram-Sin had the idea to divinize his status, abandoning royalty whose rank was then subordinate to that of divinity. A temple was dedicated to him, and the iconography represented him taller than other humans.

The fact that Naram-Sin was at the head of an army 360,000 men strong demonstrates a very efficient integration of food production, economically as well as administratively. Palaces and temples organized economic activity and distributed its production, which came mainly from agriculture, animal farming, and handicraft. These two institutions also redistributed the necessary commodities: grain, oil and wool. Such a centralized organization made sure that all accumulated surpluses remained in the hands of the authority, and profited the two castes supporting the power structure, that of the priests and of the soldiers. This is most visible in three of the main activities of the State: the construction of palaces and of temples, and war expeditions.

Expansion and Slavery

Conquests blended these populations as never before. The ethnic and linguistic homogeneity of the lineages and clans, the securitized position of every individual within the community made way for a multi-ethnic social composition that defined itself in geographical terms, using territorial limits to differentiate the in-group from the out-group.

Furthermore, the limited capacity to produce and the egalitarian norms of the tribes prevented the introduction of slavery: except in cases of specific needs – lack of women, for example – defeated people were expelled from their territory and banished to more hostile grounds, or simply exterminated.

The needs generated by an economy in expansion and by territorial extension are going to transform the destiny of vanquished people. Beside annexing territories and levying tributes, the conqueror will select the most valid individuals and integrate them into its economy while forming a new caste, the caste of slaves.

This new social stratum that appears at the time of chiefdoms will play a role of first importance in the economy of the burgeoning society, since it will provide a workforce that is easily recyclable and can quickly be adapted to the economic or demographic conditions at the most minimal cost [16].

Slavery will also have a positive influence on social cohesion, reminding every “free” individual the non-negligible advantages of its social standing, and the fact that it could lose it if its armies were to be defeated.



3. The Masculine Paradigm

While the period that stretches from the chiefdoms to the late empires of Antiquity establishes the power and authority of the masculine in all facets of society, women still enjoy prestige and privileges, and take an active part in the economy. They possess lands and slaves, lend and borrow money, and are involved in commercial activities, whether those of their spouses or their own. In palaces and temples of the third millennium, many women have titles of nobility and occupy high positions. They also are scribe or musician, or practice an independent profession, such as weaver or goldsmith. But women are also objectified, left as a pledge for debts contracted by their father, their brother or their husband, or offered as a tribute. In addition, they practice prostitution.

However, various signs reveal the degradation of their status. A hymn dedicated to the popular goddess Gula confirms the total dependence of women on men: "I am a daughter-in-law, I am a wife, I am a housewife." The different tables of laws that are written at that time confirm the complete state of subordination imposed on women.

The Codes of Law

With the exception of the code of Ur-nammu dated 2,200, most codes of laws that have been found are from the beginning of the second millennium, as the one of Eshnunna (about 1950), the one of Lipit-Ishtar from Nippur (about 1850) or the famous Babylonian code of Hammurabi (about 1750) [see Appendix Hammurabi]. Later, besides a Hittite code dating from around 1,300, the codes found in the Old Testament, imitating their political predecessors, will equip the sovereign god with real tables of laws [17].

Numerous laws in the code of Hammurabi as in the Old Testament regulate conjugal relationships, problems of succession and sexual offenses. Regularizing norms that have to be enforced in society, they give a good picture of the state of relationships between men and women.

Among other things, they show to what point sexual customs were loosened at the time. The example of Sodom and Gomorrah [Ge 18:20-21] was not an exception: "*I will not punish your daughters when they play the harlot, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for [the men] themselves go apart with harlots, and they sacrifice with the prostitutes,*" writes Hosea [4:14]

The ardor with which the prophets try to regularize the sexual customs of the Israelites show how serious a problem it was: "A widow, or one divorced, or a profane woman, a harlot, these shall he not take: but a virgin of his own people shall he take to wife" preaches

Leviticus [21:14]; “There shall be no prostitute of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a sodomite of the sons of Israel,” one reads in Deuteronomy [23:17].

Sexual Offenses and Gender Roles

Codes of laws distinguish three sorts of sexual infractions: rape, fornication, which includes prostitution, and incest.

Rape

Rape is punished differently depending on whether it occurs in the city or in the countryside. In the city, the girl or woman who has been raped but has not shouted – or has not been heard – will share the fate of her rapist, death. In the countryside however, she might have shouted, but not been heard. In that situation, only the man is condemned to death. The Hittite code goes further and condemns the woman who is raped in her house, presupposing that the man could not enter without her agreement. In this case, the rapist is punished only if he’s caught red-handed by the husband who, without hesitation, can kill him as well as his own wife. If the woman is not married but promised to a man and still a virgin, the rapist is put to death while the woman is not blamed for anything. If the woman is not engaged to be married, the rapist is not put to death, but simply has to compensate the girl’s father by giving him a sum of money and by marrying his daughter.

Fornication

Fornication can be defined as encompassing all ‘inappropriate’ sexual relationships. Adultery is one of them. In the Assyrian code as in the code of Hammurabi [129], when a woman and her lover are caught in *flagrante delicto*, they are both bound and drowned. If the husband forgives his wife, or punishes her less heavily, the king might then forgive the lover as well. The biblical laws, on the other hand, exclude all forgiveness: the lovers must die [Le 20:10; De 22:22].

If a wife is accused of adultery by her husband although she is innocent, she can return to her father’s house. But if she is incriminated by a third person, even though she has not done anything, she will drown herself out of respect for her husband [Hammurabi 131-132].

Whereas the woman who commits adultery is always guilty, no mention is made anywhere of the case of an adulterous man. However, a deceived wife can apply for divorce. Yet, she will have to prove that she has been a good housewife and that her morality is without reproach. She will then recover her dowry and return to her father’s house. But “*if she is not innocent, but leaves her husband, and ruins her house, neglecting her husband, this woman shall be cast into the water.*” [Hammurabi 143] Besides, a woman whose husband has been absent a

long time will be allowed to leave him for another man if there is nothing to eat at her house. But if she wants to leave him while there's enough food to feed her, she will perish by drowning [Hammurabi 133-134].

Falling under the law against fornication is the case of two non-married individuals that have a sexual relationship. It will be, however, sufficient for them to get married to avoid punishment. Deuteronomy explores the case of a man who accuses the woman he has just married not to have been a virgin at the time of the wedding, and therefore, to have fornicated. It will be the task of her parents to prove that these accusations are false by bringing "*forth the tokens of the young lady's virginity to the elders of the city.*" [De 22:15] These will condemn the husband to a fine that will be given to the father of the woman. She will remain his wife, and he won't be able to divorce her as long as she lives. On the other hand, if the woman's virginity cannot be proven, she will be stoned by the people of the city in front of her father's house until she dies.

Prostitution

Though the laws that are meant to regulate sexual relationships partly ratify norms being already implemented in the society, they let emerge the promiscuous heritage of these populations, which the surviving practices of prostitution, incest and polyandry illustrate. However, while polyandry and incest take their roots in a very distant past and were extremely widespread when paternity did not exist, prostitution is a more recent phenomenon, probably unknown to Neolithic egalitarian communities. It certainly started to flourish with the changes in demographic balance and in social interaction that mark the chiefdoms and the Urban Revolution. It was further greatly influenced by the introduction of slaves, which replaced the practice of kidnapping women, albeit on a much larger scale. In fact, prostitution was probably used to regulate traditional promiscuity, still very much practiced.

Until the codes introduced in the Old Testament, most codes of law allowed prostitution, its practice being deeply anchored in the norms of the society. One of its institutionalized facets was the so-called "sacred prostitution": "*The Babylonians have one most shameful custom. Every woman born in the country must once in her life go and sit down in the precinct of Venus, and there consort with a stranger... A woman who has once taken her seat is not allowed to return home till one of the strangers throws a silver coin into her lap, and takes her with him beyond the holy ground. When he throws the coin he says these words "The goddess Mylitta prosper thee." (Venus is called Mylitta by the Assyrians.) ... The woman goes with the first man who throws her money, and rejects no one. When she has gone with him, and so satisfied the goddess, she returns home... Such of the women as are tall and*

beautiful are soon released, but others who are ugly have to stay a long time before they can fulfill the law. Some have waited three or four years in the precinct. A custom very much like this is found also in certain parts of the island of Cyprus." [[Herodotus](#), 1850]

Sacred prostitution was widespread, from India to Cyprus to Egypt. In Andhra Pradesh (India) for example, evil on a family or on an entire village could be avoided by marrying a girl between five and nine years old to the god Potharaju. Elsewhere, the initiation rituals of *devdaasi* included a deflowering ceremony giving a priest the right to have intercourse with every girl enrolled at his temple [[18](#)].

Providing temples with a regular income, institutionalized prostitution will also be introduced by civil authorities. In Greece, slaves worked in the *dicterion* as prostitutes, applying a very affordable one-price-fits-them-all policy. Around the same time (end seventh century, begin sixth century), Guan Zhong introduces a similar system in China to increase state income.

The Old Testament will be the only code that severely condemns prostitution. The first mention appears in Genesis, when Judah learns that his daughter-in-law, Tamar, has prostituted herself and is pregnant. He condemns her to be burnt [Ge 38:24], but forgives her when he realizes that she has had sex with him, and that he is the father of her child. In Leviticus, the daughter of a priest is condemned to be burnt because she has dishonored her father [Le 21:9]. "*Prostitution, wine, and new wine take away understanding,*" writes Hosea [Ho 4:11], while Leviticus recommends fathers not to prostitute their daughters out of fear that "*the land falls into prostitution, and the land becomes full of wickedness.*" [Le 19:29] But because these laws only concerned the Israelites prostitution flourished, actively practiced by "foreign" women.

In fact, prostitution was engrained in the mores of the time, as illustrated by the custom law that allowed a father to sell his daughter who became a concubine during the time established by the contract of sale. The Code of Hammurabi [178-180] even regulates the gifts or dowry a father makes for his daughter, whether she is a devoted woman or a prostitute. As for the adoption of children, their status was identical, whether they were born in the palace or from a "public" woman. [Hammurabi 187/192-193]

Incest

A few examples will illustrate the manner incest was considered. In the first place, all sexual relationships between a son and his mother are punished by death [Hammurabi, 157]. But sexual relations between a man and his stepmother are also condemned to the same punishment. As one can read in Leviticus, this law is not aimed at protecting the ties of blood or at avoiding inbreeding, but is justified by the fact that the father's "nudity" is exposed, that is to say, the father is dishonored [Le 20:10-11].

Similarly, sexual relations between a father and his daughter-in-law, relationships that seemed to be fairly common at that time [Ez 22:11] [19], are also condemned. The father is sentenced to death if the daughter-in-law and her husband have already had intercourse together: the dishonor incurred by the son requires the father's death in repair. But if the marriage has not yet been consummated, the father has only to pay a fine. [Hammurabi 155-156] Punishment is thus entirely dependent on whether the honor of another man has been tarnished, and his procreative exclusivity infringed.

In the case of a relationship between a father and his daughter, the code of Hammurabi [154] only banishes the father. In the story of Lot and his two daughters who sleep with their father and become pregnant [Ge 19:31-36], no one is punished because there is only one male character, the father, and he cannot dishonor himself.

Finally, we observe a certain evolution in the way the Old Testament approaches incest. While the more recent books (Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers) condemn all sexual relationships between relatives, Genesis allows it repeatedly: in the story of Lot and his daughters [Ge 19:30-38]; when Abraham marries his half-sister Sarai [Ge 20:12]; when his brother Nahor marries his half-sister Milcah [Ge 11:29]; and in the case of a wedding between cousins [Ge 28:2]. Still at the time of David, his daughter Tamar says to her brother Amnon that their father will not be opposed to their marriage: *"When she had brought them near to him to eat, he took hold of her, and said to her, 'Come, lie with me, my sister!' She answered him, 'No, my brother, do not force me! For no such thing ought to be done in Israel. Don't you do this folly. I, where would I carry my shame? And as for you, you will be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, please speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.'* However he would not listen to her voice; but being stronger than she, he forced her, and lay with her." [2Sa 13:11-14]

A Procreative Monopoly

A common value to all these laws is that they build up the procreative rights of men. Judah can forgive the prostitution of his daughter-in-law [Ge 38:26] because he is not dishonored by this act, but foremost because he is the father of the child she carries. Furthermore, the fact that punishment varies whether the marriage has been consummated or not clearly indicates that the law is written to protect man's procreative property: if the marriage has been consummated, the father has to die in order to protect his son's procreative monopoly. For the same reason, the codes of law make very little case of incestuous relationships between a father and his daughter [20].

Consequently, if we apply an identical reasoning to the laws concerning adultery, the fact that men are not punished for having a sexual relationship with another woman than their

wife is because the law does not seek to limit men sexual activity, but to establish and protect paternity. The law dealing with men who do not honor their paternal task confirms this aspiration: *“If a man takes a woman to wife, but has no intercourse with her, this woman is no wife to him.”* [Hammurabi 128] In other words, the law aims at reducing women to their functional status and at imposing on their sexual life the necessary boundaries to demarcate paternal activity [21]. The will to control women’s sexuality and to prevent them from any promiscuous relationship is confirmed by a document of the Urukagina reform. Dating from around 2,400, it forbids the practice of polyandry, an accepted tradition in Sumer until then: *“The women of former days used to take two husbands, (but) the women of today (if they attempted this) were stoned with stones (upon which was inscribed their evil) intent.”* [Kramer, 1974]

The homogeneity of the various codes of law across time and borders implies that the aspects they rule on were already put into practice in the different societies, and that the norms and values they legislate were already ingrained in the populations they were regulating. The introduction of ancestor cults in the early days of the Chalcolithic could have fostered such an in-depth integration of patrilineal filiation and genealogy into the social fabric.

Ancestor Cults

After the discovery of paternity put an end to the procreative function of the spirits, the role they played in the relationship between the living and the dead was reinvested with a new dimension, the cult of the forebears, sealing paternity into the social structure.

We must first distinguish filial ancestor cults, in which a relationship of filiation exists between the one officiating and the ancestor, from communal ancestor cults that are dedicated to an individual with whom the one officiating has no tie of filiation. Whereas filial cults imply kinship between individuals, communal cults hark back to traditions that take their source in remote myths, as was the case for most of the ancestor cults mentioned in the first part.

While we have seen communities venerating women as their ancestor, filial ancestor cults are characterized by the fact that they are never addressed to a female ancestor. Even in matrilineal communities where an ancestor cult is practiced, only male ancestry is honored, as is the case for the Ashanti (Ghana) who venerate their maternal uncle. In fact, an individual's genealogy becomes important only when fatherhood appears. Filial ancestor cults are, hence, relatively recent, introduced after the paternal function was established, whereas communal ancestor cults have always existed.

With filial ancestor cults, spirits maintain their function in their relationships with the dead, while anchoring in an indelible fashion the father in the social structure. From generation to generation, patrilineal progeny will thus be implanted, constructing a male genealogy that the ruling class will retroactively date back to the dawn of time.

This masculine approach to one's genealogy reminds us of the bloody rituals marking the accession of boys into the world of men that contrasts with the absence of ceremony signaling the "natural" entry of girls into the fertile world of women [see Part One]. Identically here, men ritualize paternal filiation in an ostentatious manner, whereas the "natural" genealogy of maternal lineages goes totally unnoticed.

Nevertheless, ancestor cults will not be sufficient to cover all facets of the new vision that humans have over themselves and over the position they occupy in the universe. By adapting the spirits to the renewed social conditions, to the recently acquired knowledge, to their new conception of the world, humans will transform them into divinities, creating the real backbone of the polytheistic culture that will dominate the Middle East and beyond for four millennia [\[22\]](#).



II. The Religious Society

With plant and animal domestication taking away some of nature's most prominent mysteries, the last parameters that gave spirits their reason to exist disappear. This will have deep repercussions on the society that is emerging from the prehistoric world.

However, the spirits will not disappear completely, but will be granted a new life, with new functions in a new universe that will spread well beyond the enclosed world they occupied until then: they will be endowed with a new attribute, that of divinity.

Divinities stem from the world of the spirits, in a transmutation that stretches over millennia. Ultimately, they will form a coherent universe that will have for function to support the new conceptions taking shape in the human society.



1. The Birth of the Divine

Under the influence of the new conditions, the status and function of spirits that, until then, reflected the limits of the world in which humans lived, change. These changes are found on several levels.

To begin with, the discovery of paternity transformed men into creators: their seeds determine the features of the child that the woman carries and nourishes. This new role, combined with the major economic function that they have acquired, heightens their status and self-image. Having become primordial, inescapable, they place themselves at the summit of the creation, banishing women to a secondary, superfluous role.

Adding further to their creator's status, the domestication of plants and animals has reinforced the idea that they dominate nature: nature, just like women, has been created for their purpose. These views led them to think that they occupy a controlling position in the universe, a position outside nature.

In the same way, the spirits are going to be detached from the material support that nature provided until then. Freed from the limitations that originally were their *raison d'être*, they will become divinities, and be allocated a world of their own, a world beyond nature, clearly mirroring the new image that men have forged for themselves. Further reflecting this new vision, the divinities will be endowed with "supernatural" powers.

With the introduction of the divine, the stable conception of the (pre)Neolithic world, in which humans and spirits were integrated in a holistic vision of nature, acquires a new dimension. Having stepped out of nature, humans and divinities are no longer frozen in an eternal and unalterable universal balance, as was the case in the ancient world. The new world is not cyclical but linear, a world in movement driven by men's new aspirations. This transformation will introduce a revolutionary idea that will serve as foundation to the new society, the idea of progress, a notion totally incompatible with that of the unalterable cyclicity that humans, nature and spirits shared in the ancestral holistic vision.

At the heart of all transformations that take place, man will use the divinities to strengthen his authority and power, and just like the world of spirits sustained his influence and power in the (pre)Neolithic world, the world of divinities will provide the ideological armature he needs to justify the new social organization.

From Natural Spirits to Divine Spirits

Freed from the manifestations of nature that defined them, the divinities acquire a new independence, giving them the possibility to be conceptualized without the support of any representation:

They can be in different places simultaneously

Contrary to the spirit that couldn't exist outside its natural manifestation, the divinity, relieved from all physical representations, can find its residence wherever it is needed. The temple will become the standard structure that shelters it. Middle-eastern monotheism will push this process of liberation to new extremes by declaring the divinity omnipresent, freeing it, if only partially, from the cult place.

They can be represented in various manners

Not limited by a physical support, the divinity can take all possible forms. It opens the door to a figurative representation of the divine that will take the shape of animals, of monsters, of geniuses, and, more notably, of human beings. Anthropomorphism appears during the fourth millennium and represents a pinnacle in the history of human thought: to grant their features to the divinities allows humans to characterize the divine, and simultaneously makes the divinization of humans possible. Ultimately, to fight the excesses of the polytheistic pantheons, monotheism will abolish all representations of the divinity, bringing it back to the state of a pure spirit.

They possess multiple functions

Finally, detached from all supports, from all particularities, divinities are not limited to a specific function but accumulate them. This will give birth, down the road, to the almighty divinities that reign at the summit of the polytheistic pantheons. It will also give its main attribute to the monotheistic divinity: omnipotence.

Human, all too Human

Parallel to the features defining the divine, the world of divinities will use the very elements that characterize the new human society:

Genealogy

Just like ancestor cults imprint the patrilineal genealogy in the social fabric, divinities acquire a name, a sex and a genealogy that will form the basis of the pantheons.

Localization

Divinities reign over a specific region, like the monarch whose authority is limited to the geographical area under its rule.

Socialization

The pantheons form a society reproducing the same interactions as those found in human society.

Politicization

Similarly to human society, the divine world is organized around hierarchies, classes and specialties.

Anthropomorphism

Gods and goddesses are frequently endowed with human features.

These facets show that the world of divinities is shaped on the very elements that structure human society. Yet, numerous aspects of the archaic world of spirits have been preserved, for example, in the way divinities share the world with humans and take part in the same reality, prolonging the vision that dominated a few millennia earlier. Thus, the Sumerian Anu is not the god of the heavens, but represents the heavens. As Karen Armstrong notes, “[t]he pagan vision was holistic. The gods were not shut off from the human race in a separate, ontological sphere: divinity was not essentially different from humanity.” [\[Armstrong, 1993\]](#)

The Pantheons as a Reflection of Society

“Gigantic, alien, and magically endowed, the gods were nonetheless all too human in their sadism, whimsy, and churlishness.” [\[Ackerman, 1994\]](#)

Just like the cities and kingdoms at the time, the pantheons underwent a vigorous demographic growth: while the Sumerian pantheon had a few hundred divinities, the Egyptian pantheon counted two thousand gods and goddesses, and imperial Rome had more than 30,000 divinities, according to the Roman historian Varro.

Inside the pantheons, the roles were distributed as to ensure the good working of a divine world that was organized in the same way as the city-states. The Syrian-Palestinian pantheon, for example, had a monarchy composed of El and his feminine counterpart, Asherah, that both reigned at its summit. Directly below them were leading deities that had to manage the affairs of the world. Each of them ruled over a specific domain and possessed immense powers, often exercising them in a particularly aggressive manner. At a third level was the executive branch of the pantheon, composed of specialized divinities that had to carry out the orders emanating from their superiors. Finally, at the bottom of the scale were

the divinities transmitting information, the messengers – who later will become “angels” – executing the orders received without any personal will. All in all, the pantheons formed a perfect mirror of human society, with its royalty, its ruling class, its castes of specialists, and its slaves.

Yet, despite this internal hierarchization, the equality that reigned between divinities belonging to different localities is striking: the god venerated here was equal to the god venerated by the neighbor. This can be explained by the fact that the divinities of the Middle East were assigned a jurisdiction, and everyone had to submit to the local cults. Besides, every god and goddess was assigned specific functions that gave the follower the possibility to choose the divinity that would most adequately grant its request. In fact, this functionality served as basis for the relationship between divinities and humans during the whole polytheistic era, and is also found during the first contacts between Yahweh and the Israelites.

Finally, besides demographic growth, the development of pantheons was supported by the increased contacts that took place between the different urban centers, motivated by commercial purpose or by territorial conquests. The integration by fusion or by absorption of divinities of various origins formed the composite identity of the gods and goddesses of the big pantheons that dominated our Antiquity. This faculty to integrate diverse divinities into an existing pantheon has been, in fact, one of the most important assets of the polytheistic culture, ensuring its expansion and its supremacy during 4,000 to 5,000 years. It has also been the cause of its demise in the Middle East.

Creation Myths as Mirrors

The ancestral conception of the world in which everything that belongs to nature was eternally recycled implied that nature had no beginning, while its end was inconceivable. This cyclical and all-encompassing vision of the universe did not allow anything to exist outside the natural world: nature preceded everything and generated all sources of life.

With humans taking control of nature, the first step was made toward rejecting the cyclical vision world. Placing himself and the divinities outside nature led to finding an origin to it.

However, it was the introduction of ancestor cults that irremediably made the cyclical vision of the world obsolete. Ancestor cults provided every individual with a genealogy. Identically, divinities were endowed with an ancestry. Anchoring one's descent into the past brought with it a linear perception of time, implying that somewhere in a very distant past, history had begun. This historical approach will give birth to the various creation myths that abound at the onset of civilization.

Yet, most creation myths took their source in nature, revealing how present the holistic vision still was: with almost no exception until the double creation myth related in Genesis [see Appendices Genesis 'E' and Genesis 'J'], nature preexisted and served as the cradle to all life.

In most creation myths, earth and water are the elements that are at the origin of life. The sky is more rarely used. At Sumer, it is the “primordial sea” that precedes all things. For the Egyptians, it is the Noun, the primordial sea in which some see a metaphor of the Nile, that gives birth to the different cosmogonies. From its waters, a mound emerges that acts as a starting point to the creation myth of the Ogdoad in which the god Ra is born from an egg or, according to other versions, of a blue lotus. In the Ennead, the cosmogony of Heliopolis, Atum emerges from the primordial waters and masturbates to alleviate his solitude. Of his semen, Tefnut and Shu are born: they will generate the sky and the earth. A third important Egyptian cosmogony comes from Memphis and sees the god Ptah emerging from the primordial waters and creating the first human being.

In other creation myths, the “primal chaos” precedes all things. In his Theogony, Hesiod places chaos at the origin of the creation. In Japan, an unlimited chaos without any definite shape reigns before the sky and the earth appear. Similarly in China, the Tao Te Ching (Lao Tzu) recounts that a formless but complete mass preceded the creation of the sky and the earth.

In most mythologies, divinities are placed in an already existing nature on which they are dependent, and it will be their task to give form to human life. The Sumerian mythology, remarkably, recounts that gods and goddesses experienced difficulties to secure their subsistence. They solved their problem by creating humans to work nature for them. The goddess-mother Ninmah created them in the image of the gods. Both divinities and humans were, therefore, subservient to nature, their survival depending on it. [For more accounts of creation myths, see Appendix [Creation Myths](#)]

Whereas in the world of spirits, the laws of nature were eternal and unchangeable, the divinities of the polytheistic pantheons organize the chaos and model nature to their will, introducing the creative principle. Nonexistent until then, this principle will justify the introduction of a new sort of law, the divine law that will ultimately supplant the laws of nature.

Besides, the introduction of divinities as a creative force within nature led to the creation of a hierarchy inside nature. The fact that humans were created to work in place of divinities establishes a hierarchy in which humans are an instrument used by divinities but, at the

same time, are bestowed with the power to work and control nature. This vision conveys the values of the new society, justifying divine law and the conquest of nature by humans.

Fertility

Finally, the growing role of the masculine creative principle will not diminish the importance of feminine fertility in the mentalities of the new era in any way. In Egypt, the power of Isis, sometimes represented nursing, will surpass that of all other divinities, and she will be worshiped as the “universal mother.” For the Thracian, the great goddess-mother was the most important figure of their pantheon. First represented as a pregnant woman or as a mother, she will later appear with a cup in her hands, a symbol of the fertility she offers. In Greece, the goddess-mother will be venerated under the names of Gaia and Rhea, which means “flow” and refers to menstruations, with innumerable altars and sanctuaries devoted to her. In Rome where all spiritual movements of the East gather, she goes by the name of Terra Mater, Tellus or Magna Mater. She has a seat beside the Egyptian Isis and Cybele, a goddess coming from Anatolia, also called Great Mother or Mother of the Gods. During the first century of our era, Seneca still deplores the impact that the devotions to these two divinities have on the mores of his contemporaries.

In the next part, we will see that the divinity of fertility will be the most prominent adversary of Yahweh, since it is to its cult that the Israelites repeatedly return. And when the monotheistic doctrine will dominate, forbidding all other cults and banishing all representations of the divine, the Fathers of the church will still feel obliged to include this pagan element to the church paraphernalia by integrating into its beliefs the cult to the Virgin Mary, whose main attribute is to be God's Mother, thus showing the importance of fertility cults at the beginning of our era [\[23\]](#).



Fig. 7: Feminine figurine seated. Period of Halaf, 5th millennium (Mesopotamia) © the Metropolitan Museum of Art
Fig. 8: Idol of fertility. Chalcolithic, Cyprus, around 3,000 © Louvre Museum / HAS. Reppas
Fig. 9: Decorated vase with naked goddess or "Vase of Ishtar." Detail. Mesopotamia, beginning of the 2nd millennium

Masculine Fertility

However, with time, the representation of fertility in the polytheistic universe changes: man appears more and more frequently as the instigator of fertility, gradually taking over the last domain controlled by women. In one of the oldest recorded myths, Dumuzi, the shepherd, marries Inanna, the goddess of fertility, and becomes a semi-divinity. Their mating fertilizes the soil as well as all female living creatures. The presence of Dumuzi does not symbolize sexual power, as the bull has done in earlier times, but represents one of the first accounts of masculine contribution to the fertility process.

The legend further says that Ereshkigal, Inanna's sister who reigns over the underworld, has made Inanna prisoner. Inanna decides that Dumuzi must take her place. The sister of Dumuzi intervenes and is allowed to take her brother's place six months every year. At every equinox, the reunion of Inanna and Dumuzi brings fertility back to nature [24].

Throughout Antiquity, this myth was integrated into many rituals, the keys of fertility being deposited in the hands of the monarch who represented the divinity. Every year, the king had to take the place of Dumuzi and to mate with the great priestess representing Inanna. The king's role was in this regard very important, since his grip on power depended on the result from this union: he would undergo a ritual death if he was not able to prove his capacity to ensure fertility of the land and of the women under his authority.

This ritual, found in Uruk during the third millennium, was also practiced with Osiris in Egypt, with Adonis in Syria and with Attis in Phrygia: every year, the masculine divinity had to die so that nature could be born again. However, whereas the female element was at first deemed necessary for all fertility rituals, whether as a divinity like Inanna or as a woman like the great priestess, the Canaanite god Baal will not need any female assistance to grant fertility to nature and to his followers. His powers will make him the chief competitor of Yahweh who will have to convince his people that he is also capable of giving them the fertility they need.

Evicting the Feminine

A similar shift from the feminine to the masculine is also found at the summit of the pantheons. Characteristically, most if not all proto-historical pantheons had set a mother-goddess as their most important divinity. Nonetheless, towards the end of Antiquity, the

supreme authority was in the hands of male divinities: El for the Canaanites, Ahura Mazda in Iran, Zeus for the Greeks, Jupiter for the Romans, Brahma in India, etc.

The description that Bruce Rosenstock gives of the Greek religious system can be applied to many of the polytheistic systems at the time for this region: “*This polytheistic theology is put into the service of legitimizing male power, whether vested in a king or in an aristocratic elite, over a society’s reproductive resources, both material and cultural. In a highly stratified urban culture, polytheism and the veneration of phallic power are inextricably linked.*” [Rosenstock, 2006] The determination to withdraw all powers from women’s hands in their relationship with the divine will reach its climax with Levantine monotheistic religions that will ban women from the places of cult.

Conclusion

As for the world of spirits, the world of divinities begins where the world of humans ends. But unlike the spirits, the divinities interact much more with humans, allowing individuals like Dumuzi to become semi-divine. Jesus Christ will serve as one of the highest expressions of this fusion. This will in turn allow humans’ field of vision to stretch beyond the limits of their own world, to reach a universe beyond the borders formed by their understanding: by introducing the supra-natural world of divinities, humans have liberated themselves from the limits imposed on them by nature.

Emancipation from nature will not happen overnight: nature remains an important reference of the polytheistic culture, and it will only be with the ideological current of the Axial Age that this emancipation will be finalized.

With the passing of time, the polytheistic pantheons became more complex, reproducing a faithful image of human society that preceded them in their development. When recorded history began, the pantheons were already in place, and we can only guess what has been their origin, their past. Having started in simplified structures like the structures of the communities in which they were born, their parameters developed as those of the surrounding society became clearer. In the cities, various divinities lived side-by-side, forming a multi-faceted world, constantly changing. Only the intervention of the authority could impose a unifying norm, whose first traces appeared at the end of the third millennium, more precisely at Eridu in Mesopotamia where, according to the Sumerian Royal List (fig. 10), “*kingship descended from heaven.*”



2. The Birth of Religion

In the traces of the political institution, polytheism is first characterized by its territorial specificity, since the divinity is attached to the place over which the monarch who represents the divinity reigns. The temple symbolizes a still more specific localization phenomenon, since it was not considered as a center of cult, but as the home of the divinity. Comparable to the palace, only the privileged could enter its premises. The rest of the population had to leave messages or pray outside the building where a representation of the divinity was sometimes put at its disposal.

The growth of urban populations, the development of communication and exchanges, but more especially the territorial expansion that characterizes this period favored the creation of pantheons bringing together cults and divinities. Divinities fulfilling an identical function merged. Others, which were too vague, too weak, or too dysfunctional, disappeared. Others still, too powerful to be set aside, were attached to the existing core of divinities. Taking a new name in each context, these major divinities were found in all the pantheons of the Middle East.

This phenomenon of integration reveals another characteristic of the polytheistic pantheons, namely the flexibility with which their structures could be adapted and modeled, not only integrating new divinities when deemed necessary, but also adapting their functions attributed according to the needs of society. This flexibility represents one of the strengths of this religious system, forming unique schemes around the kingdoms and empires that succeed one another, giving shape to the first cultural empire of our history.

Of Temporal and Spiritual Powers

In Mesopotamia, every city is associated with a god or a goddess. The king is its only representative and has mandate to organize the city according to the will of the divinity. Eridu, for example, is the only city of the antediluvian period mentioned on the Sumerian Royal List (fig. 10). The first archaeological levels reveal the existence of a village around 5,000 that will become one of the first Sumerian cities, covering about ten hectares and sheltering a temple and a ziggurat.

This structure, in the shape of a pyramid erected within the temple grounds and surmounted by an altar, possessed a double function: it brought humans closer to the divinities, and at the same time it allowed divinities to come down on earth and to mingle with humans [25].

Eridu was founded by Enki, a divinity with multiple functions: god of waters, of artisans, of wisdom, and of the creation, he is also the god who carried the mysterious *me*, key to divine

and human powers. Enki will be one of the most important and influential gods of the polytheistic pantheons, his cult still being celebrated today.

When Enki offered the *me* to Inanna, the divine authority left Eridu for Uruk of which Inanna became the official goddess. Her cult was also celebrated in several other cities of Mesopotamia [26].

Enlil, son of An and eldest brother of Enki, will reign over the city of Nippur where the gods will gather to take decisions about the future of humanity. A center such as Nippur sheltered many temples where other gods besides Enlil were venerated. Its pantheon signals a beginning of religious unification, following the traces of the political unity that takes place under Lugal-Zage-Si and Sargon.

Concentrating temporal and spiritual powers, the king – only one queen is cited in the Sumerian Royal List – represented the divinity that founded the city. The king had to marry the goddess Inanna to exercise his function and consecrate his authority. This concentration of power is also ascertained by the fact that the temple sheltered the granaries of the city, playing a decisive role in the economy [27]. Furthermore, writing, in its beginnings, will be confined to the temple, placing the means of communication in the hands of the priests. As a matter of fact, the temple seems to have exercised a monopoly on all vital domains of the newborn society.



Fig. 10: The Sumerian Royal List gives the name of the kings of Sumer since the time that precedes the Deluge until Sin-Magir, king of Isin (1,827-1,817). More than ten copies are known, coming from Babylonia, Susa and from the Assyrian royal library of Nineveh (650). The original has probably been composed around 2,100, at the beginning of the third dynasty of Ur. The goal of the Royal List was to show that, since the moment "kingship

descended from heaven," the hegemonic power on Sumer had always been in the hands of one city at a time.
Around 1,740, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

By descending from the heavens, the authority justifies a monolithic exercise of power from top downwards, while eliminating all doubts about its legitimacy since the monarch is chosen by the divinity itself and is subservient to its power. The rise of a monopolistic authority concentrating spiritual and temporal powers in the hands of one individual characterizes the formation of the first nation-states. This phenomenon has been observed well beyond the borders of Mesopotamia, from the king-priests of Ur and Uruk to the Thracian and Scythian, whose kings possessed political and religious power, to the Egyptian Pharaohs and the first emperors of China and Japan who created the divine to their image. European kings of the feudal period will also be enthroned with divine power, some of them even possessing the power to heal, a faculty directly inherited from the shamans of our prehistory. The divinization of the supreme authority will act as basis for the pyramidal structure on which most States will be developed, and will only be (partially) dismantled with the advent of the democratic State.

The New Shaman

A question arises then: at what moment was religion born?

Defining religion as a system of commonly shared beliefs ritualized and regularized by an institution [28], it will be necessary to wait until the world of divinities is sufficiently developed before one can speak of religion. As the political institution established the laws that regularized the relationships inside society, the religious institution will fix the rituals that regularize the relations between community and divinity. The birth of divinities will therefore not be sufficient for religion to appear: the function of shaman and its rituals will have to be institutionalized before religion emerges.

As the function of chief had to change with the renewed demographic and economic conditions, the function of shaman had also to be adapted to the new social context. The vacuum left by the disappearance of Neolithic values made this adaptation all the more necessary. In the tribal structure, the authority of the shaman, as that of the chief, was determined by the egalitarian structure and by his individual achievements.

The religious system that is being developed inherits some of the shamanistic rituals, more especially using the shaman's "faculty" to communicate with the spirits. However, the aspects that make the institutionalization of his function impossible – his personal implication,

the extreme individualization of his activities, and the role his charisma played – will be discarded.

Another factor that played a determining role in the creation of the religious structure is the size of the population. While the smaller chiefdoms kept the shamanistic structures as they were at the time of the tribes, the large chiefdoms needed several shamans to provide for the necessities of a sizeable population. The shaman had therefore to allow others to exercise a function that had been, until then, his monopoly. This fragmentation will have two major consequences: it will entail the introduction of a hierarchy, and will require a slow but inexorable formalization of the rituals.

Ultimately, the individualized function of the shaman will give way to a hierarchized and centralized organization in the hand of the priests under the command of a high priest, function very often assumed by the chief himself. But contrary to the shaman who had to prove his capacities, the function of priest is much less personalized, anchored in a hierarchical structure and in formalized rituals.

Relating to the Divine

The formalization of rituals will have a profound influence on the relationship with the divinity and the functions it will play. The shaman exercised his task in a definite context: he had to deal with precise problems, requiring the involvement of specific spirits and demanding a particular ritual.

In the world of divinities, this contextual relationship partially disappears. The priest has now to do with divinities that are bestowed with multiple functions and various powers, whose will, flexible and unpredictable, is on all points comparable to that of humans. It is their will that the priest must convert in a merely psychological context. However, contrary to the shaman whose science helped influence causes and events, the priest does not possess the power to bend the will of the divinities: he only knows how to communicate with them and acts as a mediator, indicating to the individual (or to the group) the procedure to follow without guaranteeing any success. Nevertheless, with divinities possessing multiple functions and powers, the follower can always bring the same request to another divinity. In the end, the proliferation of gods and goddesses will create such a complex and chaotic structure that it will collapse under its own weight.

To illustrate how the relationship to the divine has been transformed, let us take the example of Sargon who assigns his accession to the throne to the goddess Inanna, admitting that the will of the divinity has been decisive. If Sargon had not become king, this failure would have

been imputed to the goddess's will. And while no one doubts that it is in the power of the goddess to grant Sargon's request, nothing guarantees that she will.

The will of the divinity is therefore always expressed in the way facts are brought to a close, in the events that follow, whether the request is granted or not. This will become one of the characteristics of the monotheist divinity.

The personalized role that the shaman played and the results on which he depended have been replaced by the depersonalized service of the priest. The manner with which the priests intercede with the divinity does not involve them personally, and their know-how does not play any significant role in the relation between the public and the divinity they serve. It is precisely this depersonalization that will allow the institutionalization of their function: whoever has learned the rituals in use in a temple can take office as a priest.

Similarly, rituals undergo an identical process: they lose their secretive aspect and their initiatory content, acquiring the possibility of being shared by the community.

Finally, the relationship to the divinity will also be institutionalized. Abandoning the keys to solve all problems in the particularism of magic or shamanic relationships, communicating with the divinities will slowly be detached from its contextual aspect to be defined by a global and generic approach: problems and answers will not refer to the exception, but to the rule. The community having partially taken the place of the individual, rituals having given up their secretive character, the religious discourse will rest on a common logic, eliminating from its gear all the specificities that characterized exchanges with the spirits. It will offer a group's dialectic that can be commonly shared by the whole community.

When the union of the king with the high priestess is requested to ensure the fertility of the land, it does not address a case in particular, but takes a global approach: the fertility of all the land and of all the women depends on it.

Nevertheless, some of the Neolithic heritage will still impregnate the relationship with the divinities, notably, the contextual approach, so ingrained in the public. In fact, the rapport with the divinity will be defined by its functionality, the divinities being consulted for very specific purposes. And if a divinity cannot achieve what one asks, the request will be submitted to another one in the hope that it will be brought to satisfaction.

Despite their multiple powers, the relationship to the divinities remains functional and pragmatic during the polytheistic era. We will have to wait for the prophets of the Axial Age to see a new relationship with the divine emerge.

The Polytheistic Culture

Territorial expansion and the edification of new empires will require a constant adaptation of the political structures, as well as of the religious organization, every conquest integrating new faces in the existing pantheons while others, becoming redundant, disappear. Mythologies will merge and form the hearth in which the great empires of our Antiquity will draw their sources and their values.

The faculty to integrate new divinities will be one of polytheism's strengths, altars and sanctuaries being sometimes shared by several divinities, associated here by circumstances or necessity, there by will or by logic [30].

With the passing of time, the world of divinities will become more and more intricate, reflecting the complexity of the human society it mirrors. Except for the gods and goddesses that dominate the pantheons, it will become increasingly difficult for the public to find its way in the labyrinth formed by several thousand divinities. We can imagine the number of gods and goddesses a merchant had to approach if he wanted to make sure to have all odds on his side, without crumpling the ego of any of these divinities!

In the Middle East, this entanglement will lead polytheism to its demise. At the same time, the ideological impetus carried on the wings of the Axial Age will offer an alternative to polytheism in asphyxia, establishing a less functional but more abstract and more individual relationship to the divine.



Stele featuring Egyptian and foreign gods: Qetesh (Syria), Min (Egypt), Resheph (Canaan), detail
Painting on limestone. © Projet Rosette, Musée du Louvre (C 86)

Part Four

The Transcendental God

In the first part, we saw why men invented the spirits and the functions they assigned to them. In the second part, we discovered the process of sedentarization around the norms and values inherited from nomadism. We further described the profound but delayed influence animal domestication has had on the world of spirits, announcing the end of shamanism. In the third part, we saw how the egalitarian values of the preceding period gave way to a hierarchized world in which men and divinities dominate nature. We also assisted at the birth of religious institutions that mirrored the transformations taking place in civil society.

In the fourth and last part, we discover the influence of the Axial Age, an ideological tidal wave that gives shape to a new vision of the world. We see the difficulties that the prophets encounter when trying to impose their divinity on the Israelites. As we plunge in the traditions of this people, we understand why Genesis recounts two versions of the creation, why Yahweh chooses Abel and not Cain, and why Eve is born from Adam's rib. Furthermore, the relationship between this people and the new divinity explains how the profane and religious intolerance were born. And while the masculine as creative principle occupies the firmament, nature and the feminine disappear from the sacred world.

Most references used in this part come from the Old Testament. The first, second and third books of Genesis can be consulted as appendices [Appendices Genesis 'E' and 'J'].

This part is divided in two chapters and a conclusion:

I. The Age of Renewal refers to the Axial Age, a period that promotes individualism and abstract thought, the divine being now revealed

II. The God of the Prophets exposes the relationship between the Israelites, the prophets and their god

Function: God takes us down the path that led from feminine fertility to masculine creativity man, and gathers some of the consequences the advent of Levantine monotheism entails.



“Pagans divinized life, while Christians have divinized death.” [\[Staël, 1817\]](#)

As often in our history, renewal – whether political, religious, or artistic – arises from the desire to replace a system that no longer suffices to satisfy the requirements of a population. Levantine monotheism finds its sources in the polytheistic culture of Antiquity, in a wish to simplify the complexity of its pantheons and to concentrate divine powers in a few influential hands.

It is difficult to imagine a pantheon composed of some 30,000 divinities, as the one Varro describes in Rome [\[1\]](#). With time, the personality and function of the lesser divinities became fuzzier, while the authority and power of the popular ones increased. Besides, it certainly is more pleasant to deal with one god who takes care of everything and answers all questions, rather than searching a labyrinth of divinities for the one who will be the most able to answer one’s request. Moreover, the frequent disputes and wars that raged in the pantheons did not make it easier, the divinities having to be pampered and flattered in order to obtain their support.

Another aspect that will exercise a considerable influence on the ideologies of these populations is the development of philosophical and scientific thought that will infiltrate the religious sphere by proposing other answers to the “mysteries” of nature. Even though these answers are not always satisfactory, and sometimes even mutually contradictory, they will broaden the field of possibilities and renew the structures and content of the relationship with the divine. By confirming the special place that humans occupy in the creation, they will make it easier to uncouple the religious exchange from its functional character, and from the concrete support in which polytheism was anchored, providing it with an existential dimension. As an example, let us mention the desire to escape mortality and finitude by introducing the notion of eternal life that appears in most religious systems during the last millennium [\[1b\]](#), and more significantly, that was totally absent from the quests of the polytheistic credos. Humans will go as far as establishing a pact with the divinity, a sort of all-risk insurance enriched with different clauses that guarantees the follower a place in paradise after his or her death. Such a contract, necessitating a unified and centralized religious system, would have been impossible in the polytheistic shambles. In Levantine monotheism, this contract will take the form of a code of laws with which Moses establishes the authority of his god. As we have seen in the previous part, this code is modeled on the civil codes of laws of the preceding millennium [\[2\]](#).

The use of logic and reasoning as introduced by philosophy and science will also have a noticeable influence on religious thought. Ultimately, this ascendancy will oblige the religious discourse to differentiate itself from that of science and of philosophy by establishing a

relation of transcendence with the divinity, putting it beyond any logic, beyond any reason: in relationship with the divine, all human references are worthless [3].

It has long been acknowledged that Plato's influence on the mysticism surrounding “the religions of the Book” [4] was decisive, notably perceptible in the notion that every human being is a reflection of the divine and conceals a fragment of it. Influenced by Hindu mysticism, Plato's ideas brought revelation and transcendence to the religious systems of the Middle East.

Yet, in 1957 CE, approaching this period in a more global manner, Karl Jaspers introduced the notion of “Axial Age,” transforming the way we look at history and at the movement of ideas.



I. The Age of Renewal

“We never fear, but kill tigers in the plain, because we can see them. Artificial tigers we do fear, because they can neither be seen nor killed by us.” [[Dobrizhoffer](#) 1822]

With the Axial Age (*die Achsenzeit*), the German philosopher Karl Jaspers described a current of thought that washed over the Eurasian continent during the first millennium before our era, transforming all ideological frameworks in its passage.

Geographically, this movement spreads from the China of Confucius to the Greece of Pythagoras and Plato. It starts around 1,000 with Zoroaster, and culminates between the seventh and the fourth centuries with the philosophers and prophets who so profoundly mark this period. This period comes to a conclusion in the seventh century CE with Muhammad, the last great prophet of the Abrahamic tradition.

In the wake of this current, new religious and philosophical systems will arise, distributed around four centers of thought.

- In China where two semi-religious movements come to light: the Confucianism of Confucius (551-479) and the Taoism of Lao Tzu, his contemporary
- In India, with two important religious movements: Buddhism revealed by Siddhârta Gautama (624-544) and Jainism founded by Mahâvîra (599-527)
- In the Middle East, a group of prophets propagates a new message: Zarathustra and Mithra in Persia; the prophets of Judaism during the seventh and sixth centuries, and particularly Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel in Palestine; and the last two great prophets of Abrahamic monotheism, Jesus Christ in Palestine (first century CE) and Muhammad in the Arabian Peninsula (seventh century CE)
- In Greece finally, which witnesses the birth of philosophy and of science with Thales of Milet (625-547), Pythagoras (580-497), Heraclites (around 544-480), Socrates (470-399), Plato (428-347) and Aristotle (384-322)

It is difficult to establish if the transformations taking place at the four corners of the known world at the time are connected together. Two reasons have been given to explain this phenomenon: rapid urbanization and political instability that predispose populations to accept new ideas, on the one hand, and economic transformations that see the emergence of a new class of citizens, the merchants, who play a more influential role in the society, on the other hand. To these social and economic factors can be added the necessity of replacing outdated religious systems, maladjusted to the needs of the different societies.

However, the various contexts impregnated by this new current of thought are far from homogeneous. The differences existing between the political, economic and cultural situation of China when Confucianism appears, and those of the nomadic tribe of the Israelites at the time of the prophets, are profound. Similarly, the Greece of Plato and Aristotle and the world of the Arabian tribes in Muhammad's time are worlds apart.

Yet, two features seem to have been remarkably absent until the Axial Age, and characterize the new ideologies from one side of the planet to the other, whatever the ambient cultural landscape might be: individualism and abstract thought. A third characteristic is the fact that all these transformations lift the masses: the ideas put forward are not meant for an elite, but embrace whole populations, spreading contagiously beyond all borders.

These three elements typify the transcendental thought powering Levantine monotheism as well, although it will experience some difficulties in detaching itself from the contextual approach of polytheism.

Discovering the Individual

At this turning point of our history, the relationship between the divinity and its public radically changes with the appearance of a key element: the individual. In the polytheistic system, this relationship was dictated by one's request, and by finding the best way to use cults and offerings to secure the divine will. The most powerful or capable gods and goddesses were the most popular divinities and possessed the richest temples. No requirement other than what the priest prescribed was imposed on the follower, no special code of conduct was asked of him or her: one notes a total absence of moral or ideological framework aside from preserving the hierarchy in power.

With the transformations brought by the Axial Age, the roles are reversed: it is now the divinity that asks, that even requires from its supporters a certain code of conduct and the practice of precise rituals. To be worthy of the divinity, the followers must accept these requirements. These codes of conduct will become the norm on which the follower adjusts his or her life. In Mithraism, for example, the codes of friendship and loyalty determine the conduct of its adherents. A similar tendency is found in other religious and semi-religious movements: in Confucianism, with its strict domestic and social codes; in the Way the Taoist must follow; in the Laws of Manu (India) that distribute the rights and duties according to castes and age; in the precepts of Buddhism that indicate to its disciples the means to escape suffering and annihilate desire; in Jainism that, on the contrary, incites to personal suffering. They are also present in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in which the divinity imposes very specific requirements on its followers. The Book of Deuteronomy, for example,

considers every individual accountable for their acts. It breaks with the ancestral tradition that allowed a son to be punished in place of his father (and vice versa): everyone must now receive the punishment they deserve, and every individual is unique and responsible when dealing with the divinity.

This focus on the individual is also found in the philosophical and scientific thought that takes the person as starting point of its analysis, from the atomism of Democritus to the teachings of Socrates and Epicurus. Everywhere, one observes the advent of what Fernand Braudel called the dissocialized individual.

Revelation and Destiny

The empowerment of individuals in the new religious order acquires an extra dimension with the introduction of a new character in the doctrinal landscape: the prophet [5]. Whereas the religious dogma rested, until then, on myths and rituals imposed by tradition and approved by the sovereign authority, the new ideology will break this mold by introducing revelation as vehicle of transmission. The prophet becomes the carrier of a message that he directly receives from the highest authority, the divinity itself. Recipient of its messages, he gives shape to its discourse and spreads it. As the mediator between the divinity and the people, his intervention marks a will to dissociate religion from its political anchor. In other words, the divine message transmitted by the prophets is meant for all, for ordinary people as well as for priests and kings. The monarch, who until then represented the divine law, must now accept the law as formulated by the prophets [6].

One fundamental consequence of introducing prophetic revelation will be the emergence of faith: *“by revelation the mystery was made known to me.”* [Eph 3:3] Associated for the first time with the perception of the divine message and in relation with the divinity, faith will be sustained by the fear of death and oriented toward the individualized promise of acquiring eternal life.

The mysteries of nature that gave birth to the spirits and sustained their existence have now become a personal and interiorized quest. The new religions deal with the realities confronting the individuals, with their difficulties and their sufferings. Most of them propose a better world to come, projection into the future that one uses as support for the present. Personal salvation, immortality, and paradise are the words expressing this new belief. And to achieve their “destiny” – whether to reach the promised Eden, to escape the cycle of (re)births, or to reach a state of beatitude or of total extinction in nirvana – the supporters must follow the precepts established by the prophets.

To guide them on the path of the destiny that is promised to them, the prophets will draw a definitive line between good and evil. This aspect is already apparent in the dualism proposed by Zoroaster: the one doing good will join Mazda in the heavens, while the evil person will serve Aryaman in the abysses of hell [7].

From Chinese Taoism to the renewed interest in karma in India, to the development of science in Greece, it is on the individual that all eyes now converge. On the global stage, the human being has become the main actor, the microcosm that serves as referent to any macrocosm, the new unit by which all things are measured.

Toward Abstraction

Another distinctive quality of the ideologies born during the Axial Age is abstraction. One of its manifestations, as we have seen, is the introduction of revelation to transmit the message of the divinity, a pure abstraction in itself. But the passage from a concrete environment to a more abstract system of thought is also conspicuous in the way the polytheistic functional relationship is transformed into a more mystical tie with the divinity: the divinity becomes an entity internal to the human being, while transcending it at the same time. Buddhism and Jainism place deliverance inside every individual, the first through renouncement, the second through personal suffering.

A similar process takes place in all other manifestations emanating from the ideological current of the Axial Age. Its latest realization, Islam, will be the most abstract of all religious systems born in the Middle East. Banishing all representations of the divinity, the divine is placed beyond dialectics, beyond conceptualization, beyond reason: it cannot be described, it cannot be apprehended, it can only be revealed. Even rituals get a more abstract tint, the relation with the divinity not leaning any more on donations and sacrifices, but on an inner practice that each must exercise, that each must interiorize and live [8].

Beyond Space and Time

Monotheism can be distinguished from polytheism not only by the way its supporters are submitted to their god, but also by the fact it liberates its divinity from any contextual definition. First, the divine message is not attached to a specific geographical or political situation anymore, and is not limited by any border or secular authority. Besides, it is transmitted from individual to individual, what will enable missionaries to bring the divine “word” to the most remote corners of our planet. Pulled out of its geographical and social constraints, the divinity has become exportable. The fact that its message does not vary with the different context and remains the same for all, will facilitate its diffusion.

Freed of its spatial context, the divinity will also escape the ascendancy of time: defined as having no past, present, nor future, it becomes timeless.

All in all, the process of transcendentalization that was started with the spirits, and that was used to counterbalance the imminence of the natural world takes with this divinity its most achieved form, totally eclipsing nature from its realm.



II. The God of the Prophets

The establishment of monotheism in the Middle East is the result of a relationship, the relationship between a people and a divinity represented by its prophets. This triangular relationship will be so particular that it will turn the polytheistic religious world upside down. The way this divinity, Yahweh [9], will be defined, his function, his messages, will all be delineated by his prophets for a nomadic tribe, the Israelites.

Ever since his first apparition, Yahweh shows without ambiguity the role he wants to play in the life of this people, asking Abraham to move to the country of Canaan, several hundreds of kilometers away from the city of Ur where he resided [Ge 12:1-5]. Yahweh promises him a land and says that Abraham will be the father of a great nation [Ge 15:18]. He makes it immediately clear that he intends to take an active part in the life of this man, and indicates that he controls the future and holds the keys to his destiny.

However, there is nothing abstract or transcendent in what he proposes: a land and an abundant progeny. Just like his polytheistic counterparts, he is a functional god who responds to the aspirations of his believers. At his beginnings, his function, his feelings, and even his representation have a definite human touch [Ge 3:8; Ge 18:1-8]. Only later will his definition and his approach become more abstract. But during his first steps, he follows the path of polytheism, sharing the natural world and the reality of his followers in a functionalized relationship, as the story of the three strangers who appear before Abraham resting in front of his tent shows: one of the three personages is simply the god that he venerates [Ge 18:1-8]. This story dates from around 1,850. Anthropomorphism is also present when Yahweh walks in the Garden of Eden [Ge 3:8], but disappears when he dictates the tables of the law to Moses, symbolized by a burning bush.

It will be the task of the prophets to detach their divinity from his polytheistic context. Addressing their message to a nomadic people will ease this transition, since it eliminates the problem of localization. Besides, the absence of writing will allow the prophets to reformulate this people's history.

The "Chosen People"

The origin of the Israelites is not known. The nomadic populations [10] that orbited around urban centers remained, for most, out of range of the political and religious organization introduced by the Urban Revolution, although they certainly used its facilities such as the cities' temples and markets. When kingdoms and empires went to war, these populations, caught between two fires, were probably the first victims of the marching armies. As a matter

of fact, the nomadic lifestyle of the Israelites will play a determining role in the functions this people without land, without borders, without any political or religious structures, will attribute to their god.

Nomadic Pastors versus Sedentary Agriculturists

Anthropological research shows that pastoralist nomads tend to generate a communal identity that is at the same time very distinct and quite opposite to that of settled communities. They often consider sedentary people as “impure,” and sometimes even “unhealthy.” [11] [Phillips, 2001] For them, the demarcation between the in-group and the out-group is very manifest [12].

For the Israelites, this divergence probably originated at the end of the Neolithic, when deteriorating conditions obliged populations of this region to diversify their economy. While one group continued its farming activities in the village, another group had to leave for several months to lead livestock in transhumance. The seals that appear at the end of the seventh millennium in different villages could be the first sign of distrust between the two groups. At the site of Tell Sabi Abyad (Syria) [see Part Two, endnote 22], seals were set on the clay closing bags or goatskins to indicate property and identify their owner during the period they were gone.

Dissensions certainly intensified during the Chalcolithic, when nomadic people maintained their traditional lifestyle and values, while settled populations got immersed in the motion of progress. For pastoralists, conditions became worse when kingdoms and empires drew up the boundaries of their territory, limiting a liberty of movement that had, until then, known no border. The exactions of conquering armies will only increase this animosity.

One of the oldest traces of divergence is mentioned in the Sumerian mythology in which a quarrel opposes Dumuzi, the god of pastors, to Enkimdu, the god of agriculturists. It reappears in the Old Testament with the story of Cain and Abel, Cain representing the agriculturists and Abel the shepherds. Yahweh accepts Abel's offering, but rejects that of Cain [Ge 4:4]. The text gives no explanation for such a decision, but it must have been so obvious to its author and to the audience for which it was meant that it was not judged necessary to provide further clarification. Thus, defining settled populations as the in-group of the Urban Revolution and the nomads living in its periphery being relegated to the role of out-group, the bias of Yahweh for Abel unveils the paradigm of a definition of the Chosen People as a community of nomadic shepherds who strongly rejects the settled populations represented by agriculturists [13].

Moreover, this partiality helps us understand how the prophets and authors of the early texts forming the Old Testament exercised their influence to incite the Israelites to adopt Yahweh as their unique god. Your god, they said, is not the god of agriculturists and of settled people, but it is the god of shepherds, the god of pastoralists. If you venerate him, he will provide for your needs, and he will be implacable with your enemies who will become his enemies. This represents a veritable *tour de force* of these prophets, who succeeded in reversing the roles by making a group situated on the margin of society and living on the periphery of history become the focal point of another history by simply redefining the in-group.

The first characteristic of this god is that he is not attached to a place, as his polytheistic counterparts were, but to a people: his jurisdiction is not geographical, but ethnic. It is a divinity that follows his believers, whereas the polytheistic tradition expected the believers to come to the divinity.

But the match between this god and his people does not end here. Originally a god of war, one finds his cult as god of the armies in Midian (Jordan). This function will procure him with a non-negligible advantage in the eyes of the Israelites, a people without a state, a people without an army: Yahweh will often be called to rescue them at perilous times. Those moments [1Sa 17:45; 2Sa 7:8] will provide him with his most convincing role and will allow him to assert his power.

He is also a god of the desert: having no affinity whatsoever with urban populations, he will be completely devoted to this nomadic people. Abraham, a shepherd himself, is the first person approached by Yahweh, and the shepherd theme will be constantly recurring in the Old as well as in the New Testament [14].

Still under the influence of the polytheistic culture at the beginning, Yahweh tries to grant the wishes of his believers, just like any other polytheistic divinity does, though more actively. He asks Abraham to leave Chaldea and to head toward Canaan [Ge 12:1-5] where he will obtain a land and become the father of a "nation." Yahweh translates this way the aspiration of Abraham and of his people, which is not to prolong the ancestral tradition of pastoral nomadism, but on the contrary, to settle down, to possess a land, to become a nation [15], and, ultimately, to honor him by building a temple for him. It will become the leitmotif of the Jewish people during the millennia that follow.

Yet, once settled, the Israelites immediately turn to Baal, the powerful god of agriculture and of fertility, asking him to make their land and their women fertile. Yahweh might be most qualified to ensure their defense and their protection, but he is not worth much as god of fertility, and as soon as their security is assured, the Israelites turn to divinities better suited

to answer their needs than a god who is thirsty for war and vengeance [see the thematic table below].

A People without State, a People without Religion

As a nomadic people, the Israelites did not have a place of worship or a religious organization of their own – two aspects that determined the relationship with the polytheistic divinities at the time. This, in turn, facilitated the introduction of the god that the prophets promoted – a god without temple or priests – and encouraged the emergence of a spiritualization of the divinity.

On the other hand, the Israelites were regularly in contact with other divinities as they used the religious amenities encountered on their path. The prophets will accuse them of ignoring the precepts dictated by their god whose first commandment is: “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” [Ex 20:3] Obliging the Israelites to renounce their customs will not happen without tears: “*Don’t make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, lest they play the prostitute after their gods, and sacrifice to their gods, and one call you and you eat of his sacrifice; and you take of their daughters to your sons, and their daughters play the prostitute after their gods, and make your sons play the prostitute after their gods.*” [Ex 34:15-16] The prophets, however, will not accept what they consider a treason, and will spend their time trying to convince their people that they do not need a divinity like Baal [16], Yahweh being able to fulfill all their demands [Ho 2:17]. In fact, fertility will become a real obsession in the mouth of Yahweh’s spokesmen, being branded as the ultimate reward after the Promised Land.

By putting these elements back into the context and perspective of the time, one understands that the imbalances found in the relationship between this god and his people do not come from a lack of goodwill on behalf of the Israelites, to whom the vision of the prophets is certainly difficult to grasp. They rather result from the will of the prophets to establish the monopoly of their divinity. The fact that they multiply the tests, from Abraham until Ezekiel, and that they constantly look for proofs, reveals how uncertain they are of their endeavor.

Another element missing by the Israelites is the political and hierarchical organization found in the surrounding cities, their communities still being organized around a tribal system. In the absence of a king, the prophets will confer the role of monarch on their divinity. In turn, they will be his spokesmen, transcribing and imposing his will and his law [Ex 15:18].

Assigning human features to Yahweh, the prophets will endow him with a jealous and revengeful character: as any other potentate of the time, he will not hesitate to use threats and force to establish his authority and eliminate all competition. The table below shows how often terms relating to vengeance, punishment, anger, sanction, war and enemy appear in the Old and in the New Testament. The considerable divergence in the frequency of these terms between the two books clearly illustrates the difference existing in the content of their message.

Themes*:	Old Testament	New Testament	ratio
vengeance	93	9	10x
punishment	105	16	6x
wrath, anger	314	48	6x
sanction, penalty	155	20	7x
war	254	14	18x
enemy	382	35	11x

* These results were obtained by searching in the Louis Segond version of the Bible the following French words: vengeance, punition, colère, châtement, guerre, ennemi

The relationship between Yahweh and his people rests on a balance of power, authoritarianism and diplomacy. He must impose himself inside as well as outside his jurisdiction, and uses various threats, from exile to destruction, to make his people obey. At the same time, his enemies – people hostile to his people or people possessing a hostile divinity – exploit every sign of weakness to enslave the Israelites. As all other polytheistic divinities, it is incumbent on him to show that he fits the function he claims to fulfill, that he is capable of protecting and defending his people's interests [Ps 76:4-9].

This functional relationship will last most of the historical period covered by the Old Testament. A new level will be reached when a more transcendental approach allows Yahweh to rise above the crowd and to break with the utilitarianism of polytheism by becoming unique, omnipresent, omniscient, and almighty. No recesses of time or space will then escape him [Ez 39:21-29].

This transformation takes place when the prophets conceive the exile of the Israelites as being part of the divine plan [17]. This way, they establish that divine law is independent of events, that it encompasses all reality [Ez 39:23; Me 31:33]. Starting from that moment, a holistic perception of this people's history is born, a history that spreads in time as in space, a history every instant of which is sustained by a unique goal, a goal that only revelation can apprehend.

God of Exclusion

Yahweh is a historic and tribal god who tries to establish a pact of exclusive rights with the Israelites. Little by little, they will accept this alliance and the conditions it imposes on them. It is a marriage of reason: a people without a land to which one promises a nation; a people without an army that forms an alliance with a god of war; a nomadic people and a god of the desert; a people without history that becomes the center of history. This marriage promotes the Israelites from a tribal state to the status of “people” and cements their new identity into the exclusive story that the prophets collect. This collective identity will ultimately allow them to create a state, to form a nation.

The different facets of this identity – religious, historical and geopolitical – will be founded on the norms defining the chosen people of course, but also on those demarcating who is excluded from the alliance. Yet, the populations of the Middle East were defined by their geopolitical identity: one belonged to a city, to a kingdom, to an empire. In the absence of any geopolitical context, the Israelites will use their religious alliance as basis for their collective identity.

The prophets will define the norms of this alliance, describing with much specificity on what ground someone is not accepted into the congregation. Depictions of this apartheid abound: *“for whoever eats that which is leavened, even that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a foreigner, or one who is born in the land,”* one can read in Exodus [12:19]. In Leviticus [24:16], it is the blasphemer that will be excluded not only from the alliance but from the world of the living, being condemned to die by stoning. An identical procedure awaits the one who gathers wood the day of the Sabbath [Nu 15:32-36].

But it is especially Deuteronomy that explicitly details who is to be excluded: “He who is wounded in the stones, or has his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the assembly of Yahweh. A bastard shall not enter into the assembly of Yahweh; even to the tenth generation shall none of his enter into the assembly of Yahweh. An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of Yahweh; even to the tenth generation shall none belonging to them enter into the assembly of Yahweh forever: because they didn’t meet you with bread and with water in the way, when you came forth out of Egypt...” [De 23:1-4] Further: “You shall surely set him king over yourselves, whom Yahweh your God shall choose: one from among your brothers you shall set king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother.” [De 17:15] And then: “There shall be no prostitute of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a sodomite of the sons of Israel.” [De 23:17]

It is interesting to note that the discourse of the prophets does not contain any intention of universality. On the contrary, they want to clearly and definitively differentiate the chosen

people from the others. This principle of exclusion appears very early in their writings, more precisely in Genesis, during the second narration of the creation [Ge 2:4-3:24]. After a first creation in which Yahweh creates a universe where all is “good,” a second creation follows, laden with interdictions, punishments and sanctions. It is there that Adam and Eve are excluded from the Garden of Eden.

Why did the prophets then consider it necessary to write two versions of the creation, two versions so completely different that they almost contradict themselves?

The Two Creations

The first creation occurs in six days and ends with one day of rest. It forms the first book of Genesis [1:1-2:3] [18]. The second creation comes immediately after the first one, without any transition or explanation, as if pasted after it without taking into account the continuity of the text and what has been said before. In addition, it recreates what has already been created in the first version, in a seemingly contradictory way: “*This is the history of the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens. No plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth. There was not a man to till the ground,*” [2:4-5] whereas the first version says: “*God said, ‘Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with its seed in it, on the earth;’ and it was so.*” [1:11]

Further, in the second version, we read that “Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” [2:7] A little later, woman is also created [2:23], whereas both were already conceived in the first creation: “God created man in his own image. In God’s image he created him; male and female he created them.” [1:27]

Why create nature, man and woman a second time, when Yahweh declares every day of the first creation that he is satisfied with his work. And if Yahweh says that he has done a good job, who would be so audacious as to pretend the opposite and ask him to start all over again?

It is commonly admitted that two authors are at the origin of the first texts composing the Old Testament (those of Genesis and Exodus): the first is assigned the initial ‘E’ because he names his god Elohim, while the second is called ‘J’, vocalization of the tetragram YHWH. These two authors seem to have lived during the seventh century, ‘J’ coming from the south of Judea, ‘E’ from the north of Israel. In the polytheistic tradition, a same divinity changes name from one locality to the other, and it is not at all surprising to see these two authors,

living in different regions, call this divinity with a different name. Moreover, the polytheistic imprint can be read again in the name Elohim, which is the plural of a Hebrew word meaning “those who have power.” This plural probably refers to the divinities who reigned at the summit of the Canaanite pantheon at that time: El, Asherah and Baal [19].

However, the fact that these texts have been assigned to two different authors does not explain why two versions of the creation have been integrated into Genesis, whereas their obvious contradictions undermine the authority of its content, and by consequence, the authority of the god it presents: to contradict, in the space of a few lines, the actions of a god that is supposed to be almighty, can only weaken his authority and ascendancy.

But do these texts really recount the actions of a god? Do we not rather have here to deal with the staging of a very particular historical and mythical context into which the actions of Yahweh have been incorporated? Could these two creations form the different facets of a history whose significance would be anchored in the cultural heritage of the people to which they are addressed, recreating around the divinity an intelligible and recognizable universe for them?

An Ancestral Mythology

The first creation remains in the tradition of its predecessors, except on one point: the primordially of nature has been replaced by a divinity that precedes everything that exists. Even time and space factors are incorporated in the creation: “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... God divided the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day,’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ There was evening and there was morning, one day.*” [1:1-5]

The second creation does not describe facts as those that cadence the creation in six days, each of them perfectly completed. It rather concentrates on the creation of a man, Adam, and is organized around a set of events that form a story, a myth. These events provide the dramatic elements that will prove to be crucial for the course Middle-Eastern monotheistic religions will take. They not only define the function of the new god, but also the role that humans assume in their relationship to the divinity.

In the first creation, the god of ‘E’ creates nature and everything that it contains, and ends up being satisfied with his creation. ‘E’ proposes a world in which humans are part of nature that has been created to feed them: “... *I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food. To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food...*” [1:29-30] This

vision differs on all points from that of 'J' who establishes distinctions at all levels: among the trees in the garden of Eden, there is one whose fruit may not be eaten; among the animals, there is one more cunning and more deceitful than all others, the snake. Even among the two human beings a distinction is made, the woman being created afterwards to keep company to the man and help him. A hierarchy is also created between man and animals, since the animal world has to parade before Adam to be named by him [20]: *"Yahweh God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.' Out of the ground Yahweh God formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field; but for man there was not found a helper suitable for him. Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall on the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. He made the rib, which Yahweh God had taken from the man, into a woman, and brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of Man.'" [2:18-23]* In the vision of 'J,' woman is not man's equal, but does not either belong to the animal world. She thus acquires an intermediate status in the hierarchy of the creation between the animal world and man who is placed directly below Yahweh.

The hierarchized creation of 'J' is at the opposite of the egalitarian balance that reigns in the creation of 'E'. However, if one approaches the content of these texts in a historical perspective, one perceives that the worlds they describe do not contradict but prolong each other. Within a few lines, these two authors stage a large part of the history of their people, with the egalitarian and unified world of the Neolithic period, on the one hand, and the differentiated, hierarchized universe brought by the Chalcolithic era and the Urban Revolution on the other hand.

The fact that these two worlds are presented as an extension of one another is truly astounding. We must, nevertheless, keep in mind that these lines were written for a people still living in a tribal structure inherited from the Neolithic, a people out of phase with its context and that has kept its ancestral traditions alive [21]. Yet, there are more parallels that can be drawn.

Eve's Birth

With a creative god at the summit of his hierarchy, 'J' gives a place of choice to man, followed by the animal world, and then by nature that acts as support, as decor to the whole production. It is in this context that, out of Adam's rib, Eve is born, a last touch brought to conclude the creation. 'J' assigns to her a place of second rank in the divine order, since she

has not directly been created by the divinity, but has been extracted from man and assigned a function.

In the creation according to 'E' on the other hand, there is neither Eve nor Adam, but a man and a woman, created at the same time and having the same status in the order of things [1:27]. In 'E's' vision of the world, only the divinity is placed outside the creation, since Yahweh creates nature and everything that it includes. It also renews with the prehistoric tradition of the spirits: "*God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters.*" [1:2] It was a time when nature fed all living beings as well [1:29]. No trace of hierarchy at any level, and no mention of work, whereas for 'J', man is created to work: "*There was not a man to till the ground.*" [2:5] [22] 'J' describes the world of the Chalcolithic period, a world whose economy rests in the hands of man and where the domestication of nature plays a prominent role, since man has for function to cultivate it.

As for the woman, her role is second to that of the man. Eve is created afterwards, in hindsight: "*Yahweh God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."*" [2:18] Man is here presented as an autonomous being, who does not necessarily need a companion but who could use some help. In other words, Eve is created to help him, though he could manage without her.

Man's authority is brought to the forefront: he names animals, and his rib is used to give birth to Eve. He is second to his creator, while Eve is subordinate to him, made to his image and named by him. In this version of the creation, 'J' faithfully describes the gender relationships as they have emerged during the Chalcolithic era in the Middle East: man representing the productive and creative forces has taken control of nature while relegating woman to a superfluous function.

The two narrations of the creation do not refer to two facets of a creative god that contradict or oppose each other, but represent an allegory of the history of the people for whom they were written, an allegory in which the actions of the divinity have been integrated. The first narration brings a nostalgic look at the world of nomadism: a world before work, a real earthly paradise in which nature provides subsistence for everyone, and in which no differentiation is made, no hierarchy exists.

The second narration plunges us into the universe of settled populations, as perceived by the public of pastoralists to whom these texts are addressed, a hierarchized universe in which man is in command but in which he is condemned to work.

Common element to both creations, the divinity takes the place that nature occupied in earlier creations: preceding all things, the divinity represents the creative principle. Yet, none

of the two narrations establishes the divinity as being more male than female. In the first one, it is described as a spirit, creating humans in its own image, male and female, man and woman. In the second one, there is no description of the divinity, and it is not said that Adam has been created in its image. Yet, a little later, Yahweh is going for a walk in the Garden of Eden and takes a human shape.

The Garden of Eden

It is in the story of the Garden of Eden that a first contact is made between Adam, Eve and Yahweh. In this first apparition, Yahweh is far from being omniscient, nor even omnipresent: *“They heard the voice of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden. Yahweh God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”* [3:8-9] We have here a god who strolls in a garden and speaks, a very temporal and spatial presence satisfying the polytheistic norms of the time.

He then asks a lot of questions: “Where are you?”, “Who told you that you were naked?”, “Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”, and to Eve: “What is this you have done?” [3:9-13] It is clear that this god is not yet omniscient. More importantly, there is so far no sign of transcendence.

Finally, Yahweh hears that Adam and Eve have transgressed his interdiction, but the sentence of death with which he had threatened Adam at the time of the warning – *“but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die”* [2:17] – is not carried out. The snake knew it already: *“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You won’t surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’.”* [3:4-5] Yahweh transforms his sentence – that would have had for consequence the disappearance of the human race – into punishments that he adapts to the particularities of every participant in the scene.

To the snake: “Because you have done this, you are cursed above all livestock, and above every animal of the field. On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.” [3:14] To Eve: “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bring forth children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” [3:16] To Adam: “In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns also and thistles will it bring forth to you; and you will eat the herb of the field. By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” [3:17-19] He then expels Adam out of the Garden of Eden [23]. But before doing that, Yahweh acts unexpectedly: he makes clothes of animal hide and covers Adam

and Eve with them [3:21]. ‘J’ sets here the tone that will characterize the relationship that Yahweh has with his people, castigating and punishing them on the one side, and supporting them on the other.

To conclude, ‘J’ very explicitly establishes what differentiates the divine world from that of humans: the knowledge of good and evil, and immortality [3:22]. Once more, the permeability that exists between these two worlds, expressed by the physical reality of the divinity as by the fact that humans, promoted to the status of half-divinities – thanks to Eve – have only to eat of one fruit to become fully divine, confirms the ascendancy of the polytheistic context.

Nature and Sexuality

The main themes that dominate the scene of the disobedient couple are nature and sexuality.

Two facets of the story represent nature. One is the punishment that Yahweh inflicts on Adam, who must now cultivate the soil to get his food. A second one is the Garden of Eden, nature in all its affluence and generosity, referring to an idyllic world, a world before the punishment, a world in which man does not have to work since nature provides for everything he needs.

Sexuality has two facets as well. First, the woman is condemned to give birth in pain and to desire man [24]. The second one concerns the discovery of nudity. After having eaten of the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve suddenly realize that they are naked and hide out of shame. Yahweh provides them with the necessary clothes, confirming that nudity that bothered no one until then has now become unacceptable, and that their shame is justified. As with the theme of nature, reference is made here to an idyllic world, a world before ‘the fault,’ a world in which nudity did not cause any shame: “*They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.*” [2:25] Because of a newly acquired knowledge, the natural state disappears, and humans ‘fall’ in a universe where sexuality, thus symbolized, must be hidden and becomes a source of shame.

The following table illustrates how the two themes are distributed among the protagonists:

	Adam	Eve	Adam + Eve
Nature	must toil for food		are thrown out of the Garden of Eden
Sexuality		will give birth in pain and desire man	discover their nudity

But what is the function of these themes?

Nature

The theme of nature is approached by a first sanction that obliges man to cultivate the earth for his food. If we place this event in a historical context, it is at the end of the Neolithic that men take the work of the fields in their hands.

The second punishment relating to nature reinforces the first one: Yahweh banishes Adam – Eve being absent – from the Garden of Eden, a terrestrial paradise in which nature provides all the food that humans need without having to work for it. We can see, filigreed in this story, a transposition of the moment when humans, trying to tame nature to control food production, are condemned to work the earth forevermore. Definitively turning their backs on the time when nature provided for all their needs, they become slaves and outcasts: slaves, because they have to produce food by the sweat of their brow [25]; outcasts, because by trying to control it, they place themselves outside nature, and exclude themselves from it. This aspect is symbolized by the semi-divine status humans acquire after having eaten of the forbidden tree. The Garden of Eden represents a nostalgic and mythicized vision of nature, an image of nature as it was in bygone days when humans were part of it.

The fact that the prophet assigns to Eve the responsibility of our expulsion from the Garden of Eden does accentuate the parallel with this faraway past, since women can be held responsible for having altered the ancestral balance by introducing agriculture and settling down.

Finally, it is not astonishing to find such a longing for a bygone era by a nomadic people who has but few affinities with the urban society nearby but on which it depends, regretting a lifestyle that it senses is on its way to disappear. Is it not the worst of all punishments for these shepherds to know that they will ultimately have to settle and work the earth?

Sexuality

An identical approach is used for the theme of sexuality. The first punishment condemns the woman to give birth in pain and to be dependent on the man, whereas the second sanction applies to Adam as well as to Eve, therefore to all humans, obliging them to hide their nudity.

Just like those related to the theme of nature, these punishments hark back to a period of our past, to the moment when we established a relationship between sexuality and procreation. Here also, a mythicized world is staged, a world in which men and women lived in nudity without constraint, without shame; a world in which woman was not subjected to man [26].

The world changes when humans acquire the knowledge of the procreative function of sexuality. With the discovery of paternity, the balance in the relationship between men and

women takes a new turn. Fatherhood not only allows man as creator to topple woman as symbol of fertility at the pinnacle of the creation, but it also imposes a unique partner on the sexual activity of woman, in order to make certain who has fathered the child she carries. For her, all sexual promiscuity is banished so that there can be no doubt on the paternal filiation: *“Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”* [3:16] Besides, the way procreation is understood gives to woman the role of soil in which man plants his seeds: relegated to a secondary function, she is subjected to her man who has become the determining element.

The second aspect of the theme of sexuality, the awareness of nudity, also refers to a time when sexual activity was free of all procreative connotations. At the moment man discovers fatherhood, sexual freedom disappears, to be replaced by a social contract that binds woman to man. The number of articles that are found in the different codes of law and that define this contract shows the importance it has in the new society [see Part Three].

Even though our interpretation covers the different elements of the two creations exhaustively, it still seems inconceivable that a people without writing could have kept for so long such a remote historical context alive. Furthermore, the authors of these texts did not just bring back the past, but they used it as an allegorical background to the deeds of their god.

Obviously, this history was transmitted orally, oral tradition remaining an inescapable means for nomadic populations to pass on customs and knowledge [see Appendix Spencer, [Of oral tradition](#)]. It has helped keep this essential period of their past alive and present in their collective memory, reminding them of a bygone era in which their traditions and knowledge take their source. As we have seen in the second part, oral transmission as well as an acute sense of identity allowed the settled communities of the late Neolithic to recover the norms and lifestyle of nomadism, though these had not been in use for millennia [28].

When ‘J’ freezes this history in his narration of the creation, it has long been part of a common heritage and has been assimilated to the domain of myths. Maintained alive in the heart of a people whose existence and lifestyle have not changed much through time, this vision of the past has, however, been completely erased from the memory of settled populations. Furthermore, the fact that the prophets relate their history allegorically but not explicitly in their texts lets us presume that these myths had not lost any of their freshness and of their actuality for their audience. On the contrary, their goal being to convey the divine message in a setting that would appeal to their public, these authors will have used the most striking images to impose their vision with clarity and intensity.

We now understand why the Old Testament begins with these two narrations of the creation, since the world to which 'J' refers – the world before the acquisition of knowledge, the world before the punishments –corresponds to the one described in the creation according to 'E': a world where nature provided for all subsistence, a world in which work did not exist, a world whose unity was not altered by nudity or knowledge, a world in which everyone found their place and from which no one was excluded.

The universe recreated by 'E' is the one that existed before historical times, the prehistoric universe of hunter-gatherers, of nomadism [1:29]. And what 'J' depicts in his vision of the creation is not a second and contradictory version of the creation, but a historical extension of the one described by 'E'. The punishments that the divinity inflicts on humans precisely stage the sequence of events that punctuated our history between the late Neolithic and the Chalcolithic Revolution. They express the nostalgia of a bygone era that these shepherds kept alive and that the narrations of 'E' and 'J' revive, mythicized.

This heritage will, nevertheless, end up getting lost because the cultural support on which it was developed, already rarefied at the time of the prophets, will completely disappear by the end of Antiquity, as the Israelites leave behind them their nomadic lifestyle and traditions.



Function: God

"It seems to me that the sacred pre-exists the religious." [\[Clement and Kristeva 1998\]](#)

A few authors have attributed the origin of the misogynistic message that the Axial Age diffuses to a nomadic people coming from the north of India, the Aryans. We have noted, however, that the decline of woman's status finds its roots long before the philosophy of the Axial Age invades the Eurasian continent. In fact, more than a few centuries will have been necessary to shake so profoundly the pluri-millennial certainties of our prehistory.

The Aryans' oldest sacred texts that serve as basis to the Vedic religion, the Samhitas, were composed between 1,500 and 800, and are posterior to the code of laws of Lipit-Ishtar or of Hammurabi (around 1,800) that both establish man as the focal point of the society.

A similar trend is observed in all regions where the winds of the Axial Age blow. In the Indian subcontinent, the Laws of Manu develops identical themes: *"She who, controlling her thoughts, speech, and acts, violates not her duty towards her lord, dwells with him (after death) in heaven, and in this world is called by the virtuous a faithful (wife, sadhvi). But for disloyalty to her husband a wife is censured among men, and (in her next life) she is born in the womb of a jackal and tormented by diseases, the punishment of her sin."* [\[Laws of Manu\]](#)

In China, signs of women's subordination appear when Confucianism becomes the doctrine of the State. It introduces an extremely hierarchized, patriarchal organization resting on a strictly patrilineal ancestor cult, boys being the only ones authorized to carry their father's name. Some aspects of this patriarchal society will exceed the most extreme canons, woman being simply considered as a biological necessity and merely useful for procreative purposes. She will have to devote all her energy on procuring a male heir for her husband, and girls will often be sacrificed at birth. As for men, they will develop an elaborate science of sexual practices, in their search to control the gender of the fetus that has to be, evidently, male [\[30\]](#).

However, still in China, Taoism will escape this trend by developing a vision of the world that finds its balance between the forces of the Yin and those of the Yang. The space that the feminine occupies belongs to the Yin and is in every aspect comparable to the space in which the masculine is located, the Yang. Whereas Confucianism establishes the woman as man's maid, Taoism keeps a more ancestral standpoint by assigning to her a natural and mysterious role, and by maintaining a holistic vision of the universe in which every element possesses its place and where complementarity is the rule.

Stretching from China to Greece over millennia, it seems impossible to endow such a trend to a unique Aryan source. All the more since norms and values imposed by a foreign people are mostly rejected by autochthonous populations.

On the other hand, the discovery of men's procreative function could have had such an impact, infiltrating and impregnating the different societies in all their layers, deeply influencing their mentalities as well as their social structures. Ultimately, it will result in putting man at the center of the universe, in an ideological and psychological expression that will culminate during the Axial Age, a phenomenon so unique in its geographical scope that only the most remote places will escape its impact and ascendancy.

The Masculine Civilization

In their comparative analysis of different creation myths in pre-industrial societies, Nienke [Moor](#) and her team showed that the technologies of subsistence and the belief in a creative god were closely linked:

Technology of subsistence	No notion of a creative god *	Notion of an inactive creative god or non concerned *	Notion of a creative god non concerned with the human moral norms *	Notion of a creative god concerned with the human moral norms *	Total number of communities or societies studied
Hunter / gatherers	60	29	8	2	85
Fishing	69	14	7	10	29
Simple horticulture**	60	35	2	2	43
Advanced horticulture**	21	51	12	16	131
Agriculture**	23	6	5	67	66
Pastoralism	4	10	6	80	50

[Moor et al, 2009]

* percentage of the total number of communities/societies studied

** Horticultural societies use a rudimentary tooling (wood, bone and stone in the simplest of them, metal in the most advanced).
Agricultural societies use a sophisticated tooling as the plow.

The notion of a creative god is mainly present in pastoral communities and in societies possessing an advanced agriculture, in which a differentiated economic structure rests on man. It replaces a more ancestral vision of the world in which humans were part of an all-encompassing nature, vision that did not allow the existence of a creative god that would exist outside the natural world.

Let us summarize the main steps that have marked the passage from the holistic to the hierarchized representation of the universe.

1) Spiritualizing nature, and adding thus meaning to its manifestations that can now be interpreted represents a primordial expression of the way humans take control of nature

2) The domestication of plants and animals is another decisive development that has firmly established the dominance of humans, since, for the first time, a species breaks away from the prevailing economy of predation. For men, the domestication of symbolic animals, such as the bull and the horse, represents an economic and strategic turning point as well as a psychological victory in their endeavor to control nature

3) Inside the human couple, the discovery of man's procreative function reverses the ancestral balance that favored, until then, female fertility. A new conception of procreation arises in which man becomes creator while woman is relegated to a nursing role

4) To secure their new position in the universe, men conceive a new entity, Yahweh, who, as Father and Creator, replaces fertility embodied by Mother-Nature at the summit of the creation

While the economic and social transition leading to the Urban Revolution will be swift, driven by necessity due to the implosion of the Neolithic society, the transformation of the deeply ingrained traditions and the replacement of the ancient beliefs will take more time. This will create a discrepancy in the societies of Antiquity. On the one hand, the balance of power is definitely tilted towards the masculine, as the codes of law ascertain. On the other hand, the norms and beliefs of the past still play an influential role: goddesses dominate the first pantheons, and all creation myths before Genesis refer to a primordial nature on which divinities are dependent. Ultimately, the ideological tidal wave of the Axial Age will completely erase these residues of ancestral beliefs, as exemplified by the advent of the Abrahamic religions that consecrate the ideology of the masculine civilization from which nature and the feminine have been evicted.

The Birth of the Profane...

"In brief, the sacred is an element in the structure of human conscience, and not a stage in the history of this conscience." [[Eliade](#) 1976]

In the primeval holistic vision of the world, nothing could exist outside nature: everything was included and possessed a place in it. Defining the natural world as sacred, the concept of profane could not exist, since nothing existed outside nature.

When a divinity exterior to nature was introduced, when the original creative principle that once belonged to nature was attributed to a divine entity, sacredness was transferred to the divinity sitting now on top of the creation, encompassing all that existed without exception.

In the case of Levantine monotheism, the relationship between Yahweh and its people was defined by monopolistic and contractual characteristics meant to identify and circumscribe the “chosen people.” Yahweh conceptualizing the principle of sacredness, a new concept that would describe and encompass the “out-group” became necessary: the notion of “profane” will be introduced and applied to all that does not belong to the divine world, defining all that has been excluded from the sacred.

By limiting the use of the term “sacred” exclusively to their divinity, the rise of monotheist religions based on the Old Testament does not celebrate the advent of the sacred, but divides the human race by introducing the concept of profane [31].

... and of Intolerance

Another consequence ensues directly from the reductive definition of the sacred and the resulting apparition of the profane. Contrary to the holistic vision in which the creation as a whole forms an indivisible unit, the religions of “the Book” consider as profane everything that does not belong to their definition of the divine. As we have seen, the texts forming the Old Testament clearly seek to identify what characterizes the in-group as opposed to the out-group. They establish the basis for a division between the faithful and the infidel that will give rise to religious intolerance, an unfortunate characteristic defining these religions. This new attitude greatly contrasts not only with the primitive holistic vision, but also with the openness and flexibility attached to the polytheistic cults that excluded no one.

However, just like the notion of profane, religious intolerance does not form an intrinsic condition of monotheism, the teachings of Christ and of Buddha being proofs of the opposite. Intolerance, nevertheless, is inherent to the way the prophets attach Yahweh to its people: i.e. defining them as “chosen” automatically leads to the rest of humanity becoming the “excluded” people. None of the big religious institutions developed on these premises will be able to escape the principle of exclusivity: they will all apply intolerance on a systematic and global scale. Excluding and condemning all other credos, they will go as far in their blindness as to reject sister-religions that are issued from the same sources, that share the same prophets, that refer to the same texts [32].

In their quest to extend their power and authority and to monopolize the religious landscape, these religious institutions will send their missionaries all around the world to convert the out-group. This will lead to all sorts of abuses: oppressions, persecutions, massacres, wars, and not to forget the systematic acculturation of millions of people, erasing in the name of their credo ancestral traditions all over the world. A unique phenomenon that still defines the history of these religions today.



Creation of Adam (detail). Fresco (1510). Sistine Chapel (Italy)

Epilogue

Seven to eight thousand years have gone by since the egalitarian social structure has given way to a hierarchical organization of human society. At the same time, the complementary equilibrium of an all-encompassing nature relying on the feminine as a key fertile element has been substituted by a universe in which the creative masculine, in an attempt to dominate its environment, has placed itself outside nature.

The norms and values that this latest vision carries are so deeply anchored in our traditions, our cultures, and our ideologies that they seem all too natural to us. Yet, a series of events has shaken their edifice, events that could be the precursors of profound changes, and that could lead to a complete reappraisal of the relationship between men and women as of our relationship with nature.

The first challenging elements were the discoveries of Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler who dismantled the idea that the earth was the center of the universe, removing man from the central position he thought he had. Darwin's theory of evolution pursued this phenomenon of deconstruction by replacing the creation in a merely natural and holistic context, contradicting the religious dogma of a creation ex nihilo conveyed by the prophets of the Axial Age.

Various elements have been added to the new evidence, all indicating that the notions on which the masculine civilization was developed have become obsolete. We have noted, for example, how economic structures and the way procreation is perceived influence our conception of the world. Both domains have witnessed a genuine revolution in recent times. The twentieth century has seen a very abrupt emancipation of women, economically as well as politically. Particularly since the 1980s [\[33\]](#), most western societies have witnessed an extremely fast integration of women at all levels of their economic activity.

As for our views on procreation, they have been fundamentally shaken by a series of discoveries:

- In 1827, Karl Ernst von Baer discovers the ovum. This breakthrough annihilates the ancestral conception of a creative male and a nursing female that had ruled for over 7,000 years
- In 1880, Oskar Hertwig and Eduard Strasburger show that fertilization is the result of the fusion between the spermatozoid and the core of the ovum, bringing women's procreative function on an equal footing with that of men
- The introduction of new means of contraception, such as the pill in 1960, and the liberalization of abortion, "free" women from their extremely rigid sexual constraints

- . At the end of the twentieth century, the discovery of the SRY gene establishes the female sex as the sex by default. Consequently, the procreative function of man is reduced to introducing the male element in a feminine context that, within a more secured environment, would be able to survive without him [[Cyrulnik 2001](#)]

- . Paternity can be determined by DNA tests

- . New methods of conception are introduced that eliminate sexual intercourse (IVF, etc.)

In the space of a few decades, the dominating position of man has very noticeably weakened, going as far as to provoke a panic of the masculine. At the same time, the introduction of new domestic units (mono-parental families, homosexual families, etc.) exposes the depth of the transformations that are occurring.

Finally, and most revealingly, we witness a new attitude towards nature, dictated by the realization that its resources are not inexhaustible, and by the fact that our survival depends on them. We have even begun to concede that nature has to be protected against our own activities. The idea of progress, necessary motion underpinning historical linearity, finds today its first external boundaries, requiring us to reappraise the primordial role nature plays, while eliminating the deceptions of the past. In other words, to ensure our survival, we must develop a more holistic vision of our universe and stimulate a lifestyle that takes our environment into account.

This quest for a new equilibrium will certainly find hiccups on the way. The short-term economic and political necessities and the systemic crisis confronting our societies increase the risk that this process will be slowed down, even derailed. Nevertheless, it is imperative that both men and women construct a more balanced universe in accordance with their nature and in harmony with their environment.

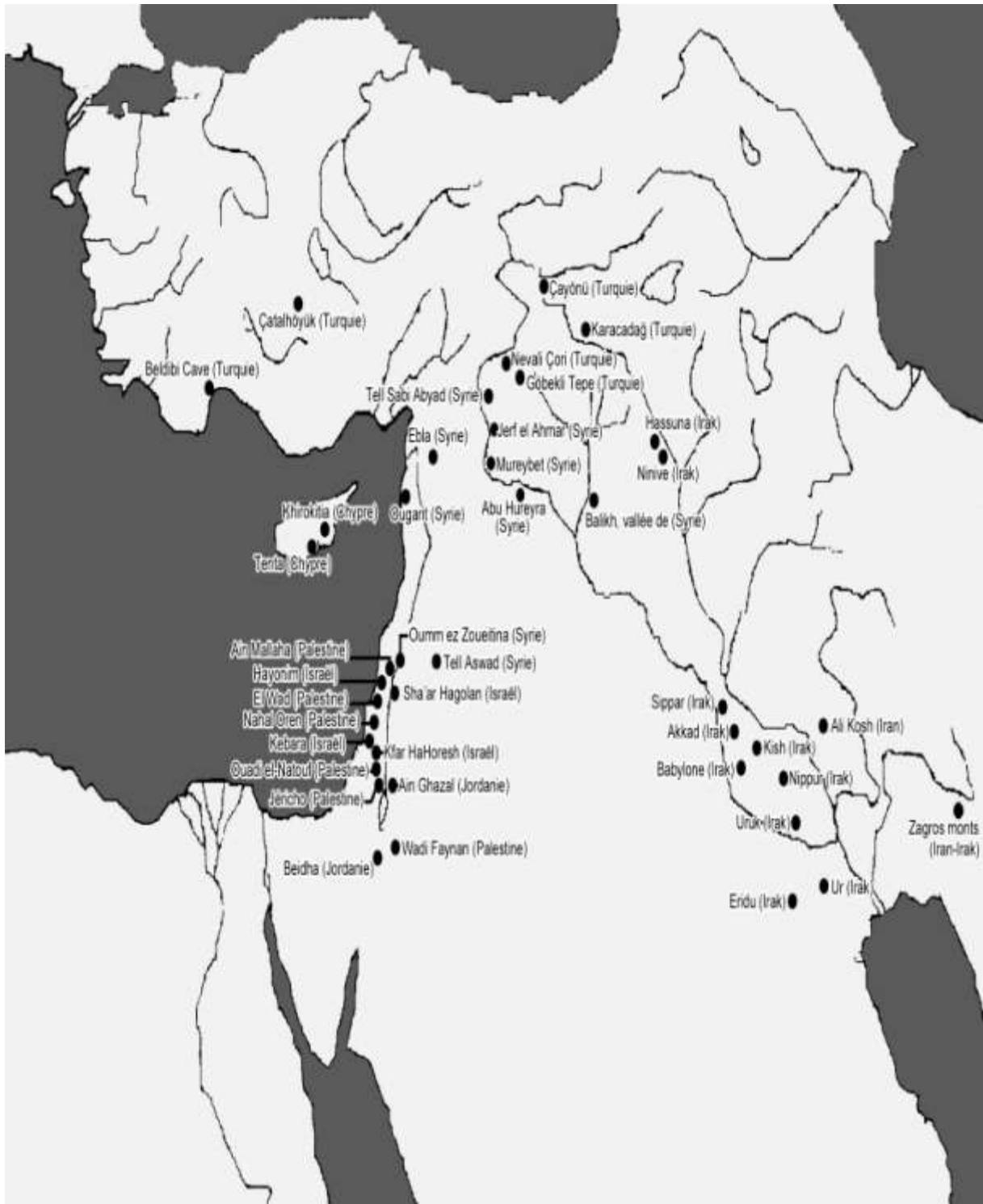
“The environment is not separate from ourselves. We are inside it, and it is inside us.

We make it, and it makes us.”

[Yanomami, Brazil]



Sites of the Middle-East



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Chronological Table

	DATE*	PERIOD	STRUCTURE & ORGANIZATION
PRE-HISTORY	around 38,000 – 12,300	UPPER PALEOLITIC	Nomadic bands Hunter/gatherers Spirits (Shamanism/Animism)
PROTO-HISTORY	12,300 – 10,800	NATUFIAN	First attempt to sedentarize and Circular architecture
	10,800 – 9,600	YOUNGER DRYAS	Nomadism
	9,600 – 8,300	NEOLITHIC	PPNA Sedentarization/Agriculture Circular architecture Tribal organization
	8,300 – 6,900		PPNB Animal domestication Rectangular architecture Discovery of fatherhood
	7,000 – 6,500		PPNC Climate change Soil depletion
	6,500 – 5,600		Ceramic The sites are deserted
	5,600 – 5,000		Neolithic Yarmoukian Pastoralism
	6,500 – 4,500	Obeid culture Patrilineal filiation	
5,000 – 3,300	CHALCOLITHIC (copper age)	Organization in chiefdoms Divinities appear	
ANTIQUITY	3,300 – 1,200 BCE	BRONZE AGE	Urban revolution Development of political and religious institutions
	1,200 BCE – 540 BCE	IRON AGE	Pantheons of divinities
	1,000 BCE – 650 CE	AXIAL AGE	Philosophy /science Monotheism

* All dates are approximate and BCE except when other specified

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Appendices

Appendix Blood Rituals

The Sambia (Papua New Guinea)

To enter the world of men, the young Sambia boy must go through an initiation that starts before his puberty and only ends after his twentieth birthday. This initiation is divided into six phases. The first three phases take place in a purely homosexual context in which the boy practices fellatio, sometimes in a very intense manner. At the beginning of his initiation, according to this people's culture, the boy must ingest the semen of older men – his genitors – in order to begin to produce his own semen and fortify his masculinity [1].

During all this period, he is not allowed to have any other sexual activity, even when he gets formally married at the end of the third phase. During the fourth phase, he may have his first sexual intercourse with his wife, but it must be limited to fellatio. Throughout this phase, homosexual activity continues but the roles are now reversed, the young man having become the genitor of younger boys. He learns to “renew” the semen that he loses during ejaculation without having to resort to ingestion by drinking the sap from a tree named “the milk of the mother-tree.”

During the fifth phase, he is taught the purifying rituals that he must practice after having sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman. At that time, he may have normal sexual relationships with his wife.

The sixth phase starts when his wife has her first child. Homosexual activity disappears. This last phase is marked by ceremonies of purification and by nose bleedings, the nose symbolizing the penis. The idea is that the man learns to renew autonomously his semen. The initiation ends when his second child is born. The myth of Numboolyu and Chenchi is then revealed to him [2].

Elisabeth [Badinter](#) has described the violence of the rituals that awaits the Sambia boy who is by surprise pulled away from his mother and taken into the forest. There, for three days, he will be whipped with nettles to open his skin and stimulate his growth. His nose will bleed to ensure that he gets rid of the female liquids that stop him from growing. On the third day, the secret of the flutes will be revealed to him. No woman should ever hear it from him, or else he will die.

From the moment he is separated from his mother, the boy is not allowed to speak to her, to touch her, or to look at her until he has reached a man's status, that is to say, when he has a

child of his own. Only then he will be able to break the maternal taboo and speak to her, offer her food and eat in her presence. [3]

The Bimin-Kuskusmin (Papua New Guinea)

The same author [Badinter, 1992] describes the extraordinary energy that the Bimin-Kuskusmin dedicate to masculine ritual activities. To begin with, the young boys are undressed, their clothes are burnt, and they are washed by female initiators who smear their body with funeral yellow mud while making unpleasant remarks about their sexual organs. After this humiliating experience, they are told that they are going to be killed because they have been weakened and polluted by their mother. The already extremely nervous boys begin to cry and scream. In such a state, they are shown to their mothers who cry as well and prepare themselves for mourning.

Brought into isolation in the forest, the terrorized boys are then whipped, humiliated, mistreated, purged, incised, and burnt. Swallowing blood and urine, they vomit constantly, faint or become completely hysterical, while their initiators tell them they are dying. In the end, their wounds are healed, and the boys get a masculine name.

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Appendix Spirits and Funeral Practices

Most funeral practices aim at winning the spirit inhabiting the body of the deceased, at pacifying it, and, ultimately, at protecting the community from the misdemeanors that some spirits can perpetrate. From rebel spirits that attempt to escape the perpetual cycle of life and death to avenging spirits that haunt the house where an offense has remained unpaid, the world of the spirits is closely intertwined to that of the living [4].

Examples of practices and rituals that show the way these two worlds are interconnected abound. One of them is the custom to close the eyes of the dead, a custom originally supposed to shut an opened window between the world of the living and that of the dead. In the same way, to cover the face of the dead with a cloth indicates a willingness to stop the spirit from returning into the corpse that it has just left, accessing it through the mouth. Some people will burn the dwelling and things of the deceased in order to destroy everything that could tempt its spirit to want to come back to haunt the place. Elsewhere, for the same reason, the dead's possessions are buried with the body. Others still will open doors and windows to ensure its departure.

In his famous *The Golden Bough* [1922], James Frazer gathered many funeral traditions intended at chasing the spirits away. To make sure that the spirit leaves, some rinse the body, while others beat the walls (Canada) or the ground of the room (China), especially when bad weather might incite the spirit not to leave the house (Madagascar). In Scotland and in Germany, chairs on which the coffin had been laid were turned upside down to force the spirit to leave. Some people like the Dakota (United States) and the Karen (Thailand) asked the deceased to behave properly, to go to its grave and to remain there. Others, anxious that the deceased might come back to bother the living, went as far as to divert the bed of a river to bury their dead. Of course, once buried, they would return the river to its original bed.

Other solutions have been used, as to bury the deceased with its feet and fists bound, or as the Burmese did, to tie up his thumbs and his big toes, or to tie his neck to his legs, to nail his skull, to surround him with thorns, or to enclose the grave with a high fence. In California (United States) and in Namibia, they simply broke his backbone.

For the spirits, their favorite haunting place is where they died. Therefore, the corpse of the deceased is often moved to an isolated place where it is abandoned. Many people manage to transport their sick relatives outside their house, so that their spirit will not come back and haunt it thereafter. If death occurs before, the house has to be abandoned [5]. If several deaths occur at the same time, the Bakalai (Congo) abandon their village. For the Balonda

(Congo), a chief's death also entails the abandonment of the whole village. The Damara (Namibia) act the same way, but reoccupy the village some time after.

Abandoning the place being not always the most convenient, other measures have been thought of to stop the spirits from coming back to haunt the place where they lived. Some have blocked the entry of the house, while others have condemned doors and windows as soon as the body had left the premises. Others still have established that a spirit can only find its way back to the house if it follows the same path it took when it left it. They have therefore practiced an opening in a wall to allow the coffin to leave the house, and closed it afterwards. According to Frazer, this subterfuge is used by many people, from Greenland to Laos, from the Fijian (Fiji) to the Khoikhoi (South Africa). In Thuringia (Germany), the body of a man who was hanged had to leave through a window if one wanted to prevent him from coming back to haunt the house. To avoid that a deceased found its way back, the Araucanian (Chile) spilled ashes on the path followed by the corpse. In the same way, the Kachin (Burma) covered their tracks with rice, and in Tonga (Polynesia), one used sand. Elsewhere, the deceased's eyes were bandaged so that it could not recognize its path. In Persia, someone who went on a journey left home backwards to ensure that he or she would come back. To bring the corpse to its destination, some used a detour; others avoided the center of the village, or did not allow the body to go through the town. Others still transported it at night. In Siberia, to make certain that a refractory spirit would not come back to haunt the village, the shaman went as far as to accompany it to the world of the spirits.

Coming back from a burial, some people made sure they would not be followed by jumping over a fire erected like a gate between the living and the dead (Siberia, Rome, China). Another obstacle frequently used is water: besides throwing water behind the corpse leaving the house, some crossed a river – even if they had to break the ice in winter – to ensure that the spirit would not find its way back. But others went even further: while many people wash or dive into the sea after a funeral ceremony, Frazer relates that the Matamba (Angola) repeatedly plunged a widow all tied up in the water, with the intention of drowning the spirit of the deceased that could still stick to its wife.

In the Mili Atoll (Marshall Islands), when a corpse is buried, a small and frail vessel loaded with coconuts is put out to sea in the hope that it will carry the spirit of the departed away. The idea of using water as a gate that the dead cannot cross is found in numerous cultures. It is the Sanzu River for the Japanese, the Styx for the Greeks and the Romans, while in Vedic writings, the river takes the name of Rasa, and that of Chiuhnahuapan for the Aztecs. For the Egyptians, it is the Noun, the primordial ocean that plays an identical role in two of their cosmogonies.

As clay models found in the tombs of Ur and dating of approximately 2,500 confirm, boats and other vessels were already associated with death in Mesopotamia, and it will be the privilege of the divinities to be able to cross the waters of death: in Lagash toward 2,000, an inscription mentions the construction of the most expensive boat of the time for the mother-goddess Ningirsu, named the 'boat of the divinity that emerges from the abyss'. In Ugarit, one of the names of the Canaanite goddess Asherah is Athiratu-Yami, 'the one that crosses waters'. The *solar* boats preserved in the pyramids and in the temples of Egypt were intended for the divinities to travel on the waters of death.

Another way of using water to separate the world of the living from that of the dead was to bury the dead on an island, like it was the custom in the archipelago of the Cyclades (Greece), but also in the Trobriand Islands. Buried on the island of Tuma, the dead had, however, to come back in order to be born again as child-spirits (Wai Waya). In Russia, during the excavations of Oleneostrovski Mogilnik, Nina Nikolaevna Gurina discovered an island in which some 500 corpses had been buried between 6,700 and 6,000. This custom was prolonged until the 19th century CE by the Sami (Lapland) who occupied the place.

The same methods used to prevent the spirit from coming back are also applied to stop the spirit from leaving the body. The Chinese tried to frighten the spirit of a sick man by making an enormous hubbub with screams and firecrackers to prevent the spirit from leaving the body, and thus the man from dying. Water is also used to block the exit of the patient's spirit. In Argentina, old Abipone women waving rattles surrounded the patient while jumping, shouting, and throwing regularly water in its face. In other places, fire is used to stop the spirit from leaving a living being. In Laos, Thailand, Burma and Ethiopia, a woman having given birth had to remain surrounded by flames during a few days, or even a few weeks, to prevent her spirit from abandoning her.

As Robert Hertz observed in Borneo, and as illustrated by the widespread use of secondary funeral rituals, the transformations that take place in the body of an individual after his or her death indicate that the passage from life to death is a gradual one, the departed staying in an intermediate zone for a certain amount of time. A parallel has therefore been created between the transformations of the body in decomposition and the wanderings of the deceased's spirit that, in its suffering, inflicts all sorts of illnesses and disasters on the living. Mortuary rituals are aimed at pacifying the spirit during this tormented period and at bringing it to rest. One will provide food and drink for the dead, while a mother will give milk to her deceased infant. And under less lenient skies, an umbrella will be placed beside the corpse.

When the process of decomposition is finished and all life has definitely left the body, the spirit can at last reintegrate the world of spirits. A big feast puts an end to this period, since

the malevolent conditions that had arisen at the moment of death have now disappeared:
“Generally, the spirits leave their parents in peace, once they have fulfilled their last duties
towards them.” [Hertz](#), 1928]

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Appendix Decapitations and Plastered Skulls

The custom of decapitating the dead has not yet found a satisfactory and exhaustive explanation. It appeared at the end of the Natufian period, when deteriorating climatic conditions obliged the semi-settled communities to return to the nomadic lifestyle of their ancestors.

At that time, decapitation might have been a manner to apply funeral practices to an individual who had died far away from the village, without having to carry the body all the way back to the camp. This interpretation would explain why no children's skulls have been recovered, children remaining near the camp. It could also justify the simultaneous use of decapitation in primary and secondary funeral practices. In the first case, when the group was far from the camp, decapitation had to happen immediately after death (primary practice). But those who died at the camp were first buried, and later unearthed and decapitated in the presence of the whole community (secondary practice).

This custom, however, evolves when the process of sedentarization starts again, after the interruption caused by the Younger Dryas. With time, variations appear in the way skulls are arranged and in the treatments they undergo.

They are sometimes buried individually, sometimes in group [6]. Whereas one finds a plastered and painted skull under the floor of a house between the hands of a deceased woman in Çatalhöyük (Turkey), a skull was placed inside a basket on a bench against the outside wall of a house in Tell Aswad (Syria). Elsewhere, several skulls formed a circle, all oriented toward the inside, while in another place, they formed a line, all looking in the same direction. Skulls were recovered in pits, under houses, placed in a niche or inside a wall [7], etc. Some of these emplacements were marked by an assemblage of stones or a monolith, but it is impossible to know if they represent an exception or if all sites were, at the time, systematically marked.

The manner skulls were treated also varies from one site to the other: some were left intact, some painted, some plastered, while others had their ocular cavities filled with a shellfish, giving the skull an expressive look.

Besides, whereas some skulls were individually plastered, others were plastered as a group, sometimes ten skulls at a time. Another important variation is that the decapitated of 'Ain Ghazal (Jordan) apparently deserved the tidiest funeral, whereas in Jericho (Palestine), headless bodies were thrown on a heap of rubbish. Finally, although skulls of the two sexes and of all ages were recovered, decapitation was generally practiced more on women than on men.

All these variations in the treatment of skulls have led to many different interpretations of its function. Some have read a final homage to the deceased, whereas others see it as a last stopover on the path of some posthumous life. But no reason has yet been found that would explain why one treatment was applied instead of another. It seems that plastering, introduced later, became with time the most popular treatment. The realism it brought to the skull and the features it preserved (fig. 4) must have excited people's imagination.

It is during excavations at Jericho that Kathleen Kenyon discovered the first plastered skulls. She compared them to the masks that some tribes in the Sepik valley (New Guinea) use to honor their forebears, and concluded that the plastered skulls revealed the presence of an ancestor cult in the Middle East. However, this idea has recently been abandoned. Among the arguments that contradict it, is the fact that 28% of the adults buried in Jericho and 35% of those buried in 'Ain Ghazal did not undergo this treatment. This implies that in these two communities, one person out of three was not eligible for this practice. While people without children or those being foreign to the community might have been excluded from this custom, decapitation was, however, frequently used on young people who didn't have children, or whose children were too young to perform a similar ritual.

Other arguments have been brought forward that exclude the existence of an ancestor cult:

- However rarely, this custom has also been used on children [8]
- Headless bodies were rejected on a heap of garbage in Jericho
- In Kfar HaHoresh (Israel), headless cadavers of gazelle and aurochs have been found too [9]
- In Mureybet (Syria), bucrania were buried under the floor or in the wall of houses
- At 'Ain Ghazal, the 'vogue' of plastered skulls was relatively short-lived, appearing around 7,100 and disappearing definitively in 6,300
- Most funeral traditions of the Neolithic were abandoned during the PPNC: it seems impossible to justify the disappearance of such traditions if they were related to something as important and timeless as an ancestor cult, in which lineages founding the community took their source

Finally, a few authors have concluded that decapitation was reserved to enemies and that the treatment of their skulls was accompanied with magic incantations. The fact that most skulls were those of women contradicts this interpretation.

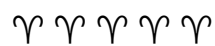
In the first part, we have seen how different rituals had been conceived to guide the spirit of a dead person toward its new function, and that some of these rituals were destined to stop the spirit from coming back to haunt the place where it lived. This could also explain the

presence of skulls in houses: decapitating, painting and plastering the skull could have acted as many guarantees the spirit would not return to haunt the body it had lived in.

Elsewhere, at 'Ain Ghazal for example, it could have been to welcome the deceased's spirit, for which skulls and statuettes were indifferently used, the spirit choosing its residence, just as was the custom on the Timor Archipelago.

The variety of interpretations and the absence of standardized rituals show that different customs cohabited in this region, justifying the fact that a headless body could be thrown on a heap of garbage at one place while deserving a more exclusive sepulture at another.

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Appendix Creation Myths

Almost all creation myths before those related in Genesis are characterized by a holistic vision of the universe, in which nature precedes all other elements of the creation, that is to say, the human world, the animal world, and the world of spirits that will later become the world of divinities. “*In bygone days, a long time ago, spirits and men lived in the same world, created by A-poe-mi-yeh, the great ancestor,*” according to Akha and Hani legends (Southeast Asia) [Chenevière, 1986]. For the Iatmul of the Sepik River (Papua New Guinea), the earth acquired its shape when a spirit put its foot in the original muddy mass. In Samoa, plants are at the origin of life: when rotting, the first worms appeared from which the first humans were born. “*At the beginning (that is during the mythical period), an Aranda myth says that in Ankota lived a man who came out of the earth without having a father or a mother.*” [Levy-Bruhl, 1935] In every instance, nature, that these mythical and other beings populate, precedes them, and they depend on it for their survival.

Such a vision of an all-embracing nature does not allow any externality. In primitive mythologies, nature is *the* initial element – primordial waters, formless matter or chaos – and no one tries to ascertain its origin since it would forcibly destroy its primordially. In other words, the idea of an entity that would exist outside nature and that would have created it is incompatible with the holistic vision of a primeval nature that acts as context preceding all creation.

Most creation myths use earth or water as primordial elements. For the Maidu Indians (North America), the universe was, at its beginning, only water and obscurity. For the Incas (Peru), obscurity reigned until the first creatures came out of the waters of the Titicaca Lake (Bolivia). And while obscurity was everywhere for the Kiowa (North America), water was omnipresent for the Cherokee, Creek and Iroquois Indians (North America) who concluded that the earth was first populated by creatures capable of surviving in a liquid element. For the Oneida Indians (North America), the earth was covered with water, and humans lived in a country situated in some superior region of the sky. In that country, death, illness, jealousy, hate and revenge did not exist.

Water is also at the origin of all life for the Tewa Indians (New Mexico), as well as for the Orok (Sakhalin). For the Tagalog (Philippines), in a country ravaged by cyclones, the collision of the sky and the earth gave birth to the spirits. At the beginning for the Diegueño Indians (North America), there only was the sky and the earth, the male sky weighing on the female earth. An identical idea is found among the Maori (New Zealand) for whom the sky and the earth were united in an eternal embrace. Their children separated them to create light.

In Nordic mythology as described in the poem Voluspa (Scandinavia), the confluence of two natural elements is at the origin of life. In the abyss that separates northern ice from southern fire, pieces of ice came in contact with fire and formed two initial bodies: the giant hermaphrodite Ymir and the cow Audumbla, whose milk fed Ymir.

The cow appears in Egypt under the shape of Hathor, who is the mother of the gods, and in India where it plays the role of “*the envelope of the universe, because it is by having been sewn into the skin of a cow that the first man is born.*” [[Clement & Kristeva](#), 1998]

The raven is another animal that played an important role in the creation tales of human beings, though always against a background set by nature. In Haida mythology (North America), a raven frees the first humans jailed in a shellfish. This bird is also found in the Inuit mythology (Arctic Circle) in which the world is only water, flown over by a raven. For the Tlingit (North America), the raven must find its way in a world without light and water.

For others, the universe is born from an egg. It is out of a cosmic egg that Brahma arises, according to old Vedic scripture: “The divine one resided in that egg during a whole year, then he himself by his thought (alone) divided it into two halves; And out of those two halves he formed heaven and earth, between them the middle sphere, the eight points of the horizon, and the eternal abode of the waters.” [[Laws of Manu](#)]

Finally, we have seen in the first part the importance of the totem that in many places around the world (Australia, North America, etc.) refers to an animal (or a plant) as creator for every clan and sub-clan. The Kiwai of Papua New Guinea think that their original father is a crocodile, while the ancestor of the Orok (Sakhalin) is an eagle. For the Trobrianders (Papua New Guinea), every clan possesses an ancestor coming from a place situated in a group of rocks or coral that associates the clan with a territory, and that determines its hereditary customs. A particularly famous site in Kiriwina is Obukula, the place that saw the first four totemic animals appear – the iguana, the dog, the pork and the snake: these are the ancestors of the four matrilineal clans. [See also *Totemism* in Appendix Lang and Appendix Spencer]

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Appendix Dobrizhoffer

The following texts are excerpts from [*An Account of the Abipones, an Equestrian People of Paraguay*](#) [1822] by father Martin Dobrizhoffer, a Jesuit missionary (Graz, 1717 – Vienna, 1791). In 1749, Dobrizhoffer left for South America where he spent 11 years with the Guarani and 7 years with the Abipone (Paraguay).

Abipone spirit, Christian divinity

“I said that the Abipones were commendable for their wit and strength of mind; but, ashamed of my too hasty praise, I retract my words, and pronounce them fools, idiots, and madmen. Lo! this is the proof of their insanity! They are unacquainted with God, and with the very name of God, yet affectionately salute the evil spirit, whom they call Aharaigichi, or Queevèt, with the title of grandfather, Groaperikie. Him they declare to be their grandfather, and that of the Spaniards, but with this difference, that to the latter he gives gold and silver, and fine clothes, but that to them he transmits valour; for they account themselves more courageous and intrepid than any of the Spaniards. Should you ask them what their grandfather formerly was, and of what condition, they will confess themselves utterly ignorant on the subject. If you persist in your interrogations, they will declare this grandfather of theirs to have been an Indian— so barren and absurd is their theology. The Abipones think the Pleiades to be the representation of their grandfather; and as that constellation disappears at certain periods from the sky of South America, upon such occasions, they suppose that their grandfather is sick, and are under a yearly apprehension that he is going to die: but as soon as those seven stars are again visible in the month of May, they welcome their grandfather, as if returned and restored from sickness, with joyful shouts, and the festive sound of pipes and trumpets, congratulating him on the recovery of his health.” [II, 64-65]

The wizard's power

“... no nation which has been discovered in Paraguay is without its jugglers [[10](#)], whom the Abipones call by the name of the devil, Keebet, or devilish workers, because they believe them to have received from their grandfather, the evil spirit, the power of performing wonderful work far surpassing human art. These rogues, who are of both sexes, profess to know and have the ability to do all things. There is not one of the savages who does not believe that it is in the power of these conjurors to inflict disease and death, to cure all disorders, to make known distant and future events; to cause rain, hail, and tempests; to call up the shades of the dead, and consult them concerning hidden matters; to put on the form of a tiger; to handle every kind of serpent without danger, etc., which powers, they imagine,

are not obtained by art, but imparted to certain persons by their grandfather, the devil.” [II, 67]

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Of death and eclipses

“The Abipones think that none of their nation would ever die, were the Spaniards and the jugglers [11] banished from America; for they attribute every one's death, from whatever cause it may proceed, either to the malicious arts of the one, or to the fire-arms of the other. If an Abipon dies from being pierced with many wounds, or from having his bones broken, or his strength exhausted by extreme old age, his countrymen all deny that wounds or weakness occasioned his death, and anxiously try to discover by which of the jugglers, and for what reason he was killed. Because they have remembered some of their nation to have lived for a hundred years, they imagine that they would never die, were it not for the jugglers and the Spaniards. What ridiculous ideas do not the Americans entertain respecting the eclipse of the sun and moon! During the time it lasts, the Abipones fill the air with horrid lamentations. They perpetually cry tayreta! oh! the poor little thing! grieving for the sun and moon: for when these planets are obscured, they always fear that they are entirely extinguished. Still more ridiculous are the Chiquito Indians, who say that the sun and moon are cruelly torn by dogs, with which they think that the air abounds, when they see their light fail; attributing their blood red colour to the bites of these animals. Accordingly, to defend their dear planets from those aerial mastiffs, they send a shower of arrows up into the sky, amid loud vociferations. At the time of the eclipse. But, who would believe that the Peruvian Indians, so much more civilized than the rest, should be foolish enough to imagine, that when the sun is obscured, he is angry, and turns away his face from them, on account of certain crimes which they have committed? When the moon is in darkness, they say she is sick, and are in perpetual apprehension, that, when she dies, her immense carcass will fall down upon the earth and crush all the inhabitants. When she recovers her light, they say she has been healed by Pachacámac, the Saviour of the world, who has prevented her death, that the earth may not be utterly crushed and destroyed by her weight.” [II, 83-85]

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Of the sun

“When a priest of our order told them that God, the creator of all things, and amongst the rest of the sun, should be worshipped before the work of his own hands, they replied; “Till this hour, we never knew nor acknowledged anything greater or better than the sun.”” [II, 89-90]

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Of illness

“They believe every sick person to be possessed of an evil demon; hence their physicians always carry a drum with figures of devils painted on it, which they strike at the beds of sick persons, to drive the evil demon, which causes the disorder, from the body.” [II, 90]

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Polygamy, infanticide, and demography

“Like the other American savages, some of the Abipones practise polygamy and divorce. Yet they are by no means numerous; the whole nation consisting of no more than five thousand people. Intestine skirmishes, excursions against the enemy, the deadly contagion of the measles and small-pox, and the cruelty of the mothers towards their offspring, have combined to render their number so small. Now learn the cause of this inhumanity in the women. The mothers suckle their children for three years, during which time they have no conjugal intercourse with their husbands, who, tired of this long delay, often marry another wife. The women, therefore, kill their unborn babes through fear of repudiation, sometimes getting rid of them by violent arts, without waiting for their birth. Afraid of being widows in the lifetime of their husbands, they blush not to become more savage than tigresses. Mothers spare their female offspring more frequently than the males, because the sons, when grown up, are obliged to purchase a wife, whereas daughters, at an age to be married, may be sold to the bridegroom at almost any price.

From all this you may easily guess that the Abiponian nations abound more in women than in men, both because female infants are seldomer killed by their mothers, because the women never fall in battle as is the case with the men, and because women are naturally longer lived than men. Many writers make the mistake of attributing the present scanty population of America to the cruelty of the Spaniards, when they should rather accuse that of the infanticide mothers. We, who have grown old amongst the Abipones, should pronounce her a singularly good woman who brings up two or three sons. But the whole Abiponian nation contains so few such mothers, that their names might all be inscribed on a ring. I have known some who killed all the children they bore, no one either preventing or avenging these murders. Such is the impunity with which crimes are committed when they become common, as if custom could excuse their impiety. The mothers bewail their children, who die of a disease, with sincere tears; yet they dash their new-born babes against the ground, or destroy them in some other way, with calm countenances. Europeans will scarce believe that

such affection for their dead children can co-exist with such cruelty towards them while they are alive, but to us it is certain and indubitable.” [II, 96-98]

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Of nomadic life

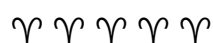
“The wild Abipones live like wild beasts. They neither sow nor reap, nor take any heed of agriculture. Taught by natural instinct, the instructions of their ancestors, and their own experience, they are acquainted with all the productions of the earth and the trees, at what part of the year they spontaneously grow, what animals are to be found in what places, and what arts are to be employed in taking them. All things are in common with them. They have no proprietors, as with us, of lands, rivers, and groves, who possess the exclusive right of hunting, fishing, and gathering wood there. Whatever flies in the air, swims in the water, and grows wild in the woods, may become the property of the first person that chooses to take it. The Abipones are unacquainted with spades, ploughs, and axes; the arrow, the spear, the club, and horses, are the only instruments they make use of in procuring food, clothing, and habitation. As all lands do not bear all things, and as various productions grow at various times of the year, they cannot continue long in one situation. They remove from place to place, wherever they can most readily satisfy the demands of hunger and thirst.” [II, 110-111]

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Of men and women

“According to the Abiponian custom, the different sexes have different places assigned them. Where the women bathe, you cannot find the shadow of a man. Above a hundred women often go out to distant plains together to collect various fruits, roots, colours, and other useful things, and remain four or eight days in the country, without having any male to accompany them on their journey, assist them in their labours, take care of the horses, or guard them amidst the perils of wild beasts, or of enemies. Those Amazons are sufficient to themselves, and think they are safer alone. I never heard of a single woman being torn to pieces by a tiger, or bitten by a serpent: but I knew many men who were killed in both ways.” [II, 139]

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Appendix Lang

Excerpts from [*Myth, Ritual, and Religion*](#) (1887) by Andrew Lang

Conservatism of beliefs

“... we shall be able to detect the survival of the savage ideas with least modification, and the persistence of the savage myths with least change, among the classes of a civilised population which have shared least in the general advance. These classes are, first, the rustic peoples, dwelling far from cities and schools, on heaths or by the sea; second, the conservative local priesthoods, who retain the more crude and ancient myths of the local gods and heroes after these have been modified or rejected by the purer sense of philosophers and national poets.

../..

The persistence of the myths after their significance had become obsolete is accounted for by the well-known conservatism of the religious sentiment—a conservatism noticed even by Eusebius. “In later days, when they became ashamed of the religious beliefs of their ancestors, they invented private and respectful interpretations, each to suit himself. For no one dared to shake the ancestral beliefs, as they honoured at a very high rate the sacredness and antiquity of old associations, and of the teaching they had received in childhood.” [I, 36-37]

Of the unity of the animate and inanimate world

“First we have that nebulous and confused frame of mind to which all things, animate or inanimate, human, animal, vegetable, or inorganic, seem on the same level of life, passion, and reason. The savage draws no hard and fast line between himself and the things in the world. He regards himself as literally akin to animals and plants and heavenly bodies; he attributes sex and procreative powers even to stones and rocks, and he assigns human speech and human feelings to sun and moon and stars and wind, no less than to beasts, birds, and fishes.” [I, 47]

“It is not unusual to assign a ghost to all objects, animate or inanimate, and the spirit or strength of a man is frequently regarded as something separable, or something with a definite locality in the body. A man's strength and spirit may reside in his kidney fat, in his heart, in a lock of his hair, or may even be stored by him in some separate receptacle. Very

frequently a man is held capable of detaching his soul from his body, and letting it roam about on his business, sometimes in the form of a bird or other animal." [I, 48]

"Les sauvages se persuadent que non seulement les hommes et les autres animaux, mais aussi que toutes les autres choses sont animées." *Again*, "Ils tiennent les poissons raisonnables, comme aussi les cerfs." [12] *In the Solomon Islands Mr. Romilly sailed with an old chief who used violent language to the waves when they threatened to dash over the boat, and "old Takki's exhortations were successful." Waitz discovers the same attitude towards the animals among the Negroes. Man, in their opinion, is by no means a separate sort of person on the summit of nature and high above the beasts..."* [I, 55]

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Totemism

"The Christian Quiches of Guatemala believe that each of them has a beast as his friend and protector, just as in the Highlands "the dog is the friend of the Maclaines." When the Finns, in their epic poem the Kalewala, have killed a bear, they implore the animal to forgive them... The Red Men of North America have a tradition showing how it is that the bear does not die... It is a most curious fact that the natives of Australia tell a similar tale of their "native bear." "He did not die" when attacked by men. In Australia it is a great offence to skin the native bear, just as on a part of the west coast of Ireland, where seals are superstitiously regarded, the people cannot be bribed to skin them. In New Caledonia, when a child tries to kill a lizard, the men warn him to "beware of killing his own ancestor." The Zulus spare to destroy a certain species of serpents, believed to be the spirits of kinsmen..." [I, 57]

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"... a savage's belief that beasts are on his own level is so literal, that he actually makes blood-covenants with the lower animals, as he does with men, mingling his gore with theirs, or smearing both together on a stone; I while to bury dead animals with sacred rites is as usual among the Bedouins and Malagasies today as in ancient Egypt or Attica. In the same way the Ainos of Japan, who regard the bear as a kinsman, sacrifice a bear sacramentally once a year... In Lagarde's *Reliquiae Juris Ecclesiastici Antiquissimae* [Leipzig, 1856] a similar Syrian covenant of kinship with insects is described. About 700 CE, when a Syrian garden was infested by caterpillars, the maidens were assembled, and one caterpillar was caught. Then one of the virgins was "made its mother," and the creature was buried with due

lamentations. The “mother” was then brought to the spot where the pests were, her companions bewailed her, and the caterpillars perished like their chosen kinsman, but without extorting revenge.” [I, 139]

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Appendix Spencer

Excerpts from [*Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*](#) (1914) by Baldwin Spencer

Of nomadism

“There are favorite camping grounds belonging to certain local groups which form the nearest approach to anything like a permanent camp, but there is no continuous occupation and never the slightest attempt to cultivate any crop or to lay by a store of food other than such as may be required during the performance of some particular ceremony or series of ceremonies...

In their camps they make various forms of shelters... The simplest consists only of a few boughs, placed so as to protect them from the sun's rays or the prevailing wind. They are very fragile, but it is astonishing how cleverly, though simply, the native will lean a few boughs up against one another in such a way as to make them a shade against the sun or a fairly efficient protection against wind and rain. They seem to know, instinctively, the right angle at which to slant the boughs so as to make them able to withstand the pressure of a strong wind.” [26-28]

Of tribes

“What exactly constitutes an Australian tribe is somewhat difficult to say. It may conveniently be defined somewhat as follows:—A tribe is a group of individuals speaking a common dialect, differing in the nature of its words from that of other groups and regarded as owning a definite tract of country, the boundaries of which are known to them, and recognised by the members of other tribes. Each tribe may usually be divided into sections and the real test of whether a native is or is not a member of any particular tribe is whether, under normal conditions, he may wander freely over the country owned by that tribe. He must not trespass on the land of any other tribe, entering upon this only after he has received permission of the owners to do so.” [34]

Etiquette

“When important ceremonies are about to take place messengers are always sent out, often to distant tribes, and the etiquette observed illustrates well one aspect of aboriginal character. Each messenger is provided by some important member or recognized leader of the group that sends him out with an object, the possession of which at once indicates to all whom he meets that he is a messenger. In the southern parts of the Territory this will take

the form of a sacred stick called a churinga, or, popularly, a bull-roarer. The bearer of this is absolutely safe anywhere. On approaching a camp he sits down waiting until the local men choose to take notice of him, which may not be until after an hour or two. They all go on meanwhile, quite unconcernedly, as if he did not exist, and then one or two of the older men will go over to him; he will show them his credentials and deliver his message, after which he is brought into camp, made free of the special men's camp and provided with food. This same thing goes on at every camp that he visits and exactly the same etiquette is observed when the visitors arrive at the camp from which the messenger was sent." [35]

Of oral tradition

"There was one man belonging to the Kakadu tribe, on the Alligator River, who was extraordinarily able in regard to remembering traditions, and was recognised as a great authority on the subject of the past history of the tribe. He was relating to us a tradition of the tribe, according to which an old ancestor sent out different individuals to populate various parts of the country. There were five groups these individuals and he was able to tell us the names, so far as we could judge, of all of them. They included those of one hundred and twenty men and women, and not only did he know their names, but also the totemic group to which each belonged and their intermarriages. It was really a wonderful feat of memory and the information was evidently correct, because it fitted in with traditions that we were told by other natives and we tested him later and found him consistent. The possessor of any particular capacity does not, except in very rare cases, secure any very direct personal gain from its exercise beyond the fact that he has a reputation for ability. Everything is communistic and even if a man is provided with an extra supply of food, or, in recent years, tobacco, in return for something he has made or done, it is usually not long before it is divided amongst his friends. There is, amongst the aborigines, an equal distribution of profits..." [39-40]

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Of magic

"Still another point of very great importance which must always be borne in mind in dealing with the aborigines, is their intense belief in evil magic. In tribes inhabiting the country around the Alligator Rivers a very favorite form of magic is to get hold of some excrement, it does not matter how small a piece, of a man or woman against whom you may have a grudge, and whom you wish to injure. All you have to do is to get two or three friends to help you perform a rather elaborate ceremony out in some quiet spot, where he cannot see you,

and you can easily encompass his death. The belief has one beneficial result in that the camps of these natives are much better from a sanitary point of view than in most Australian tribes, because everything is carefully buried, lest some enemy should be lurking about." [36-37]

"The result of all this is that there is always a feeling of mutual suspicion and distrust between members of different tribes, each of which has its own peculiar forms of magic by means of which it may encompass the death of strangers. Often in our little camp, associated with the departmental office in Darwin, we had natives of various tribes together for a few days at a time, and it was very noticeable, not only how they kept apart from one another, but the mutual distrust with which they viewed each other. You have only to tell a native that he is the victim of evil magic and he succumbs at once and can only be cured by the exercise of counter magic. The feeling is so strong that on more than one occasion when a woman, strong in magic power, had given it out that she was using magic against some individual, it very seriously interfered with the treatment of that native under medical supervision in a hospital and, if this be so amongst natives who have been for long in contact with white men, it can easily be realized what an enormous part magic plays in the life of the primitive savage." [38]

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Of sacred objects

"Amongst the native tribes of Central Australia I have seen what Mr. Gillen and myself have called the Intichiuma ceremonies. These are performed by the men of different totemic groups, with the idea of increasing the number of the animals and plants with which the ceremonies are concerned, but, in the Central tribes, it is only the men of anyone totemic group who perform the ceremony associated with it, and there is no such thing as any definite request or demand. The mere performance of the ceremony is supposed to bring about the desired result. In the Kakadu tribe, and the same is true of other tribes associated with it, the members of different totemic groups join together and, though it is difficult to express, accurately, the difference between the two forms of ceremonies, both of which have the same object in view, that is, the increase of the food supply, it may be said that the Central tribes do not make anything in the way of a personal appeal to any object which is supposed to represent an animal or plant, whereas, amongst the Kakadu, this is most evident. The men of the latter tribe very clearly showed, by their insistent and fierce cry of Brau, brau, "Give, give," that they were directly asking, even demanding, the representatives

of the various animals and plants to provide them with food. Amongst the many ceremonies of this kind that I have seen performed by Australian aboriginals, none have impressed me more than these, as indicating that savage man believes that he is able to control his food supply by means of magic. The way in which the men danced round the ceremonial objects, or rolled over on the ground holding them in their hands, was most suggestive of the idea that, by doing so, they brought about some close connection between themselves and the totemic animals or plants represented by the sacred sticks and stones. All that the men could tell us was that their old ancestors had always performed these ceremonies and that, after they had done so, the animals and plants had always multiplied.

Altogether we saw about seventy of these sacred stones and sticks which, above all things possessed by the Kakadu and surrounding tribes, are pre-eminently Kumali or sacred. They brought just a few at a time to show us, taking the most elaborate precautions lest any woman or child, or even any young man, was in sight. Before they brought them in, they halted under the shelter of bushes and reconnoitred the place to make quite sure that they were safe and that no women were within sight. When a man saw us he would put a finger up to his nose, the sign that they had something Kumali. Then, when they were satisfied that everything was secure, they brought them in, wrapped up in fold after fold of paper bark. Whilst showing them to us they only spoke in whispers and, so real was it to them, that we, without thinking about it, felt compelled to do the same." [187-189]

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Masculine initiation

"The natives on Melville and Bathurst Islands differ very much in regard to their ceremonies and customs from the typical tribes of the mainland, and in nothing is this more clearly seen than in the ceremonies attendant upon the admission of their young men to the status of manhood. It is quite possible that there are certain ceremonies of a very special nature in addition to those now described, but a very striking feature of, at all events, some of the more important of them is that all the members of the tribe—men, women and children—take part in them. This is quite opposed, and stands in strong contrast, to the customs of most mainland tribes, amongst whom women and children, except to a very limited extent, are rigidly excluded from all active participation in them, and, as a rule, are not even allowed to come anywhere near the ceremonial ground." [91]

"In the central and north central and also in some of the western tribes, there are two ceremonies which often follow close upon each other. At the first the rite of circumcision is

carried out and at the second that of subincision. In some of these tribes only the first of these is practised. In the Arunta and other central tribes, the youth is regarded as initiated and is allowed to see all the sacred ceremonies as soon as he has passed through the two ceremonies named, but, at a later time, he takes part in what is called the Engwura, which consists, partly, in the performance of a long series of sacred ceremonies referring to the totemic ancestors, and partly in a curious ordeal by fire, after which he becomes a full man, or, as they say, ertwa murra oknira, which words mean 'man, good, very'. He only takes part in this when he is adult. In the Kakadu nation there is a succession of no fewer than five series of ceremonies, the last of which only adult and comparatively old men may witness.”

[122]

“[The boys] have to be very careful, however, in regard to [the women]. They must not talk to the women nor allow them to see their mouths open. Most especially they must not expectorate in such a way that a woman can see them doing it. If they want to do so, they must hold their heads down and cover the spittle with soil at once. They have no idea why, but the old men have always told them to do so. On no account must lubras [\[14\]](#) see their teeth. If they did, their (the men's) fingers would break out in sores. When eating food they turn their faces away from the women and also from their younger brothers, to whom they may not speak.” [131-132]

“The Kakadua have a special name, Ngumulaua, which they use for Ngabadaua when they perform the sacred ceremony. No woman knows this name.

Note: In some tribes the very old women are evidently allowed to know more than the younger and middle-aged ones. How much they really know of these sacred or secret rites it is not possible to say. In some cases, where the women take a certain share in the performance, they are always led by one or two of the older ones who evidently know more than the others.” [140]

“The Mungarai men first of all go inside the camp and range themselves along the two sides; the boy who, at this particular stage, is known by the status term Ikmurli, sits at one end close to the bough shelter, watched over by his namminjeri. He is naturally very frightened, not knowing what is going to happen to him, because up till now he has firmly believed that the sound of the bull-roarer is really that of a spirit who has taken other boys away.

... Outside the camp, in the dark, two men incessantly whirl the bull-roarer.” [165]

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Totemism

“In some tribes, such as the Waduman and Mudburra, the totemic name is transmitted in the maternal line; in others, such as the Worgait and Djauan, in the paternal line.

In some, the totemic groups are divided between the moieties [15], in others, such as the Djauan and Mungarai, they are divided between the classes or sub-classes, so that the child cannot possibly inherit either its father's or its mother's totem.

In some, such as the Waduman and Mudburra, there is no division of the totem groups between the moieties or classes, the same group occurring on both sides of the tribe, but the totemic groups are exogamous, and the totem descends in the female line. In others, moieties and classes do not exist, and in these there is no descent of the totem from parent to child, the latter receiving his totemic name in consequence of an intimation conveyed by a spirit individual to the parent.

In all tribes, however, there is a very definite totemic system, which may or may not regulate marriage.

In most tribes the totemic groups are exogamous, but in some, such as the Kakadu, they are not, though it is very rare to find a man married to a woman of the same totemic group as himself. Such a marriage, however, in the Kakadu and allied tribes would be quite allowable.”

[178]

“The Kakadu group of tribes is evidently much modified in many ways, and in none more so than in regard to their totemic system. The question of totems is closely bound up with their beliefs in regard to the origin of children, As described in connection with this subject, when an individual dies his spirit part remains with his bones in the form of what is called a Yalmuru. This, again, gives rise to a double of itself, called all Iwaiyu, which the Yalmuru places in some food, such as a sugar-bag or fish, that the father of the future child then secures, aided by the Yalmuru in doing so. This food will be the totem of the future child. The Iwaiyu jumps out of the food before the man secures the latter, and rejoins the Yalmuru. Finally, in the form of a small frog, called Purnumanemo, it goes into its mother. The Yalmuru, at night time, comes to the father while he is asleep in his camp and tells him the name of the child and its totem. Originally, in the far past times, each individual had his totem, or jereipunga, given to him by the great ancestor of the tribe named Imberombera, or by men and women sent out by and acting under her instructions [16]. At each reincarnation

the Yalmuru decides upon the Jereipunga, which may or may not be the same as that to which it belonged during a previous reincarnation. It has no reference of necessity to that of either the father or mother, nor is it concerned in any way with the marriage system. In the Kakadu tribe, indeed, there is no idea of heredity of the totemic name in either the male or female line... there is a complete and most perplexing mixing up of the totems, so far as anything like descent of the totemic name is concerned." [179-181]

"Inasmuch as the totemic groups are divided between the two moieties of the tribe and a man must marry a woman who does not belong to his own moiety, it follows that the totemic groups are exogamic. The child belongs to a totemic group associated with its father's side of the tribe but not to his father's own totemic group. My informant told me that a leech man marries a fish woman and that their children are yam. A fish man marries a flying-fox woman and their children are leech. A flying-fox man marries a fish woman and their children are crocodile. A crocodile man marries a snake woman and their children are flying-fox." [193]

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Appendix Tylor

Excerpts from [*Primitive Culture. Researches Into The Development Of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, And Custom*](#) (1920) by Edward B.Tylor

Of spirits and yawning

“Among the Zulus, repeated yawning and sneezing are classed together as signs of approaching spiritual possession. The Hindu, when he gapes, must snap his thumb and finger, and repeat the name of some God, as Rama: to neglect this is a sin as great as the murder of a Brahman. The Persians ascribe yawning, sneezing, etc., to demoniacal possession. Among the modern Moslems generally, when a man yawns, he puts the back of his left hand to his mouth, saying, “I seek refuge with Allah from Satan the accursed!” but the act of yawning is to be avoided, for the Devil is in the habit of leaping into a gaping mouth. This may very likely be the meaning of the Jewish proverb, “Open not thy mouth to Satan!” The other half of this idea shows itself clearly in Josephus' story of his having seen a certain Jew, named Eleazar, cure demoniacs in Vespasian's time, by drawing the demons out through their nostrils, by means of a ring containing a root of mystic virtue mentioned by Solomon. The account of the sect of the Messalians, who used to spit and blow their noses to expel the demons they might have drawn in with their breath, the records of the mediaeval exorcists driving out devils through the patients' nostrils, and the custom, still kept up in the Tyrol, of crossing oneself when one yawns, lest something evil should come into one's mouth, involve similar ideas.” [I, 102-103]

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Of water spirits

“When Sir Walter Scott, in the *Pirate* tells of Bryce the pedlar refusing to help Mordaunt to save the shipwrecked sailor from drowning, and even remonstrating with him on the rashness of such a deed, he states an old superstition of the Shetlanders. “Are you mad?” says the pedlar; “You that have lived sae lang in Zetland, to risk the saving of a drowning man? Wot ye not, if you bring him to life again, he will be sure to do you some capital injury?” Were this inhuman thought noticed in this one district alone, it might be fancied to have had its rise in some local idea now no longer to be explained. But when mentions of similar superstitions are collected among the St. Kilda islanders and the boatmen of the Danube, among French and English sailors, and even out of Europe and among less civilized races, we cease to think of local fancies, but look for some widely accepted belief of the lower

culture to account for such a state of things. The Hindu does not save a man from drowning in the sacred Ganges, and the islanders of the Malay archipelago share the cruel notion. Of all people the rude Kamchadals have the prohibition in the most remarkable form. They hold it a great fault, says Kracheninnikow, to save a drowning man; he who delivers him will be drowned himself. Steller's account is more extraordinary, and probably applies only to cases where the victim is actually drowning: he says that if a man fell by chance into the water, it was a great for him to get out, for as he had been destined to drown did wrong in not drowning, wherefore no one would let him into his dwelling, nor speak to him, nor give him food a wife, but he was reckoned for dead; and even when a man fell into the water while others were standing by, far from helping him out, they would drown him by force. Now these barbarians, it appears, avoided volcanoes because of the spirits who live there and cook their food; for a like reason, they held it a sin to bathe in hot springs; and they believed with fear in a fish-like spirit of the sea, whom they called Mitgk. This spiritualistic belief among the Kamchadals is, no doubt, the key to their superstition as to rescuing drowning men. There is even to be found in modern European superstition, not only the practice, but with it a lingering survival of its ancient spiritualistic significance. In Bohemia, a recent account (1864) says that the fishermen do not venture to snatch a drowning man from the waters. They fear that the "Waterman" (i.e. water-demon) would take away their luck in fishing, and drown themselves at the first opportunity... Thus, in discussing the doctrine of sacrifice, it will appear that the usual manner of making an offering to a well, river, lake, or sea, is simply to cast property, cattle, or men into the water, which personally or by its indwelling spirit takes possession of them... Among the Sioux Indians, it is Unk-tah the water-monster that drowns his victims in flood or rapid; in New Zealand huge supernatural reptile-monsters, called Taniwha, live in river-bends, and those who are drowned are said to be pulled under by them; the Siamese fears the Pnük or water-spirit that seizes bathers and drags them under to his dwelling; in Slavonic lands it is Topielec (the ducker) by whom men are always drowned; when some one is drowned in Germany, people recollect the religion of their ancestors, and say, "The river-spirit claims his yearly sacrifice"... [I, 108-110]

Priests wizards

"It was remarked in Scotland: "There is one opinion which many of them entertain, that a popish priest can cast out devils and cure madness, and that the Presbyterian clergy have no such power." So Bourne says of the Church of England clergy, that the vulgar think them no conjurers, and say none can lay spirits but popish priests. These accounts are not recent, but in Germany the same state of things appears to exist still. Protestants get the aid of Catholic

priests and monks to help them against witchcraft, to lay ghosts, consecrate herbs, and discover thieves..." [I, 115]

Of natural tigers and man-killing tigers

"Natural tigers, say the Khonds [India], kill game to benefit men, who find it half devoured and share it, whereas man-killing tigers are either incarnations of the wrathful Earth-goddess, or they are transformed men. Thus the notion of man-tigers serves, as similar notions do elsewhere, to account for the fact that certain individual wild beasts show a peculiar hostility to man...

How vividly the imagination of an excited tribe, once inoculated with a belief like this, can realize it into an event, is graphically told by Dobrizhoffer among the Abipones of South America. When a sorcerer, to get the better of an enemy, threatens to change himself into a tiger and tear his tribesmen to pieces, no sooner does he begin to roar, than all the neighbors fly to a distance; but still they hear the feigned sounds. "Alas!" they cry, "his whole body is beginning to be covered with tiger-spots!" "Look, his nails are growing!" [I, 309-310]

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Appendix Flannery

Excerpts from [The Cultural Evolution of Civilizations](#) (1972) by Kent V. Flannery

Of different types of social organization

Type of society	Some institutions, in order of appearance	Ethnographic examples	Archeological examples
STATE	Local group autonomy Egalitarian status Ephemeral leadership Ad hoc ritual Reciprocal economy Unranked descent groups Pan-tribal sodalities Calendric ritual Ranked descent groups Redistributive economy Hereditary leadership Elite endogamy Full time craft specialization Stratification Kingship Codified law Bureaucracy Military draft Taxation	FRANCE ENGLAND INDIA U.S.A.	Classic Mesoamerica Sumer Sheng China Imperial Rome
CHIEFDOM		TONGA HAWAII KWAKIUTL NOOTKA NATCHEZ	Gulf Coast Olmec of Mexico (1000 B.C.) Samarran of Near East (5300 B.C.) Mississippian of North America (1200 A.D.)
TRIBE		NEW GUINEA HIGHLANDERS SOUTHWEST PUEBLOS SIOUX	Early Formative of Inland Mexico (1500-1000 B.C.) Pre-pottery Neolithic of Near East (8000-6000 B.C.)
BAND		KALAHARI BUSHMEN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES ESKIMO SHOSHONE	Paleo-indian and Early Archaic of U.S. and Mexico (10,000-6000 B.C.) Late Paleolithic of Near East (10,000 B.C.)

FIGURE 1. Types of societies in ascending order of sociopolitical complexity, with ethnographic and archeological examples of each. A selected number of sociopolitical institutions are shown, in the approximate order in which they are believed to have arisen (see text).

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Appendix Lee

Excerpts from [Marital Structure and Economic Systems](#) (1979) by Gary Lee

“In more than three-fourths of the world's cultures, adult males are permitted and usually encouraged to take two or more wives – in other words, to contract polygynous marriages. This does not mean, of course, that a statistical majority of all marriages in the world or in any given social system are polygynous. It does mean that polygyny is the normatively endorsed form of marriage in most cultures. Those cultures in which polygyny is not preferred tend to be exclusively monogamous and have no provisions for any form of multiple marriage. Of the 1,170 societies which comprise the Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1967), women are permitted to take multiple husbands (polyandry) in only six, and group marriage (cenogamy) is not normative in any known culture, although it occurs sporadically in several.” [701]

Table 1

MARITAL STRUCTURE BY PRESENCE OF PLOW ANIMALS			
Marital structure	Plow animals Absent	Plow animals Present	Total
Monogamy	11.2	39.6	15.0
Polygyny	88.8	60.4	85.0
Total	100%	100%	100%
N	714	111	825

Table 2

MARITAL STRUCTURE BY INTENSITY OF AGRICULTURE				
Marital structure	Agriculture Absent/Casual	Agriculture Extensive/Horticulture	Agriculture Intensive	Total
Monogamy	9.3	10.4	24.7	15.0
Polygyny	90.7	89.6	75.3	85.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	236	308	283	827

Table 3

MARITAL STRUCTURE BY TYPE OF ECONOMY								
Marital structure	Primary Subsistence Base							Total
	Gathering	Fishing	Hunting	Herding	Incipient Agriculture	Extensive Agriculture	Intensive Agriculture	
Monogamy	12.2	9.9	3.8	13.0	16.7	12.5	28.2	15.0
Polygyny	87.8	90.9	96.3	87.0	83.3	87.5	71.8	85.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	82	99	80	46	72	273	177	829

Table 4

FEMALE CONTRIBUTION TO SUBSISTENCE BY TYPE OF ECONOMY								
Female Contribution	Primary Subsistence Base							Total
	Gathering	Fishing	Hunting	Herding	Incipient Agriculture	Extensive Agriculture	Intensive Agriculture	
Low	6.1	52.5	57.5	51.0	17.6	15.9	41.7	31.0
Medium	20.7	34.7	28.8	14.3	24.3	20.9	20.0	23.0
High	73.2	12.9	13.8	34.7	58.1	63.2	38.3	46.0
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	82	101	80	49	74	277	180	843

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Table 5

MARITAL STRUCTURE BY FEMALE CONTRIBUTION TO SUBSISTENCE				
Marital structure	Proportionate Female Contribution to Subsistence			
	Low	Medium	High	total
Monogamy	19.3	15.8	11.6	14.9
Polygyny	80.7	84.2	88.4	85.1
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
N	254	190	387	831

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Appendix Hammurabi

Excerpts from the [Hammurabi's Code of Laws](#)

110. If a "sister of a god" opens a tavern, or enters a tavern to drink, then shall this woman be burned to death.

128. If a man takes a woman to wife, but has no intercourse with her, this woman is no wife to him.

129. If a man's wife be surprised (in flagrante delicto) with another man, both shall be tied and thrown into the water, but the husband may pardon his wife and the king his slaves.

130. If a man violate the wife (betrothed or child-wife) of another man, who has never known a man, and still lives in her father's house, and sleep with her and be surprised, this man shall be put to death, but the wife is blameless.

131. If a man bring a charge against one's wife, but she is not surprised with another man, she must take an oath and then may return to her house.

132. If the "finger is pointed" at a man's wife about another man, but she is not caught sleeping with the other man, she shall jump into the river for her husband.

137. If a man wishes to separate from a woman who has borne him children, or from his wife who has borne him children: then he shall give that wife her dowry, and a part of the usufruct of field, garden, and property, so that she can rear her children. When she has brought up her children, a portion of all that is given to the children, equal as that of one son, shall be given to her. She may then marry the man of her heart.

138. If a man wishes to separate from his wife who has borne him no children, he shall give her the amount of her purchase money and the dowry which she brought from her father's house, and let her go.

142. If a woman quarrel with her husband, and say: "You are not congenial to me," the reasons for her prejudice must be presented. If she is guiltless, and there is no fault on her part, but he leaves and neglects her, then no guilt attaches to this woman, she shall take her dowry and go back to her father's house.

144. If a man take a wife and this woman give her husband a maid-servant, and she bear him children, but this man wishes to take another wife, this shall not be permitted to him; he shall not take a second wife.

145. If a man take a wife, and she bear him no children, and he intend to take another wife: if he take this second wife, and bring her into the house, this second wife shall not be allowed equality with his wife.

146. If a man take a wife and she give this man a maid-servant as wife and she bear him children, and then this maid assume equality with the wife: because she has borne him children her master shall not sell her for money, but he may keep her as a slave, reckoning her among the maid-servants.

147. If she has not borne him children, then her mistress may sell her for money.

148. If a man take a wife, and she be seized by disease, if he then desire to take a second wife he shall not put away his wife, who has been attacked by disease, but he shall keep her in the house which he has built and support her so long as she lives.

154. If a man be guilty of incest with his daughter, he shall be driven from the place (exiled).

155. If a man betroths a girl to his son, and his son has intercourse with her, but he (the father) afterward defile her, and be surprised, then he shall be bound and cast into the water (drowned).

156. If a man betroths a girl to his son, but his son has not known her, and if then he defile her, he shall pay her half a gold mina [17], and compensate her for all that she brought out of her father's house. She may marry the man of her heart.

157. If anyone be guilty of incest with his mother after his father, both shall be burned.

158. If anyone be surprised after his father with his chief wife, who has borne children, he shall be driven out of his father's house.

178. If a "devoted woman" or a prostitute to whom her father has given a dowry and a deed therefore, but if in this deed it is not stated that she may bequeath it as she pleases, and has not explicitly stated that she has the right of disposal; if then her father die, then her brothers shall hold her field and garden, and give her corn, oil, and milk according to her portion, and satisfy her. If her brothers do not give her corn, oil, and milk according to her share, then her field and garden shall support her. She shall have the usufruct of field and garden and all that her father gave her so long as she lives, but she cannot sell or assign it to others. Her position of inheritance belongs to her brothers.

179. If a "sister of a god," or a prostitute, receive a gift from her father, and a deed in which it has been explicitly stated that she may dispose of it as she pleases, and give her complete disposition thereof: if then her father die, then she may leave her property to whomsoever she pleases. Her brothers can raise no claim thereto.

180. If a father give a present to his daughter -- either marriageable or a prostitute (unmarriageable) -- and then die, then she is to receive a portion as a child from the paternal estate, and enjoy its usufruct so long as she lives. Her estate belongs to her brothers.

209. If a man strikes a free-born woman so that she loses her unborn child, he shall pay ten shekels for her loss.

210. If the woman dies, his daughter shall be put to death.

211. If a woman of the free class loses her child by a blow, he shall pay five shekels in money.

212. If this woman dies, he shall pay half a mina.

213. If he strikes the maid-servant of a man, and she loses her child, he shall pay two shekels in money.

214. If this maid-servant dies, he shall pay one-third of a mina.

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Appendix Genesis 'E'

The Creation according to 'E'

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was on the surface of the deep. God's Spirit was hovering over the surface of the waters.

1:3 God said, "*Let there be light,*" and there was light.

1:4 God saw the light, and saw that it was good. God divided the light from the darkness.

1:5 God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." There was evening and there was morning, one day.

1:6 God said, "Let there be an expanse in the middle of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters."

1:7 God made the expanse, and divided the waters which were under the expanse from the waters which were above the expanse; and it was so.

1:8 God called the expanse "sky." There was evening and there was morning, a second day.

1:9 God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together to one place, and let the dry land appear;" and it was so.

1:10 God called the dry land "earth," and the gathering together of the waters he called "seas." God saw that it was good.

1:11 God said, "Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, with its seed in it, on the earth;" and it was so.

1:12 The earth brought forth grass, herbs yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit, with its seed in it, after their kind; and God saw that it was good.

1:13 There was evening and there was morning, a third day.

1:14 God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of sky to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years;

1:15 and let them be for lights in the expanse of sky to give light on the earth;" and it was so.

1:16 God made the two great lights: the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He also made the stars.

1:17 God set them in the expanse of sky to give light to the earth,

1:18 and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good.

1:19 There was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

1:20 God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of sky."

1:21 God created the large sea creatures, and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarmed, after their kind, and every winged bird after its kind. God saw that it was good.

1:22 God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth."

1:23 There was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

1:24 God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind, livestock, creeping things, and animals of the earth after their kind;" and it was so.

1:25 God made the animals of the earth after their kind, and the livestock after their kind, and everything that creeps on the ground after its kind. God saw that it was good.

1:26 God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

1:27 God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them.

1:28 God blessed them. God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

1:29 God said, "Behold, I have given you every herb yielding seed, which is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree, which bears fruit yielding seed. It will be your food.

1:30 To every animal of the earth, and to every bird of the sky, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food;" and it was so.

1:31 God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. There was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

2:1 The heavens and the earth were finished, and all their vast array.

2:2 On the seventh day God finished his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

^{2:3} God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because he rested in it from all his work which he had created and made.

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Appendix Genesis 'J'

The Creation according to 'J'

^{2:4} This is the history of the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens.

^{2:5} No plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth. There was not a man to till the ground,

^{2:6} but a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground.

^{2:7} Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

^{2:8} Yahweh God planted a garden eastward, in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed.

^{2:9} Out of the ground Yahweh God made every tree to grow that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the middle of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

^{2:10} A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it was parted, and became four heads.

^{2:11} The name of the first is Pishon: this is the one which flows through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;

^{2:12} and the gold of that land is good. There is aromatic resin and the onyx stone.

^{2:13} The name of the second river is Gihon: the same river that flows through the whole land of Cush.

^{2:14} The name of the third river is Hiddekel: this is the one which flows in front of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

^{2:15} Yahweh God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

^{2:16} Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, "*Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat,*

^{2:17} but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die."

^{2:18} Yahweh God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

2:19 Out of the ground Yahweh God formed every animal of the field, and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. Whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

2:20 The man gave names to all livestock, and to the birds of the sky, and to every animal of the field; but for man there was not found a helper suitable for him.

2:21 Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to fall on the man, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.

2:22 He made the rib, which Yahweh God had taken from the man, into a woman, and brought her to the man.

2:23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken out of Man."

2:24 Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh.

2:25 They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made. He said to the woman, "*Has God really said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'*"

3:2 The woman said to the serpent, "Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat,

3:3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, "You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die"."

3:4 The serpent said to the woman, "*You won't surely die,*

3:5 for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

3:6 When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate; and she gave some to her husband with her, and he ate.

3:7 The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

3:8 They heard the voice of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.

3:9 Yahweh God called to the man, and said to him, "*Where are you?'*"

3:10 The man said, "I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

3:11 God said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

3:12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

3:13 Yahweh God said to the woman, "*What is this you have done?*"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

3:14 Yahweh God said to the serpent,

"Because you have done this, you are cursed above all livestock, and above every animal of the field.

On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.

3:15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel."

3:16 To the woman he said,

"I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bring forth children.

Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

3:17 To Adam he said,

"Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground for your sake.

In toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

3:18 Thorns also and thistles will it bring forth to you; and you will eat the herb of the field.

3:19 By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken.

For you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

3:20 The man called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

3:21 Yahweh God made coats of skins for Adam and for his wife, and clothed them.

3:22 Yahweh God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil. Now, lest he put forth his hand, and also take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever..."

^{3:23} Therefore Yahweh God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.

^{3:24} So he drove out the man; and he placed Cherubs at the east of the garden of Eden, and the flame of a sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

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Endnotes

Introduction and Part One

[1] If not otherwise specified, all dates are to be considered BCE (before contemporary era)

[2] The American ethnologist L.H. Morgan (1818-1881) divided human history into three blocks: savagery, barbarism and civilization.

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[3] In this work, I use the term “procreation” that accounts for the adaptive character of the human sexual system, feature that is absent from the system by reproduction.

[MCLENNAN](#) J.F. (1865): *Primitive Marriage: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black

[LEACH](#) Edmund (1966): *Virgin Birth*. Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, No. 1966, 39-49

[MONTAGUE](#) Susan (1971): *Trobriand Kinship and the Virgin Birth Controversy*. Man, New Series, 6, 3, 353-368

[4] References on this subject are gathered under *Virgin birth* in the bibliography.

[6] “In the first place it is essential to remember that there is no such thing as a virgin amongst the women of the native tribes from one end of Australia to the other. As soon as a native girl reaches puberty, she is handed over to her allotted husband and has continuous intercourse for the rest of her life. In that respect there is no difference between any two native women, and yet the native sees that some women have children, some do not. The intercourse is continuous, the bearing of children is sporadic. It is long after a woman has had intercourse before she becomes aware that there is a child within her. Seeing then that every woman without exception has continuous intercourse; that some have children, some do not; that those that have them bear them at varying intervals which have no relationship to the time of intercourse, and that the woman only knows she has a child when the quickening takes place, which, again, has no reference to intercourse, it is not a matter of surprise that the savage man, who is, according to his lights, a very logical being, should seek some other explanation of the origin of children than that of sexual connection.” [Spencer, 1914, 25]

[EYRE](#) Edward John (1845): *Journals of expeditions of discovery into central Australia and overland from Adelaide to King George's Sound in the years 1840-1*. London, Boone (Sydney, 2002)

[7] Claude Meillassoux [1977] describes the prehistoric band as a multitude without intentions other than that of the most immediate needs, and as a group without lineage, since affiliation is imposed and represents a lack of choice.

[HERODOTUS](#) (1850): *Histoires trad. du grec par Larcher*. Paris, Charpentier, I, 216

[HERODOTUS](#) (2010): *The Histories*. An account of great and marvelous deeds through the 1920 translation of A. D. Godley. Pax Librorum, IV, 180

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MOSKO Mark (1998): *On "Virgin Birth," Comparability, and Anthropological Method*. *Current Anthropology*, 39, 5, 685-687, 685

[8] The few people around the world that do not recognize physiological maternity practice sexual totemism: dividing the community along gender lines, each gender is “mystically” linked to an animal. When Alfred Howitt observes this phenomenon for the first time in 1834, he notes that women having the magpie for totem consider this animal as being their ancestor. All the women of the community are bound with the life of that animal: protecting the magpie means protecting the life of all women who share the same totem. Members of the other sex are obliged to respect it as well, any violation giving place to bloody battles between the two sexes. [Durkheim, 1912; Frazer, 1922]

SPENCER Baldwin (1914): *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*. London, Macmillan, I

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[9] Strangely, the idea that all children belong to the female sex has been proven correct: if the SRY gene producing testosterone loosens this hormone during the formation of the fetus, it will be a male; otherwise, it will take the "default" configuration, that of the female sex.

MONBERG Torben (1975): *Fathers Were Not Genitors*. *Man, New Series*, 10, 1, 34-40

[10] As we will see in Part Three, polyandry was still practiced at Sumer until the different code of laws came to forbid it, condemning woman practicing it to death. A case of polyandry appears in the Old Testament with the story of Onan [Ge 38:8-10].

SCHNEIDER D.M. & **LEACH** E.R. (1968): *Virgin Birth*. *Man, New Series*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 126-129

[11] These differences can also be noted with regard to inbreeding. The fact that many communities have tried to reduce its consequences does not imply that they understood the laws of procreation. The Agta for example (Philippines) forbade all alliances between families that were previously connected by marriage. A young man with many brothers had to cover great distances to find a woman, since his eldest brothers had already cleaned out the surrounding villages. The interdiction to marry into the family of a sister-in-law indicates an attempt to control inbreeding without understanding its principles. In his survey on kinship

terminology by the Truk and the Ponape of Caroline Islands, J.L. Fisher noticed that the same term designates the wife and the sister-in-law. For the Lamalera (Indonesia), the man who wants to marry must offer an elephant tusk to the woman he chooses. The fact that there are no elephants on the island obliges him to leave. An effective way to make sure that the young man will look somewhere else for a wife, in places where they are less expensive, or where elephants are more common. [See also Appendix Spencer, [Totemism](#)]

[12] During the 2012 presidential election in the United States, the Republican candidate made the same assertion, alienating many women.

[13] The German missionary Carl Strehlow wrote that it was impossible for the Arunta (Australia) to establish a relationship between sex and procreation, since they could hardly count until five and were unable to measure the time between two events.

DIAMOND Jared (1999): *Guns, Germs, and Steel. The Fates of Human Societies*. New York, Norton (1997)

[14] These communities are too numerous and scattered to consider the possibility that this knowledge could have been forgotten.

BREBEUF Jean de (1636a): *Relation de ce qui s'est passé en la Nouvelle France, en l'année 1636. Part II being Brebeuf's Relation of the Hurons for this year, originally published as an appendix to Le Jeune's Relation of 1636, and thus completing the document*; in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610-1791*, Edited by Reuben Gold Thwaites. Vol. X, Hurons 1636. Cleveland, 1897

DU PERON François (1639): *Lettre au P. Joseph-Imbert du Peron. Ossossané, April 27, 1639*; in *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents. Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610—1791*. Vol. XV, Hurons and Quebec: 1638 -1639. Cleveland, The Burrows Brothers Company, 1898, 183

BREBEUF Jean de (1636a): *Op. cit.*, 17

[15] Just as it was the case for the Trobrianders and many Aboriginal populations, the totem of the Algonquin was the mythical animal after which the clan was named. This animal formed the genealogical origin of the clan, and was considered as its ancestor. Similarly, father François Du Peron mentions that every Huron family (Canada) “has also its various armories [coat of arms], one a deer, one a snake, one a raven, one the thunder, one they estimate to be a bird, and other similar things.” [Du Peron, 1639, 180]

Besides North America and Australia, one finds totemism in Africa and in South America, in Peru for example, where, to be honored, an Indian had to come from a lake, a river or a fountain, or even from the sea, or from wild animals such as the bear, the tiger, the eagle or the condor.

Found most of the time in matrilineal systems, totemism affiliates the individual to a group whose name is determined by its totem, be it that of an animal, of a plant, of an object, etc. To carry the name of one's totem was used to avoid inbreeding, for it was forbidden to all individuals to marry a person of the same totem. In addition, compelling the group to adopt specific taboos towards animals, plants, and other totem sources, instigated a concerted relationship with its environment.

[16] “The savages are persuaded that not only men and other animals, but also that all other things are animate.” [Le Jeune, 1636, 1897]

“The Abipones think the Pleiades to be the representation of their grandfather; and as that constellation disappears at certain periods from the sky of South America, upon such occasions, they suppose that their grandfather is sick, and are under a yearly apprehension that he is going to die: but as soon as those seven stars are again visible in the month of

May, they welcome their grandfather, as if returned and restored from sickness, with joyful shouts, and the festive sound of pipes and trumpets, congratulating him on the recovery of his health." [Dobrizhoffer, 1822, II, 65; see also Appendix Dobrizhoffer Abipone spirit, Christian divinity]

"The natives of Australia not only say the stars in Orion's belt and scabbard are young men dancing a corroboree; they declare that Jupiter, whom they call "Foot of Day" (Ginabong-Bearp), was a chief among the Old Spirits, that ancient race who were translated to heaven before man came on earth. The Esquimaux did not stop short at calling the stars of Orion's belt the Lost Ones, and telling a tale of their being seal-hunters who missed their way home; but they distinctly held that the stars were in old times men and animals, before they went up into the sky. So the North American Indians had more than superficial meaning in calling the Pleiades the Dancers, and the morning-star the Day-bringer; for among them stories are told like that of the lowas, of the star that an Indian had long gazed upon in childhood, and who came down and talked with him when he was once out hunting, weary and luckless, and led him to a place where there was much game." [Tylor, 1920, I, 290-291]

"The Karens of Burma say it is a spirit or demon. "The Rainbow can devour men... When it devours a person, he dies a sudden or violent death. All persons that die badly, by falls, by drowning, or by wild beasts, die because the Rainbow has devoured their ka-la, or spirit. On devouring persons it becomes thirsty and comes down to drink, when it is seen in the sky drinking water. Therefore when people see the Rainbow, they say, "The Rainbow has come to drink water. Look out, some one or other will die violently by an evil death." If children are playing, their parents will say to them, "The Rainbow has come down to drink. Play no more, lest some accident should happen to you." And after the Rainbow has been seen, if any fatal accident happens to anyone, it is said the Rainbow has devoured him." *The Zulu ideas correspond in a curious way with these. The Rainbow lives with a snake, that is, where it is there is also a snake; or it is like a sheep, and dwells in a pool. When it touches the earth, it is drinking at a pool. Men are afraid to wash in a large pool; they say there is a Rainbow in it, and if a man goes in, it catches and eats him.*" [Tylor, 1920, I, 294]

[17] In this text, the word "soul" has been replaced by the word "spirit."

DURKHEIM Émile (1907): *Cours sur les origines de la vie religieuse*. Extrait de la Revue de philosophie, 1907, vol 7, n° 5 (pp. 528-539), vol. 7, n° 7 (pp. 92-114) et vol. 7, n° 12 (pp. 620-638). Reproduit in Émile Durkheim: *Textes. 2. Religion, morale, anomie*. Paris, Éditions de Minuit (1975), 65-122. Edition électronique réalisée par Jean-Marie Tremblay. Chicoutimi (2002), 35-36 (tr. by the author)

HERTZ Robert (1928): *Sociologie religieuse et folklore*. Recueil de textes publiés entre 1907 et 1917. Première édition. Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France (1970), 2e édition, 208 pp. Collection: Bibliothèque de sociologie contemporaine. Chicoutimi, Édition complétée (2003), 53 (tr. by the author)

[18] According to the legend, the stream of the Busento (Italy) was temporarily diverted in 412 CE to bury the king of the Visigoth, Alaric the First, in its bed.

[19] These rituals differ from those performed to fend off the vengeance of hostile spirits, as Aborigines do when they cut off the thumbs of a dead enemy to prevent him from drawing his bow.

TYLOR Edward B. (1920): *Primitive Culture. Researches Into The Development Of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, And Custom*. London, John Murray, I, 467

DURKHEIM Émile (1907): *Op. cit.*, 38 (tr. by the author)

[20] A few communities like the Dieri and the Warramunga of Australia had however decided that the spirit changes sex each time it reincarnates into a new body.

[21] Still commonly used today in expression such as “the weather has gone mad.”

[22] Although women have been shaman, I use here the masculine form to facilitate the reading.

[23] Frequently attributed to men, the protection of the camp was not at all one of their expertise, as we will further see. It will become a masculine monopoly with the appearance of the caste of soldiers, during the Chalcolithic [see Part Three]. This monopoly will last until the twenty-first century CE, when women will finally be admitted to share this role.

[24] This ignorance was, in most cases, shared by both sexes: it was just as difficult for women as for men to understand the mechanisms of procreation. Besides, the discovery of these mechanisms did not represent, for women, endowed with an obvious and fundamental procreative function, an absolute priority.

BETTELHEIM Bruno (1952): *Symbolic Wounds. Puberty Rites and the Envious Male*. New York, Collier Books

MONTAGU Ashley (1937 / 1974): *Coming into being among the Australian aborigines*. London, Routledge; in Spiro, 1968; in Delaney, 1986, 505

[25] However, the procreative role of spirits will still be used symbolically in later mythologies, such as is the case in the conception of Jesus Christ.

[26] We presume that the warrior invoked the right spirits, applied the necessary rituals, prepared his shield correctly, and that no human mistake has derailed the procedure. Rituals play here an extremely important role.

DELUMEAU Jean (1999): *Des religions et des hommes*. Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 422 (tr. by the author)

HEGEL G.W.F. (1963): *Leçons sur la Philosophie de l'Histoire*. Traduction de J. Gibelin. Paris, Vrin, 76 (tr. by the author)

MALINOWSKI Bronislaw (1929): *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*. New York, 40-41

[27] Let us remind here the first verse of John “*In the beginning was the Word...*” [John 1:1]

[28] The use of magic is still widespread today: in 2013 in Gabon, for example, at least 20 people were ritually killed and their genitals, tongues and other organs removed for the magical power they confer.

[29] On the other hand, sexual relationships with a prostitute sustain the man's Yang essence, because of the richness of the prostitute's Yin essence, strengthened by her abundant sexual activities. This does more than compensate for what the man loses by ejaculating. Besides, very curiously, the Chinese considered women's Yin essence to be inexhaustible, contrary to the Yang essence of men: their semen was thought to be limited, and therefore precious, and its quality had to be preserved.

CYRULNIK Boris (2001): *Sous le signe du lien. Une histoire naturelle de l'attachement*. Paris, Hachette (1989), coll. Pluriel, 29-30 (tr. by the author)

KABERRY Phyllis (1968): *Virgin Birth*. Man, New Series, Vol. 3, No. 2, 311-313

ALBERTIS Luigi d' (1880): *New Guinea: What I Did and What I Saw*, in MACKAY, 1976

MALINOWSKI Bronislaw (1929): *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*. New York, 274-275

[30] This story also confirms the fact that these populations ignored the relation between sex and procreation: it is difficult to imagine a group of women raping a stranger while knowing that they could become pregnant.

[31] As Margaret Mead puts it, a woman's life is marked by abrupt physiological changes: her first period, the loss of virginity, pregnancies, lactation, and menopause. Besides the hormonal transformations of puberty, physiological changes by men are limited to their first ejaculation.

[32] However, as Frans de Waal has shown for the bonobos, dissociation between sexual intercourse and fertility occurs among other primates.

[33] Life expectancy for women was about 25 to 30 years, and pregnancies had to be deferred until the last born was weaned.

[34] Among the natives of Adelaide (Australia), "*as many as nine children have occasionally been born to one woman; that the average number is about five; but that each mother only reared an average of two...*" [Eyre, 1845]

[35] Discovered in the seventeenth century CE.

[37] Edward Tylor recounts that, in the primitive world, the sun and the moon are not only animate, but also humanized beings. For some people, the sun reacts to charms and incantations, and one can even play tricks on it. It sometimes comes down on earth to find a woman. According to a legend from Pentecost Island (Vanuatu), a sunbeam got a woman pregnant. She gave birth to a son who founded the clan of the Sun. In Tonga, the legend says that the sun saw the king's daughter and, seduced by her beauty, gave her a child named the Sun-child. According to a Fijian legend, the girl of one of the kings was locked in a room so that she could not get pregnant from the sun. [See Appendix Dobrizhoffer, [Of the sun](#)]

[38] The Hajj is the journey to Mecca and the rituals attached to it that every Muslim must perform once. It represents the fifth pillar of Islam and the most significant manifestation of Islamic faith and unity.

BONNET Jocelyne (1988): *La Terre des Femmes et ses Magies*. Paris, Robert Laffont (tr. by the author)

[39] Worth mentioning here is the less negative approach to female blood of the Chipaya (Bolivia). Though christianized for a long time, this people has kept alive the pagan custom of sprinkling the roof and walls of a new house with fresh blood to please Pachamama, the Mother-earth goddess. Additionally, Margaret Mead notes that the taboos over menstruation do not seem to exist among the inhabitants of the Dobu Islands (New Guinea).

CHRAÏBI D. (1972): *La civilisation, ma mère !...* Paris, Denoël, 92 (tr. by the author)

[40] Still today, mothers of African immigrants in the United States "circumcise" their daughters – understand here that they remove their clitoris – often giving for a reason that it facilitates their menstruation.

[41] As Aisha Samad Matias [2002] notes, these mutilating rituals play such an important social role that they are difficult to avoid.

DANKS Benjamin (1889): *Marriage Customs of the New Britain Group*. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain & Ireland, 18, 281-294; in Janssen, 2002b

[43] In Tahiti, James Cook reported of a man publicly copulating with an eleven year-old girl under the supervision of the queen Oberea.

MERLAN F. (1986): *Australian Aboriginal conception beliefs revisited*. *Man*, NS 21,3:474-93; in Janssen, 2004b, 480

[44] In Abrahmanic religions, circumcision will abandon its significance as a rite of passage to remain a sign of adherence. Practiced by the Jews and the Muslims, the Christians will replace it by baptism.

[45] In May 2013 in South Africa, twenty-five young men died during initiation and circumcision rituals.

LANG Andrew (1887): *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*. London, Longmans, Green, and Co, 19

Part Two

MINKOV Michael (2009): *Nations With More Dialectical Selves Exhibit Lower Polarization in Life Quality Judgments and Social Opinions*. *Cross-Cultural Research*, Volume 43, 3, 230-250, 244

[1] In Central Australia, “*infanticide is very common, and appears to be practised solely to get rid of the trouble of rearing children*” [Eyre, 1845].

[1a] “*In the case of [the death of] a young child the mother carries the bones about with her in a dilly bag...A few locks of the child's hair were wrapped in a little piece of cloth. The other contents of the bag, which contained all the woman's belongings except her digging stick and mat, were (1) a small mass of her own hair which had been cut off preparatory to being made into string, (2) two pairs of fire sticks, (3) two kangaroo incisor teeth in wax, (4) two loose kangaroo incisors, (5) a small lump of red ochre, (6) a small stone, evidently used for pounding, (7) a bone awl (?), (8) one valve of a fresh-water mussel, used for cutting and scraping.*

Whether the flesh of the child had been eaten or not I could not find out, but it is very probable that such was the case. I did not know when securing the bag that there were any bones inside it, and the woman parted with it readily for half a stick of tobacco—without any hesitancy.” [Spencer, 1914, 248-249]

[2] In spite efforts of the successive Indian governments to curb female infanticide, a census from the state of Haryana (India) showed that there were 834 girls for 1,000 boys in the age group of 0-6 years in 2013 CE (up from 819, a meager 1,8% from ten years ago). In 1,675 villages of the state of Madhya Pradesh, less than six girls were born in the last six years.

[3] However, superfluous but small status-laden items such as shells and obsidian were exchanging hands.

[4] Agriculture was definitively introduced in the Levant around 9,500, but was also “discovered” in New Guinea around 7,000, and in North America, China and the Sahel around 2,500.

[5] Unless otherwise specified, all dates are BCE (before contemporary era).

[6] The term ‘Natufian’ comes from a village of Palestine, Ouadi el-Natouf. The definition of ‘Natufian’ varies. For some, it designates a region strictly delimited between Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. For others, the same term characterizes the cultural homogeneity of the communities that prospered in the Middle East during the period of favorable climatic

conditions between the end of the last glaciations and the Younger Dryas. The geographical area they occupied stretched from the Euphrates to the deserts of the Sinai and the Negev, and from the Mediterranean coast to the Jordanian plateau. It is this last more encompassing definition that we use throughout this book. [See under Natufian in References]

[7] The Telefol (Papua New Guinea) attribute the introduction of architecture to a woman: “*For the Telefolmin, houses have always been central to the construction of identity. Telefol culture began with house building. Their ancestress, Afek, inaugurated the Telefol world when she built the telefolip.*” [Jorgensen, 1990, 151]

[8] The exceptional site of Göbekli Tepe (Turkey) confirms this masculine attachment to hunting. Dating from the ninth millennium, its first particularity resides on the fact that it is situated at a great distance from other inhabited sites. Yet, it has no trace of dwellings and no domestic residues. It is composed of a set of subterranean structures, circular for the oldest, rectangular for the most recent, with enormous pillars engraved with human and animal representations (snakes, foxes, boars, bulls, lions, birds of prey, each species being ascribed to one pillar). [Perrot, 2003]

First testimony of monumental architecture to this day, the site was exclusively built for men, something obviously established by the masculine faces and a prominent penis, but also by the fact that all represented animals are male, and by the absence of any feminine representation. In line with the shamanic traditions of the time, this site was a gathering place for hunters, a space where man and animal were brought together, where hunters and shamans from the area met, and where each clan, represented by its totem, shared its experience, its knowledge, its expertise, its beliefs.

[9] “If we look at the account of the Fuegians described in Admiral Fitzroy's cruise, we find a similar absence of rank produced by similar causes. “*The perfect equality among the individuals composing the tribes must for a long time retard their civilization.... At present even a piece of cloth is torn in shreds and distributed, and no one individual becomes richer than another...*” [Lang, 1887, I, 114-115] “*They have very little idea of private property. If you give a man, say, a stick of tobacco there are certain individuals, such as men who might lawfully be his fathers-in-law, to whom he is obliged by custom to give some; and even if they are not on the spot, he will immediately share it with others. Give a man a shirt in return for work that he has done for you and the chances are that you will find a friend of his, who has done nothing except ask for it, wearing it next day.*” [Spencer, 1914, 36]

[11] The rites elaborated by the Asmat (New Guinea) to integrate an adult in their community show to what point this people was conscious of its communal identity. In case the village must adopt several individuals, Asmat women stood in line, their legs wide open to create a passage. The ones to be adopted crawled through this passage, and were born to a second life when they reached the end of the line. Such a tribal “adoption” authorized a widening of the network of alliances while keeping intact the community's identity.

In an identical way, the integration of foreign elements to the tribe might be at the origin of using circumcision as mark of adherence.

[12] To facilitate the reading, we use the subdivision of the Neolithic era introduced by Kathleen Kenyon: the PPNA (= Pre-Pottery Neolithic A), from 9,600 to 8,500; the PPNB, from 8,500 to 6,800; the PPNC, from 6,800 to 6,500

[13] At the site of Khirokitia (Cyprus), circular architecture was still found millennia after it had disappeared in the Near East, whereas other technological developments had been imported from the mainland in the meantime. It seems that by doing so these people aimed at preserving a lifestyle that was better tailored to the limited possibilities of demographic growth of the island.

WILK Richard R. & **RATHJE** William L. (1982): *Household Archaeology*. American Behavioral Scientist, 25, 617-639, 618

[14] A few authors have distributed the first inhabitable space according to the domestic nucleus man-woman-child as we know it today. Besides the fact that paternity had not yet been "discovered," such a social organization was most impractical: pit-houses were too small to provide a habitat for such a family, and the economic structure of these populations was not adapted to sustain such a distribution.

[15] Though the myths of the Telefol (Papua New Guinea) attribute the construction of the first house to a woman [see Part Two, endnote 8], "*women are excluded from the building and its vicinity. Surrounded by a fence marking its precincts as taboo, the telefolip is founded on the premise of the separation of the sexes, a separation whose violation is punishable by death.*" [Jorgensen, 1990, 153-154]

[16] This detail has its importance since it allows differentiating primary funeral practices from secondary ones. When the skull is separated from the body directly after death, the tissues are not yet decomposed, and the cervical vertebrae remain fixed to the skull. When decapitation occurs a long time after death, the tissues are decomposed and the bones are not fastened to each other anymore.

France-Diplomatie, *Tell Aswad* (Syrie). Les Carnets d'archéologie, Orient ancien. www.diplomatie.gouv.fr (tr. by the author)

[17] Such a fractured lifestyle inside a same community was still recently practiced by the Orungu (Gabon) or by the Five Nation Indians (Iroquois) in North America, where women lived a sedentary life and men were nomads.

[18] David Schneider has brought to light the fact that animal procreative process has not systematically been applied to humans. He confronted the Yap (Caroline Islands) with the following contradiction: "*if you castrate a pig, he cannot get a sow pregnant. Surely that proved that copulation causes pregnancy!*" But it was answered to him in a way allowing no reply: "*But people are not pigs!*" [Schneider & Leach, 1968, 127-128]

[19] Notwithstanding the traditional division of tasks, these observations could have been made by either men or women.

[20] The debate between "creationists" and "evolutionists" that divides the Christian world nowadays gives us an idea, though reduced, of the impact the discovery of men's procreative function must have had on Neolithic populations.

[21] In the Epic of Gilgamesh, he is the husband of the goddess Ereshkigal. We find him also with the Sumerian Inanna, "the Lady mounted on the powerful celestial Auroch"; with Marduk in Mesopotamia, in Canaan (Moloch), and among the Israelites with the Golden Calf; in the Minoan (Knossos palace) and Aegean (Minotaur) cultures; mounted and ridden by the Hittite god of storm, by Zeus in Greece, and as the Egyptian Apis (Ptah and Hathor). In the Indus civilization, he is the primordial god Nandi. At Ebla (Syria) during the second millennium, he carries the mother goddess and symbolizes the fertile power of a young god. Later, in the eighth century CE in Nineveh (Iraq), he guards the entrance of the palace. He is very present among Roman soldiers in the cult of Mithra (tauroctony), and by the Gaul who sacrifice him to cure infertility. He is also found in the stable at the birth of Jesus Christ. Bullfighting is a vestige of this attachment that men have for bulls and for what they represent.

PERROT Jean (2003): *Aux origines de la civilisation orientale*. Bulletin du Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem, 12

[22] The studies of professors Duistermaat and Akkermans at the site of Tell Sabi Abyad (Syria), occupied between 5,700 and 5,000, have shown an absence of hierarchy and speak of a very modest stage of social differentiation despite the fact that this community introduced seals to identify the owners of stored goods. In fact, the element that characterizes a hierarchical society – monumental architecture, public works, castes, wealthy tombs – are absent from the Neolithic landscape. Even at the site of Çatalhöyük (Turkey), with its rich panoply of objects and representations and its original urban organization, evidence of public buildings, of ceremonial centers, of cemeteries, or of any other sign of social differentiation has not been found.

LUTZ Donald S. (1998): *The Iroquois Confederation Constitution: An Analysis*. Publius, Vol. 28, No. 2, 99-127, 113

MITHEN Steven (2004): *After The Ice. A Global Human History*. London, Phoenix, (2003)

Part Three

[1] Unless otherwise specified, all dates are BCE (before contemporary era).

ARENDET Hannah (1963): *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. London, 1994

[3] We attribute masculine characteristics to the chief, though female chiefs existed: the Powhatan Indians (North America) had two different words to designate this function, one male and one female.

[4] Michael Minkov notes that “*In cultures where the whole community’s welfare is dependent on the complex management of common property and the achievement of shared goals, harmony and cooperation are essential.*” [Minkov, 2009, 242]

[5] To this effect, Indian tribes of the United States have introduced the “talking stick,” an ornamented stick of wood used during tribal meetings. Changing hands, it gave the possibility for everyone to take the floor, limiting the exercise of power while bringing order to these meetings.

[6] As is the case in Japan today where a special language, almost incomprehensible to the ordinary citizen, must be used in presence of the emperor.

SAHLINS M.D. (1962): *Moala: Culture and Nature on a Fijian Island*. The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor; in Flannery, 2002

[8] In the first part, we saw how the shaman had benefited from such a control.

The Laws of Manu. IX, 33; in Georg Bühler, translator (1886). *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XXV. Oxford, Clarendon Press

[9] It is important to remember here that men and women shared the same procreative vision, notwithstanding some rare exceptions.

AESCHYLUS (1920): *The Oresteia...* with an English verse translation by R. C. Trevelyan. Cambridge, Bowes & Bowes

[10] From 6,500, the Obeid culture spreads over two millennia. Its capital is Eridu.

FOREST Jean-Daniel (2002): *L'apparition de l'État en Mésopotamie*; in *L'État, le pouvoir, les prestations et leurs formes en Mésopotamie ancienne*. Actes du Colloque assyriologique franco-tchèque. Paris, 11-17, 14 (tr. by the author)

[11] These walls were constructed to protect the village from flooding.

[12] "Rather than presenting us with a static picture, Çatalhöyük architecture features an agglutinative development that seems to occur from a relatively open settlement in level VIII to a densely built settlement in levels VII, VIB, and VIA... Later on, in levels V, IV, III, and II, open space becomes more dominant, and streets appear... (23)... an interesting development occurs from the early levels (VII, VIB, and VIA) without streets to the later levels (V, IV, III, II) in which streets are present..." [Düring, 2002, 23-31]

[13] However, bodies are still buried beneath the houses at the time of the archaic dynasties, in the first half of the third millennium.

[14] For millennia, Sargon remained a model for Assyrian and Babylonian kings: 1,800 years after his reign, King Nabonidus undertook excavations to recover his palace.

[15] Many centuries later, in a poem addressed to Marduk, the Assyrian King Assurbanipal (669-around 630) wrote: "*I am Assurbanipal the great king, the powerful king, the king of all lands, the king of the country of Assyria, the king of the four shores of the earth, the king of kings...*" [Glassner, 2002, 87]

[16] Slavery is not born of a philanthropic desire to save the life of enemies, as some have thought, lives that would have otherwise been simply wiped out. The economy of production, the hierarchization of society, and the need to expand made the creation of a caste of slaves not only possible, but extremely desirable. The working class, the valorization of work and unemployment will all appear after the abolishment of slavery.

[17] Those that define the Alliance in Exodus [20:22 -23:19] are estimated to have been written around the twelfth century. Those of the Deuteronomy [12-28] are from the seventh century. As for those found in the Book of Numbers, Leviticus and the other books of Exodus, they are posterior to the period of the exile (fifth century).

HERODOTUS (2010): *The Histories*. An account of great and marvelous deeds through the 1920 translation of A. D. Godley. Pax Librorum, I, 199

[18] To fight against child prostitution, *devdaasi* has been banned in 1982.

[19] In the hymn dedicated to the goddess Gula that we mentioned earlier, a woman is first a daughter-in-law before being a wife, which could mean that the father had certain "rights" towards the women joining his household.

[20] We have to take here into account the custom that married girls had to move into the household of their husband. Intercourse between father and daughter would therefore almost always happen when the girl still lived with her father, when she still was his property. What's more, the fact that a father had the right to sell his daughter into prostitution made incestuous relationships between them very common.

[21] In the code of laws of Hammurabi, the word 'father' appears 61 times against 12 times for the word 'mother', whereas the word 'wife' appears 36 times against 4 times for the word 'husband'. Similarly, the word "father" and its variants appear 1,350 times in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, it appears 457 times. In comparison, the word "mother" appears 291 times in the Old Testament and 110 times only in the New Testament.

KRAMER Samuel (1974): *The Goddesses and the Theologians: Reflections on Women's Rights in Ancient Sumer*. Rome, XXII, Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale; in Swidler, 1976, 322

[22] Under polytheism, we understand a system of beliefs organized around several divinities.

ARMSTRONG Karen (1993): *A History of God. The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. New York, Knopf, 9

ACKERMAN Diane (1994): *A Natural History of Love*. New York, Random House, 47

[23] While integrating fertility as a symbol, Christianity has eliminated all sexual references to Christ's conception. Interestingly, it has used the antediluvian notion of spirit intervening in the procreative process.

[24] Dumuzi appears in Babylon under the name of Tammuz, and is known as Adonis in the Greek pantheon. In the Old Testament, the women of Israel implore Dumuzi during a drought [Ez 8:14].

ROSENSTOCK Bruce (2006): *David's Play: Fertility Rituals and the Glory of God in 2 Samuel 6*. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, Vol. 31, 1, 63-80, 78

[25] Besides their official religious functions, these towers offered to a selected few the possibility to escape the flooding that regularly took place in Low Mesopotamia, the country "between two rivers."

Interestingly, it has been noted that the size of the ziggurat of Eridu and its emplacement correspond to the description that the Bible gives of the Tower of Babel.

[26] In the Sumerian mythology, Inanna is a very powerful goddess, her various names indicating the multiple facets of her nature. She is Nintud, the Lady who gives Birth; Nintinugga, the Lady who gives life to the dead; Damgalnunna, the Great Wife of the Prince; Nin-Ghursag, the Lady of the Mountain. She is also called Ninnana, the Queen of the Sky, or Ninsianna and personifies the planet Venus. Companion of Enlil, the eldest brother of Enki, she is the wife of Dumuzi, who shares her sanctuary in Uruk. A very complex goddess found in all polytheistic pantheons, Inanna the Sumerian will carry the name of Ishtar in Babylon, of Ashtart in the Ugarit myths, of Ashirat for the Assyrians, of Astarte for the Canaanites, and of Aphrodite for the Greeks. For the Canaanites and the Israelites, she is the wife of Baal and El.

[27] The temples disposed of important domains. In Egypt, they will control a third of the arable land of the country. Their administrators will be chosen by the Pharaoh.

[28] Emile Durkheim defines religion as "a system of beliefs and practices referring to sacred things – beliefs and practices being common to a specific collectivity" [Durkheim, 1907, 8]. In the fourth part, we will see the origin of the notion of "sacred."

[30] "Paganism did not usually seek to impose itself on other people ... since there was always room for another god alongside the others." [Armstrong, 1993, 26]

The idea to amalgamate divinities can seem strange for those of us who live in a context of religious exclusive rights, in which adherence to a religion entails the automatic dismissal of all other religions. However, this phenomenon is relatively recent and limited to the religious systems issued from Levantine monotheism. Outside this particular context, we find a much more flexible religious environment, from Africa to the Far East, leaning on the functionality of the divinity rather than on its ideology. In Japan for example, the different religious communities count more members than the number of inhabitants the country possesses, many Japanese belonging to several confessions at the same time.

Part Four and Epilogue

STAËL Mme de (1817): *Corinne ou l'Italie*. Paris, H. Nicolle, 6e édition, revue et corrigée, 1, IV, 120; (tr. by the author)

[1] Strabo already observed a similar phenomenon in Greece: “Just as in all other respects the Athenians continue to be hospitable to things foreign, so also in their worship of the gods; for they welcomed so many of the foreign rites that they were therefore ridiculed by the comic writers ...” [Strabo, 1924, 10, 3, 18]

[1b] Unless otherwise specified, all dates are BCE (before contemporary era).

[2] Symbol of the “new order,” Yahweh dictates the Tables of the Law. For the first time, a god is placed at the head of a community, instituting a hierarchy in which the divinity is at the same time king and judge. This accumulation of mandates can be explained by the fact that the Israelites, at the time, had a tribal structure without a monarch at its head.

[3] Philosophy as well as science will be practically banished from the territories that Christianity will occupy after the fall of the Roman Empire. However, Islam will not make the same mistake, and this will lead it to its apogee.

[4] The religions of the Book include Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all inspired by texts coming from a common source.

DOBRIZHOFFER Martin (1822): *An Account of the Abipones, an Equestrian People of Paraguay*. London, Murray, II, 77

[5] The role of prophetesses having been practically non-existent in giving shape to the religions of the Axial Age in the Middle East, we systematically use the masculine form.

[6] Whereas only kings and emperors could refer to a divine ascendancy in the polytheistic culture, everyone is now directly affiliated with the divinity. It not only points towards a process of democratization, echoing a similar development that took place earlier in the Greek city, but it also indefinitely widens the number of recipients of the divine message.

[7] Present in Persia under the Achaemenids in the sixth century, Zoroastrianism became the official religion of the Sassanid Empire (224 CE) until Islam replaced it, during the seventh century CE. This first monotheistic religion subsisted more than 1,000 years and exercised a profound influence on the formation of other monotheistic religions in the region.

[8] The fact that Yahweh stops the hand of Abraham at the last moment, just before he is going to sacrifice his son [Ge 22:2-12], shows that the motivation of its followers is what counts, the sacrifice itself being of no importance. However, this religion being in its very early stages, with polytheistic traditions still prevailing, Abraham will sacrifice a ram to his god [Ge 22:13].

[9] For convenience, we attribute here a masculine gender to Yahweh.

[10] Habiru, from which the word Hebrew comes, means “itinerant,” term used in a pejorative way by local populations. They preferred to be called Israelites.

[11] The Tahtaci, a pastoralist people of Turkey, wash a cup 40 times after a Turk has drunk from it.

PHILLIPS D.J. (2001): *Peoples on the move; introducing the nomads of the world*. Pasadena, William Carey Library; in Minkov, 2009, 46

[12] In 2012 in Kenya, fighting between a semi-nomadic tribe of herders and a farming community left 38 people dead. In Burkina Faso, an estimated 600 conflicts occur each year, provoking the death of pastoralists, farmers and government workers, in addition to the destruction of farms and houses, and the injury and death of animals.

[13] The antagonism between nomadic and sedentary populations is at the source of the banishment of pork meat in the Jewish and Muslim religions. Bred and eaten by settled populations, this animal is completely absent from the livestock of nomadic peoples. For them, it clearly became a symbol of impurity.

However, when Christianity is introduced in Rome, the conditions are very different from those existing in the Middle East, since pork was the most consumed meat in the Roman Empire. Besides, the antagonism between nomadic and settled populations having there no grounds for being, Christianity will have no reason whatsoever to banish pork's meat.

[14] There are 322 references to shepherds in the Old Testament, and 73 in the New Testament.

[15] The word "nation" appears 876 times in the Old Testament, the word "people" 1902 times and the word "assembly" 246 times. Respectively, these words appear 120, 154 and 27 times in the New Testament.

[16] For an example of the way Baal and Yahweh compete, see the story of Elijah [1Ro 18:21-40] in which the prophet ends up slaughtering 450 prophets of Baal.

[17] When the Babylonians conquered Judea and Jerusalem, many exiled Israelites blamed Yahweh for their misfortune and renewed with traditional cults, as that of Ishtar.

[18] All quotes that follow are taken from Genesis. See Appendices Genesis 'E' and 'J'.

[19] The inscription "*To Yahweh and his Asherah*" found on a jar in Kuntillet Ajrud, a site in the north of Sinai (Israel) and dating of the eighth century, indicates that Yahweh and El represented the same divinity, since Asherah was El's consort.

[20] For many people around the world, the one who names acquires a certain power on the object or on the person named. The Hittite code of laws, describing a ritual of black magic (section 170), recounts that when someone kills a snake while pronouncing a person's name, the person in question will undergo the same fate as the snake. For several tribes of North America, whoever mentions the name of a deceased can be asked to pay a heavy fine to the deceased's family. In Australia and Tasmania during the nineteenth century CE, if a deceased carried the same name as an animal or a plant, the name had to be abolished and replaced by a new name. In a short period of time, tigers had three times their name changed. As for the Arunta, every individual possesses a secret name that relates this person to its totemic ancestor. Only the eldest know that name. Adding a level of complexity to this organization, each person possesses several ancestors among whom some might not be named. Finally, Genesis clearly marks this relation of dependence on the one who names when Yahweh renames Abram and Sarai [17:5; 17:15], and when Adam names Eve [3:20].

[21] Jean Perrot notes that around 4,000, "*small groups of herders with sheep and goats settle in the region of Beersheva (Israel), until then uninhabited.*" They lived in subterranean dwellings, their communities organized in domestic units or clans around egalitarian values, and though traces of specialization can be clearly noticed, one cannot speak of chiefdoms but of a tribal organization. [Perrot, 2003]

[22] 'J' uses elements of the Mesopotamian creation in which humans are created by the divinities to work in their place.

[23] Remarkably, Adam is at that moment alone [3:23], Eve being probably already considered as subjected to him. Her absence here mirrors the absence of Adam during the scene between Eve and the snake, absence that can yet be explained by the fact that in the hierarchized universe of 'J', Adam is considered as second to the divinity. By letting a "subordinate" carry the responsibility for the events, 'J' can commute the punishment, death, that was destined for Adam.

[24] Establishing what Lacan called "the primacy of the phallus."

[25] Anthropologists often qualify hunters-gatherers living in regions well provided with food as being the idlest people in the world.

[26] Introducing pain during childbirth as punishment implies that this people had mythicized the time before the discovery of fatherhood, the time when spirits were the procreative elements.

[28] Furthermore, in a recent article over his study on the origin of languages, Mark Pagel concluded that human beings "*have this ability to transmit highly complicated and precise information from mouth to ear over tens of thousands of years.*" [Sample, 2013]

CLEMENT Catherine & **KRISTEVA** Julia (1998): *Le féminin et le sacré*. Paris, Stock, 52 (tr. by the author)

The Laws of Manu, IX, 29-30; in Georg Bühler, translator (1886). *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XXV. Oxford, Clarendon Press

[30] During the Song period, neo-Confucianism will bring women's servitude to a culminating point. The bandaging of their feet will be extremely popular: required by the prevailing aesthetic norms, women, not being able to walk, will be confined to their domicile. More recently, the "one-child" policy combined with the depreciation attached to girls will have for effect the death of numerous little girls, creating thirty years later a serious gender imbalance. In 2013, the country counted on average 119 boys for 100 girls, some regions having even reached the alarming proportion of 130 boys for 100 girls. India has a similar problem [see Part Two, endnote 2].

MOOR Nienke, **ULTEE** Wout, **NEED** Ariana (2009): *Analogical Reasoning and the Content of Creation Stories: Quantitative Comparisons of Preindustrial Societies*. Cross-Cultural Research, Volume 43, 2, 91-122

ELIADE Mircea (1976): *Histoire des croyances et des idées religieuses. I. De l'âge de la pierre aux mystères d'Eleusis*. Paris, Payot, 7 (tr. by the author)

[31] In recent times, the tendency has been to broaden the notion of sacrality to a number of things and people. Not only is nature about to be – again – consecrated, but sacralization is also applied to individuals (human rights, women's and children's rights, democratization, etc.), to animals (banishment of bullfights in Spain, political parties taking the defense of animals in The Netherlands, etc.), to the arts, to work, to sex, etc.

Rather than a "transfer of sacrality" as some have defined this process, we rather witness here the rejection of a restrictive definition of the sacred that could up to now be only applied to a divinity. This rejection could prefigure the return to a more holistic vision of the universe in which the realm of the profane will contract, and finally disappear.

[32] Protestantism, a religion of the Book born in recent times within a more illuminated society applies a similar principle of exclusion. In The Netherlands, an official census on religions practiced in 2006 counts 48 various Protestant factions. An identical partitioning is found in Islam where one sees every day different factions killing one another.

[33] In the Epilogue all dates are CE.

CYRULNIK Boris (2001): *Sous le signe du lien. Une histoire naturelle de l'attachement*. Paris, Hachette (1989), coll. Pluriel, 103

Appendices

[1] The belief that semen has to be introduced into young boys is found among many people of Papua New Guinea. The Etoro and Kaluli, for example, "inseminate" boys when they are 10 years old until they carry a beard. In the same way, the Onobasulu compare a non-inseminated boy to a sowed garden that could not be cultivated. The Baruya end their initiation by ingesting semen. The coastal tribes think that little girls at the age of 8 have to have sexual relationships with adult males in order to store semen that will serve to fortify the semen of their future spouse. According to Bruce Knauft, girls agree gladly to this ritual, convinced that it is beneficial to their fertility.

Although these practices provoked reactions of horror in the 'civilized' world, the psycho-historian Lloyd DeMause came to the following conclusion: "*Of the several hundred anthropologists whose work I have researched, I found none who said pederasty was detrimental, agreeing instead with the New Guinea natives that it was both desired by and beneficial to the victims.*" [DeMause, 2002]

[2] Numboolyu has breasts, and a penis so small that he does not know what to do with it. By incising his foreskin, Chenchi allows the penis to become beautiful and strong. As for Numboolyu, he makes on Chenchi a vertical incision that becomes a vagina.

BADINTER Elisabeth (1992): *XY. De l'identité masculine*. Paris, Odile Jacob, 111-112

[3] It is difficult for us to imagine the ties that unite men of this community, men that generation after generation have gone through such rituals. The hostile, and sometimes extremely hostile environment in which these tribes live, as well as the continuous state of war they are in, might make such fusion necessary for their survival.

BADINTER Elisabeth (1992): *Op. cit.*, 114-116

[4] A clear difference exists between the cyclical vision of life and death, in which death is part of the same process as life, all two being complementary and indispensable to each other, and the dualist approach where life and death are in distinct opposition, one being the antithesis of the other, as it has been introduced by the Greek philosophers during the Axial Age.

FRAZER James G. (1922): *The Golden Bough. A study of magic and religion*. The Gutenberg Project. Release Date: January, 2003 [EBook #3623]

[5] Until the 18th century in England, it was the custom to close the room of the deceased.

HERTZ Robert (1928): *Sociologie religieuse et folklore*. Recueil de textes publiés entre 1907 et 1917. Première édition. Paris, Les Presses universitaires de France (1970), 2e édition, 208 pp. Collection: Bibliothèque de sociologie contemporaine. Chicoutimi, Édition complétée (2003), 53 (tr. by the author)

[6] In Çayönü (Turkey), the famous 'skull building' contained more than 70 skulls and 400 bodies.

[7] Edward Tylor [1920] mentions innumerable legends relating to the walling up of living beings during the construction of buildings. They might find their source in these customs of the Neolithic.

[8] In Çatalhöyük (Turkey), several skulls of children were found with cervical vertebrae still attached, indicating a primary burial.

[9] The team of Nigel Goring-Morris who conducted excavations at this site found several carcasses of aurochs, complete but headless, as well as a human body whose bones had been rearranged in order to represent an animal. The fact that decapitation was not only reserved for humans but could also be applied to animals makes it possible to establish a parallel between death and hunting. If these animals had caused the death of the hunter, their decapitation and burial might offer a way to restore the harmony between the two entities, a quest symbolized by the animal representation given to the man's remains. [See also Appendix Lang, *Unity of the animate and inanimate world*]

CHENEVIÈRE Alain (1986): *Le dernier matin du monde*. Paris, Éditions Hologramme, 108 (tr. by the author)

LEVY-BRUHL Lucien (1935): *La Mythologie Primitive. Le monde mythique des Australiens et des Papous*. Edition électronique réalisée Jean-Marie Tremblay, Chicoutimi (2002), 33 (tr. by the author)

CLEMENT Catherine & **KRISTEVA** Julia (1998): *Le féminin et le sacré*. Paris, Stock, 49 (tr. by the author)

The Laws of Manu, I, 12-13; in Bühler, Georg Bühler, translator (1886). *The Sacred Books of the East*, vol. XXV. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 6

DOBRIZHOFFER Martin (1822): *An Account of the Abipones, an Equestrian People of Paraguay*. London, Murray

[10] [11] Sorcerers

LANG Andrew (1887): *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*. London, Longmans, Green and Co

[12] In French in the original English text. "The savages are convinced that not only men and other animals, but also all other things are alive" and "They hold fish and also deer as reasonable." (tr. by the author)

SPENCER Baldwin (1914): *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*. London, Macmillan

[14] Aboriginal girl or woman

[15] When a community is distributed along two parental lines, these are called moieties (from the French 'moitié').

[16] The author uses here the feminine form to refer to this ancestor.

TYLOR Edward B. (1920): *Primitive Culture. Researches Into The Development Of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, And Custom*. London, John Murray

FLANNERY Kent V. (1972): *The Cultural Evolution of Civilizations*. *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, Vol. 3, 399-426

LEE Gary (1979): *Marital Structure and Economic Systems*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 701-713

[Hammurabi's Code of Laws](http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/hammurabi.htm) Translated by L.W. King (1910). University of Evansville.
<http://eawc.evansville.edu/anthology/hammurabi.htm>

[17] Money was weighted. The unit was the shekel. Forty shekel was a mina.

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