PETER LANG

Matriarchal Societies

STUDIES ON INDIGENOUS CULTURES ACROSS THE GLOBE

HEIDE GOETTNER-ABENDROTH

This book presents the results of Heide Goettner-Abendroth's pioneering research in the field of modern matriarchal studies, based on a new definition of "matriarchy" as true gender-egalitarian societies. Accordingly, matriarchal societies should not be regarded as mirror images of patriarchal ones, as they have never needed patriarchy's hierarchical structures of domination. On the contrary, matriarchal patterns are socially egalitarian, economically balanced, and politically based on consensus decisions. They have been created by women and are founded on maternal values. This new perspective on matriarchal societies is developed step by step by the analysis of extant indigenous cultures in Asia, Africa, and the Americas.

"For decades, Heide Goettner-Abendroth has been a serious scholar of the deep history and ongoing traditions of matriarchy in Europe. Her extensive research has taken her through strong historical matriarchies on several continents, drawing together the research of the most modern international scholars on matriarchy. Her book now brings to undeniable light the matriarchal alternatives available to humanity. Goettner-Abendroth should be on the reading list of every women's studies program."—*Barbara Alice Mann, Ohio Bear Clan Seneca, Assistant Professor in the Honors College of the University of Toledo, and Co-Director of the Native American Alliance of Ohio*

"If in the millenium of women, future generations look back to find the origin of their peaceful societies, they will find that the work of Heide Goettner-Abendroth opened the way. Modern matriarchal studies break through patriarchal capitalist ideology and provide the new/old models for viable ways of life of which our present globalizing market is only a destructive abberation."—*Genevieve Vaughan, Author of* For-Giving: A Feminist Criticism of Exchange *and* Women and the Gift Economy: A Radically Different Worldview Is Possible, *and Founder of International Feminists for a Gift Economy*

Heide Goettner-Abendroth is a German philosopher and researcher of culture and society who is focused on matriarchal studies. She taught at the University of Munich and was visiting professor at the University of Montreal, Canada and the University of Innsbruck, Austria. She organized and guided two World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies in 2003 and 2005. She was nomitnated as one of the "1000 Women for the Nobel Peace Prize" in 2005.

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR Matriarchal Societies

"With the publication of this important book, Heide Goettner-Abendroth's brilliant critical conceptualization of the deep structures shared by matriarchal societies around the world becomes fully available in English. Her theory has developed, not abstractly but inductively, from the analytical investigation of numerous societies by non-indigenous and indigenous researchers. It provides the basis for a full-fledged interdisciplinary and cross-cultural field of matriarchal studies where previously only isolated studies were possible.

Matriarchal studies is a deeply political and liberatory field grounded in an understanding that the destructive patriarchal power structures pervasive today are a historically recent development. Scholars of matriarchy, some of whom are members of matriarchal societies, are uncovering and reclaiming cultures created mainly by women. Their research offers support for indigenous peoples' struggles on every continent for land and cultural rights and brings hope to us all that we can build a better world."—*Angela Miles, Professor of Adult Education, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, Canada*

"Heide Goettner-Abendroth has devoted her life to the study of matriarchal societies and the development of modern matriarchal studies. Her monumental work is presented in this book. As a Western feminist and peace activist this knowledge has transformed almost every facet of my thinking, theorizing, and activism as well as my daily life. My work on, motherhood, sexuality, racism, and above all peace and peace building has been significantly altered by Goettner-Abendroth's scholarship. I believe her work offers Western feminists and other progressive scholars as well as social change activists a new, innovative vision of an alternative society—a society of peace and balance, insightful ways to heal the many harms Western civilization brought about, and groundbreaking passages of doing politics, peace building, and conflict resolution." —*Erella Shadmi, Isha L'Isha feminist center, Israel, and former Head of Women's Studies Program, Beit Berl College, Israel*

"In an ideal world this ground-breaking study would already be required reading in most disciplines from women's and native studies to anthropology and, most importantly, economics, political science, and religious studies. I predict, however, that in this era of urgent survival studies following the moral, financial, ecological, and climate crises, Heide Goettner-Abendroth's vital findings regarding past and present matriarchal gift economies and societies will finally be embraced. The English translation of this part of Dr. Goettner-Abendroth's life work has been long overdue; the work—her magnum opus—is likely to become a classic among all those scholars who have the courage and ethics needed to resist the ethno- and androcentric legacy of white patriarchal Western science. No 'paradigm shift' parallels that which replaces the master discourses that have wreaked havoc on women, non-human species and other colonized objects of capitalist patriarchy. Goettner-Abendroth brings us the factual knowledge that allows us to adopt a radically alternative worldview, beyond establishment claims that matriarchies are reversals of patriarchies or never existed. This book establishes that academic colonialism not only blocks the truth, academic freedom and sustainability, but must now be stopped in the name of the planet's

survival."—*Kaarina Kailo, Assistant Professor (Docent), Oulu University, Finland, and former Professor of Women's Studies and Director of Simone de Beauvoir Institute, Canada*

"Heide Goettner-Abendroth is one of the most insightful and important social thinkers of our time. With this long-awaited translation of her German work on matriarchy, she brings her penetrating understanding and synthetic analysis of 'mother-centered' and 'mother-origin' societies to the entire English-speaking world. There is no more articulate theorist about the true nature of such societies, no more thorough, respectful, and appreciative cataloguer of them. Dispelling stereotypes and misunderstandings about matriarchy, she unveils the riches of an 'alternative' social structure beneficial to humanity that has been with us for millennia and continues to function in many pockets around the globe. Hers is a work of tremendous scholarly activism. By showing us that peaceful ecological living based on mothering values is possible, and that warfare and economic imbalance are not natural and 'given' human conditions, her vision offers great hope for the future."—*Marguerite Rigoglioso, Dominican University and the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, California, and Author of* The Cult of Divine Birth in Ancient Greece *and* Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity

"Heide Goettner-Abendroth is one of the very few scholars who has delved into the wider meaning of the word 'matriarchy' as it is meant to be understood and not as a mirror-image of patriarchy. She has been unwavering in her commitment to enquire deeper into the social arrangements of matriarchal societies across the globe. This enquiry is critical in the twenty-first century if we have to reverse the rapid pace at which world economic, political, and financial systems, based largely on the patriarchal model, are collapsing one by one. This scholarship is one of a kind!

Seeing the world through the eyes of matriarchy requires adjusting the mind's lenses and discarding past prejudices. Goettner-Abendroth has used all the scientific tools for intellectual and social enquiry even as she argues cogently about how matriarchies were relegated to a position of insignificance and how this egalitarian social system needs to reclaim itself from the hands of those who use patriarchy to promote an unsustainable global system."—*Patricia Mukhim, Journalist and Editor of* The Shillong Times, *Shillong, India, and Director of the Indigenous Women's Resource Center at Shillong, Meghalaya, India*

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PETER LANG
New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
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Heide Goettner-Abendroth

Matriarchal Societies

Studies on Indigenous Cultures Across the Globe

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This book is dedicated primarily to the matriarchal peoples from whom I was privileged to learn. Without their wisdom, it could not have been accomplished.

It is also dedicated to all the matriarchal peoples that I have not named here; there are many more of them.

And it is dedicated to all the peoples who still practice certain matriarchal ways—of this there are innumerable examples throughout the world.

May all of them come to light in the course of future Matriarchal Studies!

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A Word on Matriarchy

The surge of popular and scholarly interest in non-patriarchal social patterns has inspired the formation of various new terms for them. Why insist on the sometimes problematic designation, "matriarchy"?

Reclaiming this term means to reclaim knowledge of societies that have been socially, economically, politically and culturally created by women. In the course of these cultures' long histories, women and men have participated equally to sustain them and pass them on to future generations. For the moment, let this brief description serve as a guide. This book has been written with the aim of developing a long-term definition that I hope will be useful for navigating a sea of misunderstandings about the term "matriarchy" itself, and the cultures it describes.

Matriarchies are true gender-egalitarian societies; this applies to the social contribution of both sexes—and even though women are at the center, this principle governs the social functioning and freedom of both sexes. Matriarchal societies should emphatically not be regarded as mirror images of patriarchal ones—with dominating women instead of patriarchy's dominating men—as they have never needed patriarchy's hierarchical structures. Patriarchal domination, where a minority emerges from wars of conquest and takes over a whole culture, depends for its power on structures of enforcement, private ownership, colonial rule, and religious conversion. Such patriarchal power structures are a historically recent development,

not appearing until about 4000–3000 B.C.E. (and in many parts of the world even later) and increasing in strength throughout the further spread of patriarchy.

In light of this misunderstanding about the word "matriarchy," its linguistic background needs to be looked at more carefully. We can challenge the current male-biased idea that matriarchy means "rule of women" or "domination by the mothers," as these definitions are based on the assumption that matriarchy is parallel to patriarchy, except that a different gender is in charge. Because the words sound parallel, this fueled the notion that the social patterns must be parallel.

In fact, the Greek word "arché" means not only "domination," but also "beginning"—the earlier sense of the word. The two meanings are distinct, and cannot be conflated. They are also clearly delineated in English: you would not translate "archetype" as "dominator-type," nor would you understand "archaeology" to be "the teaching of domination." People who believe in the myth of universal patriarchy present this relatively recent form of society as if it had existed all over the world since the beginning of human history. Hundreds of fictitious stories of this sort have been propagated by patriarchally-oriented theorists. First of all, they are unable to see matriarchy through any other lens except the dominator pattern. Based on this misunderstanding, they search high and low for evidence of a matriarchy based on domination; when they find no evidence of any culture that conforms to their patriarchally-oriented hypothesis of domination by women, they proceed to assert that matriarchies do not now and never have existed. They invent a phantom culture, and then go looking for an example of it; then, because they cannot find any, they smugly proclaim that it was just a phantom. This circular reasoning is not only illogical, it is a shameful waste of science.

Based on the older meaning of "arché," matriarchy means "the mothers from the beginning." This refers both to the biological fact that through giving birth, mothers engender the beginning of life, and to the cultural fact that they also created the beginnings of culture itself. Patriarchy could either be translated as "domination by the fathers," or "the fathers from the beginning." This claim leads to domination by the fathers, because—lacking any natural right to claim a role in "beginning"—they have been obliged, since the start of patriarchy, to insist on that role, and then to enforce it through domination. Contrary to this, by virtue of giving birth to the group, to the next generation, and therefore to society, mothers clearly *are* the beginning; in matriarchy they have no need to enforce it by domination.

General Introduction: Philosophy and Methodology of Modern Matriarchal Studies

This chapter addresses the foundation and development of modern Matriarchal Studies. This is not just another socio-cultural science, but a new, distinct field that transgresses existing disciplinary boundaries. After having outlined a theoretical framework for modern Matriarchal Studies, I further developed its philosophy and methodology, always in relationship with my practice-oriented research into matriarchal societies. This is a reciprocal process, which means that the new insights generated by my practice-oriented research could have only emerged in light of the theory, but without the research the theory would have remained sterile and empty.

This book constitutes an important element in this process of developing a theory of matriarchal societies. Step by step, it places examples derived from my practice-oriented research within the programmatic framework provided by the philosophy and methodology of modern Matriarchal Studies. Of course, this book could only have been achieved in conjunction with this philosophy, and cannot be fully understood outside of it. So this introduction will present the philosophy and methodology of modern Matriarchal Studies.

Later on I will spell out the precise relationships between theoretical points and the way they are corroborated and implemented by the research presented in this book. This process will also shed light on what modern Matriarchal Studies are, and what they encompass.

My intellectual-spiritual journey with modern Matriarchal Studies

What brought me into a field—some might say a minefield—of which the central concept is so maligned and misunderstood? While studying both traditional and modern philosophy, and during the writing of my dissertation in the field of Philosophy of Science, I kept coming up against the question of what, if anything, all this had to do with me—as a woman. Every philosophical system always referred to "man," and though this term supposedly included women, it was clear that, in fact, only the male half of humanity was being addressed: man was the norm, the standard human being. The female half of humanity did not exist in these philosophical systems; "human being" and "man" were interchangeable in their European/western worldview and language. I felt like an alien, and suffered from a creeping loss of my identity as a woman. Setting out to discover a world, and a way of thinking, that included me as a woman, I was surprised to find it in the historical epoch that preceded European Greek and Roman civilization—an epoch that had not been influenced by patriarchy. This was the beginning of my research on matriarchal societies. I started with my own cultural background and investigated the social and mythological patterns of pre-patriarchal European, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern cultures. Combining this unofficial investigation with the obligatory official courses of study helped me to survive mentally and spiritually in the repressive institution of the university.

After ten years teaching modern philosophy at the university, I stood at a crossroads: should I continue to be a servant of patriarchal philosophy? Or should I dedicate myself completely to Matriarchal Studies—such a politically and socially relevant field, yet so ignored by the university? The way forward became clear through my active participation in the beginnings of the modern women's movement and Women's Studies which provided a platform where the new research on matriarchy could be seen and heard in public. At that point I turned away from a university career, left that institution and founded the independent "International Academy HAGIA for Modern Matriarchal Studies." Ever since, I have taught and researched, as an independent scholar, in the context of feminism and other alternative movements. For me, this means having the chance to be as free as possible from the internalized patriarchal ideology that European/western philosophy and socio-cultural sciences indoctrinate their students and everybody else with. Of course, since then I have repeatedly been discriminated against and publicly denounced by the scientific establishment and by the general public.[1]

From the start, development of modern Matriarchal Studies has required a radically critical analysis of patriarchy, since women are always aliens in the patriar-

chal system, always invisible, unheard; they are always "the other." Though generally called "sexism," this is actually *internal colonialism*, i.e., colonialism directed inside the society itself; in patriarchies this means exploitation of women in general, as well as most of the men—though the exploitation of women and men is different in many respects.[2]

Seeking a women-based worldview and culture in pre-patriarchal Europe, I soon came up against an insurmountable barrier to my study: early matriarchal cultures in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Middle East have long since been destroyed. Only fragments remain, distorted by thick layers of historically recent interpretation; these remnants are not enough to suggest the full picture of matriarchal societies. They could not be of further help to my investigation of how people in matriarchal societies live, act, celebrate and do politics. Not wishing to risk the substitution of fantasy for science, I had to leave the area of Europe.

To decide where to search next, I got acquainted with anthropological research on this topic. However, I encountered the same prejudice against matriarchal cultures, the same fragmentation and distortion in anthropological research as I had found in historical research. I knew their sources all too well—that is, the European/western philosophical tradition, and this led me to broaden my criticism of patriarchal ideology. This was now aimed against *external colonialism,* i.e., colonialism directed outside of society, this exploitative combination of imperialism, racism and sexism that made indigenous peoples on every continent into "the others"—unseen and unheard. This alienation was even worse for matriarchal peoples. Just as the female half of humanity does not exist in patriarchal western philosophy, matriarchally organized societies and cultures also do not exist in that ideology; they never have. Nevertheless, thanks to my method of criticism of patriarchal ideology—which I had developed in the meantime—I found abundant evidence for the existence of matriarchal societies. Little by little, a completely different perspective of society and history came to light: the *matriarchy paradigm.*

The matriarchy paradigm developed out of the modern women's movement, ut goes beyond all the various western feminisms that tend to remain captive to the European/western way of thinking. It is not confined to the situation of women, and does not foster an essentialist antagonism between women-in-general and men-in-general. From the viewpoint of the matriarchy paradigm, such ahistorical generalizations are counterproductive; they overlook the broad diversity of societies and historical contexts in which gender questions are rooted. In contrast, modern Matriarchal Studies address the overall structure of the society of women and men, old and young, human and non-human nature. And they are not confined to the western world (as mainstream feminism often is), but rather are engaged with

non-patriarchal societies on every continent. The matriarchy paradigm also goes beyond currently fashionable Gender Studies, which are also stuck in the western worldview, and take account neither of history nor of indigenous peoples on other continents, despite some token studies or perspectives.[3]

The political relevance of modern Matriarchal Studies

Using critical analysis and cross-cultural studies, I gradually generated a more complete structural outline of matriarchal societies. My intellectual-spiritual journey led me to recognize my true teachers: the living matriarchal societies and cultures on several continents. I drew not only on western sources (which must be read in light of the criticism of patriarchal ideology), but also undertook a research trip to the matriarchal Mosuo in Southwest China. This visit, undertaken with a team of assistants, was in response to an invitation from the Mosuo. (I would never have wanted to show up uninvited, adding my own concerns to the many political problems already faced by indigenous peoples there.) The Mosuo specifically asked me to write about them, as they welcome every serious, open minded publication as a building block in their struggle for the recognition of their culture in present day China.[4] The encounter with the Mosuo—and with other representatives of matriarchal cultures on other trips, in the western world as well—allowed my understanding to grow, and profoundly changed the way I think. Little by little, my new thinking also changed my life.

At this time I was also becoming increasingly aware of how little I, as an outsider, *could* know about their cultures. This prevented me from intending that my results should speak for indigenous peoples; nor would I ever pretend that my general analysis of the deep structure of matriarchal society could elucidate any one of these societies completely, or that it could be applied to every indigenous society. This task would take years of field work all over the world, and can best be done by indigenous researchers into their own societies. Fortunately, today more and more indigenous researchers are investigating their own societies, and levelling justified criticism of the fragmented and degrading way colonial and patriarchal science deals with their cultures. And they are making use of their knowledge to serve their struggle for self-determination, and for the promotion and protection of their rights as peoples.[5]

The work I want to do here is to construct a theoretical framework to help us recognize a matriarchal society when we meet one, and to be able to describe it adequately. Without the light of a theory we would remain blind, much as patriarchal socio-cultural science has been blind up till today in this respect. This special

form of society has been described as "matrilineal," "matrifocal," "matristic," or "gylanic." Instead of elaborating a clear definition of "matriarchal" (which is completely missing in the research on this topic, producing a lot of confusion), scholars tried to find substitute concepts—but these are rather weak, inadequate and arbitrary. These surrogate concepts do list certain elements present in this form of society, but they lack inner cohesion. Against this, I have set myself the task of discovering the deep structure of this form of society, and I am therefore obliged to understand the fundamentals of indigenous societies of this type. But it is not necessary—or possible, as a European—to know everything about those cultures, or to describe them completely.

This work is also politically relevant, intersecting with the political intentions of several alternative movements for self-determination. The *intersection of modern Matriarchal Studies with western feminism* is important in terms of its critique of patriarchy's internal colonization of women, in which women are "the other"—simply objects. Feminism, on the other hand, sees women as acting subjects in society and history, and calls for their self-determination—a stand crucial to modern Matriarchal Studies.

But in addition to a western patriarchy of European/North American-style, there is also an eastern patriarchy exemplified by Islamic and Chinese cultures, as well as a southern patriarchy exemplified by cultures in India and Africa—and so on, worldwide. The range of forms taken by patriarchally-organized societies has led to the great diversity among international feminist struggles for women's self-determination. But as various as the struggles may be, there are similar principles discernible in the ways women are being oppressed by patriarchal elites the world over. This similarity becomes more pronounced when dominant local elites are taken over or influenced—as they have been in recent history—by western, global patriarchy. Following from these circumstances, there are numerous *intersections between modern Matriarchal Studies and other, non-western forms of feminism* that exist on every continent—for modern Matriarchal Studies address not just the patriarchalization process of Europe, but of all other continents as well.

Investigating how these patriarchalization processes happened in other continents is a task that would best be undertaken by indigenous and non-indigenous researchers analyzing the histories of their own patriarchalized societies. The claims I make regarding the histories of peoples on other continents are meant simply to indicate that modern Matriarchal Studies also offers a framework for new, deep analysis of history. In my historical challenges I take the oral tradition (as much as I know about it) of a given people as seriously as I do written historical sources and archaeological evidence.

Today in western patriarchy it is not only women who are taking up the struggle against increasing violence and militarization of European and US American society, but many men as well. In repressive, exploitative patriarchal structures, women and children are affected, but so are most men—albeit in different ways. This is also true in the world's other patriarchies, in the east and in the south. In many international movements on every continent, men are also fighting for fundamental change and for a better society—although their struggles differ vastly from one another.

Insofar as they recognize that their fight is not just against colonialist and capitalist structures, but also against old or recent forms of patriarchy, there are also significant *intersections between men's alternative movements and modern Matriarchal Studies*. But if men, engaged in their alternative struggles, don't recognize this, they will leave out an important aspect of freedom, or will downgrade it to negligible triviality; then their struggle will fall apart because of gender questions—which has often occurred. On the other hand, if colonialism, wherever it is found, would be recognized as colonial patriarchy, and capitalism as capitalist patriarchy, and capitalist globalization as globalized patriarchy, then their fight would be socially and historically much more significant. Then it would take its place alongside feminist struggles for self-determination. Modern Matriarchal Studies would then be seen for what it is: a critical, liberating form of socio-cultural research by women—not only for women, but for all people.

Modern Matriarchal Studies can also be important for indigenous peoples' struggles for self-determination and rights to lands and cultural identity. Indigenous societies on every continent have been oppressed by the external colonialism of various dominant patriarchal elites, and in some cases are in danger of extinction. They struggle against colonialism's ongoing legacy; the success of their fight for self-determination also depends on recognizing that colonialism is a part of patriarchy. When it comes to the last extant matriarchal cultures, colonialism is revealed to be crudely allied with sexism, placing a double burden on these cultures. Just as in sexist patriarchies, women don't really exist, neither do matriarchal societies—such a thing can't possibly exist! Patriarchal colonisation of indigenous peoples thus has ignored and made invisible the significance of indigenous women in general; this had, and still has, especially disastrous effects in the case of indigenous matriarchal societies. In the case of indigenous societies with patriarchal patterns, it would therefore be necessary to develop a criticism not only of colonial sexism directed at it from the outside, but also a criticism that recognizes and suggests solutions to its own internal sexism.[6]

The crisis is even more acute for indigenous, matriarchally organized peoples. They often regard their society as a fabric woven from their own specific traditions, with its own local name. As these cultures are threatened with disappearance in our time, it could benefit them to develop an awareness of the matriarchal patterns that make them so extraordinary, and that connect them to matriarchal cultures worldwide, past and present—they have great significance for today's patriarchal world.

This is where *indigenous researchers' studies* on their own societies are of utmost importance; their investigations *intersect significantly with modern Matriarchal Studies*. Understanding the deep structure of matriarchal societies could illuminate the fact that this extraordinary form of society still exists on every continent, and has a long and worldwide history—much longer than the history of the patriarchal form of society. Far from existing only as isolated, "exotic," special cases, this form of society was once the general rule. Recognizing this history would shed new light on the traditions of the diverse matriarchal societies, which then could be seen as more analogous to each other than they previously appeared to be. This insight could strengthen them in their awareness of cultural identity and significance, as well as in their efforts to build worldwide networks.

These multiple intersections demonstrate the various ways that modern Matriarchal Studies can be used. They form a critical and liberating research process with a respectful, healing and educational potential. And they are in a position to empower feminist women and alternative men in western societies, as well as indigenous peoples on every continent, to engage fully in effective political alliances against local and global patriarchal domination.

Nothing is so practical as a good theory.

Modern Matriarchal Studies began to appear during the past few decades, and are now advancing rapidly. As liberation-oriented research, they emphasize not just results, but also process. What follows is an attempt to give a sense of this process, along with the theoretical concepts that emerge from it. Clearly formulated, consistent theories are highly efficient intellectual tools, which can be used by all interested researchers. Nothing is so practical as a good theory!

My long years of preparatory work yielded a strong foundation for modern Matriarchal Studies, based on scientific principles that allow them to develop as a new socio-cultural science. This foundation consists of:

- first, the formulation of an increasingly precise definition of "matriarchy," one that outlines the deep structure of this form of society;

- second, the development of a methodology capable of adequately presenting the area under investigation, in this case, matriarchal societies;
- third, the development of a theoretical framework that encompasses the vast historical and geographic extent of matriarchal social forms.

My first approach to modern Matriarchal Studies appeared in 1978, when I sketched an outline of a theoretical framework and a methodology for researching matriarchies; this included the criticism of patriarchal ideology as an important method.[7] From the very beginning of my work, I recognized that the term "matriarchy" had to be re-defined, because there was no clarity about this concept. I intentionally didn't choose a surrogate term. Philosophical and scientific re-definitions generally take common terms and re-define them. After that, scholars can work with those terms, yet remain in contact with people's everyday speech. For example, the term "sustainable": in everyday language it meant something that could keep going, endure. Now the socio-cultural science of ecology has elaborated it as a special term that covers many detailed conditions, taking into account a much greater worldview than it had before. In the case of the term "matriarchy," I thought this re-definition would be a great advantage; especially because for women, reclaiming this term means to reclaim the knowledge about cultures that have been mainly created by women. Thus, at that early time, I also formulated a first, simplified definition of matriarchy, based on the social, political, economic and cultural patterns of the matriarchal form of society, and not just on one or another individual example.

In my first book on this subject, *Die Göttin und ihr Heros* (1980) I elaborated matriarchal patterns at the cultural level.[8] Here I developed a comparative structural method of studying myths, which shed light on the distinct structure of matriarchal mythology and on the way it was transformed through various phases of patriarchalization. By doing this, I placed the myths back in their different phases of cultural historical context; this serves to give the structural method substance.

Next, in my multi-volume work on matriarchy (*Das Matriarchat*, 1988, 1991, 2000), I began to elaborate upon the structural patterns of matriarchal societies at the social, political and economic levels, extending them to the level of culture.[9] Since it was not possible to do this solely through analysis of the myths, I turned to anthropology and found these patterns in existing matriarchal societies worldwide.

The detailed structures I have discerned at all levels of the matriarchal form of society yields an explicit, systematic definition of "matriarchy." Its advantage is that it is not abstractly constructed and projected back into this field of research, but rather is inductively developed from analytical investigation of these societies. I call

it a "structural definition," because it conveys the deep structure of the matriarchal form of society.

In brief, this structural definition says that matriarchal societies:

- at the economic level are societies creating a balanced economy, in which women distribute goods, always seeking economic mutuality; such an economy has characteristics in common with a "gift economy."[10] Therefore I defined them as *societies of economic mutuality, based on the circulation of gifts.*
- at the social level are societies based on matrilinear kinship, whose characteristics are matrilinearity and matrilocality within the framework of gender equality. Therefore I defined them as *non-hierarchical, horizontal societies of matrilineal kinship.*
- at the political level are societies based on consensus. The clan house is the basis of decision making, both locally and regionally, and is outwardly represented by an (often) male delegate; the politics of strict consensus processes give rise not only to gender equality, but to equality in the entire society. Therefore, I defined them as *egalitarian societies of consensus.*
- at the spiritual and cultural level these societies are based on an all-permeating spiritual attitude that regards the whole world as divine, originating in the Feminine Divine; this engenders a sacred culture. Therefore, I defined them as *sacred societies and cultures of the Feminine Divine.*

About the logic of defining

This systematic way of defining matriarchal society—that is, the two-step process using a basic and a structural definition—has never before been developed. Both these steps build upon each other, but they don't necessarily have to be used together.[11]

First, the basic definition:

A basic definition is at the core of any scientific theory; it delineates what the theory is actually investigating—in this case, matriarchy. For it to be a definition based on scientific principles, it must set forth the *necessary and sufficient conditions* of its subject. *Sufficient* conditions are understood to include characteristics that are more or less coincidental, and do not always need to be met. But *necessary* conditions must always be met, and their scope must be neither too narrow nor too broad. If it is too narrow, the theory cannot encompass everything that properly

belongs to it; if too broad, the theory will include more than it can really clarify, and becomes vague. In any case, adequate formulation of the *necessary* conditions must be provided by the theorists—otherwise, it is impossible to know exactly what is being investigated or discussed.

The necessary conditions of the definition of "matriarchy" are that mothers are at the center of society, as manifested by matrilinearity and by mothers' (or women's) power of economic distribution, both in the context of gender equality. If these conditions are fulfilled in an actual society, we can call it a "matriarchy." Matrilinearity is essential because it not only structures the social relationships of the entire society, but also ensures these relationships via female inheritance and the political decision-making processes that follow from matrilinearity. The effects of matriliny put women at the center of the society. And a matrilineal genealogy—extending back through the female lineage to the first ancestress of the people—puts women at the spiritual center as well. Gender equality is also essential, as it ensures that in spite of women's position at the center, matriarchal societies are not gender hierarchies: they foster a view of both sexes as equally valuable. Matriarchal societies are thus not mirror images of patriarchy. But matrilinearity and equality of the genders are still not enough to describe a matriarchy: in addition, the power of economic distribution must be held by women. This is essential because it is the basis of the matriarchal economy of mutuality. This kind of economy would not occur if the economy were in the hands of the men and the chiefs who accumulate goods, even if the society were matrilineal. Such societies do exist, but they are just matrilineal, not matriarchal.

It makes sense to include sufficient conditions in the definition as well, as their variability demonstrates the diversity of actual matriarchal societies. For example, matrilocality, or residence in the mother's house, would be a sufficient condition; that is, matrilocality *can* be present, but doesn't have to be. Actual matriarchies have various residence customs; these don't affect their matriarchal character.

A well elaborated, basic definition is a very practical, intellectual tool for any researcher who cares to work with it. It took a long time to develop: I did not just project it onto this material. Rather, it emerged, piece by piece, through long years of systematic research. And it is meant to keep developing: the necessary conditions of the definition must continually be tested as to whether they are too narrow or too broad; and the sufficient conditions of the definition can be extended. This process of testing, extending, refining a definition—and a theory based on this definition—is an ongoing project, in which many researchers can participate.

Secondly, the structural definition:

Having defined matriarchy, I went a step further and formulated a structural

definition. Such a structural definition, while developed step by step out of the research results, must not be misunderstood as formulating an ideal type. Postulating an ideal type comes close to thinking in categories as closed systems; the abstraction is formulated *prior* to solid research. This is an antiquated way of proceeding that characterizes traditional philosophy. In modern Philosophy of Science, a structural definition deals with the area of investigation—here, the matriarchal form of society—in a different way: it starts after research and formulates the intrinsic interrelations that connect all the society's parts and make it a consistent whole. It is precisely these integrated, internal interconnections that constitute the *deep structure* of the area of investigation, here, the matriarchal form of society. For example, matrilocality, even though it is only a sufficient condition, nevertheless belongs to the inner logic, or deep structure, of a matriarchal society. Thus it is part of the structural definition. This kind of definition is not a closed system, but presents an open structure which can be elaborated during the ongoing process of research.

Methodologically it is important to note that matriarchal societies of today have gone through many changes. After a long history of struggling to defend their ancestral cultures, and now threatened by increasing pressure from their patriarchal surroundings, they have changed in many aspects. This is why it is so crucial to consult the histories of their cultures in order to obtain a more adequate understanding of their matriarchal character. Here a structural definition can be used in a carefully re-constructive process, which has several very effective scientific functions. First of all, matriarchal societies will be better understood on their own terms, according to their own patterns and values, rather than being looked at through the lens of theories that originate in the patriarchal worldview; this will result in more adequate descriptions of this form of society. In cases of uncertainty, they should generally be assumed to be matriarchal, and their patterns interpreted in a positive way. Secondly, a structural definition makes it possible to see the great diversity among individual matriarchal societies, and to describe it in a very distinctive way. Thirdly, the process of patriarchal deformation and distortion of matriarchal societies throughout long epochs of history can be recognized. All this can only be seen by practical application of this intellectual tool.

But again, it would be a grave error to confuse a structural definition with an abstract ideal type, or with irrefutable categories, which form a closed system, set in stone. Such a position would be completely obsolete today. Irrefutable categories and closed systems belong to traditional, patriarchally influenced philosophy and its imperialistic truth claims, but not to modern Philosophy of Science nor to modern Matriarchal Studies. This concerns practicality: it is about developing a refined,

appropriate tool for the scientific investigation of a highly complex area of study. This successive method of proceeding will be demonstrated in this book, in which a structural definition will be developed and—by my own research on specific societies—continually expanded. As this new socio-cultural science unfolds, the further development of the given structural definition becomes an open, creative process, one that has room for the participation of many researchers. The touchstone for the theory of matriarchy is the precise, sensitive and respectful understanding and description of the diversity of actual matriarchal societies, in the past and present. If it achieves this, it will have a strong and far reaching explanatory power.

Interdisciplinarity and the criticism of patriarchal ideology

In addition to the lack of an explicit and systematic definition, there was no dedicated methodology of the kind required by modern Matriarchal Studies until I approached it in 1978.[12] From the beginning, I showed that an appropriate methodology would have to be founded upon the dual pillars of interdisciplinarity and a radical criticism of patriarchal ideology.

When it comes to getting a grip on an entire form of society and its history, *interdisciplinarity* is absolutely required. The separation inherent in traditional disciplines results in a fragmentation of knowledge that makes broader interconnections invisible. Interdisciplinarity sheds light on those obscured interrelations. Instead of the traditional focus on specialization, the emphasis is on recognizing and integrating the societal and historical connections. The first chapter of this book, dealing with the history of research on matriarchy, clearly demonstrates how diverse branches of study must be brought to bear, in order to deal adequately with this subject. The interdisciplinarity required here encompasses nothing less than the entire spectrum of social sciences and the humanities, including cultural studies; it can also engage various branches of the natural sciences.

To arrive at conclusions based on scientific principles, it is important to avoid the widespread tendency to eclecticism, which is just another form of fragmentation. It is therefore necessary to systematically bring each relevant branch of research one by one into relationship with the others. In this way, a systematic arrangement will emerge, but it will be different for each theoretical focus, as well as for the individual studies in a given theoretical context. In each case, the disciplines involved must be explicitly identified and the reasons be given for choosing each arrangement.

The criticism of patriarchal ideology also needs a method to keep it from getting caught up itself in an obfuscating ideology. In my first sketch, I outlined such a method, and by 1988 the details were worked out.[13] Its application employed both negative and positive processes.

The negative process entails discovering the typical preconceptions that permeate the literature on the topic of matriarchy. Interdisciplinarity is a great advantage in this process; comparison of researchers' opinions from different disciplines (but also within a single discipline) brings the incomplete, one-sided and distorted accounts to light. I have compiled a list of these preconceptions; it is useful to keep them in mind while engaged in research, in order to see the material separately from the ideology.

The typical preconceptions are:

> firstly, judging the relationship between the genders in matriarchal cultures according to patriarchal patterns and norms; these are the primary ideological preconceptions.

They give rise to factual preconceptions, which distort matters and often contradict the researcher's own results; which leads to logical contradictions in the argument. Such preconceptions are:

> secondly, denying the existence of matriarchies in general, or denying their intrinsic structure and value system—which, because of the first preconceptions, cannot be recognized.

This engenders a characteristic blindness to the geographic and chronological spread of matriarchal forms of society, a blindness intensified by preconceptions such as:

> thirdly, confining matriarchies to far away, exotic places and to historically vague transitional periods labelled as "primitive." But early patriarchies are not exiled like this; in fact, some are dated—in the absence of any evidence whatsoever to justify this—as contemporary with, or even earlier than, matriarchal cultures. The latter are then explained away as historical exceptions.

In this way the process of displacement, repression and fragmentation begins, leaving behind nothing more than isolated "elements" of matriarchal societies' intrinsic structures—totally denying their coherence and cultural significance. This occurs by:

> fourthly, denying the priority of cultural achievements of matriarchal societies, or attributing these achievements to (fictional) early patriarchies—bolstered by further denying that matriarchal cultures developed high culture. (Here "high culture" is misleadingly defined to include only patriarchal state- and empire building.)

The result is a lack of explanation for the origin of matriarchal societies, and for patriarchal societies as well. In fact, patriarchy is presented as the universal norm, interrupted only briefly, if at all, and only in remote areas, by the random deviation known as "matriarchy." The untested assumption that patriarchy is eternal is accepted a matter of course, given the "superior" nature of man. This leads to:

> fifthly, denial of the matriarchal traditions that still exist today—whether in cultures marginal to patriarchy, or in subcultures within patriarchies. Indeed, since from this standpoint there is no way to recognize such traditions for what they are; they go unexplained or are classified wrongly—which makes them, in any case, invisible.

Thus, carrying out a thorough criticism of patriarchal ideological preconceptions—which is even harder to do with more recent theories, as the preconceptions are subtly hidden—opens up the way to the positive process of analyzing the factual material.

The Matriarchy Paradigm

Developing a theory and referring to it as a paradigmatic theory, or paradigm, is not the same as trying to set up a universal theory; this is an effort, rather, to inspire a complete change of perspective. Since the ongoing development of the theory of matriarchy certainly entails a complete change of perspective, I call it a "paradigm." But it is not a universal theory, because it is not a closed system, and it does not set up universal assumptions—which means there are no assumptions about universal sameness of women, or of matriarchal cultures generally. Furthermore, it does not suggest a uniformity of patriarchal oppression in regard to the actual cases. Certainly, nearly everyone on earth is now oppressed by patriarchal elites, but there are differences, and different cultures respond very differently to this oppression.

Universal theories were characteristic of traditional, patriarchal philosophy, and usually had a normative function. When they were then elaborated as evolutionary historical or social theories, they carried patriarchal values with them; this warped the image of other societies and cultures. Their characteristic stance towards earlier cultures is arrogant, and towards contemporary cultures it is colonialist and racist.[14]

The theory of matriarchy formulated here is a theoretical framework that can be further developed by researchers for their own investigations. This dynamic is typical for a new paradigm. Although I discuss and analyze various existing matriarchal cultures around the world, the brevity afforded them in this theoretical framework is evidence enough that the investigation is not closed. The intention of my

analysis is to find out the basic structures in order to develop, step by step, the structural definition of the matriarchal form of society. However, far from completely filling in the theoretical framework, it opens up a host of further tasks. Development of a new socio-cultural science goes far beyond any individual researcher, and further research will bring to light the vast extent of this new area of knowledge. This is precisely how the dynamic of a new paradigm works, and how it yields results.

I also do not claim to have encompassed all the matriarchal societies in existence today. It is in the nature of paradigmatic theories that they must leave unfinished areas at the beginning. Paradigms are not lexicons. Their contribution is to offer, from a new, heretofore unknown perspective, a more comprehensive system of explanations.

The scope of the matriarchy paradigm is huge. It encompasses not only all of known history and—especially with its criticism of patriarchal ideology—also the various forms of society that exist today, but it also touches on the content of all cultural and social sciences. This has been presented in various articles of mine;[15] it is outlined once again here:

In the first step toward developing the matriarchy paradigm, or theory of matriarchal societies, an overview of the previous research on matriarchy must be presented, and critically revised. By following the course this research has taken up till now, the lack of a clear and complete definition of "matriarchy" becomes obvious. Furthermore, most of the early and contemporary writings about matriarchy are riddled with patriarchal ideology.

In the second step, the complete structural definition of matriarchy must be formulated. To achieve this, the first place within the systematic arrangement of disciplines is that of anthropology, therefore I start with it in my book. The reason is that history of cultures will not, by itself, yield a complete definition of matriarchy: history deals only with the traces and fragments of former societies, which is not enough to form an overall picture. Though these fragments are unquestionably numerous, and may well be extremely important, they can give us only sketchy information. Historical research alone cannot reveal how matriarchal people thought or felt, or how they organized themselves socially and politically—how their society, as a whole, was structured.

In the third step, this structural definition of matriarchy can be used as a scientific tool to revise the cultural history of humankind. This history reaches back much further than the 5,000–6,000 years of patriarchy. During the longest periods of history, non-patriarchal cultures arose in which women created the institutions, practices and structures that constitute culture; they embodied the center of society, integrating all the other members. Extant matriarchal societies are the

most recent examples. Such an immense task obviously cannot be completed without a full structural definition of matriarchy; this is the only defense against anachronistic fantasy-projections still so common around this theme. In the absence of distortions wrought by patriarchal prejudice, a new interpretation of human history can unfold.

In the fourth step, the problem of the rise of patriarchy can be solved. Two important questions have to be answered: How could patriarchal patterns have developed in the first place? And how could they have spread all over the world? The answer to this latter problem is by no means obvious, and in my opinion, neither question has been sufficiently answered as yet. To explain the development of patriarchy, we must at first have clear knowledge about the form of society that existed before it arose—which was matriarchy. Secondly, a theory of patriarchy's origin and development must explain how and why patriarchal patterns emerged in different places, on different continents, at different times and under different conditions. The answers will be very different for the diverse regions of the world.

In the fifth step, a deep analysis of the history of patriarchy must be developed. Until now, this history has been recorded as one of domination: history from the perspective of the dominators at the top. But there is also the completely different perspective from the bottom. This is the history of women, of the lower classes, of indigenous peoples: the history of subcultures and marginalized cultures. The existence of this history shows that patriarchy did not succeed in destroying the ancient and long lasting matriarchal traditions on all continents. In the final analysis, the patriarchy lives, like a parasite, on these traditions. But we can recognize this only with the help of the structural definition of matriarchy. If we can follow the traces back through the history of patriarchy and to connect them, we will accomplish nothing less than regaining our heritage.

So the theory of matriarchal societies shows the scope of the matriarchy paradigm, and of modern Matriarchal Studies. Ongoing important research has been included in this framework and will continue to be in future. In this way, I hope that generations of researchers will work creatively with the matriarchy paradigm as long as it takes, until this new worldview becomes part of public consciousness.

About this Book

In a sense this book inaugurates the paradigmatic theory of matriarchal societies, or the matriarchy paradigm. It fulfills the first and second steps toward the devel-

opment of the theory of matriarchy, described above, and accordingly constitutes an important part of modern Matriarchal Studies.

A couple of chronological gaps demand a word of explanation. The original publication in three parts (1988, 1991 and 2000) of this work in German inaugurated modern Matriarchal Studies, but the opportunity to make it available in English has arisen only now. The second gap arises from the circumstance that the philosophy and methodology of modern Matriarchal Studies, which is the basis of this book, also was the basis of the two "World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies," which I guided in Luxembourg 2003 and in Texas 2005. As this English version of my work was not available at these congresses, the coherence of both conceptions remained invisible; the latter (congresses) appeared before the former (book) did.

It might seem that this would be detrimental to this book. But I look at this situation as being positive, because it gave me the opportunity, to expand my own knowledge through the material presented by indigenous matriarchal researchers at the congresses. This material has been published in the book documentation *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future.*[16] Now this book *Matriarchal Societies. Studies on Indigenous Cultures across the Globe* in a sense provides the philosophical and theoretical basis for this recent essay collection.

In regard to the *first step toward developing the matriarchy paradigm:* The first chapter outlines the history of research on matriarchy, in its various contexts and academic disciplines. It sheds new light on old theories, and re-evaluates newer theories in light of modern Matriarchal Studies. It constitutes a critical evaluation of what was achieved with this research before modern Matriarchal Studies emerged. It is "critical" in the sense that—in spite of appreciating the value of each of these works—the urgently needed criticism of patriarchal ideological preconceptions is accomplished.

This marks the difference, in terms of scientific principles, between modern Matriarchal Studies and traditional research on matriarchy. In spite of the richness of their knowledge, these older theories are characterized, firstly, by a lack of a clear, scientifically based definition of matriarchy, which has allowed the incursion of so many common preconceptions associated with this concept. The result is the illogical, emotionally-charged baggage that often hampers these theories and studies, limiting their significance. Secondly, development of research is also disadvantaged by lack of an explicit methodology, and this is why—in spite of the wealth of material—there has been no comprehensive account of matriarchy as a social form. The problem of fragmentation remains unchanged, and no deeper insights

emerge. Thirdly, there is no explicit theoretical framework. In the end, these theories and studies remain exotic, isolated phenomena; so any cross-cutting issues among them cannot come to light, and no insight into the vast scope of this realm of knowledge can develop.

For these reasons, most of the earlier research contributions on matriarchy have to be considered pre-scientific; only modern Matriarchal Studies is in a position to change this situation. Apart from that, this earlier research is politically blind and unreflective, as it usually has no liberating purpose, and instead—with very few exceptions—remains stuck in the mire of patriarchal thinking.

The chapter ends with a brief review of various feminist and indigenous approaches to matriarchy research. They differ fundamentally from traditional matriarchy research, both in their criticism of patriarchal ideology and their liberative context.

In regard to the *second step toward developing the matriarchy paradigm:* The anthropological chapters take their systematic place as described above, and supply the material for the complete structural definition of matriarchy.

Part 1 (chapters 2–10) presents existing matriarchal societies across the continent of Asia, with its immense diversity of people. These chapters are devoted to East India, Nepal, Tibet, China, and Korea, as well as the Pacific Islands, home to matriarchal societies in Japan, Indonesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. Certain hypotheses regarding cultural relationships and migrations of matriarchal peoples in these areas of the world will be presented and discussed.

When I speak of "existing" cultures, I don't mean exclusively those that exist right here and now, but of the entire time frame during which anthropological studies of such cultures have been made—and this goes back to the 18th century. Although all these reports are patriarchally influenced and distorted by western—or eastern—ideologies, at least they are eye witnesses. In order to remove, as far as possible, ideological preconceptions from this material, I make use of the comparative, i. e. cross-cultural, method and criticism of ideology. I use these implicitly, because in the interests of readability, it doesn't make sense to demonstrate it at every turn. Each of the short chapters represents the results of this complex process.

When I refer to "traditional" social and cultural patterns of matriarchal societies, I mean the time before contact with European or other colonial contact. Clearly, we can't know for sure exactly how traditional these patterns really are, all the more since the sources must be subjected to criticism of patriarchal ideology. In addition, indigenous cultures do not represent a fixed, timeless social fabric, but have a history as long and as complex as our own. Prior to colonial contact, they developed in diverse ways, according to their own principles and problems. Since

it is so difficult to know these histories of cultures more precisely, I refer to the patterns they seemed to have at the time they were first described by outsiders as "traditional." I also draw carefully on archaeology, where possible, and additionally use the structural definition with caution to try to shed light on their "traditional" patterns. Throughout, I remain aware of just how relative this term is.

Thematically, the focus of Part 1 is on the *microstructures* of matriarchal societies—the guidelines and customary practices that make up family and clan systems. Economy and politics combined with the family and clan systems are included, as well as cultural-spiritual forms that are also based on the clan system.

Part 2 (chapters 11–18) addresses existing matriarchal societies in the Americas, Africa and West India. The vast region of Western Asia was a challenge: careful research yielded no extant matriarchal societies there, but this reflects only the present state of the investigation.

The European continent does not appear, as no existing matriarchal societies have survived there, though it does have indigenous cultures with individual residual matriarchal characteristics. But my research is concentrated on societies that still have complete, or nearly complete, matriarchal patterns. If I had included every culture with residual matriarchal patterns, worldwide, the number would have been in the hundreds and the task well beyond the scope of this work.

Again in Part 2, I present some hypotheses about cultural relationships and migrations of matriarchal peoples on these continents, and try to justify them. While Part 1 focused on microstructures, Part 2 focuses on the *macrostructures* of matriarchal societies—the institutions that refer, beyond family and clan systems, to larger social structures. In certain chapters, these large-scale forms of social and political organization even refer beyond one single matriarchal people to encompass connections of several matriarchal tribes—although these large intertribal forms are highly diverse. They are examples of the way matriarchal societies, with their particular forms of politics, are able to create states—if one wants to call them that. In general I avoid the use of the term "state," which has, from the beginning of written history till today, been understood as an institution of hierarchically organized domination. In this sense, matriarchal societies did not form states, they were stateless and free of domination—so the term "matriarchal state" is somehow self-contradictory.

But the "state" argument is often used as evidence that such societies were too primitive to effectively develop large-scale forms of social and political organization—that is, to create states. The contrary, however, is demonstrated by the complex political forms that include several societies and extend over a huge geographical area. The complexity of these large-scale matriarchal forms is even

vaster and more striking than those of patriarchal states; there, hierarchical pressure from above keeps everything—and everyone—in line, while matriarchal peoples base their largest forms on the equal value of every member. In this, and in their fundamentally peace-oriented politics, matriarchal societies serve as important models for future societies, beyond patriarchy, that are just and peaceful.

It is my fervent wish that the research begun here will reach many open-minded women and men in patriarchal societies. This work can support women in the feminist struggle by introducing them to better forms of society that profoundly value women and their creativity. And it can support men in their alternative movements, giving them another way of identifying as men by demonstrating that war and violence are not the innate heritage of mankind.

Above all I intend that this research will find its way back to the women and men of indigenous matriarchal cultures all over the world. Although I have made every effort to put my Eurocentric perspective behind me, I will surely have made mistakes, and for these I alone am responsible. Indigenous researchers will immediately recognize these. But I hope that in general my research will echo what many of them already know: that they possess an incredibly valuable heritage with a worldwide history. And I boldly hope that this recognition will be a source of strength in their political struggle for cultural identity and self-determination.

—Heide Goettner-Abendroth
January 2008

Notes

1. Autorinnengemeinschaft (eds.): *Die Diskriminierung der Matriarchatsforschung—Eine moderne Hexenjagd*, (Collective Authorship (eds.): (*Discriminating against Matriarchal Studies—A Modern Witch Hunt*), Bern, 2003, Edition Amalia.
2. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen / Maria Mies / Claudia von Werlhof: *Women, the Last Colony*, London, 1988, Zed Books.
3. To put it more precisely: Women's Studies have produced a complex multilevel analysis of sexism in its intersectional forms (with racism, ethnocentrism, classism, speciesism, etc.), see for example the excellent study from Angela Miles: *Integrative Feminism. Building Global Visions 1960s-1990s,* New York and London 1996, Routledge.

   However, Women's Studies also have tended to replace "patriarchy" with "hegemonic masculinity" or "compulsory heteronormativity." I do not take on this debate but comment that the failure to know the pre-patriarchal history and modern matriarchies has limited this most recent feminist theory of power relations.
4. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchat in Südchina. Eine Forschungsreise zu den Mosuo,* (*Matriarchy in Southern China: A Research Trip to the Mosuo People*), Stuttgart, 1998,

Kohlhammer-Verlag.

5. See Linda Tuhiwai Smith: *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London, New York and Dunedin, 1999–2001, Zed Books and University of Ontago Press; and Rauna Kuokkanen: *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of Gift*, Vancouver, 2007, University of British Columbia Press.
6. See Joyce Green: *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, London 2007, Zed Books.
7. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: „Zur Methodologie der Frauenforschung am Beispiel einer Theorie des Matriarchats" ("Towards a Methodology for Women's Studies, exemplified by a Theory of Matriarchy"), in: Dokumentation der Tagung „Frauenforschung in den Sozialwissenschaften", Munich, 1978, Deutsches Jugendinstitut (DJI).
8. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *The Goddess and her Heros. Matriarchal Mythology*, Stow MA, 1995, Anthony Publishing Company (first edition, Munich 1980).
9. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Das Matriarchat I. Geschichte seiner Erforschung* (*Matriarchy I. History of Research*), Stuttgart, 1988–1995, Verlag Kohlhammer; and *Das Matriarchat II.1. Stammesgesellschaften in Ostasien, Indonesien, Ozeanien* (*Matriarchy II.1. Matriarchal Societies in Eastern Asia, Indonesia and Pacific Area*), Stuttgart, 1991,1999, Verlag Kohlhammer; and *Das Matriarchat II.2. Stammesgesellschaften in Amerika, Indien, Afrika* (*Matriarchy II.2. Matriarchal Societies in America, India, Africa*), Stuttgart, 2000, Verlag Kohlhammer.
10. Genevieve Vaughan: *For-Giving, a Feminist Criticism of Exchange*, Austin, 1997, Plain View and Anomaly Press.
11. In her anthropological work, Peggy Reeves Sanday developed a definition of matriarchy from another perspective, which she presents in an implicit, non-systematic way (in: *Female Power and Male Dominance*, 1981, and *Women at the Center*, 2002). Her approach criticizes the idea of universal male dominance, suggesting that this is based on a false assumption: that is, it ascribes the wrong meaning to the concept of matriarchy by understanding it to mean "dominance by women"—a misinterpretation that has been eagerly and unquestioningly accepted since the 19th century. Anthropologists then go looking for societies in which women dominate (in the sense that men do); not finding any, they decide that male dominance is universal.

    This sort of reasoning violates scholarly norms, it is unscientific; furthermore, it blindly replicates the Western habit of conflating dominance with political leadership. Sanday demonstrates that, to the contrary, female authority displays different patterns: it is based on the economically and spiritually central role of women—which not only gives them power at the local level, but also gives them great influence over men's activities. Female authority and male leadership are thus not unequal, but differ from one another. Sanday suggests for societies that evince these patterns to be called "matriarchies."

    See: Peggy Reeves Sanday: *Female Power and Male Dominance. On the origins of sexual inequality*, Cambridge, 1981–1996,Cambridge University Press, pp. 113–118; and "Matriarchy as a Sociocultural Form. An Old Debate in a New Light," Paper presented at the 16th Congress of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association, Melaka, Malaysia, July 1–7,1998; and *Women at the Center. Life in a Modern Matriarchy*, Ithaca, New York, 2002, Cornell University Press, pp. 225–240.
12. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: „Zur Methodologie der Frauenforschung am Beispiel einer Theorie des Matriarchats" ("Towards a Methodology for Women's Studies, exemplified by a Theory of Matriarchy"), ibidem.

13. See Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Das Matriarchat I. Geschichte seiner Erforschung*, chapter I, ibidem.
14. Some remarks on Peggy Sanday's paper: "Matriarchy", in: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History*, Oxford Digital Reference Shelf (short version) and *Oxford University Press Encyclopedia* (longer version): To begin with, Sanday provides a good overview of the history of the definition of the concept "matriarchy." Then she presents a new approach toward redefining matriarchy—her own definition—in which she asserts that "the attention must be shifted from forcible power to the persuasive power of tradition" which is rooted in "female responsibility." She cites, in addition to her own approach, the attempts of other anthropologists, who try to define matriarchy based on their own—always specialized and particularist—studies. Regrettably, the definition I developed is not mentioned, although Sanday is familiar with it. In addition, my theoretical framework is called "universalist and evolutionary," a judgement that crudely misrepresents my work.—To clarify: my work is to undertake cross-cultural studies to investigate patterns in the social, economic, political, and cultural levels of matriarchal societies and to uncover the deep structure of this type of society that can be presented this way. It makes it possible to offer a complex structural definition of "matriarchy"—which Sanday did not provide.

    Combined with a methodology that combines different scientific branches, I develop the foundation for a new socio-cultural science, "Matriarchal Studies." Sanday's work serves to underscore the point that a foundation for a new socio-cultural science cannot be developed from a particularizing approach based on one particular science, but requires the level of theoretical reflection, based on philosophy of science. Presumably, her charge of „universalism" alludes to this, but it includes a fundamental misunderstanding: the confusion of the philosophical-methodological level with that of an individual science.

    The other charge—that of "evolutionism"—demonstrates a similar misunderstanding of my approach. This book makes it clear that I criticize, and repudiate as colonialist and racist, any and every socio-cultural evolutionary theory. Again, Sanday confuses the different levels of scientific work. I demonstrate that discovered social structures can be observed for a particular time span, and their transformations noted; in a second step, I show that the factors and rules of these transformation can be investigated and, possibly, discovered. This is quite a complex method, which again is developed at the philosophical-methodological level. In contrast, evolutionist theories are based on value judgements, and most of them privilege the prevailing Eurocentrism while devaluing other cultures.
15. See to its scope: Heide Goettner-Abendroth: "Matriarchal Society: Definition and Theory," in: Genevieve Vaughan (ed.), *The Gift*, Rome 2004, Meltemi (Athanor Books).
16. Heide Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future* (Selected papers of the First and Second World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies 2003 and 2005), Toronto 2009, Inanna Press, York University.

1

A Critical History of Perspectives on Matriarchy

The history of research on matriarchy since the 18th century is not so much a story as it is a series of starts and stops whose repeated "beginnings" keep disappearing into the shadows of history. The thread of this history keeps breaking off, pieces of the narrative seem to go nowhere, lines of argument are not followed up—or are, in western science, eliminated completely.

Nevertheless an undercurrent of knowledge about matriarchal forms of society exists, incorporating work from various scientific branches. But the existence of more than 150 years of research and discussion on the subject of matriarchy is not generally known about, and when it does make a rare appearance, is quickly silenced with contempt or ridicule.

These unusual circumstances raise the question of what is actually at work here. It appears that researchers—at least the traditional ones—must have discovered something terrible, something that threatens to breach their patriarchal worldview. If they were to follow the logical consequences of their discoveries, they would have to abandon this worldview. And in the patriarchally-influenced „scientific community" their prestige would be on the line, they would become isolated and possibly even lose their jobs, if they stood by their discoveries. So they rescind their findings, invalidating their results by reframing them

in theoretical constructs designed to save the patriarchal paradigm of society and history—an undertaking that naturally produces countless logical and factual contradictions.

The patriarchal system has a large investment in making sure the findings of matriarchal social forms stay invisible, and this becomes particularly clear when a researcher breaks out of the self-censorship and stands by his or her findings—which has been happening fairly often recently. These scholars are promptly demonized, their work defamed in every way possible, by their colleagues as well as by the general public. Such is the ideological power of today's patriarchal system, and the pressure is being intensified more and more, as knowledge of matriarchal social forms is less and less willing to be restrained.

In this chapter, my task is therefore to find the broken ends of the thread and tie it back together. I will follow the obscured lines and make the undercurrent of research on matriarchy visible again—and thereby offer an introduction to the historical development of the idea, or concept, of matriarchal societies. In fact, the idea that there was a form of society clearly distinct from patriarchy did not arise until the 18th and 19th centuries with the pioneering work of J. J. Bachofen and others. Matriarchal societies had existed long before this, as had reports about them, but the idea of matriarchy as an independent social form did not exist, nor did the term "matriarchy." What can't be named can't be discerned.

This is why I am trying to put these fragments back together, as a mosaic is made from its scattered individual stones. The guiding questions are: what do these researchers contribute to the knowledge about matriarchal societies, and what do they then do with their findings? Or, what becomes of their findings in patriarchal socio-cultural sciences and in the general public? These questions serve to critique ideologies, and will uncover the limited—and limiting—way this fascinating socio-political subject has been dealt with up to now. This will lead us to the situation today—which is highly charged, as the patriarchal paradigm is beginning to crumble.

At the same time, this chapter will make visible the contributions made by various branches of socio-cultural sciences to the awareness of a matriarchal form of society, as well as the key role of an interdisciplinary methodology in developing an adequate understanding of it. Rather than offering an exhaustive listing of every source pertaining to research on matriarchy, I will refer to a few exemplary works in the most important research branches. My questions will shed new light on old theories, and on more recent ones as well. That older theorists did not have the benefit of critical and feminist studies should not be a reason to ignore the findings they produced—after all, at that time, they were the only ones addressing the

matriarchal patterns uncovered by their various disciplines. Things have changed a lot since then, but—as we will see—not always for the better within academia. Patriarchal ideology, which in the case of earlier researchers was passed on subconsciously rather than explicitly, has now, in the more recent research, become intentional and aggressive. This survey of researchers is therefore meant to acknowledge their fundamental contributions, and also to critique them. Finally, I will illuminate the change that modern Matriarchal Studies bring to the field.[1]

1.1 The pioneers

Johann Jakob Bachofen should be seen as the founder of research on matriarchy as it is usually meant, and with *Das Mutterrecht (Mother Right)* (1861) he initiated discussion in this field.[2] He had at least one predecessor, Jesuit missionary ***Joseph-Francois Lafitau*** (1724), who, describing the daily life of Iroquois he stayed with in Canada, compares American Indian customs with those of early European history, and does so in detail—particularly concerning the significant role of women.[3] Although constrained by the limited perspective of the time, his report is valuable because Iroquoian society had not yet been so degraded by white oppression as it later was. Even so, his observations lead him to make comparisons between Iroquoian matriarchal society and certain customs he knew about from authors of classical antiquity. But as a missionary Lafitau unfortunately was not driven by interest in scientific knowledge; his book, though an important source of data, failed to present the idea and the concept of matriarchy.

It was Bachofen who intentionally opened up the new research area, which he called "Mutterrecht" (mother right), with reference to matrilinear descent and its associated social patterns. He also employed the term "Gynaikokratie" (gynocracy), which is problematic since it means "domination by women," and in none of Bachofen's investigations is there evidence for interpreting such societies as being dominated by women. His more or less interchangeable use of "mother right" and "gynocracy" is the source of the misunderstanding and prejudice that still hampers research on matriarchy today.

His investigations formed the foundation of the cultural-historical branch of research on matriarchy, and his significant contribution opened up new understanding of the development of human culture. Drawing on historians of classical antiquity, he made it absolutely clear (contrary to the prevailing view of the time) that mother right was not just an exotic South-Asian oddity, but was widespread in India, Persia, and Egypt, as well as in the eastern Mediterranean, including Greece—and served in each place as the foundation for later cultural development. He suc-

cessfully demonstrated that the phenomenon was not just a trivial exception to a larger cultural destiny, but rather that it constituted a perfect social system in itself, one that did not apply only to certain discrete peoples, but was shared across the entirety of an earlier cultural era.

Bachofen also provided detailed information on his methods of investigation, which consist of analyzing myth and comparing it, insofar as possible, with historical evidence. This approach not only interprets the myths, but creates a comparative cultural-historical framework that allows him to discover surprising similarities across broad time spans; it supports the conclusion that myths can generally be understood as witnesses to history, speaking in images instead words. He took myth seriously as an expression of past historical circumstances and worldviews.

Even with his successful methodology, Bachofen's theoretical conclusions and interpretations throughout his vast, wide-ranging work are problematic. His theory is a romanticized, ideological view of matriarchy not supported by his own sources. His perspective is skewed by his concept of woman—a reflection of patriarchal values of his time; based on this hypothetical gender called "women," he attempts to explain the history of mother right in three stages. First, there was a general sexual free-for-all, a stage of promiscuity, in which women were urged to have sex with anyone who came along. Though this so-called "Promiscuity Stage" is a completely unproven assumption, Bachofen suggests that mother right developed in reaction to this kind of life, and that women's resistance took the form of what he called the "Demeter Principle": chastity and monogamy—yet another instance of projecting middle class Christian values backwards onto an earlier time. But following Bachofen's theory, the virtuous "Demeter Stage" of matriarchy died out with the advent and demise of the Amazons and their wild ways. (The attribution of "wildness" is required by the patriarchal gaze to modify the Amazons, who were neither monogamous nor man-friendly.) Now, after this chaotic "Amazonian stage," patriarchy established itself even faster, building upon the ruins of what was left of the previous epoch. This was seen as proceeding just as it should, that is, in accordance with the (equally hypothetical) male character. So a man's killing and war-making were seen as his innate qualities and praised as "heroic," and men were seen as naturally destined to ascend the ranks of power, and ultimately to be identified with the "omnipotent maker"—and all this was valued positively and estimated as superior to the female character. This understanding of maleness was undergirded by a belief in immortality and transcendence based on the intellectual "Appolonian Principle" in which the god "has completely freed himself of any connection whatsoever with the female."[4] These are the basic ideas of patriarchy in a nutshell!

We wouldn't have to be bothered any further by such unhistorical fantasizing, except for the crippling effect it had on public consciousness of matriarchal and patriarchal cultures. Though the clichés popularised by Bachofen were based on figments of his imagination, they stubbornly persisted, contributing much to patriarchy's reputation as the vastly superior form of society.

Henry Lewis Morgan founded the social science of anthropology with his work on the Iroquois League in North America[5] (1851)—a matriarchal society, though he didn't call it that. As a fellow scholar, Bachofen was in contact with Morgan because he saw his own cultural-historical work validated by Morgan's anthropological work. The Iroquois study seemed to make possible, for the first time, an outside look into the world of a highly developed matriarchal culture of that time. But his study remains highly problematic because—just as with Bachofen—Morgan's research failed to lead him to hermeneutic self-reflection and to a critical analysis of his own patriarchally influenced assumptions. Instead, he used his findings to construct a stages-of-history theory, or theory of unilinear evolution, in regard to human family, in which development moves forward in a straight path, its progressive improvements culminating in patriarchy—along the same lines as Bachofen.[6]

He constructs the three-stage evolutionary progression of "savagery, barbarism, and civilization"—all obviously biased, if not racist, terms. Loose family bonds with indiscriminate sexual intercourse and multiple marriage (polygamy) characterize the first, or "stage of savagery": concepts of blood kinship did not yet exist. In the second, or "barbarism stage," more restricted marriage relationships lead to the tribal society. Based on the Iroquois example he concludes that tribal groups of this type of society are not founded on families—unknown in Neolithic times—but rather on clans originally founded in the female line of descent, and only much later based on the male line. Several clans form a tribe according to definite marriage rules, and then several tribes come together to form a people. In such a society, political decision making follows the lines of relationship, and is never independent from them. It is this sense of identity between the lines of descent and political decision making that makes the tribal society homogenous. It is also one of the oldest and most widespread human forms of organization. Morgan calls it the "universal basis of ancient Asiatic, European, African, American and Australian society," [7] and it was the mortar that held early communities together without needing to engage in political domination.

These are far-ranging insights in themselves, pointing to the relatively late, historically verifiable origin of patriarchy. But Morgan has his own way of taking his enlightening insights and casting them back into darkness. As his theory of unilinear evolution might lead one to expect, this matriarchal kinship society final-

ly comes to an end at the dawn of "civilization." Here Morgan gives us a taste of how indigenous matriarchal societies will be treated by patriarchy (and this still holds today): important findings are obscured by racist theories. For Morgan, "civilization" came into being when private property and land ownership, developed among men, caused a transformation of matriarchal into patriarchal clans. Irresistibly, and apparently without a struggle, humanity hurried to embrace this type of "civilization," and with it monogamy (not to mention monotheism) of the Christian type. The high value Morgan assigns to this "civilization stage" comes from his claim that in monogamy only, both partners enjoy the same status and the same rights—a deceptive idea that has come to full fruition in western middle class society. But this contradicts his earlier assertion that monogamy occurred as a consequence of men getting control of private property, and that this worked, and stills works, to women's disadvantage—which he, however, excuses by saying that women must make this sacrifice for the good of humankind. Morgan's ideology of historical stages is thus unmasked as reflecting—besides racism—a crude vein of sexism in his ideology of fatherhood, typical of the late-bourgeois nuclear family.

Nevertheless, Morgan is celebrated as the „father of anthropology"—which is really not surprising, as this branch of science, in its Western form, even now is shackled with racist and sexist attitudes.

1.2 The Marxist discussion

Marxist discussions based on Bachofen's and Morgan's research were particularly concerned with establishing the origin of patriarchy, and this is especially true for ***Friedrich Engels*** (1884).[8] Following Marx, Engels tackled the two main questions left unanswered by Morgan: first, whether bourgeois monogamy is the ideal institution for equality between the sexes; and second, how it happened that private property wound up being controlled by men.

He answers the first question unambiguously by asserting that the overthrow of mother right signalled the worldwide defeat of women. Men not only pushed them out of public life, but lorded over them in the home as well. Women were debased, made the household servants and sexual slaves of the men, and were employed as mere tools for childbearing. Little by little this abject position of women was glossed over or cloaked in a somewhat more benign guise, but it was never abolished.[9]

According to Marx and Engels, control over private property enabled men to

overthrow matriarchy and establish domination over the home. For them, monogamy also has an economic basis, rooted in the patriarchal victory of private property of individual men over matriarchal communal property. So monogamy does not constitute a reconciliation of men and women, as Morgan would have it; instead it simply keeps the struggle going on both sides, with monogamy being enforced for women, but not men. The recognition of biological fatherhood, highly valued by men, does not contribute at all to a balance between the sexes, but rather serves to preserve inheritance of private property within the father's line—that means, passing exclusively from father to son. Engels' thinking dispenses with Morgan's sexist view of the virtues of monogamy. He makes it clear that monogamy, which came into being by force, cannot be a sign of progress.

As to the second question—how private property ended up in the hands of men—what is striking in Engels' explanation is that he sees this major revolution as progressing quietly, at a measured pace, without any cataclysmic rupture in history. He sees increasing division of labor, and the concomitant increase in productivity, as the driving force behind patriarchal control. Of course, this could definitely be a positive development for whoever controlled the profit derived from increased productivity, but it could be very bad for the others. This is why social tensions and contradictions arise between classes, with all the problems they bring.

But the tensions and contradictions between matriarchal and patriarchal forms of society were not completely thought through by Engels, and several issues remain unsolved. First of all, holding property communally does not necessarily mean there is a lack of division of labor. For example, urban matriarchal cultures demonstrate a high degree of labor specialization and productivity, even where no individual men hold private property. Increased division of labor does not automatically generate class differences between rich and poor. This is a fallacy in Engels' thinking, and it is why, with his equally simplistic theory of unilinear evolution, he cannot satisfactorily deal with matriarchal societies. For him, they are frozen at the stage of good (i.e., communist), if ultimately primitive, matrilinear tribal cultures.

Engels formulates it better when he says that what changed history is private property, acquired when the means of production are in the hands of individuals, taking profit for themselves. And since these individuals are, historically speaking, always *men*, the Marxist definition of class society only applies to developed patriarchal societies. The theorists Marx and Engels understand very well that private property in the hands of some men is an instrument of patriarchal domination. But if this is so, private property can only have been introduced *after* patriarchal domination was established. And that happens in certain historical situations when

matriarchal societies are attacked and subjugated *from the outside,* and then are dominated by foreign male rulers. This perspective is not compatible with a unilinear evolution theory in which private property quietly arose through some immanent mechanism. Rather, what is needed here is an explanation that covers the rise of war—by which matriarchal societies were overthrown—and domination as organized violence, which together constitute the prerequisites of private property in the hands of men.

On the other hand, the Marxist definition of the state is all the more relevant: the state, sorely needed in every existing class society, is there to keep insoluble economic tensions and contradictions from leading to outbreaks of revolt. This requires laws and punishment, taxes and civil servants, police and prisons: in fact, institutionalised violence. This is patriarchal state and nation building. But Engels assumes that the patriarchal state was *necessary* at a certain stage of economic development—as if evolution, capricious and sneaky as it can be, led us there of itself. This explains nothing. It makes it seem as if the evolution of private property came first; later on, the state had to be invented in order to protect it. But what if it happened the other way around: the state, born out of conquest, came first; later on, the rulers confiscated the people's property in order to consolidate the new order: a class society of rulers and subjects?

Marxist ***August Bebel,*** who based his work (1913) on Bachofen and Engels, gets straight to this point.[10] While Engels saw the transition from mother right to father right as being quite painless—achieved by simple acclamation of the clans—Bebel holds a different opinion. Referring to the legends of Amazons as an interesting example, he takes seriously all the fighting and struggle undertaken by women against the new order. He turns away from unilinear evolutionist theories and their untenable premises, calling the upheaval from matriarchy to patriarchy the first great revolution in human history. He rightly notes that this development did not happen everywhere at the same time, nor did it always unfold in the same way—and definitely not from one single cause.

We agree, and would put it more strongly yet: it was not only the first chronologically, but was also the *fundamental* revolution in human history. The transition—from simple or complex peaceful matriarchal societies to the organized violence, war, domination, and private property of the patriarchal states—amounts to such a rank upheaval in the inner and outer lives of humanity, that we are obliged to speak of the deepest and most revolutionary break ever to occur in the history of humankind. Nevertheless, Bebel does not address the question of how this revolution could have happened, and in any case his findings were not followed up.

A recent Marxist thesis about the origin of patriarchy is presented in ***Christian***

Sigrist's work (1979).[11] He takes up the question (left unanswered by Engels) of the rise of domination, and points the way to a solution. On the basis of his anthropological research, he suggests that tribal societies free of domination still exist; they live this way not out of ignorant naiveté, but based on a consciously developed set of social principles. This makes it clear that it is not private property that generates domination by the masters, but the other way around: as soon as domination is established, it develops private property to consolidate its power.

Sigrist bases his work on tribal cultures in Africa with economies that revolve around their animal herds. Though they are patrilinear, they are not patriarchally organized. He points out their lack of patriarchal power structure on the one hand, and their common-good based social structure on the other, rejecting the widespread assumption that societies without domination belong to the realm of fantasy writers. At the same time, he rejects the theory of primitivism associated with Engels' evolutionist theory, that is, the idea that early tribal cultures were without domination only because there was no differentiation between the various aspects and roles of community life. Sigrist shows that in the light of modern anthropology, this theory is untenable. These domination-free tribal societies exhibit such a great variety of social relationships and structures that the practice of labelling them "naive" must be abandoned.

For Sigrist, the basis of these peoples' ability to govern without domination is their exercise of natural authority. During their journeys abroad with their herds, heads of tribal groups are not in a position to control the group. Since decision making requires the whole group reaching consensus, leaders have no special rights to decide. A tribal head is recognized only as a speaker for the people, not as decision maker. He is respected, but has no staff to enforce his will. This lack of an enforcement staff (warriors, police, controlling institutions) is the criterion for a domination-free society.

Societies without domination maintain their internal structures through self organization. For example, self organization comes into play when someone violates the mutually agreed upon social rules, and is passively excluded from the communality of the group. Or it is engaged when the group goes into action to insist that someone fulfils his duty to share with the community or risks attack on his property or his person. This makes it clear that equality among members of this society is not a naively unconscious habit, but is deliberately maintained through these social techniques. Whereas *conscious maintenance of equality* as a significant regulating factor is lacking in Engels' social analysis.

For Sigrist the first appearance of domination and hierarchy, in the sense of forming a body of followers and an enforcement staff through a charismatic leader,

does not grow organically out of the normal life of a tribal society. It happens not through an internal process, but always occurs in response to outside pressure—which can have various causes. He points to such developments in the recent situations of some African peoples, where domination developed in response to the pressure that colonial powers exerted on them from outside. The forms of domination then included militant men's societies; these were set up to fight the enemy outside, but also started to control their own people within the society.

These insights are interesting, but there is a blind spot in Sigrist's work where women, and women-centered societies, are concerned. Nowhere does he mention women in accounts of the patrilinear nomad societies he investigated, nor does he address whether the freedom from domination also applied to women (this is very doubtful). He investigates only the absence of domination among men, missing out on the much more interesting area of freedom from domination in matriarchal societies, where it applied to both sexes. This negligence became a conscious disdain when he encountered modern Matriarchal Studies in Germany—and behaved just like every other patriarchally-influenced anthropologist.

Though we certainly have the Marxist discussion to thank for first giving the problem of patriarchy a name, and for identifying some of its patterns, this changed nothing in terms of the disdain in which matriarchal societies and research on matriarchies were held. Although the idea and concept of matriarchy had appeared in traditional versions of this discussion, they disappeared completely from the modern version—indeed, even in the traditional version they were only employed to shore up Marxist theoretical superstructure. The political consequence of this is that in socialist states—true to Engel's unilinear evolutionist theory—matriarchal societies are in fact considered to exist (and to have existed), but are looked on as "backward." Therefore, the existing matriarchal societies that happened to be included into modern socialist states are subordinated to inappropriate concepts and measures of "development" that take no account of their distinct identities and traditional knowledge; these cultures are thus being destroyed.

1.3 The anthropological-ethnological branch

For an understanding of matriarchal economy, social and political organization, and worldview, research in the anthropological-ethnological branch has the great advantage of being based on societies where these matriarchal traits are still practiced.

Matrilinearity and its wide-ranging consequences are described by anthropologist ***Bronislaw Malinowski*** in his imposing study of the Trobriand Islanders of

Melanesia (1926).[12] Significantly, his study is largely devoted to Trobriand Islanders' relationships between the sexes; this means that women are not just relegated to a sub-chapter or a passing remark. According to Malinowski, women have a large role in community life, and take the lead in several areas. They have a deciding role in the culture of human relationships and erotic life, which Malinowski indicates is much more elaborated and developed in Trobriander society than in so-called "civilized" societies. Compared to the social and erotic culture of the Trobriand Islanders, the customs of so-called civilization are demonstrably less sophisticated, even "barbarous." This is a bold statement, and Malinowski makes clear that higher levels of human relationships are not necessarily produced by higher levels of economic and technical expertise.

For Malinowski, Trobriand Islanders' matrilinearity conforms to a social and cultural pattern in which descent, kinship, and social relationships are exclusively determined by the mother. The mother alone is considered to be related to her children; biological fatherhood is unknown. Pregnancy is the deciding, formative stage of life. Children come not from a man, but rather from ancestral clan spirits, beings who lived in the clan before and are re-embodied in the womb of the pregnant woman. This suggests that lack of knowledge about men's role in conception must have resulted not from ignorance, but from the way conception is valued: the cause of pregnancy is a sacred, rather than a profane, event. Here it can be seen that matrilinearity is directly connected to belief in rebirth, where each male or female ancestor comes back to life in the community through a woman of his or her own clan.

In this matrilinear system, brothers are seen as the nearest relatives of their sister's children. Brothers not only carry the same clan names as the children do, but belong to the same clans as the ancestral spirits, who re-enter the clan as babies. Because of this, brothers not only care for their sisters, producing their sustenance in the Trobriander gardens, they also take on the role of "social fathers," who are honor-bound to see to the well-being of their sisters and their sisters' children.

In this ancient matriarchal tribal law, basic matriarchal structure consists of mothers and daughters, and sisters and brothers; the whole society is constructed upon this foundation. At the time Malinowski was in the islands, this tradition was still so strong that all arts, including the very important art of magic, along with all honors and titles, including that of chief, were inherited exclusively through the female line. In each generation women propagated their clans, inheriting the title of head, while a man—her brother—represented the clan in outside matters. As delegate of his mother's and sisters' clan, his honor was subordinate to theirs.

Malinowski also describes the tension-laden paradox of marriage customs in Trobriand Islanders' society, which were patrilocal and monogamous (these prevailed despite frequent switching of partners, especially by women). This means that brothers not only provided for their sisters and sisters' children, but also for their sisters' husbands. In regard to the chief, this had a negative effect on the otherwise egalitarian system: the chief alone is married to more than one woman, with each clan giving him one wife, so that he ends up with several. Since he also collects the produce from the gardens of each of his wives' brothers, he can accumulate goods, storing them in large storehouses. But since he also has to stage the great feasts and equip the long distance ocean voyages, he never accumulates much wealth. Nevertheless, this situation elevates his status and supports his hierarchical position. He manages to keep this position, in part, because of the fixed, monogamous marriages with his wives, who are the most disenfranchised people in the society, and because it is an impossibility to topple the chief.

Malinowski describes here with precision and delicacy a completely unique form of society, he demonstrates its basic structures and internal tensions. But the question is whether he realizes it. Unfortunately this cannot be affirmed, for his work suffers from the lack of inclusion of diachronic examination, which means that these social structures, with their internal tensions, are presented as having existed since time immemorial, with no process of adaptation or modification. This approach shifts a society into an a-historical suspension, as if indigenous societies were unvarying frozen tableaus. From this point of view it is irrelevant to ask how this hierarchical chiefdom came to be, or how the unique relationship between matrilinearity and patrilocality (the woman lives in the house and village of her spouse) developed. Both these customs substantially weaken the influence of the mother, for a daughter must leave her mother's house, and a son must work for a spouse from an outside clan—especially if he is a chief.

Trapped in his a-historical perspective, Malinowski gets side-tracked by secondary reflections. He is preoccupied with the emotional conflict a man experiences as a spouse in a matrilinear society, where because of his obligations to his sister's children he is unable to live out his "fatherly love" and to give preferential treatment to his "own" children. But it is likely that this one-sided flood of compassion has more to do with the western, sexist fatherhood ideology than with the Trobriand Islands society.[13]

At the same time, the researcher's hidden racism rears its head—even if he does not express it directly—when he downgrades indigenous societies as being too rigid and affected with insoluble tensions, apparently in contrast to western societies. As a consequence, Malinowski is unable to discern the characteristic quality of the soci-

ety he is looking at, he has no idea of this peculiar societal form and no concept to name it. It is characteristic of this a-historical perspective, considered "empirical," that any notion of a matriarchal form of society that existed in the past and that exists in the present is extinguished. With this eradication of history, anthropology ends up at the other extreme, which is considered the cure for the old theory of unilinear evolution. But both extremes reflect only the patriarchal worldview.

Of significance in this context is the work of feminist anthropologist ***Annette Weiner*** (1976), which offers a fundamental revision of the way Trobriand Islands society is understood.[14] She asserts that anthropology has uncritically defined "power" from the perspective of western patriarchal society: as secular economic-political power. The viewpoint and self-definition of Trobriand Islander women remains completely excluded from this definition. Therefore, it is not surprising that this constricting definition leads to the idea that women's position is universally inferior to men's.

Weiner's study shows that for Trobriand Islanders, „power" is seen much more from the perspective of the sacred. In this sense, women there possess great power at both the cosmological and the socio-political levels, and this is publicly acknowledged in their culture.

This conclusion is of paramount importance for the study of matriarchal societies that are based on the sacred. Weiner doesn't mention this, but stays trapped in the same a-historical, so-called empirical, perspective by which a great deal of modern anthropology is characterized.

Theories of the origins of human social structures abound in anthropology, and elsewhere. Two classic positions offer diametrically opposed answers to the question of whether it was men's—or women's—social instincts that gave rise to society.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1973) takes the radical stance that it was men's.[15] His theory of "exchange of women" is based on the assumption that women live in society not as subjects, but solely as objects of exchange between men. He presents the core structure of kinship as consisting of man, woman, and child—plus the male person who gave the woman to the man. Giving a woman to a man is accompanied by a considerable transfer of goods, the marriage goods. This mutual, contractual use of women as exchange goods between men is what Lévi-Strauss means by "exchange of women"; he considers it to be a universal kinship pattern.

This patriarchal-anthropological perspective obviously lacks any history whatsoever. Denial of history is of course a dogma of structural anthropology, in which empirical findings on other societies are replaced with constructions of "binary oppositions," i.e., rigid schemes into which all the facts about other societies are

inserted. However, his abhorrence of history does not hinder Lévi-Strauss from speculating on prehistory—which he offers in the absence of any appropriate Palaeolithic and Neolithic investigation, and in the absence of any of the available data on ancient societies. This shows the absurdity of denying history: it leads directly to wild historical constructions. The result is that understanding of ancient societies is set back to before Bachofen, who at least based his conclusions on culture-historical data.

And so, Lévi-Strauss trots out the old theory of enemy hordes attacking and vanquishing each other, stealing the women, who finally make agreements sanctioning what had otherwise been accomplished violently: this marked the introduction of "exchange of women" and goods. Accordingly, it appears that fighting and killing under the leadership of men has existed since the beginning of history and that stable human community life on a large scale came into being only through wars and treaties. This abstract and contradictory construction allows Lévi-Strauss to establish the origin of the first great social institution—the tribe—as deriving from men's social instincts. Thus, even though warmongering, selfish accumulation of goods, and violence against women only arose much later, Lévi-Strauss (and he was not alone in this) came to accept these characteristics as the original male behavior. Obviously, this is a question not of social, but of a-social, instincts. Nevertheless, these late, twisted male urges were projected backwards into prehistory as the origin of society. In this way, patriarchal behavior was established as being universal and eternal—and this means that violence and war are permanently glorified.

The opposite answer to the question of human social origins was given by ***Robert Briffault*** (1927). In his study of the basic patterns of social behavior he soon discovered, to his surprise, that they all could be traced back to the instinctual behavior characteristic of female, rather than male. That the consciousness of women could have had such a fundamental influence in historically patriarchal societies was incomprehensible, so he concluded that early development of larger-scale social institutions must be considered in light of theory of matriarchy.

He pursued this conviction in his comprehensive work, *The Mothers*,[16] where no less than 60 small-print pages are devoted to a list of every tribe and people, on every continent, who were matrilineally and matrilocally organized. In these societies, it becomes clear that the authority of the mother holds the female clan together and guides the sons, in their outside marriages, to form ties with other clans. The exogamy rule (marriage outside the clan)—formerly always attributed to men as acting subjects of history—proceeds from women, and in this way they wove the matriarchal society peacefully together. Briffault asserts this unambigu-

ously, calling on a wealth of ethnographic and historical examples that establish the mothers as the foundation—and the acting subjects—of the social order ever since the dawn of time, no matter how diversely these social orders might have developed.

But Briffault's work was not recognized for the revolution that it suggested in the dominant world view. It was suppressed, suffering the fate shared by all researchers who contradict the ideological dogma that man is the eternal first sex. How else is it possible that Lévi-Strauss could come up with his speculation on patriarchal prehistory in the 1970's, nearly five decades after Briffault published his decisive work? The answer is obvious, as Lévi-Strauss' theory of violence and war from he beginning of time is propounded not only in western science, but also in the general public, stifling any thought of a peaceable society founded by mothers.

1.4 The prehistory branch

Widely differing disciplines can contribute to prehistory research, among them palaeolinguistics, speleology, and socio-biology. It becomes quite interesting when researchers from these different areas get together and co-operate, as they did in 1979. The findings of this group validate Briffault's conclusions from various perspectives.

The prehistorian and speleologist ***Marie Koenig*** (1954, 1973) devoted herself to decoding Ice Age symbolic systems in both residential and ritual caves in Europe.[17] Recognition of her discoveries made it necessary to let go of the notion of Ice Age "Man the Hunter," that is, the assumption that it was the hunting men who created prehistoric culture and determined its course. She succeeded in unravelling the meaning of the abstract signs—similar to script—which occur next to, or combined with, cliff drawings and cave paintings, and interpreted the amazing world view of Palaeolithic people.

In Marie Koenig's interpretation, Paleolithic peoples used—at least 100,000 years ago—a system of practical orientation in space and time, and possessed a comprehensive religious worldview, expressed with high intelligence and artistic ability. In the heart of France, on the Île de France, she investigated an entire cultural region with over 2000 ritual caves, and compared them with other ritual caves in Europe. The epoch she looked at was long before the small sculptures of women appeared, but those statues did not come out of nowhere—they were preceded by this system of symbolic signs and drawings made on the walls of the caves.

Two abstract systems came to light: the system of the four (square, rhomb, cir-

cle divided into quadrants), which Koenig ascribes to orientation in space, and the system of the three (three lines, triangle), which hints at the visible phases of the moon that were used as the earliest measure of time. This lunar symbolism is associated with drawings of women, one with a crescent moon in her hand, others as a trinity, which suggests a connection between women and the moon. Neither are animal images meant for "hunting magic"; they are rather, by virtue of the abstract and non-naturalistic rendering of the horns, also associated with the moon as a measure of time. This points to the most ancient religion, one that grapples with the problem of life and death, and solves it through the concept of rebirth. In this religion women were central. The images of women are not associated with a "fertility cult"—a reductive notion that refuses to die—but instead are indicative of the centrality of women: because of their ability to give *rebirth*, women were at the center of the culture and were the bearers of this primordial religion. It was only later that the small female sculptures appeared, covered with the same abstract symbolic signs; so Koenig sees them as bearers of the space and time systems, and therefore powerful symbolic figures.

Marie Koenig's research is supported by the paleolinguistic work of ***Richard Fester*** (1962, 1974), who demonstrates that in most of the world's languages the same root syllables and root words directly indicate the female and feminine, or the effects that come from them.[18] He discovered no comparable examples of root words indicating the male and masculine. There must be a reason for this.

For Fester the most reliable criterion for applying the category of human being—along with walking upright and using tools—is language. In his view language arose not from shouting during the hunt—which he finds highly improbable since hunters don't want to scare the game away by talking and yelling. His view, like Marie Koenig's, is that language originated from the voiced intimacy of mother and child, from which articulated speech and meaning developed. This would explain the overwhelming number of female-associated root words. Meanwhile socio-biologists have discovered that the language abilities of women and girls are—after millions of years of human development—still measurably higher than that of men and boys.

In addition, Fester sees the earliest use of tools not with man as hunter, but with mothers looking after their children. To get food into a form suited to the baby, smashing fruits and roots by simple tools would have emerged early. Support for this are the words for "hand" and "holding," and the names for the earliest tools, which in many languages are derived from root words that signify the feminine, as Fester affirms. According to him it was the mothers who laid the groundwork for every subsequent technology. They are the origin of human society through giv-

ing birth, the origin of culture through the invention of language and the creation of religion.

In light of his paleolinguistic findings, Fester recognizes an early and long lasting central social position of women that was crucial for the survival of the human species. He closes with a tribute to Bachofen and his elucidation—long before the modern research into prehistory, socio-biology, and genetics—of the mother right structure of society.

The husband-and-wife research team of anthropologist ***David Jonas*** and evolutionary biologist ***Doris F. Jonas*** came to analogous conclusions in both their disciplines (1970).[19] Their research demonstrates that women must have been central to the formation of human society at the beginning and for hundreds of thousands of years after that. Their work indicates that for all higher mammals, and especially primates, the core of social organization is formed by the mothers, and that the alpha female who leads the herd enjoys the highest status. The dominant males have a different role. All sexually mature males are chased out of the center of the herd by their mothers, remaining at the periphery. There, at the outer edges, they fight for the highest status among each other, which exclusively limits who is permitted to engender the herd. For many animal groups, lower status males are driven out, while in others they are permitted—provided they don't challenge the alpha male's place—to hang around on the periphery of the group, and serve as first kill for predators. This gives them an indirect protective function for the center of the group consisting of females and young.

This is even more pronounced with apes, descended from primates, and from their observations the Jonas team concluded that early human groups were no different. The males at the edge of the group were also involuntary "protectors" of the group, at least until they learned to defend themselves with tools against predators. Later, through further development of defense techniques, they became hunters and little by little discovered that attack is the best defense. But hunting was a secondary phenomenon, and was not what made humans into culture bearers. Rather, the basis of cultural development was the center of the group, where mothers and children not only provided most of the food through their collecting activities, but also formed the web that held society together.

The Jonases used their theory to explicitly criticize the enormously exaggerated value of hunting, and with it, of the male role at that time, giving a completely warped picture of prehistory. Doris Jonas spells it out: in the social order of the higher mammals and primates, a fundamental core of community organization is in place that is, in fact, a matriarchy.[20] But as interesting as her insights are, she overlooks the fact that matriarchy is not comparable to the animal world. This form

of society is not a matter of socio-biology and evolutionary biology, but a consciously created human culture.

The interdisciplinary work and courageous theorizing of these four prehistory researchers has received far too little attention by the scientific establishment. Because it unmasked the ideology of universal patriarchy as a false assumption, their work was greeted by a deafening silence. They were made to understand, through the hostile treatment they encountered, that their findings were dangerous. In a typical incident, Marie Koenig was one of the very few women to be nominated a member of the famed Académie Française—but significantly, this honor was solely for her specific research in Celtic numismatics, and not for her breakthrough findings in use of symbolism in prehistory, which continue to be ignored by French and other archaeologists.

1.5 The religious studies branch

Although anthropologists research mythology and ritual, their work is significantly complemented and extended by the work of researchers in the area of religious studies.

Like Bachofen, ***James George Frazer*** (1890) interpreted mythology as a kind of chronicle expressed in metaphorical images, which has a "true core," i. e., refers to real cultural and political processes in earlier epochs.[21] But unlike Bachofen, he included in his work much anthropological evidence from every continent from his own time. In that way mythology became for him a rich source of insight about ancient ways of thinking and living. Since then, religious studies has maintained this double focus, supplanting the former, more abstract school of history of thought.

In his comparative studies Frazer brought an ancient religious ritual pattern to light, which he describes in his comprehensive work: it is the pattern of the goddess and her sacred king, or priest king. The king's destiny plays out in a cycle that begins with his initiation as priest king, continues through his sacred marriage with the goddess, and is completed with his ritual death—which can take various forms—with the promise of rebirth through the goddess. Afterwards, a successor—the dead king's reincarnation—will become the new sacred king. In the magical worldview, the sacred king is regarded as being responsible for harmony in nature, and he must maintain it through his ritualized life and death, in which he accepts the laws of waxing and waning in nature.

With this model of ritual pattern, Frazer sheds light on a very old and widespread religious patterns shared by peoples on every continent, a pattern from which

several religions later developed—including, as Frazer points out, Christianity.

Still, Frazer's model is weakened by a serious one-sidedness. Although he mentions in several places that this ritual pattern was a two-sided relationship between goddess and sacred king, throughout his work he is only concerned with the male side. His bias blinds him to the female side of the pattern; for him the female side might as well be non-existent.

Furthermore, his groundbreaking findings are again overshadowed and obscured by his 19th century theory of unilinear evolution in three stages. The initial stage of history of culture: the early, magical worldview, is devalued as primitive, and magic is defined as a simplistic philosophy that attempts to subdue nature using the wrong means. Consequently, he reduces the magical function of the sacred king to that of a charlatan who, though he knows perfectly well that his magic does not work, keeps deceiving his people as to its effectiveness, in order to stay in power. With this mistaken conception of magic he discriminates against all the indigenous peoples who practice within a magical worldview, and serves the racist colonialist project.

But the cultures formed by the great religions fare no better: at the second stage of history of culture he puts religion, which he defines as the trial to subdue nature by introducing a supernatural being. This peculiar definition of religion leads him to see nothing but superstition in religion, just as he saw magic as nothing but manipulation.

Then, however, comes the third and highest stage of history of culture: the enlightenment brought by modern western science, which tries—and claims to succeed—in mastering nature with causal-mechanistic techniques. Here we can see that his theory of unilinear evolution, which saturates and distorts his rich material, is grounded in the classical patriarchal idea of mastering and subduing nature. At the same time, it is a way of justifying European imperialism's oppression and domination of all peoples who have a magic or religious worldview.

In contrast, historian of religions ***Mircea Eliade*** (1951) significantly furthered understanding of the magic worldview and of magicians and shamans in his work.[22] Ever since Sigmund Freud drew on Frazer's research and ideology for his book *Totem and Taboo* (1913),[23] there has been the puzzling interpretation that there is a parallel between magic and neurosis. Psychologist Karl Kerény boldly forges on from this point, asserting that archaic peoples who engage in magical practice live in a closed-off, collectively neurotic worldview.[24] For him, magic is quite simply a neurotic offshoot of myth, and the magician a full-blown neurotic, acting it out in public. Kerény does not shy away from seeing a "neurotic situation" in the "early stage of all humankind."

Eliade dismisses this view, in that he suggests a distinctly different image of the magician or shaman. Most importantly, he dismisses the caricature of the sophisticated charlatan. He, too, includes anthropological material from every continent and shows that shamanism is a worldwide phenomenon.

His investigations conclude that the shaman is not a hysteric, neurotic or epileptic; to the contrary, the shaman is a person of above-normal brain power and ability to concentrate. The intensity of the shaman's concentration is out of reach for other people. Also, the shaman possesses a higher than usual intelligence and memory, as shamans are also the keepers of oral tradition of the mythology and history of their people. In healing rituals—considered as journeys through the three zones of the world: heaven, earth, and underworld—they integrate the mythology and cosmology of their culture.

Eliade's research amounts to a rehabilitation of the magician, or shaman, and the magical worldview. But it misses something crucial: for him, only the male shaman is considered, as if shamanism were a thoroughly male phenomenon. The widespread appearance of female shamans, from the earliest times all the way up to the present (as ancient China and modern Korea proves), goes by him unheeded. Furthermore, he cannot explain what the roots of the shamanic worldview are. There is much evidence to suggest not only that both male and female shamans can be seen as originating from female shamanic traditions, but also that the shamanic tradition is rooted in the worldview of matriarchal cultures. This perspective does not occur to Eliade—fixated as he is (like most male researchers) solely on the male half of the world.

Historian of religions ***Robert Graves*** had the courage to go further. A student of Frazer and influenced by Bachofen, he completely liberated himself from their prejudices against the idea of a social order created by women: matriarchy. In his work on Greek mythology and the mythology of Mediterranean cultures (1955)[25] he openly used the concept of matriarchy and disdained to go on the pointless diversion that considers the intervening patriarchy higher and better just because it came later in time. Instead, he linked his research to a passionate critique of patriarchy.

For Graves, as for both of his predecessors, mythology is not a series of fantasy stories but a source of understanding cultural-political events in earlier epochs. He distinguishes very precisely between false myths and authentic ones, with the authentic ones being narrative versions of archaic religious drama, containing the worldview of that time. Further, he doesn't approach an individual myth as a closed narrative, but rather uses its cognate variants to shed light on the various processes that formed its different elements. Then he connects its different elements to the various cultural-political contexts they were developed in, insofar as the

archaeological and anthropological records allow. In this way he brings special early historical epochs together with special layers of a myth and of mythology.

This way he can demonstrate that these myths speak a clear message relative to matriarchal societies known in the Mediterranean and Europe before the appearance of patriarchal invaders from the east and north. In his treatment, the image of the goddess appears in its full significance and scope. He shows that early Europe had no male gods—only the Great Goddess was immortal, comprehensive and ubiquitous. She embodies the terrestrial and cosmic nature; moon and sun were her celestial symbols. The moon, with its three phases, was primary and became an important symbol of the threefold goddess, ruling over the three zones of the world: heaven, earth and underworld. Most often the goddess appears in the three shapes of Maiden, Mother and Crone Goddess, corresponding both to the phases of the moon and the zones of the world.

Graves recognizes this threefold goddess as the basic pattern of matriarchal mythology. The great goddess's sacred king, or *heros*, is her companion and lover; at her direction he goes through the three phases of initiation, sacred marriage and transformation through death and rebirth, passing through the three zones of the world. Thus Graves completed Frazer's one-sided "ritual pattern," and illuminated it as a matriarchal ritual pattern by presenting the extended process.

Furthermore, he not only presents a mythological and historical study of matriarchal religions, but, supported by the wealth of his material, looks critically at the canon of history of cultures, showing it to be patriarchally biased. He points out that patriarchy was preceded by the sacred world of ancient matriarchal cultures, left out of the canon by the patriarchal writing of history. He doesn't judge this ancient sacred world from the perspective of a Eurocentric present; to the contrary, he turns existing patriarchal values upside down, presenting the matriarchal thea-cracy as the superior culture. He clearly states that it was destroyed by a male, military aristocracy and its peaceful sacred character dissolved through violence and domination—with ever more catastrophic consequences, up through the present.

These are unequivocal words and offer an unusually clear perspective, so it is no surprise that because of his bold stance Graves' colleagues would brand him—in spite of his vast knowledge and brilliant methodology—an outsider. He was accused by orthodox academics of having inadequately documented his assertions about early cultural-political events, of being unclear about his sources, and of hazarding creative, hermeneutical guesses. The insights—scorned as "hermeneutical guesses"—included seeing mythological rape as a reference to past expropriation of goddess temples and imposition of patriarchal control, as well as Graves' find-

ing that the slaying of Titans, giants and monsters by "heroes" were usually records of genocide, that is, of ancient indigenous peoples being slain by patriarchal conquerors.

Of course, this is an interpretation of myths—an ideology-critical one—that takes into account that the stories which came down to us were filtered through the lens of the victors, that is, a patriarchal Greek lens. Graves' colleagues offered no comparable coherent interpretation, except possibly one that considers rape and slaughter as the eternal norm. So these claims—to which orthodox academics cling—are the patriarchal type of "hermeneutical guesses," made with no more evidence than Graves', but much less probable, given the available material. The attacks on Graves were mainly motivated by the desire to dismiss his troublesome findings as "fiction" and to silence his critique of patriarchal history of cultures—the usual biased procedure. Nevertheless, his work as a whole and his critique of patriarchal civilization and history of cultures had a strong influence on the modern North American and European women's movement, especially its cultural and spiritual aspects.

The work of ***Edwin O. James*** (1959) appeared at about the same time.[26] He is a conventional researcher and mentions interconnected mythic narrative structures only in passing—and without a breath of cultural criticism. However, based on his detailed study of sources he proves the existence of the cult of the Great Goddess for an even greater range of cultures than Graves does. In his well-founded work he follows the cult of the goddess chronologically from the Palaeolithic, through the Neolithic, up to the late Bronze Age. He discovers it in Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as in Palestine and Anatolia, Persia and India, Crete, Greece and the rest of Europe. Thematically, his work is wide-ranging, as he presents the Great Goddess not only as the primordial mother, but also within her relationship to the "young god," her son, who in most cases might well be the mortal, sacred king. Also, his scope reaches from patriarchal Greek, Roman and Hellenistic epochs of goddess worship up to the Christian Madonna, whose attributes and festivals—although filtered through the interpretation of the Christian Church—are directly derived from those of the Great Goddess.

His work indirectly confirms that of Robert Graves, but is known only among religious studies scholars and has had no follow-up in the general discussion.

1.6 The branch of study of oral traditions

The study of folklore brings in oral tradition—customs, proverbs, songs, beliefs, and folk narratives, among other forms—and written versions of folk narratives such as myths, legends and fairy-tales. These traditional sources can carry traces of other, older cultures—in this context, of matriarchal ones—that live on underground, as it were, in patriarchal societies.

These traditions have been handed down within subcultures outside the dominant classes for a very long time, usually without the bearers' knowledge of where the content came from. This was especially ubiquitous in ancient patriarchal societies with definite stratification—such as those of Europe and Asia—with dom-inant groups above and subordinate ones below, and with most women belonging to the subordinate groups. So it is not coincidental that in the various subcultures women have always played an important role; usually women were the bearers of these fragments of matriarchal tradition.

These matriarchal elements are threatening material for the patriarchal worldview, so it is interesting to observe how they are handled. By the end of the 18th century, with the dawn of nationalism and the search for national identity in Europe, this body of oral tradition began to be collected and recorded—inspired by the Romantic movement, which lifted up "the folk" as the true bearers of a nation's human culture—a collective representation of the nation's creativity. This creative spirit might vary from region to region within national boundaries, but taken collectively it was seen to form the basis of the national culture. These traditions were celebrated as emanating from the numinous "soul of the folk," and so in the Romantic period the deciding step was taken to fictionalise these matriarchal elements, that is, to consign them to folk-fantasy or even superstition, which served to deprive them of any relation to past socio-political reality.

Folklore as a serious study began in the 19th century, having developed out of this Romantic movement. Nevertheless, the content of these traditions was not taken seriously, considered then (and now) as fiction, as false "myths and folktales," from which nothing useful could be learned. So it came to pass that throughout the 20th century (and up until today) folklore has been misused in the service of diverse intellectual and political trends. Various modern ideologies have been layered over the material, distorting it; this was done, for example, by the school of history of (patriarchal) ideas and religions, the school of aestheticism and formalism (which is not interested in any content at all), and by symbolic psychology (which made it into individual or collective dreams). In this way, the matriarchal elements embedded in these oral traditions were made completely invisible with-

in patriarchal worldviews and scholarship—as no lens had been developed to see them through.

To rescue them from this great variety of misinterpretations and give them the informed investigation they deserve, we must turn to modern Matriarchal Studies, which have the resources and perspective to place them back within the cultural framework they come from.[27]

Attempts at formulating a theoretical basis for this are being made in earlier and more recent folklore studies, which we will look at below.

A broader view than the Romantic was introduced by German folklorist ***Wilhelm Mannhardt*** (1905), who ventured outside of his national borders to study folklore comparatively. His work on the cults of field and forest in Greek and Roman antiquity, which he compared with those in North and Central Europe, is a unique collection of ancient beliefs, rituals and mythical figures that persisted in Europe's peasant traditions.[28] His work uncovers surprising parallels between Greek nymphs, found in springs and trees, as well as fauns and satyrs with Central European tree-women, water nymphs and grain spirits. Showing these parallels across the entire European peasant tradition is certainly Mannhardt's greatest contribution. It demonstrates that at the level of peasant culture, the submerged figures of deities of matriarchal origin lived on for all of Europe's patriarchalized peoples—Greeks, Thracians, Romans, Celts, Germans, and Slavs. However, for Mannhardt the implications of his findings were obscured by his rather vague notion of ubiquitous „nature spirits"—a very generalized category lacking a historical basis.

At first, English folklorists who studied Celtic tradition offered theoretical reflection on the subject. ***Walter Evans-Wentz*** (1911) addressed the various forms of belief in fairies, sensitively approaching Celtic peasants about their traditions.[29] He presents various theoretical frameworks to help him explain the phenomenon: first of all, he presents the belief in fairies in the context of a worldwide "animism." Secondly, he tries to explain belief in fairies with the so-called pygmy theory, in which it is supposed that the frequent references to the small size and delicacy of the fairy folk goes back to a very small race of people in prehistoric times—but he himself doubts it, because there was no archaeological evidence for this. Thirdly, he dredges up the druid theory, which makes fairies leftover relics, in folk memory, of druid priestesses—an explanation he himself doubts. Fourthly, he applies the mythological theory, with fairies being degenerated, miniaturized versions of ancient divinities—and in Evans-Wentz' understanding, they were Celtic deities, of course! Fifthly, he presents his favorite theory, in which belief in fairies is rooted in sympathetic feelings and experiences engendered by the intense contact

between humans and nature—here Evans-Wentz reflects his informants views about experiences of this kind.

However, regardless of his painstaking approach, he was unable to find a key to unlock the mystery of belief in fairies. All his theoretical attempts are like pieces of a puzzle he can't quite fit together. This characteristic, widespread blindness occurs because his approach does not reach far enough back into cultural history—beyond the patriarchal epoch.

Lewis Spence (1946) addresses exactly this problem in his work.[30] He rightly insists that isolated theoretical attempts to solve the origin of belief in fairies further distort the question, as they come from the reductive, disembodied and competitive perspective of modern scholars. For him, the contradictions are not inherent in the material, but lie in the attitude of the researchers. Thus, he is looking for a historically and anthropologically inclusive explanation and finds it in a cultural clash between several early peoples. According to him, the conflict plays out in the Bronze Age when a new culture came up against an older Neolithic one. Later, Iron Age peoples (among them the Celts) retained these events in their narratives and myths.

With these reflections Spence is on the right track, as he takes oral tradition's vast time span seriously. The wide range of early historical epochs and their conflicts is not covered up. But his comprehensive explanation does not describe the content of the diverse social orders and worldviews of these epochs of human culture, nor is he in a position to discover the deeper basis of this clash of cultures. Because of this, the actual meaning and significance of belief in fairies—in the midst of patriarchal cultures—remains unexplained. Although Spence (like Mannhardt and Evans-Wentz) had important predecessors such as Bachofen and Morgan, he does not draw on them. This means that for Spence, too, matriarchal cultural epochs remain obscure, and the conflict that led to their demise can't be addressed by him.

This crucial idea was first clearly set forth in the findings of ***Michael Dames*** (1976, 1977, 1992), who managed to put all the pieces together to form a whole. In his work on the great megalithic site of Avebury and the artificial round pyramid of Silbury Hill in South England, he brings archaeology together with comparative cultural studies, folklore research with linguistics of local geographical names.[31] In so doing he advances the discussion from belief in fairies to belief in the Great Goddess, a belief that goes back to the Neolithic. He discovers that Silbury Hill is itself a landscape goddess, that is, it was constructed so as to form, in concert with seasonal changes in the land, the image of a goddess. He reveals the monumental stone circles of Avebury as elements in worship of the Great Goddess, with

various stones associated with different aspects of the agrarian year. This makes visible the harmonious connection of human cultural construction with the living landscape, demonstrating the great spiritual reach not only of Neolithic technology but also of Neolithic religiosity. By his reference to the rich material of folk customs and folk narratives in South England, he is able to reconstruct parts of the content of this religiosity, which clearly show traces of a past matriarchal cultural epoch.

Michael Dames is not afraid to say this, which caused his orthodox colleagues—as with Robert Graves before him—to dismiss his work and to accuse him of creating "fictions," like a poet.

At present, this new perspective in folklore studies is being furthered by the Swiss researcher ***Kurt Derungs*** (1997, 1999, 2000); he explicitly proceeds from modern Matriarchal Studies, and this gives him the key to his investigations.[32] In light of his numerous case studies, primarily undertaken in Switzerland, he shows that matriarchal societies—which he openly names as such—had a tradition of creatively forming the landscape and of sustainable ecological practices. For these findings he uses a methodology that combines the study of ancient (often pre-Indo-European) names of geographical features such as mountains, rivers, lakes, hills; the symbolism of megalithic graves and other megalithic constructions; and, additionally, local myths and rituals. Taken together, these features document an ancient wisdom that revolves, in individual landscapes, around worship of a central figure, a divine ancestress, venerated in her appearance in nature as a landscape goddess. Kurt Derungs labels his work "Landscape Mythology," and his complex methodology is in accordance with that of Michael Dames. Proceeding in this way, both researchers succeed in uncovering the symbolic connection and sacred meaning particular landscapes had for Neolithic peoples, and also peoples who came later.

It is certainly no accident that Dames and Derungs are engaged as freelance scholars, their work ignored by the different disciplines of academia to which their findings are highly relevant. They belong—as many in the field of research on matriarchy—to the ranks of the intentionally excluded.

1.7 The archaeological branch

Archaeological excavations bring to light the impressively high cultural level attained by matriarchal societies, as well as the surprising time span represented by the matriarchal epoch of cultural development. The findings can provide the greatest evidence for the assumptions in the cultural-historical branches. On the

other hand, ancient architecture and artefacts provided by archaeology cannot be interpreted without a solid grounding in the history of cultures.

Ever since ***Heinrich Schliemann,*** taking Homer's epic as including a historical record, excavated Troy, Mycenae and Tyrins (in 1870–1890), the archaeological evidence has shown that myths and mythological epics are not just fictions, but have a cultural-historical basis. A bit later ***Arthur Evans*** did the same: he treated the narratives of Cretan mythology as including a historical core, and discovered the palaces of the Minoan culture on Crete.

The story of his excavations is recounted in his comprehensive work.[33] In 1901, he describes a great number of religiously symbolic objects with great precision, but the way he assigns their significance is biased toward patriarchal interpretations. He sees the cult of sacred stones, sacred trees and sacred columns, and the cult of the double axe as belonging to a male god. He refers to the large, centrally placed and elegantly dressed figures of women on signet rings as "female adorers," meanwhile a very small, unclothed male figure hovering above them, is designated as a "god."

Thirty years later, in 1931, Evans completely revised his perspective, which attests to his scientific integrity. His further research led him to no longer see Crete as ruled by a tiny, naked god of war, but rather by the great mother goddess who looks back at us from many murals, signet rings and statuettes. As for sacred poles and columns, sacred stones and trees and the religious symbol of the double axe, Evans now offers an opposite view. He sees them, along with the large caves of Crete, as cult objects of the early Minoan mother goddess, whom the Greeks called Rhea.

He comes to the general conclusion that a female divinity had the highest place in the Cretan religion, just as in Anatolia, Palestine and Syria at that time. Male gods did not yet exist; rather the young male companion of the goddess was her partner, lover or son. He characterizes this figure as the mortal Cretan Zeus, whose relationship to the goddess is solely that of a child, and that is why he is depicted as being so tiny. This Cretan culture shows an amazing staying power; in this island society the matriarchal culture held on longer, and became more highly developed than on the mainland surrounding the Eastern Mediterranean.

However, precisely because archaeological findings provide evidence, this discipline is held under strict patriarchal control, as can be seen in the way archaeologists who break with patriarchal ideology are treated. This was already the case when Evans brought out his breakthrough research, and it demonstrates some of the ways patriarchally moulded science uses to trivialize and suppress undesirable results. In spite of the first-rate cultural-historical understanding possessed by

Evans—in contrast to later archaeologists—his interpretation of Minoan culture has been sidelined. At first, the search began for an omnipotent king in Minoan culture, the "Big Man," around whom the society must have revolved—but who is not to be found there. Then, trade ships, decorated with flowers, were to be seen as warships, and the Minoan culture was said to have been expansionist and imperialist, with a reach all the way to the Greek mainland. Most importantly, women in Minoan culture were returned to the background, and all sacred images re-classified as secular decoration. Women were to be considered as mere ornaments, and their sacred dances as incidental adornment for religious events. Even when it was admitted that Minoan culture on Crete was organized in accordance with a certain degree of mother right, this was immediately followed with the disclaimer that matriarchy was in no way involved here; rather, Minoan culture would be seen as an "enigmatic culture" that suffered some sort of obsession with "the eternal feminine." This tactic of using an a-historical term like that one as diversion—even if nobody knows what it precisely means—is a method of making the difficult facts disappear; it is used still today.[34]

In his work (1967, 1975) ***James Mellaart,*** the archaeologist who excavated the Neolithic city of Çatal Höyük in Anatolia, presents a completely different picture of the Stone Age than what is taught in the patriarchal educational system.[35] He criticizes that interpretation of history of cultures has not kept up with the great strides made by archaeology, but rather has been rendered deplorably outdated by this progress. Based on the results of his own excavations he concludes that the level of culture in the Stone Age was much higher than is admitted today: already in the Paleolithic, the transfer of goods and knowledge was conducted over vast areas; and in caves and cliff dwellings, sedentary tendencies were already in evidence—the painted ceremonial caves, for example, would be unthinkable without an ongoing human presence. In regard to the Neolithic: as to whether a Neolithic settlement can be called a city, Mellaart rejects the criterion of size as being too superficial. It is rather a question of division of functions, and of the economic and cultural level of such centers where trade and industry, politics and religion are concentrated. He illustrates this with the example of Çatal Höyük, and asserts that in this sense all early Neolithic settlements in Anatolia (10,000—7,000 B.C.E.) should be regarded as cities or city-states; the villages were dependencies of these entities.

Mellaart rejects any unilinear evolutionary theory in which humanity progresses from primitive to higher levels. He doesn't, however, dispute that there was a development in numbers, size and range, since the human species increased significantly after its beginnings. But this doesn't necessarily imply an increase in quality. Size does not necessarily reflect quality. His excavations in the Near East,

particularly in Anatolia, have finally put an end to the bias of seeing Neolithic cultures as "primitive." Çatal Höyük was clearly a remarkable center of art and handicrafts. Its buildings are evidence for targeted planning; its economy for advanced agriculture and cattle-breeding; its imports for thriving trade; and its numerous sanctuaries for a developed religion that included symbolism and mythology.

Over a period of 1200 years, twelve cities were built on the hill of Çatal Höyük, each constructed on top of the one before. No traces of war or invasion have been found. Into the houses, stacked-together like a beehive, countless religious spaces have been built, so densely that there is one religious space for every two to five habitation rooms. The religious, or cult, rooms are distinguished from the habitation rooms by their artistic reliefs and paintings. The huge plaster reliefs—which appear most often on the walls—represent goddess figures, all depicted in attitudes of giving birth, according to Mellaart. Further, numerous bull horns and bull skulls, which probably embody the male fertility principle, have been found in the religious spaces. Also in the hunting-sanctuary, the goddess was the sole divine figure, as Mistress of the Animals, and when the hunt was superseded by planting, her statuettes, together with piles of grain and cultivated cruciferous plants, were found in the sanctuaries. In comparison, the male role in religion was limited: the man appears as the son of the goddess and is subordinate to her. For Mellaart, the primacy of the goddess reflects the primacy of women, which he concludes not only from pictures, but also from the evidence of funeral practices. Among the raised platforms in the living spaces, which served as beds and under which the dead were buried, the larger, main platform belonged to the woman of the house, while the smaller, corner platform belonged to the man. The consequences of this for the social order are obvious.

Nevertheless, Mellaart's reaction to his findings is instructive. The danger that the culture of Çatal Höyük could be interpreted as a "matriarchy" (matriarchy misunderstood as domination of women over men) worried him, and it would continue to occupy generations of archaeologists that came after him. With a certain desperation, Mellaart sought a significant role for men—whether as fathers, craftsmen, priests—in order to balance out the very visible primacy of women. But the archaeological material contradicts this. His proceeding is possible, but his dedication is unusual: would an archaeologist whose findings document the primacy of men go on a desperate hunt for the importance of women in such a society, in order to demonstrate its balance?

Even today, Mellaart's findings continue to irritate the orthodox archaeology club. His conclusions—in spite of his own reservations about them—are too dangerous to the patriarchal worldview, so it was inevitable that they would be revised.

This task has been taken over by ***Ian Hodder,*** the current Chief Archaeologist of Çatal Höyük. Under his direction the work of interpreting this site is not so carefully carried out as it was with Mellaart—after all, the point is to refute Mellaart.

In an article indicative of his position, Hodder discusses the question of what it really meant to be born in Çatal Hüyük as a woman or a man (2004).[36] He presents a summary of new research findings and tries to prove that matriarchy in Çatal Höyük is a fiction. Referring to various methods used by his colleagues, he demonstrates that in Çatal Höyük equal rights prevailed: at the table, in the use of space, in occupations, and in funerary practices. He explicitly repeats that there are no traces of fighting and war in the long history of Çatal Höyük. Based on such equality between the genders, Hodder concludes there was no "matriarchy." With this argument and the most recent findings, he proves precisely what he tries to refute: a gender-egalitarian society, that is, a matriarchy. What he understands by matriarchy is nothing more than an old, worn-out prejudice, rather than a scientific definition.[37]

But his mood changes rapidly when the subject is culture and belief of Çatal Höyük. Here Hodder asserts that depictions of men engaged in the hunt, and of male animals with erect penises predominate. Depictions of women, on the other hand, seem to be fewer—a surprising argument, where even male animals are enlisted as witnesses for patriarchal society! He (and most contemporary archaeologists) denies that the female figures—even when they are sitting on leopard thrones—represent goddesses; instead, he and his team offer absurd interpretations. The large reliefs of goddesses in birthing position, ornamenting the religious spaces, turn out, in his version, to be "animals." This interpretation is based on finding a very small seal that depicts a bear in this same position. When these goddess reliefs are reproduced in museums, bear ears are stuck on, transforming them into animals (as was done in the archaeological exhibition on Çatal Höyük in Istanbul, Summer 2006). This is a case of cynically deceiving the public. These blunders are thoughtlessly repeated by younger archaeologists for the sake of their careers.

There is certainly method, in patriarchal science, to this madness of presenting incomplete data and twisted facts: the point is constantly to diminish women and inflate men.

The struggle breaks out into the open when it comes to the work of archaeologist ***Marija Gimbutas*** (1974, 1989, 1991). Based on her excavations and comprehensive knowledge, she demonstrates that women did hold the rank of priestesses who venerated a variety of goddesses, and that they had an outstanding social significance not only in the Neolithic, but also much earlier, from Paleolithic times on. These are the results of her research, presented in her two most important books.[38]

In the chronologically oldest part of Europe—which she called Old Europe and whose cultural center is the Balkan Peninsula—she compared over 3,000 archaeological sites, in which over 30,000 miniature sculptures of goddesses were found—which she thoroughly investigated. This huge abundance of material speaks for itself. They are known as "idols," which says nothing about their meaning. Unlike most of her male colleagues, Gimbutas refers to the sculptures as goddesses, for she sees them as symbols of ancient beliefs. This goddess worship lasted more than 40,000 years from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic, and beyond. Over this vast span of time Gimbutas finds a continuity of various series of goddess images, whose aspects as giver of life and fertility, as well as bringer of death and regeneration, are clearly manifested. These miniature sculptures represent the seasonal ritual drama, and were used in ceremonies in this context. They bear scratched or painted stereotypical ciphers, like codes, that also appear on shrines, religious objects and painted ceramics, which Gimbutas decoded as an ancient symbolic script and interpreted as "the language of the Goddess." She was thus able to establish a durable connection between this Early and Late Stone Age symbolism and that of later goddesses in Europe, known through historical sources. She called this method Archaeomythology.

All the evidence points to Old European culture as being characterized by a deep religiosity devoted to goddesses and by the central place held by women in society—since woman is the source of life. Men were considered the spontaneous and life-stimulating gender, but did not embody life-giving power. Gimbutas describes this culture as matrilinear and matrifocal, egalitarian and peaceful. This contrasts starkly with the Indo-European stage that followed, which had a patriarchal character and destroyed the Old European culture in barbarous ways. According to Gimbutas this culture of war did not arise in Old Europe, but came in from outside with the invading horsemen of the Russian steppes, who set themselves above the native population as a class of rulers.

These are clear results and clear statements of what most male researchers, in spite of overwhelming evidence, do not want to admit. As she is free of bias, Gimbutas develops her conclusions convincingly and without the otherwise typical distortions and logical contradictions, usually manifested by patriarchally biased researchers when they confront matriarchal cultures.

This took place in the heart of the strictly guarded discipline of archaeology—and by a woman! It also happened during a time of strong international women's movements and of excellent feminist scholarship, which for the past thirty years has been critical of the patriarchal worldview. Thus Gimbutas' work had a great impact among feminist researchers, and continues to resonate.

But this situation made Gimbutas' findings and interpretation all the more threatening to the dominant scientific view. Her work set off an open war of the worldviews and was fought—no surprise here—with unfair means. A highly spiteful campaign was launched to discredit her as a researcher and salvage the threatened patriarchal version of history. This effort came from ***Colin Renfrew*** (1987), a specialist in Indo-European archaeology, who realized that his area of study had been fundamentally altered by Gimbutas' discoveries and masterful synopsis. He set out to demolish her work by means of a counter-theory.[39] He claimed that it was not the horsemen from the southern Russian steppes who Indo-Europeanized Old Europe, asserting that this occurred much earlier, with the first agriculturists, who migrated little by little from western Anatolia to Southeast Europe, and who were Indo-European and patriarchal. With this theory he moved Indo-European culture thousands of years back, thus reinforcing the ideology of eternal patriarchy. Renfrew's theory does not, however, take into account the abrupt change in funerary customs, the sudden disappearance of pre-Indo-European symbolic systems, or the appearance of fortifications during the Copper Age. Similarly, he ignores all the linguistic evidence contradicting his concept.[40]

This was not invisible to his colleagues, but since Renfrew is a powerful figure in archaeology, he was able to push his untenable theory through by manipulation and power games. At the level of political strategizing, his campaign was successful, especially in England, North America and Germany. For many young male and female archaeologists, knowledge of Gimbutas is now limited to insulting caricatures of her work, and some even believe they must ridicule her to keep up with the times or to help their own careers.[41] Newer archaeologists in Renfrew's lineage go so far as to assert that it was early agriculturists in Europe who practised murderous violence; they invoke this to prove that peaceful societies have never existed, and are nothing but romantic feminist dreams. In addition the old, widespread prejudice was again brought out, that the thousands of goddess statuettes from the Palaeolithic and Neolithic—which Gimbutas had interpreted with great nuance—had been nothing but children's toys or, worse yet, pornographic figures for men. There is not a scrap of evidence for this, but it is crucial that in this way early human culture is once again demoted and thoroughly robbed of its sacred character.

Through these examples, the power of western patriarchal sciences and societies to control the terms of the discussion is made visible. At the same time, the structural violence can be seen to enforce the "correct discussion," with which an atmosphere of defamation and hate against undesirable findings and knowledge is created. All this serves to maintain the obsolete ideology of universal patriarchy, one of the pillars supporting patriarchal domination.[42]

1.8 Feminist and Indigenous Matriarchal Studies

A turning point is indicated by the fact—and the significance of this should not be underestimated—that in the past few decades, feminist and indigenous researchers, for the most part women, have taken the investigation of matriarchal forms of society into their own hands. Their work stands in stark contrast to traditional research on matriarchy as it has been done ever since Bachofen (1861) and Morgan (1851), which is full of patriarchal prejudice. These feminist and indigenous approaches to research on matriarchy assert the right to proceed on their own terms, and have developed a very different perspective on society and history. These scholars are bringing forth a paradigmatic change in these fields, no longer waiting for a stamp of approval (or rejection) for their findings from patriarchal institutions. Though feminist and indigenous Matriarchal Studies—which overlap in many respects—are relatively new, they are developing rapidly, both in quantity and quality.

Awake and self-aware, feminist and indigenous women researchers have questioned patriarchal and colonialist—i. e., sexist and racist—thought patterns. Therefore, they are best prepared to recognize the particulars of matriarchal societies as a women-created form of society:

First of all, they have no trouble seeing women as acting subjects in history and in society—an approach that patriarchally influenced researchers have a great deal of trouble with–, because these women researchers are thinking and acting subjects themselves, whether in the context of their traditional cultures or in protesting against the patriarchal societies they live in.

Secondly, they are able—more so than men are—to apprehend the requirements, social effects and symbolic images of motherhood, as well as the values of mothering, which in matriarchies play such a structuring economic, social and cultural role. Not a few women researchers understand these basic situations having experienced them in their own lives.

Thirdly, this issue of access is becoming particularly important in ethnographic research on existing matriarchal societies. Female anthropologists have an easier time making contact with women of matriarchal cultures, and this is particularly true when the anthropologist has a feminist orientation. Since they start from a very different perspective, they come to very different conclusions than did their patriarchally influenced predecessors. This new point of view is being decisively advanced by indigenous women researchers, whose research within their own matriarchal societies looks farthest and most deeply, in a way that could never be possible for outsiders to do. At the same time, they intensify their critique of patriarchy through the history both of external col-

onization, which subjected their societies and still oppresses them, and internal colonization, which these researchers have been subject to as indigenous women.

Therefore, feminist and indigenous Matriarchal Studies are necessarily always dedicated to one degree or another to critiques of patriarchy. All together, this means a change of perspective so radical that research on matriarchy has come far from its beginnings in traditional theories and approaches to arrive at a new turning point of great significance. In fact, it not only is a new area of research, but could be labelled a new socio-cultural science, one which includes a new paradigm.

The new socio-cultural science began in the 1970's, in the context of western feminism, and its beginnings were hampered by lay researchers' naive, non-methodical approach. A whole range of poorly-reasoned theoretical constructs played a role; these are still being recycled today, albeit at a somewhat higher level. To wit:

- the *reversal thesis,* in which a "women's society" is seen as the simple reversal of the prevailing "men's society";
- the *essentialist thesis,* holding that since women are by nature the better sex, matriarchy will automatically be the better form of society;
- the *complementing thesis,* holding that matriarchy and patriarchy could complement each other, forming the optimal society;
- the *intermixing thesis,* where matriarchy and patriarchy are supposedly intermixed in such a way that an eternal matriarchal principle will somehow also be present in patriarchy—though how this will come to pass is not explained;
- the *beyond-dominance thesis,* which says that a just, gender-egalitarian society is only possible by going beyond matriarchy and patriarchy.

All these constructions come up against a certain lack of knowledge or misjudgement of matriarchal patterns. They are stuck in the outdated concept of matriarchy (a concept that comes along with unexamined patriarchal ideology), or they have only a very vague concept of matriarchy. Thus these constructions can never lead to scientifically grounded research on matriarchal societies, not to mention to a new, paradigm-changing perspective.

This doesn't begin until the advent of modern Matriarchal Studies, a scientifically well-grounded field of study that has appeared over the past few decades, and is rapidly undergoing further development. Through my own work, a definitional, methodological and theoretical basis was created—without which this research could not achieve its wide-ranging goals. These goals involve investigating and pre-

senting a huge historical and geographical spectrum of matriarchal social forms adequately, that is, in a way which is interdisciplinary, systematic, critical of ideologies, and carried out with subtlety and empathy.

Modern Matriarchal Studies has been undertaken in several disciplines, with ever-increasing numbers of good individual studies on existing matriarchal societies being done. In anthropology, feminist researchers displaying great cultural empathy have devoted their work to the role of women and men in indigenous matriarchal societies, producing interesting results: see, for example, *Peggy Reeves Sanday* on the Minangkabau of West Sumatra,[43] *Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen* on Juchitàn, a city on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico,[44] *Hélène Claudot-Hawad* on the Tuareg (Amazigh) in the Central Sahara,[45] and many others.

Indigenous anthropologists from existing matriarchal societies have done studies on their own peoples; this represents a significant step forward for modern Matriarchal Studies. These researchers not only investigate their own traditions (insofar as these have not been completely destroyed by various colonial incursions), but they also attempt to reconstruct them, to bring them out from under the layers of foreign infiltration. Their personal connections to their cultures lend great authenticity to their voices: see, for example, *Barbara Alice Mann* (Bear Clan of the Seneca-Iroquois, North America) on Iroquois women and society,[46] *Lamu Gatusa* of the Mosuo (Southwestern China) on Mosuo social forms and traditional religion,[47] *Wilhelmina J. Donkoh* of the Akan (Ghana, West Africa) on the leading role of women in Akan-Ashanti society,[48] *Malika Grasshoff (Makilam),* a Kabyle, on the central role of women in her own North African Berber society,[49] and many others.

In cultural history and archaeology as well, the feminist perspective has engendered theoretical developments that belong to the realm of modern Matriarchal Studies—even if their authors don't use this term, choosing substitutes instead: see, for example, *Riane Eisler,* with her theory of cultural evolution from the perspective of two fundamentally different social systems, which she calls the "dominator model" and the "partnership model,"[50] and *Marija Gimbutas,* whose wide-ranging work on Old Europe is based on factual archaeological material and thus is much better founded. Though Gimbutas did not see herself as a feminist researcher on matriarchy (instead, she refers to "matristic societies"), her work became the basis for many interesting studies in history of cultures by researchers, some of whom consider themselves to be doing feminist Matriarchal Studies.[51]

A well-founded, reliable explanation of the rise of patriarchal societies is an important part of modern Matriarchal Studies. Numerous naive, speculative theories have been put forth on this subject—theories that neither recognize the

appropriate sources from relevant disciplines, nor proceed methodically, which makes them irrelevant for the use in socio-cultural science. Serious attempts at such an explanation are brought together by many scholars in a recent anthology.[52]

1.8.1 The politics of modern Matriarchal Studies today

Modern Matriarchal Studies—in all of its feminist and indigenous varieties—have emerged from movements critical of patriarchy: the feminist movement, fighting for women's self-determination, and the indigenous peoples' movement, fighting for self-determination of peoples and cultures. With these movements and this research, women and indigenous peoples are reclaiming their rights to their own interpretations of history and culture.

Because it is an area of study that transgresses patriarchal worldviews and social forms—and thus has a revolutionary impact—it is not at all surprising that modern Matriarchal Studies have only a limited place (or none at all) in academia and patriarchal educational organizations. Some researchers on matriarchy who do work within the university system find themselves marginalized in their institutions, with barely any influence over content, curriculum and worldview. Others work outside academia as freelance scholars in more or less autonomous circumstances.

In this context, an important role is played by the independent *HAGIA, International Academy for Modern Matriarchal Studies and Matriarchal Spirituality,* which I founded in Germany in 1986 and have directed ever since. It is supported and administrated by women, and is unique in that modern Matriarchal Studies have been further developed and taught here for over two decades. All of the current international and intercultural aspects investigated by researchers in this new socio-cultural science are addressed in the curriculum. This academy has a clear feminist orientation, and since its inception primarily serves the independent, serious education of women, their personal development, and their political empowerment.

Thanks to the initiative and support of *International Academy HAGIA,* and under my direction, two World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies took place in 2003 and 2005, making this new socio-cultural science visible to an international audience for the first time, in all its diversity and breadth of scope. In their own way these congresses were unique events, and constituted a measure of historical significance for modern Matriarchal Studies.

The First World Congress on Matriarchal Studies was called "Societies in Balance," and took place in 2003 in Luxembourg. It was primarily supported

through the Minister for Family and Women in that country, Marie-Josée Jacobs. The congress was a groundbreaking event, bringing together for the first time scholars from Europe, the USA and China who had, until then, worked in relative isolation on this subject. Their highly-qualified presentations covered a broad spectrum of modern Matriarchal Studies in theory and politics, in the investigation of existing matriarchal societies in the Americas, Africa and Asia, as well as in studies of the history and symbolism of matriarchal cultures of the past. In the course of their encounters, they developed a broad-based, alternative "scientific community" addressing the subject of matriarchy. In 2006, the conference papers from this First World Congress were published in German.[53]

The Second World Congress on Matriarchal Studies, "Societies of Peace," took place at the Texas State University in San Marcos (Texas). It was generously supported by Genevieve Vaughan, founder and director of the "Center for the Study of the Gift Economy" in Austin, Texas; she understood the relationship between modern Matriarchal Studies and her own theory of the Gift Economy. This congress signified a further milestone of modern Matriarchal Studies, exceeding the achievements of the first congress: this time it brought together indigenous anthropologists from existing matriarchal societies worldwide. They came from North, Central and South America, from North, West and South Africa, from the Asian countries of China, Indonesia (Sumatra) and India—and their presence made this Second World Congress a significant intercultural event. The indigenous researchers spoke not only of matriarchal patterns kept alive in their cultures up until today, but also about the social and political problems brought to their societies by colonization and missionizing. In this way they offered correction to the skewed perspective often held by non-indigenous scholars, and taught the public about the non-violent social order in their various matriarchal cultures—societies in which all living beings are respected, and in which a reciprocal equality, independent of gender and age, is achieved.

Both congresses are documented in English in the book: *Societies of Peace. Past, Present and Future* (2009).[54]

All in all, in these congresses the creative contribution of women to the development of human culture worldwide was brilliantly presented. An egalitarian form of society shaped by women, and its concrete patterns, were made visible—whether in societies from the past, or in individual matriarchal cultures that still exist in the present. At this time, the repercussions and consequences of these extraordinary events are not yet clear. But the great success achieved by both congresses offers hope for the excellent further development of modern Matriarchal Studies as a new socio-cultural paradigm.

Above all, and more important than any other aspect of this study is that from the lessons that matriarchal societies offer, solutions to the social problems of today can be discovered, and that we maintain the courage to undertake the political steps necessary to stimulate the process of changing patriarchal society into a humane one. In light of the deep political, economic and ecological crises we face today, this is an absolute necessity.

Notes

1. This chapter is an extremely abbreviated version of Heide Goettner-Abendroth's *Das Matriarchat I. Geschichte seiner Erforschung (Matriarchy I. History of Research),* Stuttgart, Verlag Kohlhammer, 1988–1995.
2. Johann Jakob Bachofen: *Myth, Religion and Mother Right,* Princeton, N.J., 1967, Princeton University Press, (*Das Mutterrecht,* first edition, Stuttgart 1861).
3. Joseph-Francois Lafitau: *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times,* William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore (eds. and transl.), 2 vols., Toronto 1974, The Champlain Society, (*Moeurs des Sauvages Amériquains comparées aux Moeurs des premier Temps,* first edition, Paris1724).
4. Bachofen: *Myth, Religion and Mother Right,* ibidem, p. 53.
5. Heny Lewis Morgan: *League of the Hau-dé-no-saunee or Iroquois,* 2 vols., New York 1901, Burt Franklin, (first edition 1851).
6. Henry Lewis Morgan: *Ancient Society,* Chicago 1877, Charles H. Kerr & Company.
7. Morgan: *Ancient Society,* ibidem, pp. 52–53.
8. Engels, Friedrich: *The origin of the family, private property and the state,* Chicago 1902, Kerr (first edition, Zurich 1884).
9. Engels, ibidem, p. 70.
10. August Bebel: *Die Frau und der Sozialismus,* Cologne 1967 (53rd edition), Verlag Jakob Hegner (first edition, Stuttgart 1913).
11. Christian Sigrist: *Regulierte Anarchie,* Frankfurt 1979, Syndikat.
12. Bronislaw Malinowski: *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, New York 1926, Paul R. Reynolds.
13. In contrast, in his Malinowski interpretation Wilhelm Reich asserts that it is not so much men's emotional conflict as it is hard economic and political reality that slowly but surely disadvantages Trobriand Islands women (in: *The Invasion of compulsory Sex-Morality,* New York 1971, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, first edition 1932/1935). He sees the culture as more developmentally dynamic than Malinowski does in postulating a general transition from mother right to father right, in order to explain the apparent paradox of Trobriand Islands society as evidenced in encroaching patriarchal tendencies. Regarding the chieftainship, he shows that the driving force behind the chief's position is marriage goods; that is, the food and goods each wife's brothers produce for her, which he as the husband then profits from. This is why he connects himself with women from all clans, thus keeping a large group of men in servitude. As the mechanism of marriage goods doesn't benefit ordinary men, but only the chief, he—though

it is against matriarchal principles—gives preferential treatment to his biological son over his sister's son, who would be the rightful inheritor of the title. In that way he tries to move (parts of) the inheritance from the mother's to the father's line.—Although Reich's analysis is discerning, he remains committed to Engels' untenable thesis that through internal economic mechanisms a matriarchy can change into a patriarchy. Therefore, he also fails to explain how the chief's exceptional position came into being, with its patriarchal tendencies that allow him to institute hierarchy within a matriarchal society.

14. Annette Weiner: *Women of Value. Men of Renown: New Perspectives in Trobriand Exchange,* Austin 1976, University of Texas Press.
15. Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Structural Anthropology,* 2 vols., New York 1963, Basic Books.
16. Robert Briffault: *The Mothers. A Study of the Origins of Sentiments and Institutions,* 3 vols., New York 1996, Johnson Reprint Corporation (first edition, New York-London 1927).
17. Marie E. P. Koenig: *Das Weltbild des eiszeitlichen Menschen,* Marburg 1954, Elwert Verlag; and: *Am Anfang der Kultur. Die Zeichensprache des frühen Menschen,* Berlin 1973, Gebr. Mann Verlag.
18. Richard Fester: *Sprache der Eiszeit,* Berlin-Grunewald 1962, Herbig; and: *Protokolle der Steinzeit,* Munich-Berlin 1974, Herbig.
19. Jonas/Jonas: *Man-Child. A Study of the Infantilization of Man,* New York 1970, McGraw-Hill.
20. Fester/König/Jonas/Jonas: *Weib und Macht. Fünf Millionen Jahre Urgeschichte der Frau,* Frankfurt 1979, Fischer Verlag, p. 166.
21. James George Frazer: *The Golden Bough,* New York 1990, Saint Martin's Press (3rd edition, 9 vols., first edition 1890).
22. Mircea Eliade: *Shamanism,* Princeton 1964, N.J., Bollingen Series (first edition, Paris 1951).
23. Siegmund Freud: *Totem and taboo. Some points of agreement between the mental lives of savages and neurotics,* London 2008 (Repr.), Routledge (first edition 1913).
24. Karl Kerény: Introduction to Frazer: *The Golden Bough (Der Goldene Zweig),* German edition, Frankfurt 1977, Ullstein.
25. Robert Graves: *The Greek Myths,* New York 1955, Penguin Books; and *The White Goddess,* New York 1958, Vintage Books.

    See also Jane Ellen Harrison: *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion, and Themis,* New York 1962, University Books Inc. (first edition, Cambridge 1908).

    See also Momolina Marconi: *Da Circe a Morgana. Scritti di Momolina Marconi,* Anna da Nardis (ed.), Rome 2009, Edizioni Venexia.—Like Jane Harrison and, later, Robert Graves, Momolina Marconi discerned in ancient Mediterranean religion an earlier substratum of goddess veneration and matriarchy. She wrote from the late 1930s through the 1970s and is an early pioneer in this field. (see the review of Luciana Percovich in: http://www.universitadelledonne.it/english/kirke.htm)
26. Edwin O. James: *The Cult of the Mother Goddess,* London 1959, Thames & Hudson; and Miriam Robbins Dexter: *Whence the Goddesses. A Source Book,* New York 1990, Athene Series, Teachers College Press.
27. See Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *The Goddess and her Heros,* ibidem; and *Inanna. Isis. Rhea,* Königstein/Germany 2004, Ulrike Helmer Verlag; and *Fee Morgane. Der Heilige Gral,* Königstein/Germany 2005, Ulrike Helmer Verlag; and *Frau Holle. Das Feenvolk der Dolomiten,* Königstein/Germany 2005, Ulrike Helmer Verlag.

28. Wilhelm Mannhardt: *Wald- und Feldkulte,* 2 vols., Darmstadt, Germany, 1963, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft (first edition, Berlin 1875–1877).
29. Evans Wentz: *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries,* London 1911, Colin Smythe, (first edition 1911).
30. Lewis Spence: *British Fairy Origins,* London 1946, Watts & Co.
31. Michael Dames: *The Silbury Treasure. The Great Goddess rediscovered,* London 1976, Thames & Hudson; and *The Avebury Cycle,* London, 1977, 1996, Thames & Hudson; and *Mythic Ireland,* London 1992, 1996, Thames & Hudson.
32. Kurt Derungs: *Mythologische Landschaft Schweiz,* Bern, Switzerland, 1997, Verlag Amalia; and *Mythologische Landschaft Deutschland* (Derungs/Goettner-Abendroth), Bern, Switzerland, 1999, Verlag Amalia; and *Landschaften der Göttin. Avebury, Silbury, Lenzburg,* Bern, Switzerland, 2000, Verlag Amalia.
33. Sir Arthur Evans: *The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult,* London 1901, Macmillan; and *The Earlier Religion of Greece in the Light of Cretan Discoveries,* London 1931, Macmillan.
34. See two examples from many: Friedrich Matz: *Kreta—Mykene—Troja,* Stuttgart-Zürich 1956, Fretz & Wasmuth; and Peter Haider in a public disputation with Heide Goettner-Abendroth at the University of Innsbruck, published in: Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Für Brigida,* Frankfurt, 1998, Verlag Zweitausendeins.
35. James Mellaart: *Çatal Hüyük—A Neolithic Town in Anatolia,* London 1967, Thames & Hudson; and *The Neolithic of the Near East,* London 1975, Thames & Hudson.
36. Ian Hodder: "Women and Men at Çatal Höyük," in: *Scientific American* 290,1, 2004/ January, pp. 77–83.
37. See the critique of Hodder's article by Heide Goettner-Abendroth: "Did matriarchal forms of social organization exist in Çatal Höyük?," in: *The Journal of Archaeomythology,* vol. 2, no. 2, Fall/Winter 2006.
38. Marija Gimbutas: *Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe,* London 1974, Thames & Hudson, and University of California Press; and *The Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization,* San Francisco 1989, Harper and Row; and *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe,* San Francisco 1991, HarperSanFrancisco.
39. Colin Renfrew: *Archaeology and Language,* London 1987, Jonathan Cape.
40. See the critique of Renfrew's theory in: Charlene Spretnak: „Die wissenschaftspolitische Kampagne gegen Marija Gimbutas", in: *Die Diskriminierung der Matriarchatsforschung. Eine moderne Hexenjagd,* (ed.) AutorInnengemeinschaft, pp. 88–108, Bern, Switzerland, 2003, Edition Amalia. (This article has not been published in English as yet.)
41. See for examples: Margaret W. Conkey/Ruth E. Tringham: "Archaeology and the Goddess: Exploring the Contours of Feminist Archaeology," in: *Feminisms in the Academy,* (eds.) Stanton/Stewart, pp.199–247, Ann Arbor 1995, University of Michigan Press; and Cynthia Eller: *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future,* Boston 2000, Beacon Press.
42. This comes out clearly in Cynthia Eller's book, *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future,* op.cit. Her defense of the idea of eternal patriarchy assumes universal male dominance, along with the sovereign authority of a transcendent, male, monotheistic God, since prehistoric times. This is a myth of western civilization, projected through colonial arrogance onto all past cultures and present non-western cultures. Eller

attempts to prop up this myth with outdated ideological theses (e.g., Rosaldo/Lamphere, 1974), while ignoring the whole spectrum of research findings that contradict hers (e.g., Peggy Reeves Sanday: *Female Power and Male Dominance,* 1981/2000). Furthermore, she is silent about the feminist critique of the conventional, ideologically slanted, western scientific practice that regards both early and extant egalitarian non-western societies as male-dominated gender hierarchies—even where authoritative testimony indicates egalitarianism (see Gero/Conkey 1991; Nelson 1997; Kent 1998, 1999). Furthermore, Eller's concept of matriarchy has been superseded by the definition articulated by modern Matriarchal Studies, which—as this book in its totality demonstrates—has proved to be adequate to existing indigenous, mother-centered societies. The conflation of "matriarchy" with "gynocracy," i.e. women's rule, is a patriarchal construct (beginning with Bachofen 1861) and is permanently used as a rallying cry to discredit and eliminate any research on non-patriarchal societies. These serious failings disqualify Eller's book as a scientifically based argument, and expose it as a biased broadside. In fact, what "won't give women a future" is the belief in the eternal, unchanging nature of male dominance, a belief that sustains this construct in the present and projects it into both past and future.—See the detailed critique of Cynthia Eller's book in: Joan Marler: "The Myth of Universal Patriarchy: A Critical Response to Cynthia Eller's *Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory,"* published in *Prehistoric Archaeology and Anthropological Theory and Education,* Reports of Prehistoric Research Projects 6–7 (2005), pp. 77–85, Nikolova/Fritz/Higgins (eds.), Salt Lake City & Karlovo, International Institute of Anthropology; also published in *Feminist Theology* 14, 2 (2006), pp. 163–187, London, SAGE Publications.

43. Peggy Reeves Sanday: *Women at the Center. Life in a Modern Matriarchy,* Ithaca, New York 2002, Cornell University Press.
44. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen: *Juchitàn, Stadt der Frauen. Vom Leben im Matriarchat,* Reinbek bei Hamburg 1994, Verlag Rowohlt; and *FrauenWirtschaft. Juchitàn—Mexikos Stadt der Frauen,* Bennholdt-Thomsen/Müser/Suhan (eds.), Munich, 2000, Frederking & Thaler.
45. Hélène Claudot-Hawad,: "Femme Idéale et Femme Sociale chez les Touaregs de l'Ahaggar," in: *Production pastorale et société,* no. 14, Paris 1984, Maison des sciences de l'homme; and "Femmes Touaregues et Pouvoir Politique," in: *Peuples Méditerranéens,* no. 48/49, Paris 1989, Editions Anthropos; and *Eperonner le monde. Nomadisme, cosmos et politique chez les Touaregs*, Aix-en-Provence 2001, Edisud.
46. Barbara Mann: *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas,* New York 2002, 2004, Peter Lang Publishing.
47. Lamu Ga tusa: Monograph: *Walk into the Women's Kingdom, Lugu Lake. Mother Lake, Mosuo Women, Mosuo Daba Culture,* Yunnan Academy for Social Sciences, Kun ming, China (in Chinese only); and "A Sacred Place of Matriarchy: Lugu Lake—Harmonious Past and Challenging Present," in: Heide Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* Toronto 2009, Inanna Press, York University. See also Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchat in Südchina. Eine Forschungsreise zu den Mosuo,* Stuttgart 1998, Kohlhammer Verlag.
48. Wilhelmina J. Donkoh: *Osei Tutu Kwame Asibe Bonsu (The Just King)*, Accra 2000, Woeli Publishers; and "Female Leadership among the Asante," in: Heide Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace,* ibidem.
49. Makilam: *The magical Life of Berber Women in Kabylia,* New York 2007, Peter Lang Publishing;

and *Symbols and Magic in the Arts of Kabyle Women,* New York 2007, Peter Lang Publishing.

50. Riane Eisler: *The Chalice and the Blade,* New York 1987, Harper & Row.
51. See the contributions in: Joan Marler (ed.): *From the Realm of the Ancestors. An Anthology in Honor of Marija Gimbutas,* Manchester 1997, KIT (Knowledge, Ideas & Trends).
52. Cristina Biaggi (ed.): *The Rule of Mars. Readings on the Origins, History and Impact of Patriarchy,* Manchester 2005, KIT (Knowledge, Ideas & Trends).
53. Heide Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Gesellschaft in Balance. Dokumentation des Ersten Weltkongresses für Matriarchatsforschung in Luxemburg 2003,* Stuttgart 2006, Edition HAGIA and Kohlhammer Verlag. See also the documentary by Uschi Madeisky/Gudrun Frank-Wissmann: *Societies in Balance. Documentation of the First World Congress on Matriarchal Studies, Luxembourg 2003,* Frankfurt 2005, UR-KULT-UR.
54. Heide Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future (Selected papers of the First and Second World Congresses on Matriarchal Studies 2003 and 2005),* Toronto 2009, Inanna Press, York University.

PART I

Indigenous Matriarchal Societies in Eastern Asia, Indonesia, and Oceania

The account of indigenous matriarchal societies begins in Northeast India and generally follows the same path taken by matriarchal cultures in the earliest times: beginning in the central mountains of East Asia, abundant with water, down toward the southeast and east, and on to the Pacific region. A specific hypothesis regarding their historical spread is not related to this general arrangement of the book, and is beyond of its scope.

This first section is particularly dedicated to the characteristics of the internal social and cultural patterns of matriarchal societies. The general outlines and particular variability of these characteristics will be derived step by step from analysis of individual matriarchal societies and cultures. The East Asian region lends itself especially well to this, as it still has some indigenous matriarchal societies that coherently demonstrate the full range of matriarchal patterns. This is not to say that, over their long history, they have not been distorted by centuries of patriarchal oppression; but these super-impositions can be historically pinpointed and are easily discernible.

For the same reason, I begin with the matriarchal societies of Northeast India. Until recently, they have held onto their classic matriarchal traits; today their matriarchal patterns are in rapid decline—a fate that almost all extant matriarchal

societies are confronted with today. It should not confuse the reader, that in Part 2 of this book there is a chapter on indigenous matriarchal societies in South India. There is a good reason for this separation, because the matriarchal culture of Northeast India is historically associated with the Sino-Tibetan type of languages and to the East Asian type of matriarchy. So, the Northeast India chapter is followed by a chapter on Tibet and by those on East Asia in general. In contrast to these, the South Indian matriarchal culture goes back to the very early Indus civilization, and thus to West Asia; it has a different history and is a completely distinct type of matriarchal culture. It is important to respect these distinctions, as today's Indian nation-state encompasses a variety of very disparate cultures. Compared with traditional cultural-historical groupings, the relatively recent setting of national borders is quite arbitrary. This also applies in other chapters, where the designations refer more to geographic-cultural regions than to modern state borders.

2

Matriarchy in Northeast India

For each Ka Iawbei Tynrai, "grandmother of the roots," ancestress of each Khasi clan

2.1 Khasi: the land and the people

In the Khasi Hills of Assam (Meghalaya), which thrust up 6,000 feet between the great Brahmaputra and Irawadi rivers, live the *Khasi,* who have maintained their traditional lifestyle up to the present time. Their traditional social order and way of life provide us with a good template for recognizing typical elements of matriarchy, so that we can identify these in other contexts.

The Khasi are a sub-population of the *Wa,* who once inhabited all of Indochina. Wa are considered to be the indigenous peoples of the entire region that stretches from the mountains of eastern India to those of Indochina, and to the high mountains of western China. Today the Wa are found only in scattered tribes in mountain hideaways, after having been destroyed, displaced or assimilated by the encroaching Thai, Shan, Laotian and Siamese. One of these groups of Wa, the indigenous peoples of this region, are the Khasi, who in ancient times came down from the northeast on the rivers of the Himalayas and settled in large parts of eastern India (as attested to by archaeological findings and myths from the Khasi tradition). Also related to the Khasi are the *Palaung, Bahnar, Stieng, Koch* and *Kha*

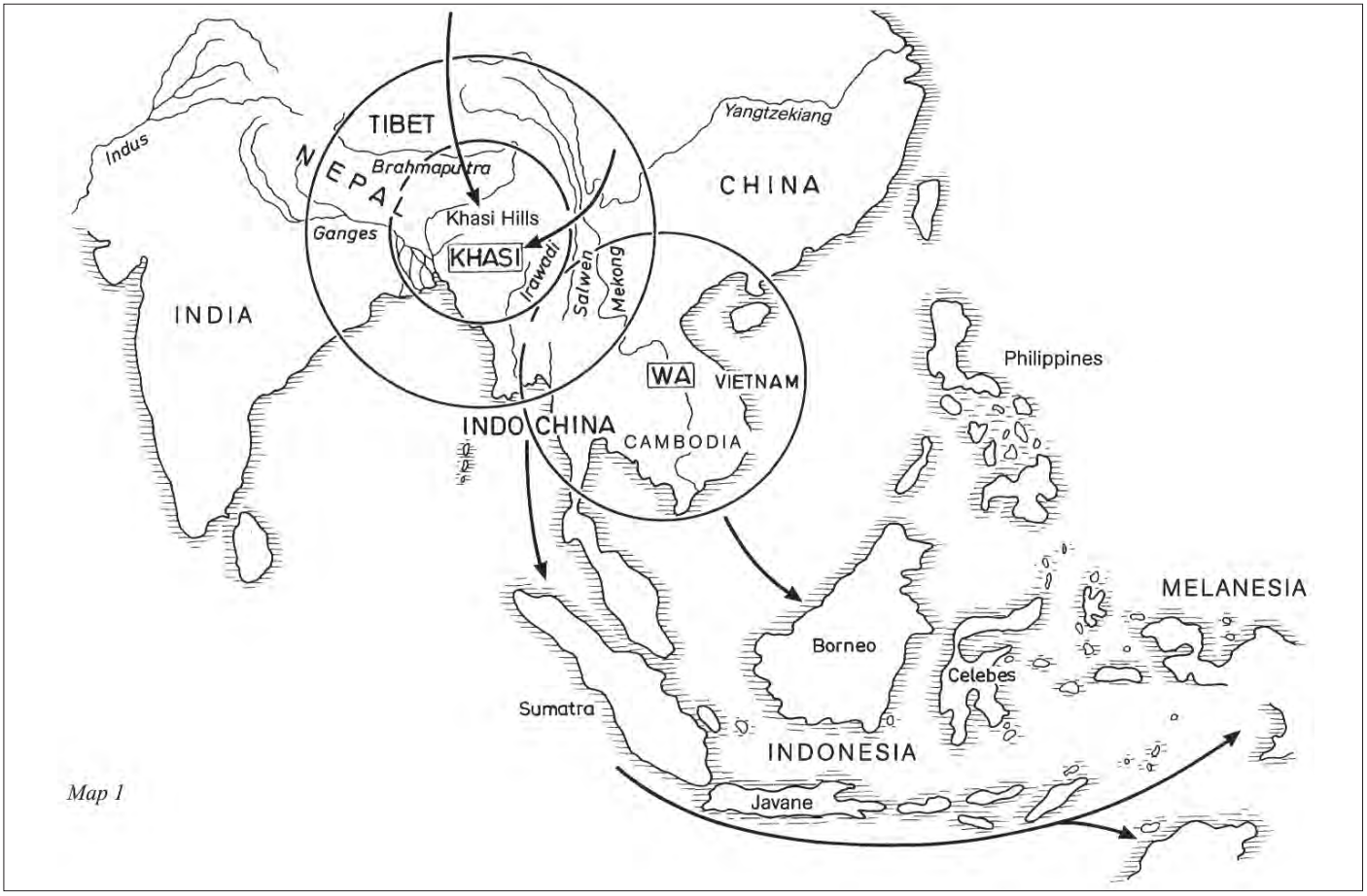
peoples, as well as the *Khasi* and *Moi* of Laos, and all the peoples who belong to the Austro-Asian language groups. That is to say that what is written here about the Khasi was quite likely for all of eastern India and Indochina in the Neolithic Age, and for a long time thereafter (see map 1).[1]

They are relatives not only of the old mountain population of Burma but also of old Tibetan mountain peoples. Although of Mongolian origin, they are not characterized by pronounced Mongolian features; rather they have quite light skin, large, round eyes without an eyelid crease, and a proud carriage.[2] That too points to their ancient heritage, since the development of Mongolian features is a later specialization of the Central Asian peoples, while the Khasi—and many other peoples—are thought to have migrated away from Central Asia before this specialization occurred.[3]

Khasi women traditionally wore long, colorful garments; for festival dances they arrived like queens, attired in precious robes and filigreed silver and gold crowns. They are described as being as strong and muscular as the men. They are capable of carrying to market heavy burdens that no Hindu man of the flatlands could even lift. As is reported about Tibetan women: they can carry unimaginable burdens balanced on long poles across their shoulders, while Khasi women carry loads in conical baskets with a strap. They carry it over high passes and through raging rivers, while also carrying a child on their backs. Europeans without anything to carry at all were exhausted by the journey that Khasi and Tibetan women undertake every day without even seeming tired. Women are considered by these peoples not as weak, but as equally strong or even superior to the men.[4]

The Khasi Hills present a desolate, and now bleak and forbidding mountain landscape. The drought season is characterized by night frosts and constant wind, and the rainy season drenches these foothills of the Himalayas with the most rainfall on earth. It rains for months on end without a break, which is why the area is called "the home of the clouds." The Khasi villages find protection from the wind and the cold in the steep valleys of the mountains, where rice is grown on steep terraces or slash-and-burn techniques are used to grow corn in the lower-situated mountain woods. Close to each village there is a sacred grove, usually of oak trees, where no tree may be cut down. Pigs and hens are kept beside the houses, and goats are particularly important; only at lower altitudes are cattle sometimes farmed.

The Khasi are originally an agricultural people. But in the course of their history they have developed a lively trade that includes peoples of the Brahmaputra low plain. The market, in which both women and men participate, is of great importance. Each seasonal festival is accompanied by a vast market, or fair, where many people gather, especially the clan members from everywhere. We may compare


TIBET
Indus
NEPAL
Brahmaputra
Ganges
Khasi Hills
KHASI
Irawadi
Salwen
Mekong
Yangtzekiang
CHINA
INDIA
WA
VIETNAM
INDO CHINA
CAMBODIA
Philippines
MELANESIA
Borneo
Celebes
Sumatra
INDONESIA
Javane

Map 1

these fairs, with their lively communication and interchange in every area of life, to a celebration, since they are, from their association with the festivals, both secular and sacred events.[5] Thus they really have nothing in common with today's capitalistic markets focused solely on maximising profits.

2.2 Social structure

Khasi is a generic term for all the subgroups such as the *Khynriam, Pnar (or Jaintia), Bhoi, War, Lynngam*—and their neighboring groups, the *Garo* and *Mikir*. The Khasi social structure has attracted the attention of several researchers.[6] It consists in large clans in which the most important person is the clan mother.

"Kha-si" means "born from a mother." The mother is not only the progenitor and head of the clan, but in her role as family priest also embodies a unifying principle. Responsibility for all family rituals lies with her, including the enormously important ceremonies for the dead. She is also custodian of all clan property: the communal house and land, and the income from the work of all the clan members. She inherits her position of official successor to the previous clan mother—her own mother. She is custodian of the clan's property—not with an eye to her own gain, but for the whole clan, for whose well-being she is responsible. She guides distribution of the common wealth, taking care that it is shared out equally, and according to the needs of each, in a give-and-take economy that could well be called a clan internal "gift economy."[7] Her responsibility is based on natural bonds, not on abstraction, since all of the clan members are her sisters and brothers, her daughters and sons, for whom she cares. In the clan house, among her close relatives she is possessed of a natural authority, rather than a power over them, as encountered in patriarchal domination roles, where people's needs and wants are not considered. Natural authority means, on her part, giving advice and, on their part, voluntary choice about accepting it or not: a relationship that develops out of family respect. In the clan house she has no staff of enforcement (no police, no army) to make her suggestions into commands.

All the Khasi subgroups follow the matrilineal principle of descent, succession and inheritance. That means, the children carry the name of the mother's clan and are members of it. Today the father's clan is also recognized, and is honored; however, the father's lineage plays no role, as most of the Khasi continue to emphasize matrilinear kinship and solidarity. The clan's property remains in the mother's clan and is passed on from mother to daughter—with minor variation in the different subgroups. With the Khasi it is the youngest daughter, or "Ka Khatduh," who takes

over the entire ancestral property and the material as well as the spiritual responsibility for the "Kur," or clan: it is the principle of *ultima-geniture.* She is supported by her eldest maternal uncle, who carries out the actual management and execution of clan property following the consensus of all clan members. The Ka Khatduh is now the new head and priestess of the clan (sub-clan, lineage) and begins her duties with the funeral rites for her revered dead mother, whose devoted support she was until the last. In this way, she uses the clan's resources first for cremation and the funeral rites, which—in traditional Khasi culture—took place in three stages, over several years: interment of the bones in the ossuary of the lineage, then the bones are shifted to the sub-clan ossuary, and finally are deposited in the common clan ossuary. All the distant relatives who have moved away are invited to each of these occasions.[8]

The position of the Ka Khatduh is seemingly a highly privileged one. However, it carries with it a great burden, as she must provide for her ageing mother until the latter's death, as well as for all clan members when they are in difficult circumstances. This responsibility weighs all the more heavily if she does not come from a rich family (and it is not a requirement); in that case she is often obliged to seek help from distant relatives. In addition, her personal freedom and mobility are strictly curtailed, as her responsibilities require her presence in the clan house. [9]

Matrilocality is also common with the Khasi peoples, meaning that the direct offspring live in the house of the mother, even after they are grown up. A Khasi household usually consists of the grandmother, her daughters and sons, and the daughters' children living under one roof. This is the "Ing Kur", the natal clan house, or mother's house. These houses are not very large, and they are plain and unadorned; at the center is always the mother's hearth.

It is clear that as the matrilineal family increases not everyone can be housed in the mother's house—although the families of the Khasi grow slowly, with development being carefully considered by the people, so that overall the population stays relatively stable.[10] The youngest daughter, her husband, and her descendants live permanently in the mother's house, and if possible, elder daughters live permanently in that house as well. In other cases, elder daughters may erect new houses near the mother's house, sometimes adding on the original house.[11] They move in at the birth of their first child, and now the Khasi wife with her husband and child begins to establish a new matrilineal family.[12]

For men, as sons, brothers or maternal uncles, "home" is in the house of the Ka Khatduh, the clan mother. Pnar men live their whole lives there, working in the clan's fields. They go to the market, or off on the hunt, but turn over all the products of their efforts to the clan mother.[13] As spouses they are permitted to visit their

partners only at night as they have no rights of habitation there. They come in the evening and wait until the evening meal is over. They don't touch a morsel, as their rights to eat and work are confined to the houses of their own mothers, not their spouses' "foreign" houses. They spend the nights with their women, and in the morning they slip away, as secretly as possible, from the clan house (so-called "visiting marriage"). If they don't leave the house in time, they will get into trouble with their spouses' brothers.

The Khasis' neighboring people, the Garo, practice the custom of women's courting. This means not that the young man courts the young woman, but that she courts him. For the Garo women's courting takes an unusual form: she arranges for the young man she has her eye on, who may be oblivious to her interest in him, to be kidnapped by her brothers. Bound hand and foot, he is delivered to her village and held for quite awhile in the men's house; later he will be presented to the richly bejeweled young woman in her own house. This custom requires that he be allowed to run away three times. If he is caught, he gets a beating from the brothers and is brought back to the village. Usually by the third time he is brought back, he accepts the young woman's choice. But if he escapes a fourth time, he invalidates her choice and the matter is over.[14]

For the Khasi-Pnar, divorce is just as casual as marriage. All it takes is a simple gesture of I-don't-like-you-anymore on the part of both spouses, and the partners separate. She stays in her mother's house, or in her own, while he goes back to his mother's house. As a result, some Khasi women manage to chalk up quite a tally of husbands in their lifetime. Many scholars refer to Khasi "monogamy" because usually the partners take up with each other one at a time.[15] But this easy change of partners can't be called "monogamy" in the usual sense. In practice, Khasi, both male and female, practice serial monogamy. After separation or divorce—which must not be necessarily legal, but recognized by neighbors and relatives—one can marry again; no prohibition is there to a number of times one can marry.

Following from this matrilineal system, men traditionally have no significant role as husbands and are not acknowledged as fathers—recognition of the father's lineage is probably a later development (see below). This is not because the man is valued less, but because, in a matriarchal clan, he is not related to his spouse's children. His parental role is as the next-closest relative of his sisters' children, his nieces and nephews. He regards the sister's children as his daughters and sons, because he bears the same clan name as they do. In this role as the "U Kni," or eldest brother and protector of his sisters, he is the social father of his sisters' children and the co-priest in family matters; as such he enjoys great respect in the clan.

European researchers who are unable to let go of the idea that a male person has to be the head of household have exaggerated the role of the U Kni. The absence of matriarchy is asserted just because the U Kni is the public representative of the clan at the council meetings, or "durbars," as well as performing other representative functions. Other scholars, while accepting the existence of Khasi matriarchy, are quick to lament the men's situation. This ambivalence arises out of a foundational anthropological prejudice: males cannot possibly thrive in a matriarchy! If it appears that men do, in fact, "have it good," as, for example, in the case of the U Kni, then it must logically follow that the society cannot possibly be a matriarchy! This presents us not with a factual problem, but rather with the limits of patriarchally molded worldviews.[16]

Another typical anthropological prejudice is the reference to cultures that are "nothing but" matrilineal, in which women control nothing except keeping the children's names in the female line. Here again, a matriarchy that doesn't fit into the stereotypes of their worldview is made invisible. Because in a "nothing more than matrilineal" society, inheritance in the female line is found as well, as is matrilocality, which is admitted—with embarrassment—between the lines. In light of these characteristics, however, "nothing more than matrilineal" vastly under-represents the situation: we see, in fact, that here is a matriarchal society. The methodological problems can be summarized as, first of all, a lack of clear understanding of the structure of matriarchal societies; and secondly, as a case of superficial fieldwork that only observes certain active (male) persons—to the exclusion of other important social actors and relationships. Such an approach will not help us to properly understand clan-based societies, where roles are social rather than individual, and where lines of relationship and political roles blend.

2.3 Political patterns

An example of the blending of kinship lines and political lines can be seen with the role of the U Kni, the clan's public representative at the council meetings or "Durbar Shnong." Simply because this local traditional institution is a men-only gathering, European anthropologists imagine it to be the key to all local and regional politics. Its strictly male members are then seen as the ultimate decision-makers—and the only political actors. Indigenous Khasi ethnographers look deeper: the clan house is the basic political unit, where decisions are made by consensus in the "Durbar Iing," or family council, which then sends out senior male clan members to represent them in the "Durbar Kur," or clan council. The clan coun-

cils in turn send male representatives out to the "Durbar Shnong," or local council. The British colonial government later superimposed a district council, which is a formal justice institution; this took away from the local councils the power to settle cases by consensus.[17]

Within traditional political patterns, every man on the councils is, above all, the son of his mother, or the brother of his sister (who is the Ka Khatduh of the house he is responsible to). Every durbar meeting takes place only with the consensual agreement of the women: without their agreement, no decision can be made. This follows from the circumstances of the society itself: women give men the food they eat, provide the shelter of a roof over their heads, and give them their tribal identity in life as well as in death (through burial in the clan grave). In this way the man figures as a helper and colleague in all the important matters of life, but he is never his own ruler. Neither is the woman a ruler *sui generis*, rather she only has the right to make decisions in the context of the clan, conforming to its unwritten rules. Only in this non-patriarchal sense is the Ka Khatduh the head of the clan, and she never exercises her power through force. She is respected by the clan members, her sisters and daughters, her brothers and sons without coercion. In today's politically aware climate, many Khasi men consider their matriarchal system to be the strength of their culture; a culture that has survived many thousands of years and holds the key to their ethnic identity.[18]

Matriarchal societies cannot be labeled as democracies—that is a much later political concept—but rather as consensual clan societies. This means that the decision-making process belongs to all the clan members; their discussions are summarized and brought to completion by the clan mother as chief authority, then represented at the village council by the clan mother's brother. In this way the U Kni's role is that of a delegate rather than a ruler. The clan would never permit him to exceed the boundaries of this purely executive role by taking steps of his own. In this sense matriarchies are characterized by *non-domination of women even while they hold full economic and spiritual authority*.

This aspect of non-domination prevails even when tribal societies develop an "elite" class, as has happened with the Khasi. The development of this so-called "elite" does not automatically engender a class society; for the Khasi, the feudal pattern of European class society did not arise. This absence occurs because the "nobility" stems not from a group of foreign invaders but rather from the most ancient indigenous clans. It is these indigenous "nobles" from whom the younger clans descended, or were integrated into, taking on the indigenous clan culture as their own. This is the source of the high respect paid to members of these oldest clans. Still, they have no more power or wealth than other clans do, they simply

enjoy an honorary status. This shows that matriarchies can remain homogenous kinship societies in spite of their "nobility."

The role of the Khasi head-persons is a good example: the oldest clans may install the "Syiems" (chiefs, or kings) in the various districts that comprise Khasi Land. Using the case of the well-researched district of Khyrim, we can outline the pattern of this "Syiemship." The Syiem of Khyrim is the son of the "Syiem Sad," the high priestess of Khyrim. Not he, but rather she, is the actual head of the people; she allows her son or nephew to act as her delegate.[19] She owns the large royal house, in which a sacred column functions as an axis that designates the center of the (Khasi) world. Symbolically speaking, she lives right at the center of the world. Every official sacrifice ceremony begins through her, at the sacred column, and ends there as well.[20] She is the keeper of the symbols: without the crown and all the sacred tools and sacrificial animals no sacrifice can be celebrated. She always performs the first sacrificial act in the house; afterwards, she turns the tools and the animals over to the Syiem, her son, and lets him continue the ceremony outside. This allows her to watch him from her house.

Much as if they were gathered in front of a temple, people then celebrate the sacrifice in front of her house. The Syiem and other men decapitate the goats with a single blow of their long knives, dedicating them to the highest goddess, "Ka Blei Synshar"; this is followed by the great harvest dance, the "Nongkrem Dance." In this way all the important official rituals revolve around the Syiem Sad. She is the spiritual center as well as being responsible for the well-being of the people. The Syiem, in contrast, possesses only an executive, temporary authority; unlike the Syiem Sad, he can be succeeded by another of her sons or nephews.[21] In addition to her spiritual authority, the Syiem Sad also holds the economic power, since she is the custodian of the royal treasury. All the income from the royal land passes through her hands, even that property which the Syiem personally acquires.[22]

This demonstrates that the Syiem's role constitutes no exception to the matriarchal clan structure, and herein is the twofold limitation within which the Syiem functions. He not only is dependent on his mother, he is also laden with duties. He lives as simply as all the other people do; he does not live separately, but rather in the middle of the village with his mother. He may not exact any tribute or taxes, and has the right to only a certain piece of land. From that income he has to organize the hunts, as well as provide for the defense against the lowland tribes. These expenses, as well as those connected with his official duties, come out of the pocket of the royal treasure. It is not uncommon that a Syiem becomes a pauper in the course of his service. In such cases he goes to work and earns money like any ordinary man, or borrows money from wealthier clans. Instances of unacceptable

behavior on his part can be grounds for removal; through the Syiem Sad he can be replaced by a male relative. There are indeed Khasi men who, upon being offered the post of Syiem, have turned it down because of the associated strictures.[23] It was only after the English military takeover of the Khasi Hills that the administrators "strengthened" the Syiem's position, while simultaneously making him into their puppet.

The Syiem Sad of Khyrim is not the only case of a power-wielding priestess who steers the course of the Syiem she stands behind. The similar role of the Syiem Sad of the districts of Bhoi and Cherra is well-known,[24] but there is historical evidence that in earlier times a Syiem Sad was chosen along with the Syiem for each district.[25] We may thus assume that it represents the general pattern of Syiemship, which itself is thoroughly consistent with Khasi clan structure. This same pattern of matriarchal kingship is shown in the historical material pertaining to many other cultures.

The power of women in the matriarchal official structure was not, however, limited to the Syiem Sad. In the history of the Khasi people there have been instances of female Syiems, or queens, who either performed both functions—priestess and executive—or else were daughters of a Syiem Sad. These queens were called "Syiem Synshar," one of whom is known to have reigned as recently as 1869.[26] Another queen is known as the founder of the capital, Shillong,[27] and Khasi mythology recounts that in the earliest times the female ancestors, as queens themselves, founded all the districts and cities. In those times the throne was inherited through the female line; it was only in later times, under the influence of neighboring patriarchal tribes, that the heir to the throne passed over to the male side, with queens becoming the exception.[28] The sacred power of the Syiem Sad, the king's mother, however, stayed constant. In matriarchal societies, including the Khasi, the highest status was not to be found in the administrative-political figure of the Syiem, but rather in the sacred dignity of the Syiem Sad. This stands in stark contrast to our own "secular" times in which the exact opposite prevails.

Similar in character from Syiem are the "Lyngdoh," or village male priests, who perform the sacrifices of goats or poultry at public ceremonial places. Gurdon's research clearly acknowledges the dependent role of the priest, who may only perform a ritual or a sacrifice when the "Ka Lyngdoh," his mother or sister, hands over the sacred objects and sacrificial animals to him. This is because the objects and animals are in her care, and they are part of the possessions of which she is the custodian. Her handing-over gesture should not be seen as "assisting, nor getting things ready for, *his* sacrifice," as it has been misleadingly described. This gesture must rather be seen as representing *her* delegation of this function to him. As her dele-

gate he is permitted to perform the sacrifice, which he would never be able to do on his own initiative. With this hand-over, she accomplishes the initial, defining act without which there would be no sacrifice. All the sacred objects, just as with the clan's property and the royal treasury, can only be in the care of persons holding the most important sacred powers; with the Khasi, these persons are women.

2.4 Belief and sacred ceremony

The Khasi-Pnar have no religion in the patriarchal sense of the term, with an organized theology and church; this has made it difficult for researchers to acknowledge Khasi spiritual beliefs. There is talk of "animism," "polytheism," and "ancestor cults," and all of this talk is wrong.

The most striking of these beliefs is the honoring of the female and male ancestors and the associated elaborate ceremonies for the dead. This is no simple "cult," but rather a unique form of religious thinking that relates to belief that one will be reborn into one's own clan. Moreover, rather than "animism" (belief in spirits) or "polytheism" (belief in many gods), the Khasi practice is to honor nature and the sacred places within it, a practice closely related to honoring the ancestors. Other conceptual descriptions are meant derisively and attest only to the arrogance and ignorance of Europeans.

Also connected with the honoring of the ancestors is the fascinating Khasi megalith culture, as well as those of the Mikir, and other related Southeast Asian peoples. Faced with these menhirs and dolmens, English researchers were led to make the astonishing statement that they felt right at home. They weren't too far wrong, though, as the megalith culture—the art of building with giant stones—belongs to the Neolithic epoch of Europe, an era of the earliest agriculturists and matriarchal communities. For the Khasi, this cultural stage lasted, in spite of their subsequent acquisition of iron tools, up to the present day. Thus, in their culture we can discern what a living megalith culture is all about.

With ropes and rolling logs, the simplest possible means, the Khasi patiently haul huge stone blocks and put them in place as menhirs (standing stones) by digging a trench and sliding the end of the stone in. This is reported by eye-witnesses.[29] The European megalith builders can't have done it much differently. There is a definite arrangement for the groups of stones: three standing stones (menhirs) and, in front of them, a large, horizontal stone resting on stone supports, like a table (dolmen). Sometimes the menhirs may be in groups of five, seven or more (always an odd number), all of them in a row and always with a dolmen in the front or cen-

ter. The stones embody the dead ancestors for whom they were built; in this everlasting form they can forever stay among the living. This is why we sometimes see some of these stones with carved faces. The large, horizontal stone is the ancestress of the clan, the "Ka Iawbei Tynrai," who, according to Khasi belief, deserves to lie down and rest after all her hard work. Every dolmen is thus a female stone. At the same time, Ka Iawbei is both an earthly grandmother and the mythical ancestress of the clan. Though the standing menhirs are male, they are not erect penises (as some researchers would have it), but rather embodiments of the whole men. The middle stone, which is the tallest in the row, represents the eldest brother of the Ka Iawbei, the "U Suidnia," the watchman and protector of her eternal peace. That's why he's standing up! Here too the earthly grand-uncle is conflated with the mythic protector of the clan. The other menhirs stand as other brothers or sons of the mythical ancestress.[30]

These stone groups function as sacred places for many purposes. Here the spirits of the ancestors are considered to be living presence in the dolmens and menhirs, even if "petrified"; these beings are called upon to bless and protect the clan. The stones are decorated with greenery for the ancestor festivals, and food is set out upon the dolmen as upon a table. As divinities, the ancestors are also offered animal sacrifices: male goats or roosters are decapitated upon the dolmen and its surface is painted with blood. In that way the ancestors are fed by the living; they enjoy their company and bless them in return. Above all, this is how the ancestors are able to remain alive until they are reborn into their own clan. The stone of the Ka Iawbei receives, in their place, all the gifts offered to the other ancestors—thus in death as in life, everything is handed over to the clan mother. The stone ancestress herself becomes an altar.

At the same time she constitutes, with the tall menhir standing behind her, the prototype of the original throne, since the stone of the Ka Iawbei is the place where her descendants may come to sit and enjoy themselves. In earlier times, not just anyone could sit there; only the Syiem, the king, was permitted, and he used it as a platform for his judicial functions at the festival gatherings.[31] Surely the honor of his office would have been conferred upon him on this dolmen, in other words, he would be enthroned there. Isis, Egypt goddess of the land and mother of all life, was also understood to be the "throne" of the Pharaoh. Similarly Ka Iawbei was the throne from where the Syiem, at the bidding of his actual mother and his ancestress, and sitting like a child upon her stone lap, dispensed justice and fulfilled his royal duties. This sacred place was thus both gathering place and court of justice, a multi-purpose place to honor the ancestors, offer sacrifices, and levy judgment. Again, this indicates the lack of separation between the sacred and the secular.[32]

It is possible that in earlier times upon the stone of the Ka Iawbei, a male was annually beheaded—a voluntary sacrifice to the ancestress of the clan, in order to ensure her descendants a continuing happy future. Here the mythic ancestress takes on the role of death-and-live goddess in the Otherworld, a role that is most clearly demonstrated by the mythical mother of all the Khasi, the "Ka Meikha." She is the primordial mother of the entire people and was elevated to the level of goddess; in ancient times she was the Great Goddess of Assam. Her sacred place—later transformed into a Hindu temple—is recognized as one of the earliest Khasi settlements in Assam: the Kamakhya Hill near Gauhati. Khasi and Garo lived there together, after they had passed over the Himalayas and came down into the plain along the Brahmaputra river in Neolithic times. This was long before the arrival of the patriarchal Aryans in Northeast India. To escape the violent Aryan invaders they retreated into the Khasi Hills where they continue to live today.[33] Ka Meikha, the dead primordial mother, was herself revered as the goddess of all the dead and the spirits to whom she gives the gift of rebirth. She is the goddess of the depth and of transformation, the abyss out of whose deep crevices and flowing waters is born new life. She is the epitome of the Mother Goddess, and is related to the East Indian Ka-li, whose prototype she may be seen as. (The Khasi word for "goddess" is "Ka Blei," which was simplified into "Ka-li.") To a lesser degree, this is true for every Ka Iawbei.[34]

Following naturally from the worship of female ancestors, this most ancient form of goddess-worship characteristically holds burial grounds and rivers as sacred. In this way every river is, for the Khasi, a goddess, and until the last century the river goddess Kopili was honored annually with the sacrificial beheading of two men on her dolmen-altar; their heads and bodies were then cast into the river.[35]

This ritual is difficult to understand for westerners, especially because wherever they encountered such rituals, European missionaries presented them as barbarous affairs that served to prove how primitive and cruel these peoples were, and how much they needed to be Christianised. But before judging them, we must try to understand what this rite meant in the context of matriarchal culture. Researchers' descriptions indicate that the men were not involuntary victims; they came from a highly regarded clan and, according to reports, went voluntarily to their meeting with the goddess of death—in hopes she would grant a better life for their people. This is a sacred role that in earlier times probably fell solely to the king: at the moment of his enthronement upon the dolmen, he gave himself over to his future ritual death. The widespread practice of sacrificing the sacred king occurred as a form of give and take between humans and the earth: she, who had given so much life, was given back one life—the best one of all.

The great rivers are considered to be the original mothers, too: they engender plant growth and following from that, all life. Their waters are the waters of death and of rebirth alike (see in India "Ma Ganga," the Ganges Mother). Their symbol is the snake, and depending on the size of the watercourse, these snakes can be as tiny as a thread or as huge as a water dragon. A practice that honors the life-giving waters, the snake cult is one of the oldest, and most widespread, forms of religiosity on earth. The Khasi-Pnar call the snake goddess "Ka Taro": [36] she brings sickness and death, or health and life—a characteristic she shares with large rivers. While floodwaters can bring sickness and death to humans, their continuing flow brings growth, health and life. The snake spirit is called "U Thlen," he is giver of health and well being and messenger of the goddess who stands behind him. Her name is "Ka Kma Kharai," originally a water goddess herself.[37] Until the last century, human sacrifices were made to him through the use of occult practices.

As the all-encompassing goddess behind the ancestral goddesses and the water and snake goddesses, Ka Blei Synshar, or Mother Nature, appears to embody heaven and earth. Her three daughters are the transformative powers of fire, "Ka Ding," and water, "Ka Um," as well as the shining sun, "Ka Sngi." The moon, on the other hand, is her badly-behaved son, "U Bnai," whom Sister Sun scolds because of his inappropriate sexual advances towards her.[38] In this origin myth no important mother's brother appears, nor is there a primordial father. A mythical male deity, "U Blei," who is paired with Ka Blei, can be traced back to later Hindu cultural influences. U Blei appears alone only in recent times, and is related to the beliefs of Christianized Khasi. In no way can he be seen as part of the older Khasi tradition.[39] All the other male gods or spirits act as civil guardians and are much less honored than are the female goddesses of the elements and of the powers of life and death.[40]

This mythology does not, however, constitute a world of its own, but is kept alive in sacred ceremonies and customary practices. The Khasi seasonal festivals revolve around two main themes: the ancestors and the harvest (Ill. 1).[41] The ceremonial grounds for these festivals used to be the sacred megalith stones; in earlier times all the ceremonies took place there. Today they have been moved to the village squares or the clan houses. Neither do the bones of the ancestors rest in the ceremonial grounds, but in the vast "giants' cemetery," where no giants are buried, but rather the bones of all the clan's dead. As the family priestess, the Ka Khatduh is also the caretaker of the dead. She looks after the year-long funeral ceremonies as well as the rites for worshipping the ancestors. The most expensive of her responsibilities is the building of graves, menhirs and dolmens, a way of honoring the dead that not every clan can afford. Instead of menhirs, neighboring peoples such as the Garo use wooden funeral steles: V-shaped ones for women ancestors and I-shaped ones for men.[42]

Illustration 1. Khasi woman and man at the harvest festival.
Photo: Sanjib Bhattacharjee

The religious system based on ancestor worship is ancient; in it we can recognize the earliest form of spiritual beliefs. There is evidence that in Europe the practice of honoring the dead and the ancestors goes back to the Paleolithic.

Originally the practice was always associated with belief in the rebirth of each and every ancestress and ancestor back into their own clan. This very explicit belief in rebirth, in which children are actually seen as reborn ancestors (family resemblance within the clan are seen by the people as evidence of this), should not, however, be misunderstood as being a rebirth of the exact individual, in the usual sense of the word. Though dead ancestors come right back into rebirth, along the way they change their shape. It is not a paradox that Ka Iawbei and her brothers are set in stone monuments, since these stones represent not only the historical individuals, but also the power of the clan's founder, she who acted in the unique circumstances of origin.

In this way it should be clear that honoring the ancestors, or "ancestor worship," is not a cult but the outer shell of a reincarnation religion. In this kind of religious thought, the women are of necessity the crucial sex—not so much because of their ability to give birth, but because of their ability to give re-birth to female and male ancestors. In contrast to the men, who—for example, on the hunt—are able to transform life into death, women can transform death back into life. Therefore, clan members focus all their spiritual hopes on the women of the clan. In light of this, it is completely wrong to suppose that there were "fertility cults" or "mother cults" in matriarchal societies, as has often been claimed. It is rather her spiritual role as re-birther, understood literally, that gives women in matriarchal societies their special sacredness.

The archaic practice of offering a yearly male human sacrifice to the primordial ancestress, or goddess of death, can only be understood in light of the belief in rebirth; knee jerk emotional reactions lead to wrong interpretations. Death is, in rebirth belief systems, not an end but a stopover in the transitional realm of souls and spirits, a journey through the landscapes of the Otherworld. The journey ends, without exception, in re-birth and is thus not laden with fear, as is death and dying in European culture. The voluntary path of a man to his primordial ancestress guarantees him rebirth in a happy life. To be sacrificed to the ancestress-goddess would therefore not have been terrifying for those men who chose it. The Khasi have passed down many stories of such voluntary male sacrifices, who, before their deaths, were permitted to enjoy all of life's joys in the marketplace.[43]

One of the first signs of the decline of this religious ethic can be seen where clan feuds lead to prisoners being taken and executed; in this type of "sacrifice" the victim participates involuntarily and the rite loses its deeper meaning. A further loss

of meaning occurs when the sacrifice of the man is down-graded to a skull sacrifice or headhunt, something that all Khasi-peoples have practiced. These sacrificial victims were always involuntary; they may have been foreign travelers and members from neighboring tribes on their way to the market place. This initiated ongoing blood feuds.[44] Naturally enough, in this situation practically no outsider felt safe going anywhere near these peoples, but this, at least, has afforded protection for the Khasi themselves!

When the Khasi culture first was researched in terms of ethnography (in 1905 by Gurdon), it was already in decline. From their mountain retreats, the Khasi had successfully defended themselves against the Indo-European patriarchal Aryans, against the Hindus and the Muslims; they had developed a defense system that earned them a reputation as courageous fighters. But even as loyal as they had been, over the millennia, to their original matriarchal culture, changes began to occur due to the effects of outside pressures. These changes included the customs, mentioned above, of sacrificing prisoners of war, as well as that of headhunting, which was meant to be shocking, and in fact was.

2.5 The current situation

So far, this has been a description of the general situation in traditional Khasi culture, derived from the available sources. In 1826, the situation underwent a dramatic change. The first Khasi people who were subjugated by British rule were from Cherra State in 1826, and in 1924, all Khasi peoples were overtaken and disarmed by British military forces. Although they were not required to perform colonial service, they lost their autonomy. The British military were followed by English missionaries, who had been (and have not stopped) trying to convert the Khasi since 1841. By 1951, 55% of Khasi were Christian—today it must be at least 80%, with widespread belief in a male trinity and male-managed monogamy. Christian educated, English-speaking Khasi men were then presented to European anthropologists as appropriate sources for their study. Because of this, we know almost nothing about the "heretical" non-Christian Khasi belief in rebirth, and very little about their goddesses; we have nothing but rather creepy, horror-film type snippets about human sacrifice. In order to rediscover the coherence of this culture, we have to read very carefully between the lines and be alert for individual clues. [45]

The economic breakdown of matrilineal clans began when British colonial rulers made land into purchasable private property, which they needed for the erection of their governmental infrastructure. In traditional Khasi economy land was

held in common, a resource no one could possess. Individual village clans were granted parcels of land by the village council to use for dwellings and fields—the land was called "Ri-Raij." There was no right to ownership, only the right to use. Private ownership of land is a relatively new idea for the Khasi. But the trend quickly established itself after the British made land a commodity and assigned it a monetary value; this individually acquirable land is "Ri-Kynti." Khasi men whose careers developed within the system of colonial power bought land and individual houses, and founded monogamous nuclear families on the European model. In other cases, Khasi clans took over common land for themselves and claimed ownership. This was bad news for other clans, who had to mortgage or forfeit their land to rich money lenders to survive poor harvests. An ever expanding class of landless peasants grew out of this situation, and the once egalitarian agrarian Khasi society collapsed into classes of rich and poor. The traditional clans who got rich first were some who held a Syiemship and adapted to the European colonial masters. These Syiems first acted as representatives of colonial power over their own people, and then became power centers in themselves, as the Khasi social order transformed into the oligarchy it is today.[46]

But because it was Khasi men that the British were in contact with, they developed an unprecedented power in the local councils and district councils. Educated Khasi have usually been educated in Christian schools and colleges in Shillong, or outside Khasi land in other schools of Assam/Bengal, and to one degree or another they tend to ignore their own clan roots in favor of the prestige associated with European or Hindu thinking. A one-family house and a nuclear family structure managed by men was encouraged, a practice that destroyed the matriarchal clan structure and permitted the leaching away of women's rights. Now, the clan house is no longer a source of family solidarity and local politics, and matrilinearity is eroding. This has two very negative consequences for women: in rural areas, even though they still do most of the work in the fields, gardens, and household, and most of the caring for children, the sick, and the aged—their participation in decision making has been drastically reduced. Urban nuclear families demonstrate the same problems as encountered in the western world: women's dependence on men, the poverty they live in when the men leave and the consequent interruption of the children's schooling. The church, who promoted this form of family, doesn't come near these women to help them; rather it is still the matrilineal clan which comes, insofar as resources are still available, to their aid. Khasi society finds itself today in a dramatic transition from a subsistence farming society to a market dominated money economy with all of its accompanying negative social and cultural consequences.

In reaction to this, an indigenous Khasi movement has developed in order to retain the traditional matriarchal culture of the Khasi as the identity and strength of this people. Particularly women are today considering the advantages and disadvantages of the matrilineal clan, which patriarchal influence squeezed from all sides, but which still offers advantages to women. The clan perpetuates the values of mothering, protection of unmarried women, free choice in marriage, with mutual agreement, equal opportunity for freely chosen lovers, the absence of the usual Indian dowry system, and protection of children.[47]

Today the situation is worse than ever: on the one hand the Khasi are threatened by the development projects of global capitalism and their degrading consequences for indigenous peoples' rights to self determination, land, and resources; on the other by the increasing number of Bengali immigrants from Bangladesh threatening their autonomy and that of other Assamese peoples as well.[48]

2.6 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies

Based on the example of the Khasi-Pnar, here is a summary of several structural characteristics typical for matriarchies:

At the economic level:

- Matriarchies are usually agricultural societies. Fields and houses are common resources of the clans. Usufruct rights, rather than the right to private property.
- As central authority, the clan mother is the custodian of the clan's property: the entire harvest and income from clan members' labor is handed over to her.

At the social level:

- The clan is matrilineal: the children are related only to their mother and carry her clan name. The youngest daughter inherits from the clan mother the honors, rights and duties of the clan's head (ultimageniture). Her brothers are her helpers and protectors, of whom one is chosen to be the delegated representative to the councils outside the clan.
- The clan is matrilocal: children and grand-children live with their mother in the clan house. The man, as "spouse" and "father" is an outsider in

the clan house of his spouse; he is not seen as being related to her children. His own nearest relatives are the children of his sister; he fulfills the role of social father to his nieces and nephews (in our terminology).

At the political level:

- In situations where councils are conducted by men, they are there as delegates sent by their clans. They require the consensus of their clans, and they owe the clan mothers and clan members an account of their actions.
- Often the most traditional and respected clans put chiefs or kings in charge. The chief, or king, is the son or the nephew of the high priestess. She is the actual chief authority in the realm of her sacred office; the chief/king is her administrative delegate and not, on his own, empowered to make decisions. In older phases of these societies queens, the founding mothers of the society, were a common phenomenon.
- Clan mothers and high priestesses have the power to give advice and counsel, but not to command through force. Their counsel is voluntarily accepted; they have no coercive forces, no retinue of warriors, no military, no police, no officials.
- The chiefs, or kings, cannot exact tribute. Their positions are honorary offices, whose duties in relation to the great festivals and clan projects often make paupers of them. They live as simply as their fellow tribal members do, and can be replaced at any time (no class society, in spite of the existence of "nobles").

At the cultural level:

- Male priesthood is, when it appears, impossible without a female priesthood. The priestess holds control over the sacred objects and performs the first sacrificial act; the priest leads the sacrifice to completion. This pertains equally to the regular priests and the priest-kings.
- The belief system is practical and ritualized, rather than theoretical and theological: worship of female and male ancestors, accompanied by elaborate ceremonies for the dead, is the context for an ancient belief in rebirth. As re-birthers, women are sacred.
- The primordial ancestress is, as the original mother, the first goddess. These most ancient goddesses are goddesses of death and rebirth, and are understood in connection with the powers of the depth (earth and water, river and snake cult). The worship of the cosmos, perceived as female, is included in this understanding.

- Spiritual beliefs are celebrated in the seasonal festivals of the year, those events that recur cyclically. The main themes of these festivals are the ancestors and the harvest. They are connected with the markets, or fairs, held at those times.
- It is probable that megalithic cultures, where they exist, are associated with matriarchal societies. In Khasi culture, the basic forms are the place of worship (rows of stones, stone circles, etc.) and the vast clan cemetery. The worshipping place is multifunctional in that it is the place where female and male ancestors are honored; the place where food, animals and sometimes men are sacrificed; and the place where the king ascends to the throne and the court of justice is held.
- The horizontal stones, or dolmens, of these sacred places are considered female and embody the female ancestors, the clan mothers. They serve as table, altar, sitting place and throne, all at the same time. The standing stones (menhirs) are considered to be male, and embody the male ancestors, the maternal brothers, acting as guards and protectors of the original ancestress and her clan.

Notes

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2. See Shadap Sen, ibidem.
3. See William Howell: *Mankind in the making : the story of human evolution*, New York 1959, Doubleday.
4. See Robert Briffault: *The Mothers. A Study of the Origins of Sentiments and Institutions,* 3 vols., New York 1996, Johnson Reprint Corporation (first edition, New York, London 1927).
5. Bareh, ibid.
6. See for this and the following: P. R. T. Gurdon: *The Khasis,* reprinted Delhi 1975, Cosmo Publication (first edition, London 1907), see especially the Introduction by C. J. Lyall; and Bareh, ibidem; and G. Bertrand: *Geheimnisvolles Reich der Frauen,* Zürich 1957, Orell Füssli; and C. Becker: "The Nongkrem-Puja in the Khasi Mountains," New Haven, Conn., Human relations area files, AR7 *Khasi,* 6 (first edition in German: *Anthropos* no. 4, St. Augustin 1909); and A. P. Sinha: "Statusrole of the matrilineal Pnar (Synteng-)husband," in: *Tribe, Caste and Peasantry,* Lucknow, India, 1974, Ethnographic & Folk Culture Society U.P.; and Majumdar/Roy: *A Tribe in Transition,* New Delhi 1981, Cosmo Publication.

7. See for the concept of the "Gift Economy": Genevieve Vaughan: *For-Giving, a Feminist Criticism of Exchange,* Austin 1997, Plain View and Anomaly Press.
8. Gurdon, ibid., pp. 132–134.
9. See the indigenous Khasi researchers: Patricia Mukhim: "Khasi Matrilineal Society—Challenges in the 21th Century," in: Heide Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* ibidem, pp. 193–204; and Valentina Pakyntein: "The Khasi clan: Changing religion and its effects," in: *Kinship and Family in the North-East*, vol. II, J. S. Bhandari (ed.), New Delhi 1996, Cosmo Publications, pp. 347–372; and "Gender Preference in Khasi Society: An Evaluation of Tradition, Change and Continuity," in: *Indian Anthropologist,* 30: 1&2, 2000, pp. 27–35.
10. Roy/Majumdar, ibidem, and the others mentioned above.
11. Gurdon, ibidem.
12. Sinha, ibidem; and Chie Nakane: *Khasi and Garo: Comparative Study in Matrilineal System,* Paris 1967, Mouton and Company, p. 131.
13. Gurdon, ibidem; Sinha, ibidem.
14. Bertrand, ibidem.
15. For example Gurdon, 1907.
16. For example Gurdon, 1907, whose argument follows this line.
17. See Patricia Mukhim, ibidem.
18. In this context see the very clear explication in Majumdar/Roy, ibid., especially pp. 44, 49 ff., 155 ff.
19. See Gurdon, Lyall, Bareh, ibid.
20. See Becker, ibid.
21. See Gurdon, Lyall, Bareh, Becker, ibid.
22. See Becker, ibid.
23. See Gurdon, ibid.; Shadap-Sen, ibid., p. 186 ff.
24. See Majumdar/Roy, ibid., p. 43.
25. See Bareh, ibid., p. 237.
26. See Bareh, ibid., p.237.
27. See Bareh, ibid., p. 237.
28. See Majumdar/Roy, ibid., p. 43.
29. H. H. Godwin-Austen: "On the Stone Monuments of the Khasi-Hills," in: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* London 1872 and 1876, Trübner; and C. B. Clarke: "The Stone Monuments of the Khasi-Hills," in: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* London 1874, Trübner.
30. Gurdon, Shadap-Sen, Godwin-Austen, Clarke, ibid.; R. Heine-Geldern: „Die Megalithen Südostasiens und ihre Bedeutung für die Klärung der Megalithenfrage in Europa und Polynesien", in: *Anthropos,* 23, 1928, Mödling near Vienna /Austria, Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel; and P. Gerlitz: „Die Bedeutung der Steinmonumente in den Khasi-Hills", in: *Symbolon,* 6, 1982, Cologne, Germany, Brill; and D. Roy: "The Megalithic Culture of the Khasis," in: *Anthropos,* 58, 1963, Fribourg, Switzerland, 1963, Paulusdruckerei und–verlag; and M. Schuster: „Zur Diskussion des Megalithproblems", in: *Paideuma,* 7, 1959/61, Wiesbaden, Germany, Steiner; and Hutton, in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* 56, London Royal Anthropological Institute.

31. See Gurdon, Heine-Geldern, ibid.
32. See Gerlitz, ibid., p. 67 ff.; Heine-Geldern, ibid., p. 303 ff.
33. See Bareh, ibid.; and B.K. Kakati: *The Mother Goddess Kamakhya,* Gauhati, Assam, 1948 and 1967, Lawyer's Book Stall.
34. Here I use "goddess," although the Khasi themselves do not use the word. I am conscious that this is a concept borrowed from western culture. In using it, I want to indicate the high importance of the Feminine Divine at the center of Khasi religion. The equivalent in their language for "goddess" is "Ka (Lady)." "Ka Jawbei" could more exactly be rendered as "Lady Ancestress" or "Lady of the Otherworld," while "Ka Meikha" means "Lady Mother" or "Lady of the Dead," and "Ka Blei" means "Divine Lady."
35. For Khasi religion and sacrifice of male victims see: Gurdon, Bareh, Gerlitz, ibid.; and S. N. Barkataki: *Tribal Folk-Tales of Assam Hills,* Gauhati, Assam, 1965 and 1983, Publication Board; and B. C. Gohain: *Human Sacrifice and Head-Hunting in North-East India,* Gauhati, Assam, 1977, Lawyer's Book Stall; and S. C. Mitra: "Note on Another Recent Instance of the Khasi Custom of Offering Human Sacrifice to the Snake Deity Thlen," in: *Man in India,* 12, Ranchi 1932 , Catholic Press; and R. von Ehrenfels: „Doppelgeschlecht und Götterpaar in der Religion der Khasi", in: *Paideuma,* 4, 1954/58, Wiesbaden, Germany, Steiner; and F. Stegmiller: „Aus dem religiösen Leben der Khasi", in: *Anthropos,* 16/17, Fribourg/Switzerland, 1921/22, Paulusdruckerei und -verlag; and Soumen-Sen: *Social and State Formation in Khasi-Jaintia Hills,* Delhi 1985, B. R. Publications, chapter IV.
36. "Ka Taro" means "Lady Snake."
37. Soumen-Sen, ibid.
38. "Ka Blei Synshar" means "Divine Lady Nature"; "Ka Ding" and "Ka Um" are literally translated as "Lady Fire" and "Lady Water"; "Ka Sngi" is "Lady Sun," and "U Bnai" means "Lord Moon."
39. Ehrenfels, ibid.; Shadap-Sen, ibid., p. 207.
40. Soumen-Sen, ibid.
41. Soumen-Sen, ibid.
42. See Heine-Geldern, Bertrand, ibid. See Gerlitz, ibid.
43. Gurdon, ibid.
44. See Heine-Geldern, ibid.
45. For the dissolution and destruction of traditional Khasi culture by European colonialism see Bareh, ibid.; and P. Roy: "Christianity and the Khasi," in: *Man in India,* 44, Ranchi 1964, Catholic Press; and N. Natarajan: *The Missionary among the Khasi,* Gauhati, Assam, 1977, Sterling.—Both authors are educated Christians who write naively, and approvingly, of the disappearance of traditional Khasi culture.
46. See Patricia Mukhim's critical article, ibid.
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48. Amiya Kumar Das: *Assam's Agony,* New Delhi 1982, Lancers.

3

Matriarchal Cults in Nepal

For the Four Kalis of the Katmandu Valley in Nepal

3.1 The Newar of the Katmandu Valley

Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and the western mountains of China surround Assam. The landscape is traversed by the upper streams of the great South Asian and East Asian waterways, providing ideal transport through mountainous terrain that would otherwise be difficult to cross (see map 1). As the Tsangpo, the upper stream of the Brahmaputra, constitute Tibet's great waterway. Near the Brahmaputra's source, the headwaters of the Ganges begin crossing Nepal, as does the Indus, great river of Northwest India with its prehistoric matriarchal Indus culture. The mountainous west of China is furrowed with the headwaters of Indochina's Mekong, Salwen and Irawadi rivers; and with the rivers of China itself, the Yangtze and the Hwang Ho.

It is not difficult to understand why early matriarchal peoples preferred the upper reaches of these rivers, despite the steep valleys they ran through. At that time the plains of India, Indochina and South China were impassable, mosquito-infested swamps where powerful currents changed the river's course every year, sweeping everything along with it. In terms of human habitation it was just as

inhospitable as the highest, glacier-covered mountains. But the deep, narrow valleys between the mountain ranges offered warm protection from the cold winds of the heights, and provided a cool, fresh climate that differed from the humid lowland swamps. Also, due to an endless water supply from Himalayas glaciers, these valleys boasted a luxurious variety of plant life. In light of all this, it is not surprising that the oldest archaeological evidence for early planter-cultures is to be found right here.

In those earliest times, matriarchal agricultural peoples arrived in Nepal by boat, traveling along tributaries of the Ganges, and they reached central Tibet along the extended waterways of the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra). They would certainly not have had to travel through swamps and primal mountain forests, nor would they have traversed icy peaks; the easiest way to travel was along the waterways. The boat must be the oldest, and one of the most enjoyable, forms of transportation ever to be developed by humans.

However, my own method of transportation to the Katmandu Valley, the cultural center of Nepal, was a modern jet airplane. We circled above the deep, round valley and gradually spiraled down in the space between the mountain ranges and the ground. During these ticklish maneuvers the valley, which once was a large seabed, was visible for a long way. We flew over the valley's steep bordering mountains, barely clearing the treetops and a mountaintop sanctuary, and looked down at infinitely varied patterns of terraced crop-mounds and rice paddy canals; from this angle, the valley's scattered villages and small towns looked like constructions made by ant-people. Not a single square of ground had been left uncultivated or without buildings: this was visibly a valley with an ancient and intensive settlement history.

The inhabitants of the Katmandu Valley belong to the large *Newar people*. They, like the Khasi of the Assam Mountains, are part of the Tibetan-Burmese group of peoples[1] and are considered the oldest population in the mountains of Nepal. They are in fact the indigenous people of Nepal, who gave the land its name, who have carried on the millennia-old culture of the Katmandu Valley, the heart of this Himalayas region.[2] Until 1956, Nepal was closed to all foreign travelers, and so was able to retain its partly archaic, partly medieval, culture until today.

In contrast to the more melancholy Northern Indian people and their often tougher, leaner appearance, I experienced the Newar as small, happy people, well-built and with dark brown, round faces, who never seemed, despite the hard work of farming, to ever have a bad day. They have not been exhaustively exploited in the same way as the inhabitants of India have; they have for the most part kept the fruits of their labors within the clan. The women I saw hoeing the field in groups

had lovely faces, long, healthy hair, and their narrow eyes flashed as they talked and laughed. They showed no timidity or shyness at all, not even with us strangers. The men, on the other hand, didn't look up at all, but just kept on working, singly or in pairs, swinging their heavy picks with the same ease as if they were just short-handle hoes. They were cultivating the land this way, without using plows, since bulls are sacred to Shiva. His Hindu temple stands in the Katmandu Valley and so in this region, no bull may perform the hard work of plowing.

Hinduism has been grafted onto the Newar culture through the long historical process of Brahmanization. The first Newar settlers probably came into the Katmandu Valley 3000 years ago.[3] But over time, cultural encroachment from their huge neighbor, India, fundamentally changed the Newar social organization, and certainly to the detriment of women; these influences included the many Brahmins who emigrated to escape Islam, and pressure from their own Hinduized kings.[4] Even though we can't say the Newar represent a case of a contemporary matriarchy, nevertheless much in their medieval culture points to the fact that they did once have a matriarchal society.

3.2 The cult of the goddess Kali

The worship of Kali constitutes the oldest layer in the syncretic religion of the Newar; it is the cult of an archaic nature worship exclusively dedicated to mother goddesses.[5] This ancient layer expresses the Newar's most deeply rooted religious tradition; it is still being devotedly practiced today, particularly by rural farmers and urban lower castes. This recalls the situation in medieval Europe, where common people practiced a religion different than that of the Christianized nobility and middle classes.

Included in this most ancient practice of religion is an interesting phenomenon: the Katmandu Valley, with its three former royal cities in the center (Katmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur) is framed, in each of the four directions, by ancient stone shrines. They contain "pithas," or vulva-shaped stones, which are objects of worship representing Mother Earth. In the Hasrat Chronicles they are called the "Four Kalis"[6] and are recognized as the oldest divinities in the Katmandu Valley: Maha, or Great Kali; Guhya, or Secret Kali; Dakshin, or Southern Kali; and Vatsala Kali of the very ancient temple compound at Pashupatinath.

By placing an additional four shrines in the in-between compass directions, their number was increased to eight. This pitha formation of the "Eight Matrikas" or "Eight Mothers" encloses the whole valley like a huge stone circle, converting

the valley itself into a natural mother-goddess temple and protecting it on all sides. There, people live perpetually in the earthly (stone) and cosmic (compass directions) presence of the mother goddess.[7] The same sacred order is also seen in the old royal city, Bhaktapur, surrounded by eight hills topped with sanctuaries of the Matrikas, at which it is the natural, uncut stone and giant trees, embodiments of the mother goddess, that receive the very highest veneration.[8] Similarly, the little town of Deopatan, also a Newar settlement, is surrounded by a magic circle of four mother-goddess temples. As in Bhaktapur, this converts the entire site to a sacred shrine to the Matrikas.[9] In the royal city of Patan this same sacred pattern appears in a Buddhist context, with four open earth-stupas (ancient burial sites) forming a mandala around the town.[10]

Unlike Europe, these places are not preserved as archaeological relics, but are in regular use as places of worship. All epochs of Nepal's religious history exist side-by-side here, and are practiced simultaneously. We find, at the same temple grounds, ancient female as well as male stones, an artfully carved Hindu pagoda, and a white-painted Buddhist earth-stupa. The juxtaposition of red ochre on stone, butter lamps in the pagoda, and flowers at the feet of the four Buddhas surrounding the stupa exemplifies the "equal-opportunity" worship enjoyed at these sacred places of divine power.

I made two visits to the sanctuary of the Dakshin Kali at the southern end of the Katmandu Valley. The Newar consider this place to be so ancient that no one—not even archaeologists—can know its beginning. Kali is seen as a primordial deity: my informant, Agni, a Newar prince, says that notwithstanding the Hindu version that associates Kali with Shiva, she was never married to a god. It is evident that "Ka Li" must be a variant of the Khasi word "Ka Blei" (primordial goddess of Nature); and it is no coincidence that the vast city at the mouth of the Ganges, south of the Khasi mountains, is called "Cal(i)cutta" (Kali's city) and is one of the most important places of Kali worship.

When they talk about her at all, Europeans describe the cult of Kali, India's ancient great goddess, as being extremely bloody. It was apparent to me at the sanctuary of Dakshin Kali how many misinterpretations and Western prejudices were tied up in this opinion. The narrow mountain road took me up the hill; below me the Katmandu Valley opened up in all its exotic beauty. In the gray dawn, unimaginably high, blindingly white peaks of the Himalayas rose up behind the circle of mountains. Gradually it became apparent that the valley is shaped like a scallop shell, symbol of the fertile, creative goddess. And right there, set into the hills where the Bagmati River breaks through the Southern narrow mountains and leaves the Katmandu Valley behind, is the sacred place of the Dakshin Kali. It lies very hid-

den; only at the end of the road a rounded, inwardly folded mountain, overgrown with the most luxurious green, was visible as a bright contrast against the dry, yellow-brown of the surrounding landscape. Even though it was the dry season, two overflowing streams rushed down over this concave mountain, flowing together, V-shaped, into a small ravine. Not only in the nature religion of the Khasi, but all over India, the junction of two rivers is considered a sacred place, embodying the lap of Mother Earth from whom flow the endless waters of life.

The shrine of Dakshin Kali is markedly different from the Hindu temples and Buddhist stupas, in that it has kept, even today, the form of an old natural sanctuary: a small, open place in the triangle where the two streams meet; shady, cool, and full of secrets in the green twilight of the gorge. I had to climb down to the goddess instead of climbing up to an imposing structure. There is no sacred building here; nothing keeps nature out. Rather, the temple is the gorge itself. The site is marked only by a low wall, and decorated with an arch over which a gilded yoni symbol hangs like a large drop of water, symbol of the uterus and female power. Covering the ground are clean black and white tiles, inset with a large six-pointed star. This star, depicting two conjoined triangles, stands for the polarities whose powers create the cosmos. A golden canopy, held up by four upwardly slanting golden snakes placed precisely in the four compass directions, stretches over this open-air temple. Here again the snakes, the sacred "nagas," symbolize water, seen as the pure blood of earth, and they symbolize the fertility that comes from water, as well as divine female energies. The power of the depth, the transformation of life into death and death into life, is understood as "shakti," or energy of the goddess Kali, whose small sculpture is at the knee-high back wall. A priest sat before her, bowed deep in prayer. The sculpture is hewn from black stone, which in earlier times had stood as an uncut pitha, a manifestation of the Black Goddess. As sculpture, she has come under the influence of Hindu art, giving her a severe expression, along with eight arms carrying the symbols of her powers, and around her neck, a chain of skulls. She is goddess of destruction and death, as well as of renewal and rebirth. She is a deity who can look back on a history, longer than any other, of being worshipped by humans.

The first time I saw it, her sculpture was smothered in silver jewelry, the most startling piece of which was a half-moon breast piece. Radiating from her head was a nimbus of nine snakes, and the arch above her consisted of two snakes intimately entwined. Her face and arms were uncovered, but encrusted with a thick layer of red ochre. This red ochre is considered the color of life and today is used instead of blood; in earlier times blood would always have been used.

On another visit I happened on an animal sacrifice, one that contradicted any

preconceived images of bloody slaughter. The site hummed with people, so many that the symbolic constructions could barely be seen. People were standing, women on the left and men on the right, in long rows that extended outside of the open gate, up the paths and terraces surrounding the place. They were ordinary, lower-caste farmers from the area, and they waited peacefully and attentively while each person took his or her turn to offer a sacrifice to the goddess. There was no aggression displayed toward an obvious foreigner, as I was. The women in their festive black and red saris smiled at me as they carried their female sacrifices: trays of flowers, especially the wild "lotus flower" of the mountain, the red poinsettia—which symbolizes the goddess—and in the middle of the flowers, a single egg. The men agreeably made room for me on the arcade, so I could get a good view of the place below. No one spoke, as they were occupied with the prayers they were whispering into the sacrificial victims' ears. On the men's side these victims were animals, and fittingly male: roosters and billy goats, all un-castrated. A female animal would never be sacrificed; these males were the year's surplus animals found in every barnyard. Well-to-do farmers were accustomed to offering Kali a sacrifice of five: buffalo, ram, billy goat, rooster and gander.[11]

The animals were treated kindly, even tenderly. While showering them with caresses, the men whispered messages into their ears, messages for the goddess, which the animals would carry down to the underworld. They were fed before the sacrifice, and were themselves worshipped. The priest had already sprinkled them with sacred water in a purifying bath, and if at that time they shook themselves off, with that gesture they signaled their voluntary assent to a voyage to the underworld. If an animal didn't shake itself off, it was considered dedicated to the goddess and so was spared.[12] Here again, even though the animals were thought to speak another language, they were credited with the idea of free will, or voluntary choice, without which no sacrifice is possible.

Finally the animals were brought before the sculpture of Kali and decapitated with a single blow, dying a quick death. Only the blood was sacrificed to the goddess; after being spread over the sculpture it flowed away through a tiled canal. The head of the animal was laid before the sculpture and a burning lamp placed on it. In this way the animal carried its message—and it is believed that, as a reward for making this voluntary journey to the goddess, the animal will never again be reborn with an animal nature.[13] The carcasses were then delivered to the farmers, butchered carefully, washed in the clear stream, and carried home in leaves or cloths. That day there would be a feast with roast meat, and happy celebration for the whole family.

This gave me an eyewitness experience of what these animal offerings mean:

they are in no way gratuitous or horrific, rather they make the regular seasonal slaughter of superfluous male barnyard animals into a ritual. In contrast to our purely secular butchering, or the grim slaughter of terrified animals in slaughterhouses, the death of an animal in this sacrificial setting is a holy act, its life a gift to the goddess, itself a sacred messenger from the family.

3.3 Pashupatinath: the cult of death and life

We have already seen surprising similarities between the sacrificial practices of the Newar and the Khasi, but there are even more parallels. One of the most important duties of every Nepalese is to look after the needs of their dead ancestors' souls and to make sacrifices to them. This is the only way the spirits can stay alive, guide the family, and achieve a good rebirth. The ancestors are worshipped as house deities: nobody eats breakfast until food has been offered to the spirits of the dead.

Often the family ancestor worship is associated with "dhoka" stones. These are not huge megaliths, as with the Khasi, but rather humble stones: vulva-shaped female stones on the one hand, that sit near the houses, in the yards or in the roads; on the other hand there are the upright male stones at the house-corners and street-corners. They sit there, mostly unnoticed, until, at certain family events they are worshipped as the abode of the house deity; then they are painted with red ochre, decorated with flowers, and adorned with little lamps. Many of these stones are dedicated to the "Matrikas," those women who are venerated as primordial mothers. This honoring of the female and male ancestors is particularly intensive at the feast of Bala Chaturdasi, the large feast of the dead in the valley celebrated at Pashupatinath.[14]

Pashupatinath is the largest and most famous temple complex in Nepal; it is paralleled in its religious significance with Benares (Varanasi) on the Ganges. The extended circle of shrines are supposedly all dedicated to the Brahmin god Shiva; however, two important goddess temples indicate that before Shiva got here, the entire complex belonged to an older belief system of the Newar, that is, to their original matriarchal religion. In my walks around Pashupatinath, I recognized little by little the consistent symbolism of the entire complex. Though to the inexperienced it might appear as an exotic jumble, it is exactly the opposite. Here the Bagmati River forms a large loop circling a rounded hill. This is "Meru Mountain," considered to be the local navel of the earth. It lays exactly in the middle between the great temple complex of Pashupati, the Lord of the Animals, in the west, and the

temple complex of Guhyeshvari, the great mother goddess, in the east. Guhyeshvari was originally "Guhya Kali," the Secret Kali. During the Brahmanization of this place, Pashupati became Shiva, the immortal lord of the world, and Guhya Kali, who appears here in her role of Great Rebirther, became his subservient, worshipful spouse Parvati. The following Hindu legend bears witness to this:

Shiva won the goddess Sati as his bride; she bent to his will and followed him everywhere. After her husband had been insulted by her father, Sati immolated herself in despair in the flames of the festival fire. (This is considered to embody the perfect model of spousal loyalty for all Hindu women since; the gruesome custom of suttee, burning widows alive, practiced for centuries in India is based on this.) Sati died, but her body did not burn; her action had made her into a saint. In great pain, Shiva carried his dead spouse all over the world on his shoulders. To bring him to his senses, the gods let Sati's body suddenly decay. It fell in pieces from Shiva's shoulders, and everywhere that a piece fell, a shrine to the goddess was built. But where her yoni (her vulva) fell to the ground, the temple of Guhyeshvari was erected. "Guhya" means "secret," and the sexual organ is the most secret part of every woman. Later, Parvati appeared to the divine, but wifeless, ascetic Shiva as the reembodiment of Sati; she stayed with him as an unconditionally surrendered, tender spouse who bore him only sons: the ideal Hindu wife.[15]

This classically patriarchal Hindu legend conflates various goddess figures and alters their original meanings. As a temple of the Guhya Kali, who was never the spouse of the Hindu Shiva, the Eastern temple complex of Pashupatinath means something much different.

As I went up the local "Meru Mountain," the ancient symbolism of this place, which doesn't have Hindu roots, made itself clear to me. First I looked over the temple complex of Pashupati toward the west. In the middle of the enclosure was the wonderful wooden pagoda, its golden spire gleaming, and the building looking like a bell-shaped, inverted lotus flower. It is clearly a male temple, with its graceful spire, a golden bull in the inner courtyard, and a menhir in the center, a standing stone that for Hindus embodies the very sacred Shiva lingam, the symbol of the sexual power of the god. In the four directions, faces are carved into the stone on which the believers, through the offices of the priests in charge, lay garlands of flowers. In front of the golden pagoda wisps of smoke rose from terraces that lead down to the river, where dead bodies are burned. After cremation, their ashes are strewn over the sacred river to insure a good rebirth for the dead. The west, where the sun goes down, is seen in many matriarchal cultures as the compass direction of death, and here it is no different. The direction of death is clearly dedicated to the male, since prior to the immortal Shiva there was no god here at all, only Pashupati, the Lord

of the Animals. Was Pashupati the Lord of the Animals because it is men's work to sacrifice animals to the goddess? Or was Pashupati the sacred king, the consort of the goddess, and therefore mortal, and went his own way into the underworld in the shape of an animal, perhaps a bull or a stag?

When I reached the very top of the hill and looked toward the east I was very surprised: right at my feet was the temple complex of the Guhya Kali, or Guhyeshvari, obviously intact and standing apart from other buildings. The place is a shrine in itself: no spired edifice, only a huge yoni symbol formed by long, low, narrow buildings. The buildings frame a large inner area that remains open to the sky. In the center the golden bodies of four inward-slanted snakes held up the canopy, exactly as at Dakshin Kali. The yoni shape opens toward the east, to the direction of the rising light and returning life. Underneath the snake canopy is hidden the most secret thing, the vulva of the goddess. One must climb into the depths to reach it, and indeed it is a deep crevice, quite small at the top, but infinitely deep, framed by a silver lotus flower, and always filled with spring water. Once upon a time a king tried to measure this deep hole with a bamboo stick, but he never managed to touch the bottom. Instead, blood flowed out of the hole, and the king was plagued by misfortune. Only a priest would dare to come near this holy of holies; believers sacrifice a few drops of milk or rice liquor, which the priest lets fall into the hole while praying.

This story sounded very archaic to me and reminded me of the widespread ancient practices of worshipping the earth goddess in crevices, ravines, and water holes. In addition, I learned that ceremonies for the dead were not carried out in Guhyeshvari's temple, but only ceremonies of birth and life: wedding parties often make pilgrimages to this place, as well as any woman who wants to ask the goddess to bless her with children. Before their visit to the temple, the women bathe in the waters of the Bagmati, in the hope that they will become pregnant. Then, dressed in their purple-red wedding saris, they bring the goddess baskets of wonderful flowers and burning oil wicks.[16]

The old customs have persisted here, and the place itself embodies the symbolism clearly. This constitutes a sort of matriarchal "language," and as such is plainly at odds with the above quoted, later Hindu legend that makes the mortal, male consort of the goddess into an immortal god and the life giving goddess into a rotting corpse.

Just as the goddess Kali takes on the loving characteristics of a motherly rebirther when she appears as Guhyeshvari, in Pashupatinath she also appears as the wild Kali, the goddess of death. The oldest temple of the huge complex is in the southwest part, and belongs to Vatsala Kali. It stands somewhat to the side, more

or less unnoticed, but at the festival of the goddess Vatsala an ancient ceremony takes place there. This aspect of the goddess has escaped the Brahmanization process which made her, as Guhyeshvari, into a loving spouse; in contrast, as Vatsala she remained an independent power, the true "Kali" of this place. Her temple is decorated with carved support posts that represent the eight Matrikas or mothers. The ninth is Vatsala herself, represented by the female stone at the center of the temple. Little bells and oil lamps are suspended over it, their smoke darkening the once purple-red canopy above.[17] In perfect contrast to the interior of the Guhyeshvari temple, which is forbidden to foreigners, Vatsala Kali presents herself to view just as her sister Dakshin Kali does; any sexist taboo is alien to this ancient goddess. The carved support posts bear typical scenes of various love-making positions, as well as a row of demon figures representing death. All this characterizes Vatsala Kali as an archaic, tantric, orgiastic goddess whose cult includes celebrations of love, death and rebirth through the ancestral mothers.

The celebration at the Vatsala temple is beloved by the people, that is, by members of the lower castes (craftspeople, street sweepers, flower sellers and others). This festival includes everything that the ascetic Hindu devotees of Shiva abhor: animal sacrifice, alcoholic drinks, onions, garlic, suspension of caste rules and probably, in earlier times, public erotic orgies. And all this in the Pashupatinath shrine to Shiva! Shiva is actually invited to this festival, represented by his priest, and it would be disastrous for the peace of the community if he did not show up. This reflects the historical confrontation of the old, tantric cult of the Newar earth goddess with the later Brahmanic cult of Shiva as the lord of the world.

The celebration begins with the meeting of three sister-goddesses at a secret place: one of them is Vatsala Kali. This divine triad represents the typical characters of the White Goddess (Maha Sarasvati, goddess of art and knowledge), the Red Goddess (Maha Lakshmi, goddess of love and plenitude), and the Black Goddess (Maha Kali, goddess of death and rebirth). Their special meeting—which vividly recalls the pattern of the threefold goddess of matriarchal mythology[18]—is celebrated once a year in the form of a procession where throngs of believers carry the pithas, or sacred stones, of these three goddesses through the streets, either to a secret, sacred place under the earth[19] or to a midnight gathering on the square: it is the Pahachare Festival in Katmandu.[20] At this celebration the three goddesses probably confer with each other on the destiny of the world, and perhaps also of their consort-king in the shape of the sacred golden bull. At the end of the procession Vatsala Kali returns to her temple in her stone shape, dressed in red and bedecked with flowers. When Shiva arrives as a guest, also in the shape of his sacred stone, then the sacrificial ritual begins. It follows the pattern of Dakshin Kali, with

water buffalo and black male goats the preferred sacrifices here. The sacrifice takes place at the western corner of the temple, the direction of death.

Several cultural traditions bear witness to the human male sacrifices that used to be presented to Vatsala Kali at this place.[21] The sacrificial beheading of the buffalo or bull, right in the middle of the Katmandu Valley, where these animals are so sacred that they don't even have to do work, and right in front of Shiva himself, points to what this sacrifice of a man originally was. Kali's consort-king, Pashupati, the Lord of the Animals—perhaps wearing a buffalo mask—met his own sacrificial death this way. The sacrifice of the mother goddess's consort and sacred king, usually represented as a bull, is a very old matriarchal custom, and harkens back to the great cultures of the Indus, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Crete.

This type of sacrifice was strictly forbidden by Shiva, who didn't want to become the sacrificed "bull." Vatsala Kali didn't listen to him, and they got into a raging battle in which she was defeated. The human male sacrifice was replaced with the buffalo sacrifice, in which Shiva's presence as "Pashupati"—substituting for the earlier consort-king—was necessary for the sacrifice to be accepted. Vatsala is still fond of the company of the dead who are burned near by, at the Shiva temple; in this way her character as goddess of death, on the western side of the river, is clearly distinguished from her character as loving mother, on the east side.

Her festival exhibits yet another very interesting social feature: after the animal sacrifice, the buffalo heads are offered to the goddess, and well into the night their flesh is cooked in great pots over an open fire. In the meantime nine girls come together and take their places on the western side of the Vatsala temple. They are beautifully bejeweled and bubbling with excitement; they chatter and giggle, unbothered by the sacredness of this temporary honor. They are, however, embodiments of the nine sacred girls, the young version of the Matrikas, and act as the ninefold Kali herself. They are girls who have not yet menstruated, and they are selected from all the different castes of the region. For this one night Vatsala's priest will worship them as the goddess herself; together, the girls will eat of the cooked sacrificial flesh as full equals. In this way, the caste separation is, for this one night, suspended through the power of the goddess, since the Matrikas or primordial mothers permit neither social hierarchy nor the oppression associated with it. The Brahman Shiva, the high lord of the world, is forced to personally watch the violation of all his principles, and this makes him angry.[22]

On the second day of the festival the rage of Shiva against Vatsala Kali's customs has increased to the point where an argument arises between him and the goddess, an argument acted out as ritual drama by the priests of the two deities. He scolds her for allowing blood sacrifice, alcohol, and contact between people of dif-

ferent castes. She throws his accusations right back at him, which embarrasses him, because she is also (in her Hinduized form of Guhyeshvari) his loving wife, his "wild and wayward calf," whose love he longs for! But for this, she must follow him to his temple, and so, with sweet, conciliatory words he begs forgiveness. Vatsala Kali is finally ready to go with him to his temple as a sign of forgiveness, but only to the threshold. There she turns around and goes home to her own temple.

This basic argument between two religious worlds, an argument that is open ended, and has no solution, is played out every year with great participation at the Vatsala Festival. Here, historical events are enacted as mythic drama, and this is the way peoples with an oral tradition present their history: it is the battle of the devotees of the matriarchal original religion against the new, patriarchal Hindu religion that forbids and alters the old life principles of the people. The outcome remains undecided, and that leads to a syncretic coexistence in Nepal between both these religions.

3.4 Kumari, the living goddess

The mystery plays are to be understood in exactly the same way: as a mythic-ritually presented relationship to nature on the one hand, and on the other, as one's own history, which the Newar celebrate over the course of the year as big public festivals. Each month has its own days-long festival, and every town its special celebrations, so that it isn't difficult to find boisterous crowds of Newar somewhere or other in a celebratory festival mood. The atmosphere is reminiscent of the great Spanish and Brazilian "fiestas." The most important of all the festivals celebrated in this country is the ten-day "Durga Puja" in honor of the goddess Durga.[23]

Durga, the great mother goddess, carries the name of "Taleju" in Nepal, and appears as the mild Lakshmi-Parvati (Guhyeshvari), goddess of love and lucky marriage, as well as the wild, inflexible Kali. In the Kumari she appears as a small, but nonetheless powerful girl.

In the Durga Puja all these aspects of the great goddess come together impressively, while at the same time the Hindu influence appears to be eclipsed. All over the country animal sacrifices are performed, there is alcohol, as well as card and dice games: these earthly pleasures are much enjoyed by the populace. During the first eight days of the festival, all eight Matrikas and their pithas—sacred stones that ring the towns—are visited, one by one, beginning in the east, at the pitha and shrine of the goddess of new creation. Each day begins with a purifying bath in a sacred spring or a sacred pond, and it ends with the procession to one of the sacrificial grounds of the tutelary mother goddess, especially in the old town of Bhaktapur.

The ninth day of the Durga Puja is the feast day of the Great Goddess, and in the shape of the Kumari, a pre-pubescent girl, she makes a personal appearance to the townspeople. The cult of the Kumari is the only one in which a genuinely living goddess is celebrated; for us it casts light on the archaic matriarchal festivals where, as her priestesses, women embodied the goddess.

The Kumari is the goddess Durga in the shape of a child. Every town has its own Kumari who is its town goddess, just as every town used to have its own king. Since the 18th century, when the peoples of Nepal were conquered and centralized by the Hindu Gurkha warriors, only the Gurkha king in Katmandu is left. Because of this, the Kumari of Katmandu is considered the royal Kumari, and is the goddess of the entire country (Ill. 2).[24] I too made a pilgrimage to her beautiful palace in the center of the city, where she lives hidden from the public gaze, briefly appearing only once a day. And that is where I came to have the pleasure of a glimpse of the royal Kumari, where I saw her handsome face and dark eyes for just a moment, behind an intricately carved window. The believers in the courtyard paid homage to her with flowers and other small presents, and loudly expressed their joy. It is she who, once a year at the Kumari Yatra Festival preceding the Durga Puja, personally blesses the king. Without this blessing from the Kumari—who, as Taleju, is his personal tutelary goddess—the king cannot reign. To receive her blessing in the form of a "tikka," a red dot on his forehead, the king comes to the palace of the Kumari: he goes to her, not she to him. This points to an ancient order of rank: it means that she has power over him, not vice versa; this is because the king is merely human, while she is divine.

During this blessing her facial expression is carefully observed, and each flicker of expression is seen as an omen for the next year. The clairvoyant abilities of the Kumari are not doubted by the Nepalese, as evidenced by an event that happened in 1971:[25] At that time the reigning King Mahendra, along with Crown Prince Birendra, visited the Kumari in her palace to receive the "tikka" as validation for remaining in office another year. Deep in thought, the living goddess approached the two and pressed the "tikka" onto the forehead of the prince instead of the king. The priests gently pointed out the error to the Kumari, but she was firm in her decision. A few months later King Mahendra unexpectedly died, and Prince Birendra succeeded him on the throne.

On the ninth day of the Durga Puja, then, the Kumari appears to all the believers in the streets of the city. The royal Kumari of Katmandu is carried through the streets on a litter, while the Ekanta Kumari of Bhaktapur is simply carried on the arms of her father, though always accompanied by a priest. The people surround her and give her little presents, and continually lead the way into the Taleju temple of

Illustration 2. Kumari, the Living Goddess of the Newar, an incarnation of the goddess Durga-Kali-Taleju. Photo: Suresh Maharjan

the town, which serves as her divine residence and may only be entered by the highest-caste Hindus. While this is going on, a young, excited bull under the influence of alcohol is pursued through the streets of the town and chased into the inner courtyard of the Taleju temple by a shouting crowd. Once there, it is decapitated with one blow as a sacrifice to the Durga-Kali—although the child Kumari is not permitted to see the blood. It is said to relate to the victory celebration that marked Durga-Kali's victory over the buffalo demon Mahisa, but this demonization already shows Hindu influence, as this buffalo demon embodies "evil." In the original religion, the Durga Puja was an occasion for the holy buffalo sacrifice and, possibly, for a human male sacrifice.[26] This sacrifice probably involved the death of the consort-king as an offering to the Great Goddess—she is his guardian deity, and the power over his destiny rests with none other than Durga-Taleju herself.

This unique ritual of girl-worship, which is only comprehensible in the context of matriarchal history, has consequences that go beyond the end of the girl's term of service, when she has her first menstruation and returns to ordinary life. These girls are not desirable marriage candidates, since the possibility of Durga's powers having rubbed off on them frightens the men. However, in light of the harsh, oppressed life of many Hindu wives, this is not necessarily a bad thing. The possibility of education or training is open to these girls, an exceptional opportunity that not a few former Kumaris take advantage of.

Let us return to the Durga Puja: On the ninth day of the Festival the Kumari worship is extended to more girls. In other temples of the towns and in the villages, groups of nine Kumaris are honored by the priests and are fed the meat of the sacrificial animals. These groups soon break up again, but in this process the offering of sacrificial animals and the worship of the goddess as a girl spreads throughout the general public. Each family brings a sacrificial animal to the temple, so that entire herds of buffaloes and male goats are brought to be killed. No family wants to be left out, or lose the chance to make sure Durga is in a friendly mood for the next year. Afterwards all the family members get together at the holiday meal of roasted sacrifice, and celebrate their membership in the clan while honoring the youngest girl as their own "family Kumari." In this way, every girl has the opportunity, sometime in her childhood, to be honored as the family Kumari, since each one of them is, at some point, the youngest. All these traditions bear witness to the Durga Puja as being an ancient matriarchal clan festival, and to the fact that before Brahmanization, the Newar "youngest daughter" was considered (as she is still today by the Khasi) to be the focus of the whole clan's hopes.

On this high holiday groups of nine men from the lower castes dance through the streets of the town (Bhaktapur) wearing elaborately worked masks of the

nine Matrikas. With their ecstatic musical outbursts, these Nava Durga dancers present the nine aspects of the goddess, aspects that influence the annual cycle as well as the life cycle; these are dedicated to the eight pitha stones that encircle the town, along with a ninth stone in the center. During the next nine months they will visit different parts of the city, celebrate family festivals and sacrifice to the ancestors. During these festivals clan families are reconnected with living and dead members.

The tenth day of the festival brings the finale, which brings the process full circle: on the last night of the festival, at the pitha of the Goddess of Rebirth and Creation in the east, the Nava Durga dancers sacrifice a buffalo. Next day, they carry the animal's head back into the town in a lively procession, accompanied by the townspeople. So everyone has been once more in the presence of the Goddess of Rebirth. This brings the power of the goddess into the town, and for the next nine months she will protect them from all danger.

All these signs of a matriarchal Newar culture are covered over with thick layers of patriarchal Hindu mythology and all-male Brahman priesthood. But in answer to them, symbolic practices and public mystery plays of the people speak their own language.

They indicate that Nepal must once have had a matriarchal social order. There is evidence for this in certain Newar practices that have protected women from being consigned to the fate suffered by Hindu wives in India. In that culture, wives would have been nothing more than the subordinated servants of their husbands, considered as gods; they would be the slaves of their mothers-in-law, and expected to perform all the heavy work. Their marriages would be insoluble, and, until recently, they would have been suspected of witchcraft in case of a husband's death. This very often would lead to their being burned alive along with his body in the custom of suttee ("sati"); such self immolation was—until 1829, when the custom of suttee was forbidden by British colonial rulers—the only way a wife could clear herself of intent to have harmed her husband.

The possibility of this fate was cleverly avoided in Nepal in this way: every six-year-old girl is symbolically engaged to a god, who takes the shape of a pomegranate-like fruit. All her life, she remains the spouse of the god in the baëlfruit, and therefore may not, if her earthly husband dies first, be burned along with him. A woman is not considered to be the widow of a mortal husband, and so widows and widow-burning are unknown in Nepal. The woman's engagement to the baël god is in fact seen as her real marriage; this is why in Nepal, in contrast to the Indian practice, earthly marriage can be dissolved by either party. If a faithful wife survives her earthly husband, she takes over the leadership of the family clan after his

death—and sometimes, even while he is still alive. This means that in rural regions, large families of fifty or more are often lead by the grandmother, although this no longer occurs in relation to her own clan lineage or her own clan house. In spite of Hinduizing influences from India, there is still space for the traditions, and the strengths, of Nepalese women.

3.5 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the cultural level:

- Matriarchal mystery festivals reflect the annual cycle and the lifecycle. As ritual drama, they present the relationship humans have with nature and with their own history; the festivals are dedicated to the various manifestations of the Great Goddess.
- These manifestations are public folk festivals, not secret cults. They demonstrate ancient principles of equality that characterize matriarchal tribal societies, and they tolerate no social hierarchy (or if they are already in a patriarchal society, they are critical of it).
- The Great Goddess appears as Maiden (Kumari), Mother (Guyeshvari, Lakshmi-Parvati) and Crone (Kali), the matriarchal threefold goddess.
- In matriarchal culture, girls and women embody, at different stages in their lives, the manifestations of the Great Goddess and are worshipped as such.
- The partner of the Great Goddess is a sacred king. He manages executive orders in her name, and at the end of his reign, he became the designated sacrifice to the goddess. In matriarchal culture, sacrifice of the sacred king is based on the principles of free will (assured by many rituals), and of rebirth. Belief in rebirth is not an abstraction, but an assumption about reality.
- The sacrifice of the sacred king has been replaced by male animals.With the animals also, the principle of free will was respected (as far as possible), and they were believed to be reborn, too.
- Matriarchal shrines and sacred grounds usually form a symbolic order in harmony with the landscape (e.g., earth and water features seen as the body of the goddess) and with the four directions (e.g., east as the direction of life, west as the direction of death). These symbolic complexes usually remain intact in the culture, even after a period of patriarchalization.

Notes

1. Jean-Francois Véziès : *Les fêtes magiques du Népal,* Paris 1981, Rancilio, table p.20.
2. Koch/Stegmüller: *Geheimnisvolles Nepal,* Munich 1983, List.
3. See Koch/Stegmüller, ibid., p.122.
4. On the situation of Nepalese women see: Lynn Bennett: *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters,* New York 1993, Columbia University Press; and: "Maiti-Ghar: the dual role of high caste women in Nepal," in James F. Fisher (ed.): *Himalayan Anthropology. The Indo-Tibetan Interface,* pp. 121–140, The Hague 1978, Mouton (distributed in the USA and Canada by Aldine, Chicago); and Meena Acharya: *The Status of Women in Nepal,* Katmandu 1979, Tribhuvan University; see also the Official report of the Public Service Library: *Status of Women Project Team,* Katmandu 1979; and I. Majapuria: *Nepalese Women,* Katmandu 1982, M. Devi; and I. Majapuria/ T.C. Majapuria: *Marriage Customs in Nepal—Ethnic groups, their marriage, customs and traditions,* Katmandu 1978, available at International Book House.
5. K. R. van Kooij: *Religion in Nepal,* Leiden 1978, Brill, chapter 2.
6. Axel Michaels: "Shiva's Wild and Wayward Calf, The Goddess Vatsala," in: *Kailash. A Journal of Himalayan Studies,* vol. XI, no. 3/4, 1984, Ratna Pustak Bhandar.
7. See Michaels, ibid., p. 116.
8. See Kooij, ibid., p. 18.
9. See Michaels, ibid., p. 115.
10. See Kooij, ibid., p. 7 f.
11. Dhurba K. Deep: *The Nepal Festivals,* Katmandu 1978, Ratna Pustak Bhandar, see about Dakshin Kali, p. 21 ff.
12. See also Koch/Stegmüller, ibid., pp. 136–141.
13. See Deep, ibid., pp. 24 and 125.
14. See Koch/Stegmüller, ibid., p. 171 ff.
15. See Bennett, ibid., p. 281 ff.
16. See Kooij, ibid., p. 16 f.; and Mary M. Anderson: *The Festivals of Nepal,* London 1971, Allen & Unwin, p. 192; and S. Lienhard: „Religionssynkretismus in Nepal", in: Heinz Bechert (ed.): *Buddhismus in Ceylon and Studies on Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries: Report on a Symposium in Goettingen,* Göttingen, Germany, 1978, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 166.
17. See Michaels, ibidem.
18. See Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *The Goddess and her Heros. Matriarchal Mythology,* ibidem.
19. See Michaels, ibid., p. 116 ff.
20. See Koch/Stegmüller, ibid., p. 20 ff.
21. See Michaels, ibid., p. 109; Kooij, ibid., p. 16.
22. Some scholars say Shiva is indistinguishable from Kali: wild, sexual, enlightened, non-dualistic, anarchical.—However, this is a later interpretation of Shiva shaped by Hindu philosophy. According to Newar tradition, Kali is much older than Shiva, who, in the first wave of Brahmanization, was introduced to Nepal as "Lord of the World"(!). Furthermore, the enactment of this celebration is a fact, and not my personal interpretation; this enactment speaks clearly for itself.
23. See Koch/Stegmüller, ibid., pp. 121–142; and Mary M. Anderson, ibidem; and Machapuria/Gupta: *Nepal—The Land of Festivals,* New Delhi 1981, S. Chand.

24. See for the cult of the Kumari: Koch/Stegmüller, ibid., pp.121–142; Kooij, ibid.; Mary M. Anderson, ibid.; Lienhard, ibid.
25. See Koch/Stegmüller, ibid., p. 113; Kooij, ibid., p. 14.
26. See Koch/Stegmüller, ibid.; p. 136.

4

Ancient Queens Realms and Group Marriage in Tibet

For Sa-trig er-sans, "Great Mother of Space," and kLu-mo, primordial mother of Tibet

4.1 Planting and herding cultures

From Nepal, Tibet lies across the towering ice wall of the Himalayas, with its many eight thousand meter peaks. Just behind this range lies the long, steep valley of the Tsangpo river, the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra, its abundant flow making agriculture possible in southern Tibet. Just as in the steep river valleys of Nepal, fields are a patchwork set in a vast array of graduated terraces. Not surprisingly, the two styles of house construction are similar to those in Nepal; they both must deal with scarcity of land in mountain valleys, and contend with monsoon rains that rapidly cause the rivers to overflow their banks. The timber farmhouses often are nothing more than large wooden scaffolds, with the back end resting on the slope and the front held up with posts. This pile dwelling construction is quite practical, providing a flat, livable surface on a sloping cliff, and allowing rainwater from the mountainside to run out between the posts into the river. The floodwaters of the river also flow between the posts, without reaching the dwelling surface. This architecture is very flexible: the construction of the houses, in steep river valleys

half on posts and half on the ground, is modified into complete pile dwellings in swampy areas; in flat, dry areas it forms dwellings constructed completely on the ground.

Besides the rising water, the torrential rains are also a problem, and just one roof is not enough. Even the simplest farmhouses have a pagoda-style roof construction: two or even three extended, thatched rice-straw roofs are placed one over the other. The rain cannot penetrate, and the wide roof provides shelter for drying garden fruits and vegetables beneath them. Finally, the walls are made of woven mats that can be put up or taken down, depending on the weather. All this results in an extremely flexible type of house, well adapted to the terrain and the weather, and one that is among the very oldest types of construction. It is assumed that the early matriarchal planting culture of this region, one of the earliest in the world, developed this type of construction at the end of the Paleolithic times, and that it spread, via migration along the waterways, over Southeast Asia and all the way to the archipelagos of the Pacific.[1]

The second type of house is stone construction, characteristic of cities, where there is a bit more area to build on. Still, place-saving construction is undertaken here too: it was in this region that the multi-story building was invented, in which as many stories as possible are stacked one above the other (Ill. 3). The fields extend right up to the walls of the houses. These stone high-rises have for a long time been typical of Tibet, where hilltop monasteries and palaces with rows and rows of windows tower over each other, with the most well-known being the Potala in Lhasa.

Beyond the range of the Trans-Himalayas, on the great Tibetan plateaus where deep, protecting river valleys are lacking, people can no longer make a living from farming. They don't own houses anymore, but rather live in tents. Here, as a result of the meager economy of the raw, high plateaus, the agricultural society's animal husbandry has been confined to specialized nomadic yak and sheep herding. The nomadic lifestyle in tents is more mobile, but is economically and culturally poorer, compared to the more complex agricultural society. The so-called historical accounts that reverently portray herding societies as spiritually and culturally superior to agricultural societies have no basis in fact. Even worse is to see this development as a cultural epoch of its own: in reality, herding cultures usually exist in relationship with planting cultures, upon which they are dependent for acquiring food from plants and for handcrafted goods. Without an agricultural society, herding peoples could not actually survive; thus the lands they take for grazing are those where agriculture is no longer possible. (A comparable arrangement can be seen in the European Alpine peoples, where valleys are given over to planting, slopes to grazing land; both economic strategies belong to the same culture.) More recent

Illustration 3. Tibetan girls with American friend; typical Tibetan houses in the background. Photo: Vicki Noble

anthropological research—research that dispenses with the fantasy of early, independent, spiritually superior, patriarchal "lone cowboy" herding nomads—exposes these peoples as rather one-dimensional and specialized; they appear as parasitic offshoots of agricultural societies, exhibiting a proportionate cultural impoverishment. In certain exceptional, extreme cases these herders have developed into nomad warrior cultures, in effect, a sub-specialization. The latter lived as double parasites, because—instead of buying the needed goods—they now plundered their neighboring planter cultures. Whether nomads or nomad warriors, in every case they emerged from Neolithic matriarchal agriculture societies and represent, especially as nomad warriors, a much later phase.[2] *Tibetan culture* is a clear example of this kind of development, since historically it goes back to a Neolithic megalith culture.[3] This was characterized by intensive, highly skilled agriculture, using terraces and irrigation systems for the winter dry season.[4] Tibetan herding culture began much later.

4.2 The Bon Religion

The practice of worshipping stones is even older in Tibet than it is in Nepal; it clearly points to Tibetans being related to the Khasi, whose mythology tells how they once upon a time came from over the Himalayas.[5] For Tibetans, the immense mountains of the Himalayas are not the thrones of the gods, as they are for Hindus; rather they are the abode of their dead ancestors and as such are more venerated by local tribes than Buddhist sanctuaries are.[6] Some mountains are considered to be mother-goddesses, such as "Chomolungma," the "Goddess-Mother" of all mountains and living beings, the highest mountain in the world.[7] (In the West it is called "Mt. Everest.")

The Ma-ni walls are in use everywhere. Tibetans are still erecting these today, at elevated places, to commemorate the ancestors. Every new death brings a new memorial stone, which blesses the dead as well as the donor, and is added to the wall. The walls provide habitation for the dead, and serve as connecting links between the living and the spirit world; they are popular with passersby, who use them as a place to sit and rest.[8] In later times, these walls were covered with Buddhist prayers which, all by themselves, are considered to bring religious merit now. Just as Nepal's ancestral culture was plastered over with successive layers of Hinduism, here Buddhism played a similar role in relation to the ancient culture of Tibet. Ma-ni walls have been found not only with Tibetan mountain peoples, but also in Nepal among Tibetan tribes like the *Sherpa* and *Rai.* In addition, the

archaic form of funerary services for the dead using memorial stones is still found throughout the region from Karakorum over the Himalayas as far as Assam and Indochina.[9]

Besides the Ma-ni walls in Tibet, there are the huge, elaborated stone structures from ancient times. One of them has been described by a researcher as consisting of 18 rows of large menhirs that are lined up parallel to each other running east to west. At the western end they open up into a stone circle made of two concentric rings. In the center stand three particularly tall menhirs with a dolmen right in front of them.[10] This center group exhibits the same construction as the Khasi megaliths. Stone rows with large circles are accretions built up over generations, with every stone standing for an ancestor, until they form huge, awe-inspiring monuments like those at Carnac in Brittany (France). At the beginning of the new year the Tibetan relatives, even today, bring food to the cemetery and place it on stone slabs, so that their ancestors may be nourished. Sometimes animals are brought to the megaliths at the Feast of Feeding the Ancestors, and sacrificed there.[11]

There are also stone mounds on which more and more stones are placed, with forked sticks hung with prayer flags, and these too are considered to be the abode of spirits and of the dead. This form of stone mound was later incorporated into Buddhist architecture as a "stupa"; stupas are beautifully formed, small or big funeral temples. In all these stupas, however, there rest only the relics of one dead person: those of Gautama Buddha, the "Enlightened One." Buddhist though they are, even the most magnificent Buddhist stupas I witnessed in Bodnath (Tibetan culture) and Swayambhu Nath (Newar culture) in Katmandu are surrounded by ancient magic circles, consisting of a ring marked with the points of the four sacred directions. Instead of stones marking the circle's perimeter, statues of Buddha were used to mark the directions, and also to represent the elements: in the east a blue Buddha represents air, in the south a yellow one stands for fire, a red one in the west for water, and a green one in the north for the earth. In the center, instead of the white Buddha (representing ether, or sky) portrayed on mandalas, is the whitewashed grave mound or stupa. Every stupa is, in terms of its symbolic construction, a mandala of cosmic significance. At the site of the Swayambhu Nath stupa there was, around 3500 B.C.E., one of the first burial places; this points clearly to an Neolithic, megalithic origin.[12]

The use of stones and indeed mountains to worship nature, earth, and the ancestors belongs to the ancient Tibetan Bon religion, later assimilated and displaced by Buddhism. The roots of the popular Bon religion go back to a land called Žan-žun in Tibetan texts; it appears to refer to an earlier epoch in Tibet's cultural history. This epoch clearly exhibited matriarchal characteristics, as indicated by the

pre-Buddhist elements of the Bon religion. For example, their primordial goddess Sa-trig er-sans, or "Great Mother of Space," is not a Tibetan name, but stems from the Žan-žun language. This deity created all the other goddesses and gods; they emanate from her. She is golden-colored and enthroned upon a lion; at first, five goddesses arise out of her: white, green, red, turquoise blue, and yellow. It is easy to see that they form the first magic circle with the center, marking out the infinite void (Sa-trig er-sans herself) into four compass directions for guidance. The same pattern is repeated with a creator god and five variously colored gods, although this god clearly is in a subordinate position to Sa-trig er-sans; he apparently represents a later addition to the ancient Bon texts.

A second Bon myth tells of a creator goddess who created the physical world of the senses: kLu-mo, primordial mother born out of the void, who formed heaven and earth from her own body. Heaven arose out of the top of her head, from her right eye came the moon, from the left the sun, and from her teeth came the planets. When kLu-mo opened her eyes it was day; when she closed them it was night. Her voice produced thunder, her tongue lightning, her breath the clouds, her tears the rain, and from her nostrils came the wind. Her flesh turned into the earth, her bones into mountains, her blood into oceans and her veins into rivers. The sensuous universe is the body of this primordial mother, while the spiritual universe is represented by Sa-trig er-sans.

Throughout the many transformations of Tibetan beliefs, these two creator goddesses have endured. Sa-trig er-sans became the Great Queen of Heaven, later consigned to the side of a celestial god. In Buddhism she became the Blue Tara, the redemptive female spirit-being, but the Buddha and his emanations had the leading role in that imagery. The symbolic construction of the Swayambhu Nath stupa highlights this reversal of status: the four compass directions are occupied by Buddhas, while Tara and her emanations are admitted only between the cardinal points (southwest, southeast, northwest and northeast). Nevertheless, even in this syncretic late Buddhism, every corner of the world is seen to be populated by dakinis, i. e. fairies, emanations of the heavenly creator goddess. Dakinis are "airwalkers," inspiring spirits who, as initiation goddesses, guide seekers in their quest for a spiritual path. Their elements are not only air but also water, the earth, and forest; their fairy nature never binds them to a special place. The Tibetan word for dakini is "Lama," derived from the old Tibetan "Lha-mo" (goddess). In their earlier role as shamans, it was women, not men, who were the spirit-possessed dakinis—the "Lamas" who initiated seekers.

In contrast to the ethereal dakinis, kLu-mo, the earthly, sensuous primordial mother, became Sri Devi (Durga-Kali), goddess of the underworld, death and trans-

formation. In pre-Buddhist religion she is "Queen of the Spirits" in the realm of the dead, presiding over the tribunal of the dead, and serving as the king's protector and goddess of destiny. The spirits of the depth are the "kLu," the dead who turn into spirits and guard hidden treasures in springs, lakes and rivers. They may bring sickness and death, or well being and good fortune, just as the ancestors' spirits do (there is no difference between them). Later, they were conflated with the "Nagas," the underworld snake spirits.

Related to the kLu are the "Ma-mo," spirits of women who died violent deaths. They roam the countryside as ugly, black-skinned women with shaggy hair, arriving during the red or black sandstorms. Like Greek Furies, they avenge men's cheating, betrayal and murder of women; they cause awful calamities to befall them. They are so powerful that their deeds—such as storms, earthquakes, famine and floods—can't be undone by any magic ritual.

It is clear that ancestor worship is closely associated with the kLu-mo's spirit beings. All through ancient Tibet's history, animal sacrifices were made to these spirits, and even male human sacrifices (in the sense discussed above), which probably were carried out at the megalith sites. Textual references attest to this, as do some elements of the Lama monasteries' mystery festivals, which still use shamanistic costumes and techniques and celebrate fertility and rebirth rites.

Things changed drastically when Buddhism, along with its men's monasteries, came to Tibet. Introduced for political reasons by Tibetan kings jostling for power over the nobility, Buddhism was forced on the people until it reverberated back against the palace itself: In the 15th century, a theocratic-lamaistic state was founded under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, master of monasteries full with trained warrior monks; he installed himself as the priest-ruler of Tibet. But without appropriating the fundamentals of the popular Bon religion, Buddhism never could have established itself in Tibet.[13] This mixture of Buddhism and Bon is known as "Tantric Buddhism" (or Lamaism), a magical form of Buddhism that includes many earlier religious ideas (Vajrayana). "Tantric" represents a deformed continuation of ancient beliefs and practices (this is also true of Nepal) that probably go back to the old Žan-žun culture.

4.3 Ancient Tibetan queens' realms

Chinese chronicles describe vast women's realms on the Tibetan-Chinese border; this probably was the ancient Tibetan *Žan-žun culture*. Given the precision with which the chronicles describe the ways of life and customs, even down to the clothing, they could not have been legendary fiction, as some western researchers have

wrongly asserted.[14] Here again is the same unscientific approach to history that has discounted ancient chroniclers of Mediterranean women's cultures: these more recent researchers diminishing otherwise credible sources, even though the chroniclers were closer by hundreds, if not thousands, of years to the events in question. The chroniclers' testimony simply does not fit into their patriarchally encrusted worldview.

The Chinese annals of the Sui and Tang dynasties (905–581 B.C.E.) report on a land ruled by queens in the northwest; this realm included the region of the headwaters of the great Southeast Asian rivers and stretched far towards the east. It was called the realm of the "Su-pi," which was also the queen's title (not her family name). The Chinese records include a clear description, framed in the geographical coordinates of the time, as well as a list of the neighboring tribes. Climate and economy are also described in detail: it was a raw, cold climate that permitted only sparse farming; so yaks, sheep and horses were bred, and this source of food was supplemented by hunting game. This is more or less consistent with the typical economy of the Tibetan highlands today—and, in addition, shows that animal-breeding or herding cultures do not necessarily have to be patriarchal. A significant source of wealth in the realm of the Su-pi was the extraction of valuable minerals like tin, copper and salt, which were exported as far away as India. This trade enabled them to have, in spite of the bleakness of the land, a better life than is possible in this region today. Population statistics attest to this: improbable as it may seem, 40,000 families and 10,000 soldiers (male defenders) lived in 80 cities at that time. But for them, "city" referred not to unlimited masses of people—as in our super-sized urban centers. If each of those 40,000 families has five or six members, it works out to about 2500–3000 people per settlement—which constitutes, as is borne out by archeological findings of ancient matriarchal urban cultures, the early practice of limits to growth. For ecological and social reasons, a population of about 3000 inhabitants per place was usually not exceeded. Not size, but the variety of activities and skills made a city: this was clearly still the case in the queens' realm of the Su-pi.[15]

The chronicles further report that these cities were situated on the steep slopes of river valleys, and consisted of six- to eight-storey stone houses; this is still the case in southern Tibet today. The city of the queen, with her nine-storey palace, was in the Kangyen valley, a wild gorge where the Jo River flows south. With the populace dressed in leather clothing and fur boots, their faces painted with colored clay, the queen wore a roughly knitted black shirt, covered by a black overcoat whose sleeves reached to the ground. In winter she added an embroidered lamb's fur garment and, like her people, fur boots. With earrings and a full head of braids, she

must have looked like an exquisite Mongolian Amazon! (Traditional Tibetan women still dress like this, braids and all.) She directed the queen's realm together with a "little queen" who, upon the death of the Su-pi, immediately took her place. One of the two of them was betrothed to a prince consort; they could not both remain single, or the dynasty would die out. In this culture the women did not particularly focus on their husbands, and they knew nothing of jealousy. A rich woman would be surrounded by several men who helped her dress her hair and do her make-up. They weren't necessarily "servants"—probably they were her spouses. Polyandry is an old practice in Tibet that still exists today.

Surrounding a reigning queen there were several hundred women who gathered with her every five days at the governing council. Some researchers, encountering this description in the Chinese chronicles, have absolutely wrongly understood these women to be "servants" of the queen.[16] Rather, they were the most important clan mothers of the matriarchal clans, who, together with the queen, carried out the functions of government in their land. The chronicles report clear matrilineal structures, with daughters and sons bearing the same "family names" as their mothers. Since in Tibet, however, there are no family names, we must gather that it means they belonged to the clan of the mother. The chronicles further assert that elected men received the decisions made in the inner palace, passed them on and implemented them. These men were acknowledged in the queen's realm as the "Messengers of the Women."

However, the researcher and missionary Hermanns thought the Chinese chronicles were implying "inferior status of the man"; since this alleged inferiority would be quite atypical of Tibet, he concluded that the whole report on the queen's realm of Su-pi lacked credibility. Very interesting logic! Fortunately, there are other researchers who approach the report with less prejudice, and validate it with their own experience.[17]

4.4 Polyandry as well-organized group marriage

Polyandry existed not only in the old Tibetan queen's realm of Su-pi; it still exists as a well-organized institution in contemporary Tibet. What it refers to is the marriage of a woman to more than one man at the same time. Western researchers—perhaps out of wounded vanity—have written much that is less than factual about this social form: the spectrum of male indignation extends as far as characterizing the practice as a "monstrous evil." This only mirrors their lack of understanding of an ancient—and to all appearances matriarchal—order; that is, a woman-designed and woman-implemented group marriage.[18]

In his history of family development, Morgan showed that individual marriage originated much later than group marriage, and is associated with patriarchal tendencies.[19] In comparison, well-organized group marriage is the oldest, longest lasting and, in former times, generally widespread form of marriage. The reason is that in extensive early historical eras, the clan—not the individual—was the deciding unit; marriage was not subverted to serve abstract religious values or a private, personal purpose. Rather, by providing multilateral economic and human assistance, it brought the different clans together. In this mutual marriage system, no one was left alone or in poverty—we try to remedy such situations today with orphanages, homeless shelters and senior centers. In such a system, all clan members were connected in the give and take of a mutual help network.

So if we summarize all the different research reports on polyandry in Tibet, leaving aside the contradictory attempts at explanation, we can say this: for ancient Tibetan peoples, polyandry was widespread, particularly in the southeast, south and west regions where steep terrace farming is practiced as a very ancient type of agriculture. But the herding tribes in the Tibetan highlands practice this form of marriage as well. In addition, Nepalese Tibetan groups who live in the highland valleys of the Himalayas also practice polyandry: *Bhotias, Sherpas, Gurungs, Limbu, Rais, Kirats, Jaunsar-Bawar* and *Khasas*.[20]

Often polyandry is not recognized for what it actually is. It is not just "multiple husbands," but a very old form of group marriage, brilliantly explained by Robert Briffault.[21] Behind the polyandry practiced by Tibetans and related tribes, the basic pattern is the sisters-brothers polyandry-polygyny (sisters-brothers group marriage). Polygamy, or marriage-to-many, occurs in two different forms; because of the male bias only one of them, polygyny (many wives) is well known. The other form, less diligently described, is polyandry, where a woman has several spouses at once. Both forms are, in themselves, neither matriarchal or patriarchal. Rather, this is determined by whether women or men arrange the marriage, and by whether or not the group of wives—or husbands—are each other's blood relatives.

In typical patriarchal polygyny, a man has several wives who are unrelated to each other, who have not been consulted about the others, and who are forced to get along in the same household with each other somehow (as is the custom in some Muslim countries). The man is their master, and they are not allowed to have additional lovers. The female mirror image of this patriarchal pattern—a woman with several husbands in her house, men who are unrelated to each other and have no say over their situation—does not exist. With the matriarchal Nayar (India), there exists a pattern of polyandry with several unrelated husbands, but they don't live in the wife's household; rather, they practice visiting marriage whenever they please, and have additional lovers or wives in other houses (see chapter 15 in this book).

Distinct from this form is the widespread, traditional matriarchal group marriage, where a group of related women (sisters) from one clan joins together with related men (brothers) of another clan. This is the full sisters-brothers group marriage. Its purpose is mutual protection of both clans, unlike the self-centered motives of patriarchal polygyny.

According to these criteria, just any collection of men is not necessarily matriarchal; similarly, every case of many wives is not necessarily patriarchal. This can be seen in examples from Africa, where a group of sisters can choose a man as their provider and representative. They themselves decide on this form of marriage, and it gives them quite a bit of freedom.[22]

In Tibet, the relationships appear to be especially complicated if one does not understand the underlying principles of the sisters-brothers group marriage. It can appear to be polyandry, or sometimes polygyny, and sometimes monogamy—a situation that has confused many researchers. In fact, it is just a question of noticing how many sisters or brothers live in the families connected by group marriage; this will of course change the situation from family to family. For ecological reasons, a Tibetan family usually has no more than three or four children; a group marriage with another sisters or brothers group does not, therefore, add up to a lot of people.[23] If a family has only one daughter, and she is married to a group of brothers from another clan, it ends up being a kind of brothers-polyandry, where one woman marries several brothers. On the other hand, if there is only one son in a family, and he is married to a group of sisters, it looks like sisters-polygyny, or the marriage of one man to several sisters. If the two families in question only have one marriageable daughter and only one marriageable son, then it comes out as an apparent monogamy or "single" marriage. But this is only a monogamous-appearing instance: there is no structure or legal form dictating it; it occurs accidentally within the frame of sisters-brothers group marriage. In fact, people feel sorry for these somewhat lonely monogamous marriage partners, who alone bear the weight of all the clan duties.

This phenomenon, where the sisters-brothers group marriage appears in ever-changing forms (with one or the other variation being favored by one tribe or another today), has contributed to researchers' inability to see what was going on. Depending on the researchers' subjective viewpoint, "monogamy," "polygyny," or "polyandry" are each suggested as being the norm for marriage; alternatively, they insist that there were other forms of marriage besides "brothers polyandry." Both explanations are wrong, since these patterns of marriage are not independent of each other; rather they are part of the same old tradition of sisters-brothers group marriage. And this old pattern still prevails in general: it is the legal, normal and basic form of marriage here.

It is really Briffault's work that we have to thank for this perspective; and Majumdar's statistical study of the distribution of this form of marriage among Nepalese Tibetan mountain tribes is just as clear.[24] The result shows that polyandry-polygyny marriages (several sisters with several brothers) and polyandry marriages (a woman with several brothers) by far outnumber the others. Unfortunately, there is no equivalent study for Tibet, so that we are limited to the reports of various researchers: from them we can infer, as a general basis to work from, that sisters-brothers group marriage in Tibet is common everywhere among farming peoples and in certain parts among herding peoples as well.

It is neither economic poverty nor other adversity that determines the sisters-brothers group marriage with the Tibetans. Falsely ascribing such causes serves to devalue this form of marriage, treating it as a temporary unpleasantness, as a desperation measure for poor people, rather than an old, well-established structure. In direct refutation of this is the fact that old Tibetan sisters-brothers group marriage appears most often in the more well-to-do agricultural tribes. Furthermore, the most elaborate instances are to be found in the old, respected families, those who maintain this form of marriage as a national heritage. The same goes for certain Tibetan-related mountain tribes in Nepal, who value group marriage as one of their most significant practices. And we find that it is here, among these tribes on both sides of the Himalayas, that the Bon religion, along with its elaborate ancestor cult and belief in rebirth, flourishes most widely.[25]

The guidelines of the sisters-brothers group marriage are very clear, which distinguishes it from decadent forms of group sex found in western civilization.[26] The marriage ceremony takes place between the eldest sister and the eldest brother acting as representatives for the other spouses (representative wedding ceremony), who are, however, present at the ceremony. From then on, all the younger sisters and younger brothers are considered married to each other too; in the brothers-polyandry of the women (which is quite common) all the younger brothers are also married to the eldest brother's spouse. The resulting household group has great advantages: the scarce arable land, as well as the herds (whose size, in the meager grazing lands of the Tibetan highlands, is limited) remain undivided, insuring a certain modest standard of living. This is living ecology, upon whose foundation humans are able to have what they need without having a surplus in one place and poverty in another.

Brothers polyandry, where a woman marries several brothers, is particularly practical from an economic standpoint: it limits the number of children. A woman with several men reduces the sum of their potential fertility in that she has no more children—that is, three or four—than she would if she had only one man. The least practical form is sisters polygyny, where a man married to several women has

unlimited potential to produce offspring, and the family grows to include many children. This may be the reason that brothers-polyandry (one woman married to several brothers) is the most preferred form of sisters-brothers group marriage and is the most common. A second reason for its popularity may be that when several brothers provide for one woman and her children, their collective work can maintain a better standard of living than if one man has to work for several sisters and all their children. The brothers group, usually consisting of two husbands, is very proud of their shared wife, to whom they can give status, and who is the custodian of their work. The more brothers a woman is married to, the more she herself is respected. The children she bears are considered to be the offspring of all the brothers equally. But it is only through the mother, and not the fathers, that the children of this form of marriage are considered to be sisters and brothers: this harkens back to the old matrilinearity.

The brothers never cohabit together with their wife, but visit her according to a strict protocol from the eldest downwards. This makes sense in light of the men's frequent absences, a result of the hard work in the fields or the long herding migrations. Married herders are usually gone half the year away from home. But because they rotate in this work, each taking his turn, the wife is never obliged to be without the loving presence, and practical assistance, of a husband. This, too, increases the reputation of a woman in these circumstances, as compared to that of the often lonely life of women in a sisters-polygyny marriage. Though married to all of the brothers, the woman married to a group has the eldest brother as her actual spouse, behind whom the younger brothers, the assistant-spouses, have to wait. If it happens that husbands unexpectedly encounter each other at her house or tent, the one arriving later can see his brother's staff already in place in front of the door. He then retires quietly without disturbing them; it comes neither to jealousy nor to blows.

Often it happens that all the brothers do not live together in her household; instead, the younger ones stay in the lama monasteries for quite some time. These monasteries are crowded with married younger brothers who will leave the cloistered life as soon as their elder brother dies, in order to take over his duties as next husband to their communal wife. This holds true for all classes; each Dalai Lama is a member of a brothers-sisters group marriage arrangement. In fact, judging only by appearances it is not possible to identify whether a given household is based on group marriage or not; each case has to be more thoroughly investigated.

In this context the dwelling unit is no longer the clan in the clan house, but the group family. In light of this, the type of residence with Tibetans is neither patrilocal nor matrilocal, but neolocal: women and men both move into the new

household. But in old, well-to-do families it still happens that they live in a clan house, sometimes with 20–30 people in the household. Whether Tibetan families live in a house or tent, the wife is the absolute head of household; she is the symbol of unity and harmony in the family. As custodian, she manages the entire inheritance and income of the brothers, and uses the resources as she sees fit, taking responsibility for the good of the family. She is extremely well-respected by her husbands, honored even; they undertake nothing without the advice of their wife. The outpouring of love and obedience rendered by the men in relation to the women is amazing, particularly so because in every other situation, Tibetans willingly obey no outside authority. The earliest foreign visitors to Tibet reported on the courage and self-confidence with which the women of the villages or the tents welcomed them, while the men hung back timidly, and avoided passing contact. If she feels the brothers-husbands are not providing well enough, the Tibetan wife, as head of household, has the right in some regions to seek additional husbands from outside the clan marriage arrangement. In such a case, the new husband would be included as an equal spouse in the family group. On the other hand, if a younger brother would decide to seek another wife, he would be obliged to separate himself from the household, leaving his share of the goods to the family. He then becomes a member of another household.

Every Tibetan, female or male, is a member of this group marriage system, and, as such, each person has the right to receive, and the obligation to give, assistance. This arrangement doesn't exclude the freedom to have sexual adventures: since the marriage functions as a mutual support system, sexuality is somewhat independent of that structure. In this way, any person, regardless of gender, can, as desired, choose individual partners with whom they may enter into a romance of a few months', weeks' or days' duration. These relationships acquire no social meaning; they are considered as a form of playful enjoyment. The younger brothers are strictly forbidden to bring lovers or wives into the group marriage. In case of a serious relationship, they must accept the consequences and move out, as discussed above.

Despite her central role in the family, a Tibetan woman does not stay rooted in the home, and certainly not in the tent. She also works outside of the house, and Tibetan women are in charge of the entire transport of goods to the local markets, as well as for selling them. In earlier times a women's council always oversaw the workings of commerce. Due the strength required by these activities—farming in the fields, nomadic hunting with slingshots, and taking the surplus (on foot) over high mountain passes to market—Tibetan women were considered much more competent, physically, than the men. Traveling researchers have reported that women were larger and stronger than men. Girls of 18 carried heavy loads over

rough terrain to market, leaving behind trails Europeans could barely manage, even in the absence of any weight to carry. It is said that in neighboring Bhutan, women ford the swollen streams carrying their husbands (who accompany their wives to market) on their shoulders, because the men would not otherwise be able to make the crossing; on the way back, the women carry them all the way home.

Considering the preeminence of Tibetan women and their central role in the polyandric group marriage, it is somewhat startling to find that many western researchers quickly judge Tibetan relationships to be patriarchal. To use the term "patriarchal" in such a vague, general way exposes the judgments to be pure unsubstantiated opinion. There is not even one instance of patriliny, since Tibetans have no masculine family names. The children are named for their individual mother and identify themselves as siblings through her. This is logical, since polyandric group marriage, with its attendant free love encounters, doesn't allow for definite identification of paternity; in contrast, maternity is always certain, through birth.[27] Neither is inheritance patrilineal, but rather bilateral: sons as well as daughters may inherit. For example, a woman can move into the house belonging to her husbands, if they inherit, but since she is the sole manager of all the household goods, and is a privileged decision maker in the family, this is far from being a "patriarchal" household. On the other hand, if the wife inherits, the husbands move into her home; this is a matriarchal household in any case, because she not only has the last word, she also owns the family goods.

In the matter of marriage opportunities, she does have an advisor; this is her maternal uncle rather than her father or fathers. The marriage situation is characterized by the fact that not just any two clans' daughters-group and sons-group can marry each other; rather, marriage must always be between the same two clans. Any such paired clans have been practicing mutual clan-intermarriage for generations; a group of girl cousins always marries a group of boy cousins, and vice-versa. Thus the bride's maternal uncle, who is her advisor, is usually the father of the groom. This pattern is called "cross-cousin-marriage," and is an old matrilineal heirloom. Briffault is certainly right when, on the basis of such observations, he says that the era when Tibetan culture was completely matriarchal can't have been so long ago.

Sisters-brothers group marriage as mutual clan-intermarriage, with more frequent instances of women practicing brothers-polyandry, is not just practiced in Tibetan tribes; it is an ancient, widespread marriage pattern. There is much evidence in the research for brothers-polyandry to be practiced in a vast geographical area, and we can assume that here, and in other areas as well, behind polyandry the pattern of sisters-brothers group marriage is in the background. It occurs with all Tibetan-speaking peoples in an area stretching from China in the east, to Kashmir

and Afghanistan in the west. More precisely, it exists (or existed until recently) in West China, including the headwaters of the great waterways of Southeast Asia and Tibet itself; in the Himalayan States of Bhutan and Sikkim, in Tibetan mountain tribes in Nepal; in Kashmir at the Karakorum, in Ladakh on both sides of the Indus headwaters; and in the Hindu Kush mountains in Afghanistan (Kafiristan). In these areas, brothers-polyandry is practiced by at least 30 million people. Also, this form of marriage was the norm for the Khasi, as well as for other peoples in Assam such as the *Abors,* the *Miris*, and the *Daflas* who inhabit the Himalayan foothills. Under the influence of Hindus from the flatlands and Christian missionaries, however, the practice is no longer to be found here.

These Tibetan-speaking peoples have not retained the practice of brothers-polyandry just because it is particularly Tibetan, but rather because they are particularly isolated in the remote highlands. Because of the circumstances, this venerable institution was able to continue undisturbed. Presumably sisters-brothers group marriage was much more widespread before Hinduization, Islamization and Christianization. Backed up by an old Arabic inscription the researcher Biddulph concludes that it once existed all over the Hindu Kush Mountains, just as it still does in the Pamir Mountains today with the *Balor* people, and that it was widespread from there to the Caspian Sea. Under the Turk peoples of West Asia and the Mongols of North Asia it was, according to Chinese reports, the general rule, in the form of sisters-polygyny and of "levirate," (which probably covers brothers-polyandry). It is practiced to this day by North Asian, Mongolian Nomads as far northeast as the River Amur. This shows that the kind of sisters-brothers group marriage described here must be a very old human form of marriage, practiced by a wide range of peoples ranging over a wide geographical area. It is related to matriarchal clan and tribal organization; and it points, wherever it exists (or existed), to a formerly matriarchal social structure.

4.5 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the social level:

- The form of marriage associated with many matriarchal cultures is the sisters-brothers group marriage, with a prevalence of brothers-polyandry for women. In these marriages, a group of sisters from one clan enters into marriage with a group of brothers from another clan.
- This form of marriage is based on mutual clan-intermarriage between two

specific, unaltered clans. Down through the generations, the daughters group of the one clan (sisters) marries the sons group (brothers) of the other clan, and vice-versa; it is ongoing cross cousin marriage.

- In a women's matrilocal society it is the young men who move back and forth between the two clans. The daughters stay in their mother's clan house.
- This form of marriage is a mutual support system between two clans of the people; it is a system in which each person, according to age and position, both gives and receives.
- Sisters-brothers group marriage includes economic principles: it avoids division of property and herds; it also includes ecological principles: it produces fewer children. Brothers-polyandry (one woman with several brothers-husbands) is especially effective for population control, and is therefore often preferred.
- This form of marriage is conducted along specific rules of encounter between the marriage partners of the sisters or brothers group; these effectively exclude conflict and jealousy.
- Matriarchal marriage does not exclude partners of either gender from having their own romantic adventures. Romances are socially insignificant, and have no place within the system of group marriage; they don't affect it.

Notes

1. See Wilhelm Schmidt: *Das Mutterrecht,* Mödling near Vienna, Austria, 1955, Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel, pp. 36–38.
2. Gordon Childe: "Old World Prehistory," in: *Anthropology Today*, Chicago 1953, University of Chicago Press, p. 197 f.; and Marija Gimbutas: *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe,* San Francisco 1991, HarperSanFrancisco.
3. R. B. Ekvall: *Cultural Relations on the Kansu-Tibetan Border,* Chicago 1939, University of Chicago Press, p. 79; and F. Sierksma: "Sacred Cairns in Pastoral Cultures," in: *History of Religions,* 16, Chicago 1976/77, University of Chicago Press, pp. 230–241.
4. Sierksma, ibid., p. 231; and S. Hummel: „Die tibetischen Mani-Mauern als megalithisches Erbe", in: *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie,* 50, Leiden 1966, Brill.
5. For a comparison of related Nepalese and Tibetan tribal groups see J. F. Véziès: *Les fêtes magiques du Nepal,* ibidem, p. 20; and Singh/Pradan: *Ethnic groups of Nepal and their way of living,* Katmandu 1972; and D. N. Majumdar: *Himalayan Polyandry,* Bombay-New Delhi-London 1962, Asia Publishing House.
6. Hummel, ibid., p. 116; Sierksma, ibid., p. 233.
7. For more on the concept of mountains as mother-goddesses, see: S. Lienhard: „Religionssynkretismus in Nepal", in: Heinz Bechert (ed.): *Buddhism in Ceylon and Studies on*

Religious Syncretism in Buddhist Countries: Report on a Symposium in Goettingen, Göttingen 1978, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, p. 156.

8. Hummel, ibid.; H. Hoffmann: *Symbolik der tibetischen Religion und des Schamanismus,* Stuttgart 1967, Hiersemann, p. 72.
9. R. Heine-Geldern: „Zwei Weltanschauungen und ihre kulturgeschichtliche Bedeutung", in: *Anzeiger der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 17 (1975), Wien, p. 257.
10. J. N. Roerich: *The Animal Style among the Nomad Tribes of Northern Tibet,* Prag 1930, Seminarium Kondakovianum.
11. Hummel, ibid., p. 233 f.; see also Majumdar, ibid., p. 252; and M. Hermanns: *Die Familie der A-mdo Tibeter,* Freiburg-Munich 1959, Alber, pp. 283–285.
12. To this and what follows below, see: Hoffmann, ibid., pp. , 23–26, 33–50, 75–76, 83–84, 90–97; and Tsültrim Allione: *Women of Wisdom,* Henley-on Thames, Oxfordshire/England, 1984, Routledge & Kegan; and Miranda Shaw: "Blessed are the birth-givers: Buddhist views on birth and rebirth," in: *Parabola,* vol. 23, no. 4, Nov. 1998, Parabola, pp. 48–53.
13. H. Hoffmann: *The Religions of Tibet,* (transl. by Edward Fitzgerald),London 1961, Allen & Unwin.
14. Hermanns, ibid., p. 297 f.
15. See for this definition of "cities" in early history: James Mellaart: *The Neolithic of the Near East,* London 1975, Thames & Hudson.
16. See for ex. Hermanns, ibid.
17. Hermanns, ibid., p. 297 f.—See for the high status of Tibetan women: Robert Briffault: *The Mothers,* New York 1969, vol. III, p. 23 f.; Sierksma, ibid., p. 232; Hermanns, ibid., p. 296.
18. On the alleged patrilinearity of Tibetan peoples, see below.
19. Henry Lewis Morgan: *Ancient Society,* Chicago 1877, Charles H. Kerr & Company.
20. Hermanns, ibid., p. 192, 193; Majumdar, ibid.
21. Briffault, ibid., vol. I, pp. 647–650.
22. See Gordian Troeller's documentary on women-decided polygyny in Africa, CON-Film, Bremen, Germany.
23. Hermanns, ibid., p. 205.
24. Briffault, ibid., Majumdar, ibid.
25. Hermanns, ibid., pp. 192, 199, 232; Majumdar, ibid., pp. 75–77; and Tank Vilas Varya: *Nepal, the Seat of Cultural Heritage,* Katmandu 1986, Educational Enterprise, p. 94.
26. See: Briffault, ibid., vol. I, pp. 372, 445–448, 485, 491, 647–673, and vol. II, p. 152; and Rockhill, Ahmad Shah, Rowney, Dalton, Gait, Fisher, Biddulph, cited by Briffault.
27. It is often asserted that the polyandry-practicing peoples of Tibet are patrilineal. However, this patrilineality is not certain, due to said lack of male family names, i.e., lack of any family names. In addition, the (here not available patrilinearity) is misinterpreted as "patriarchy," for obvious ideological reasons. Patriarchies are societies of dominance, and are structured completely differently than the egalitarian Tibetan peoples are. Here we can see the negative effects of a general lack of exact scientific definitions.

5

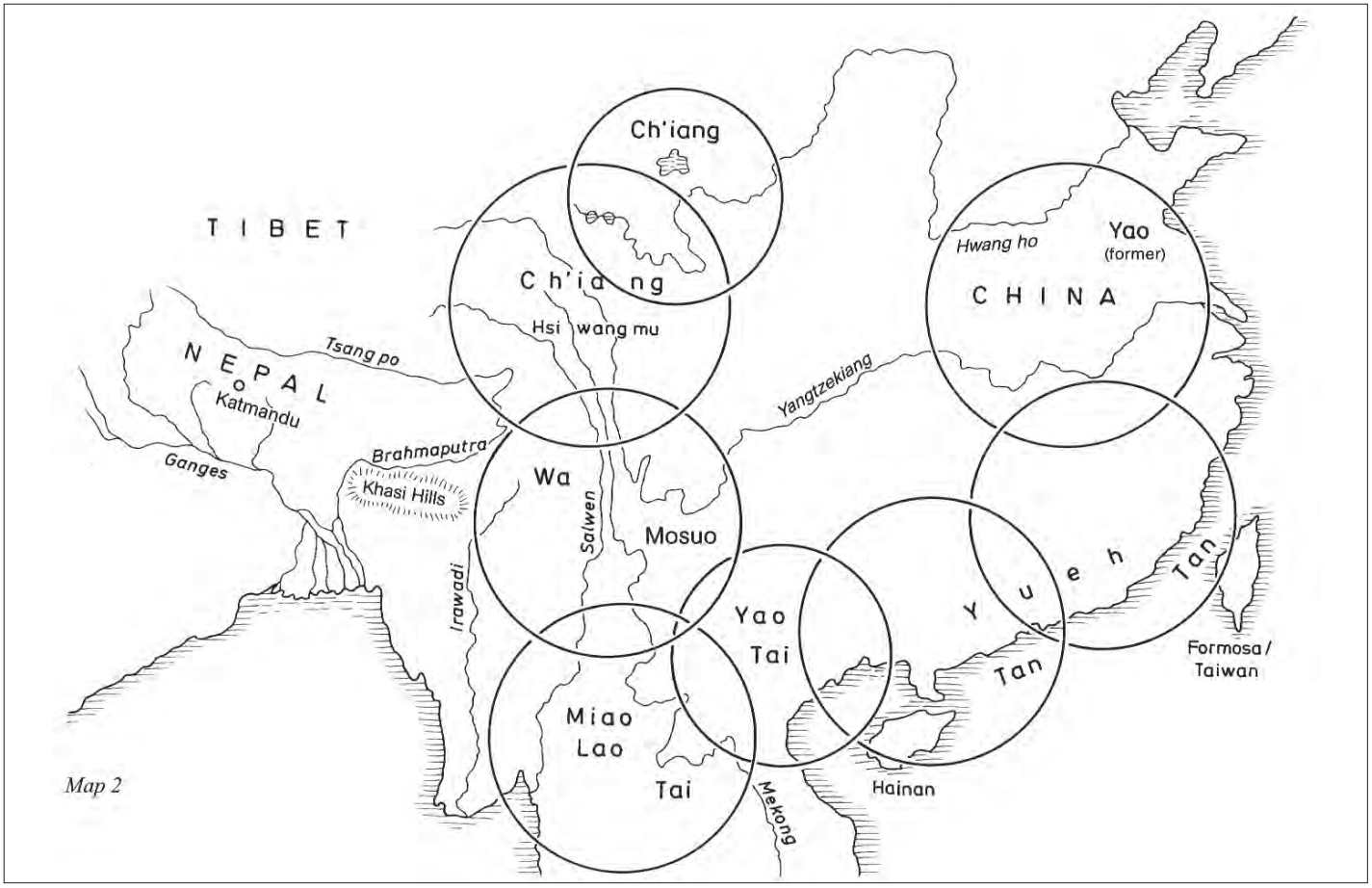
Matriarchal Mountain Peoples of China

For Gan mu, Mountain Mother of the Mosuo, and Hsi wang mu, Western Queen Mother of Kunlun Mountain

5.1 Indigenous peoples in China

Throughout their long history, China's mountain peoples have increasingly been absorbed into the vast patriarchal Chinese lowland culture, and throughout this process, they have changed accordingly. Nevertheless, the further away from the "Celestial Empire" they live, the more their original social structures can still be recognized today.

Tibetan culture once extended from the Indian border to the Great Wall which divided the lowlands from the highlands. China's three westernmost provinces include dramatic mountain ranges penetrated by deep river valleys: raw, untamed areas typical of Tibet. Gansu Province in the northwest includes part of the Kunlun Mountains, with the headwaters of the Hwangho, or Yellow River; it is the territory of the northern Tibetans mentioned above. In Chinese the Tibetans are called the *Chiang* People (see map 2). South of Gansu, around the upper reaches of the Yangtze in the western mountains, lies Sichuan, where remnants of the oldest indigenous population, the *Wa*, live. Closely related to the Khasi


TIBET
NEPAL
Katmandu
Tsang po
Ganges
Brahmaputra
Khasi Hills
Irawadi
Ch'iang
Ch'iang
Hsi wang mu
Wa
Salwen
Mosuo
Yangtzekiang
Hwang ho
Yao
(former)
CHINA
Yao
Tai
Miao
Lao
Tai
Mekong
Yueh
Tan
Tan
Hainan
Formosa /
Taiwan

Map 2

of Assam, the *Wa* once lived all over Southeast Asia. Still further south, in Yunnan Province the parallel upper reaches of all Southeast Asian rivers flow, where southern migrations of mountain peoples continue even today (see map 2). The social organization of all these peoples was matriarchal and more or less still is today; in fact, in the Chinese chronicles this region is named "Nu kuo," "the Realm of Women." In about 750 B.C.E., as reported in the annals, there existed the realm of women on the Tibetan-Chinese borders which stretched far towards the west (today's Tibet) and towards the east (to the mountains of today's Western China, east of Tibet). Most of the archaeological sites for ancient matriarchal Neolithic and Bronze Age cultures are found in these regions.[1]

The eastern peoples of China also undertook southern migrations. The *Yao* moved away from the heart of Chinese patriarchal culture, Hunan and Shantung, following the coast southwards and forming, along with the *Tan* peoples, the southern Chinese *Yueh* culture—distinguishable in several respects from the Chinese patriarchal culture to the north—and ended up in the region around the Tonkin Gulf, where they still live today (see map 2).[2]

These so-called marginal cultures of China—which, after all, did not originate in the margins but rather were pushed there—comprise some 800 tribes totalling around 15 million people.[3] None of them are Chinese, which is why they are not referred to here by the Chinese-centered label "marginal cultures," but as the "indigenous peoples" of China. The *Chiang* are Tibetan, not Chinese. The *Wa (La, Na),* as well as the *Lao, Naxi,* and *Mosuo* (also called *"Na")* are, like the Khasi, of Tibetan-Burmese origin and are the remnants of the matriarchal peoples who lived there before the Chinese came. They live on the mountain slopes and belong to the very ancient Mon-Khmer language group. Because of their brown skin and their non-Chinese cultural practices, the Chinese historically have degraded them with the name "Wu man," or "black barbarians." The *Tai (Dai),* who are related to the Malayan Thai peoples and prefer the valleys and the lowlands, are not treated any better: because of their light skin they have ended up with the name "Pai man," or "white barbarians." The *Yao* and *Miao* form a Tibetan-Chinese hybrid group with a language of its own; but they, too, are referred to as "Man," or "barbarians."[4] The patriarchal ancient Greeks treated the surrounding Mediterranean peoples with just about as much respect! In China today, after suffering the excesses of the communist Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), indigenous matriarchal peoples have received somewhat more scientific attention and governmental support—both of which bring their share of trouble.

5. 2 The Mosuo in Southwest China

In 1993, I led a women-only research trip, under the auspices of the International Academy HAGIA , to the Mosuo, who number about 30,000 in Yunnan, with a further 10,000 in Sichuan. On rural roads that gradually narrowed into sand tracks, we travelled through mountain wilderness to the spectacular landscape of Lake Lugu, 10,000 feet above sea level. The border between Yunnan and Sichuan provinces cuts across the lake, and Tibet is not far away. We visited the hospitable *Mosuo* (or *Na*) living on Lake Lugu and in the surrounding mountains and nearby mountain valley of Yongning. Through interpreters we were able to speak with them and gain important insight into their way of life.[5]

The Mosuo, both women and men, are about the same height as we Europeans are and quite slender; they live in beautiful, spacious compounds constructed of whole tree trunks, log cabin-style. Their dugout canoes are also made of large tree trunks, and are difficult to manoeuver. So we were amazed that Mosuo women could pilot them, alone, across the lake—and this while singing. We sat there as passengers and could not imagine handling such a boat (Ill. 4).

On Lake Lugu the Mosuo live from fishing, in the Yongning valley, from agriculture. Most of their extended families and clans are still classically matriarchal: they are fully matrilineal, being organised in the mother's line and inheriting through the mother's line. Daughters and sons live in their mother's clan house; their residence is matrilocal. The most capable woman is elected to be head, or matriarch, of the clan; her title is "Dabu." She organises the agricultural work and distributes the food; she manages the clan's communal property, which is handed over to her, both material and liquid, and sees to the expenses; she takes care of the guests and is the house priestess at all family ceremonies. She has, however, no special privileges that would contravene the principle of equality on which these societies are based, since she works just as hard as other family members do, and they all discuss the important events together. She can make no unilateral decisions about the community's wealth. She not only arbitrate in clan conflicts, but also, until recently, the matriarchs of the different clans held important positions in the village councils as well.[6]

When we asked Mosuo to describe which sort of qualities they seek in choosing the "ablest woman" for "Dabu," or matriarch, they responded that they vote or the person who cares the most for everyone. When we pressed them as to how they would know that, they laughed amiably and responded: But you can see it! As a rule, the matriarch is chosen from the group of sisters of the clan between 40 and 65 years of age. However, we met one 27-year-old matriarch who had, at such

Illustration 4. Mosuo woman on Lake Lugu. Photo: Karin Kastner

a young age, taken over the responsibility following the illness-induced retirement of her mother.

The matrilineal clan or lineage (about 12 to 20 persons) lives in the mother's clan house, a spacious wooden structure built around a courtyard. The main house is furnished with intricately carved and painted woodwork. The stable is along one side; on another is the young women's dormitory, with its single rooms where each can receive her "azhu," or sweetheart. The azhu men enter the clan house only as overnight visitors; they don't live there. The men of the clan have a communal men's room; a man has no need of a single room, as at night he sleeps in his azhu's clan house. Mosuo still engage in typical matriarchal „visiting marriage." At the center of the main house is the great hall, with its sacred hearth, an open, stone fireplace; here the female and male ancestors are worshipped. The family members cook here, eat communal meals, entertain guests and conduct discussions, and make offerings of grain and liquor, which they throw into the fire for the ancestors. Here near the warmth of the hearth is where the highly respected elder women, along with the children, sleep in wooden beds along the walls. At the sacred hearth, women and men sit separately to the left and right of the hearth—with the women's side being the more "honored" one. The world axis is also located here (as it is for the Khasi in Northeast India): next to the hearth are two large pillars, one for the women and one for the men, where separate women's or men's rituals are occasionally held.

The traditional costume of the Mosuo women, today worn only on special occasions, is beautiful and highly symbolic. Young women wear floor-length, white or light blue skirts with brightly colored woven sashes. Their jackets are of red silk or black velvet, and atop their heads they wear their hair in a black crown, twined with wool and silk threads. The colors of the costume announce the life stage of the woman: white skirt and red jacket for young women; white skirt an black jacket for women with children. Older women wear a dark costume, as colourful clothing would not adequately reflect their responsibility and dignity; for the young women, bright colors reflect the honor of surrendering to love and, if they so desire, having children.

As noted above, the Mosuo today practice a very open form of marriage, "visiting marriage." In their origin story, the Mosuo were born of great primordial clans, called "er." Two of these matriarchal "er" made up the first marriage group; eventually these "er" were divided up into several "siri," or daughter clans. Two "siri" then always combined in full group marriage, where all the young women of one clan have, as their spouses, all the young men of the other clan, and vice versa. The way this is set up provides evidence for the existence of fully matriarchal sisters-brothers clan intermarriage, where the sisters group is from one of two paired mar-

riage clans, and the brothers group from the other. (In matriarchal terminology, the young people from one clan are all "sisters" or "brothers," even if they are cousins by different mothers.) "Siri" means "from the same roots," and indeed all members of a "siri" have the same grandmother or ancestress, the same clan name, and are buried in the same family cemetery. They are duty bound to help each other.

Ever since the relative easing of strictly regulated, sisters-brothers clan intermarriage, young people may freely form either "azhu" or "xiaobo" relationships with a boyfriend/girlfriend or lover: there is no term for spouse. Elders do not interfere with the choices of the young people. They mutually choose each other for a short or longer time, and in the course of a lifetime, no one has just one "azhu" relationship. These can take place one right after the other; the connection is made easily, through a simple exchange of gifts at a special dance festivals for the goddess Gan mu. Breaking up is just as easy: either the young woman refuses to let her lover come into her room, or he simply stops coming to see her. The partners in these loose associations assume no rights or duties—women remain in their mothers' houses, while men, regardless of age and status, go back and forth between their mother's clan house and their lover's clan house in "visiting marriage." They only stay in their azhu's clan house overnight: each morning a horde of men migrate back to their mothers' houses. Children always live with their mothers, and the responsibility for mutual aid lies not between marriage partners, but among the members of the same "siri," or clan. In the clan, the mother's brother is the nearest male relative of her children, and is co-responsible for these children, who are—in western terms of consanguinity—his nieces and nephews. Sometimes an azhu moves into the clan house of his sweetheart for a limited time, particularly if her family lacks sons, to help with the work in their fields. If a family lacks daughters, girls may be adopted from a distantly related clan.

A transitional form of the matriarchal clan, which also appears with the Mosuo, is the co-existent family, where matrilineal and patrilineal forms co-exist. It comes into being when azhus, or lovers, reside long-term in the matrilineal clan house, and when they want to participate in the education of their identifiable children: these children then carry both clan names. However, this does not transgress the matrilineal clan structure as whole, since these azhus are still just guests in the house of their spouses' clan. They enjoy no societal respect, since they have abandoned their own clans. This shows that simple patriliny does not a patriarchy make, just as matriliny does not guarantee matriarchy. The societal patterns must fulfil the other conditions set out above.

In Mosuo society, 60% of all families live in matriarchal clans that are thoroughly matrilineal. In addition, if we count the clans that live in co-existent lin-

eages with both matriliny and patriliny, then the percentage is 93%. There is a small minority of purely patrilineal families, which developed under the influence of Chinese patriarchal feudalism. A Mosuo sham-aristocracy, with men as heads of households, was created to make them seem more acceptable as speakers to Chinese aristocratic officials. This demonstrates that patriarchal structures originate not simply through a process of decay within matriarchal societies, but rather from outside pressures. These patriarchal family patterns remain very unpopular among the Mosuo, because women resist having to join a family of strangers when they marry. Thus patriarchal families remained small, monogamous, isolated groups, called "yishe," while the rest of their clan continued the matriarchal customs. This is another example of different co-existing lineages in the same clan, and it demonstrates that matriarchal clans do not in fact change into patriarchal ones, even when there is a patriarchal family within the clan. This is all the more striking, since two such co-existing lineages clearly demonstrate the clan tendency to become purely matrilineal again over one or two generations, especially if there are many daughters. "Yishe" develop into co-existing "siris," and these join together under a variety of circumstances to become, once again, a purely matriarchal "er." Clearly, the process of societal development doesn't automatically move from a matriarchal pattern to a patriarchal one; on the contrary, a matriarchal people with a strong sense of itself can resist, or avoid, outside patriarchal pressure and intentionally return to older, matriarchal forms. It is also clear that it is not some naive "naturalism" that has enabled the Mosuo to keep regenerating their matriarchal clan structure, but rather the use of consciously employed social guidelines.

The Mosuo clan structure has recently become endangered by means of western-influenced ideologies that have penetrated the society through the spread of communism in China. Elder women, the custodians and managers of the family, are seen as obstacles to the region's technological "development," as are the time and energy that young people invest in their "azhu" relationships. Since socialist monogamy and male power are encouraged, men as social actors are climbing ever higher up the social ladder. Breaking up tradition illustrated the excesses of the so-called Cultural Revolution and imposed a ban on the Mosuo way of life. After subsequent liberalization, the matriarchal clans immediately reorganised themselves, which demonstrates an amazing tenacity. However, today they must contend with being labelled as "backward."

The fact is that wherever Chinese influence is on the rise, as it is with the neighboring Naxi of Li Chiang Province, patriarchal patterns have taken hold. On the other hand, where peoples such as the Mosuo live in remote mountain areas,

matriarchal structures have been retained. For example, it is still an insult to ask a Mosuo boy about his father. He will answer that he has no father, but rather an "a-gv," or uncle on his mother's side.[7]

In Mosuo life, the initiation ceremonies, especially the ones for girls, are the main religious festivities. There are also elaborate funeral rites—I was able to attend an initiation as well as a funeral. At the initiation the girl's mother dresses her for the first time in the garments of a young, grown-up Mosuo woman, and she is presented with a key to her own room (Ill. 5). Now she can initiate azhu relationships. The clothes have more than just traditional significance: during the numerous rituals for the burial of an old woman, one detail especially stood out—among the offerings for her journey to the Otherworld, there was a young woman's traditional costume, just like the one given to the initiate. Asked about this, the dead woman's grieving brother simply answered that she would "soon come back to us as a young woman."

The belief in rebirth is key to these ceremonies: though every dead person returns to the ancestors (who live in the northern sky), this is just to position them to come back as a small child—as quickly as possible—into their own clan, in their own clan house. It is not immediately obvious, with a small child, which ancestor has come back. But when it is old enough for the initiation ceremony, the whole clan recognizes the resemblance. The girl receives the name of this female ancestor, along with the traditional garments of a young Mosuo woman. Now she is celebrated as the personification of the reborn female ancestor; this is her true re-birthday. Although boys go through the same process, a girl's initiation is more significant because through giving birth, she directly carries the life of the clan into the future.

In the initiation ceremony, the tradition of having women as the house priestesses continues. Women perform, in their clan houses, the ceremonies that deal with the living.[8] But the older, indigenous religion has been plastered over with Tibetan Lamaism. The Mosuo have found a compromise between the two religions by giving the lamas responsibility for the dead. So it is the lamas' task—and that of the clan men—to carry out funeral ceremonies.

The lamas' influence is nevertheless superficial, and the Mosuo are basically loyal to their ancient religion, relating to nature as a sentient being: mountains and springs, gorges and fields are sacred places. Lake Lugu is sacred to them as well—it is "Xie na mi," or Mother Lake. The beautiful Gan mu, the mountain that rises up from the Lugu Lake's shore, is their highest goddess. The Mosuo make pilgrimages to this mountain once a year, to hold a great dance celebration honoring the goddess. Gan mu, a so-called love and fertility goddess, is in fact the all-encompassing

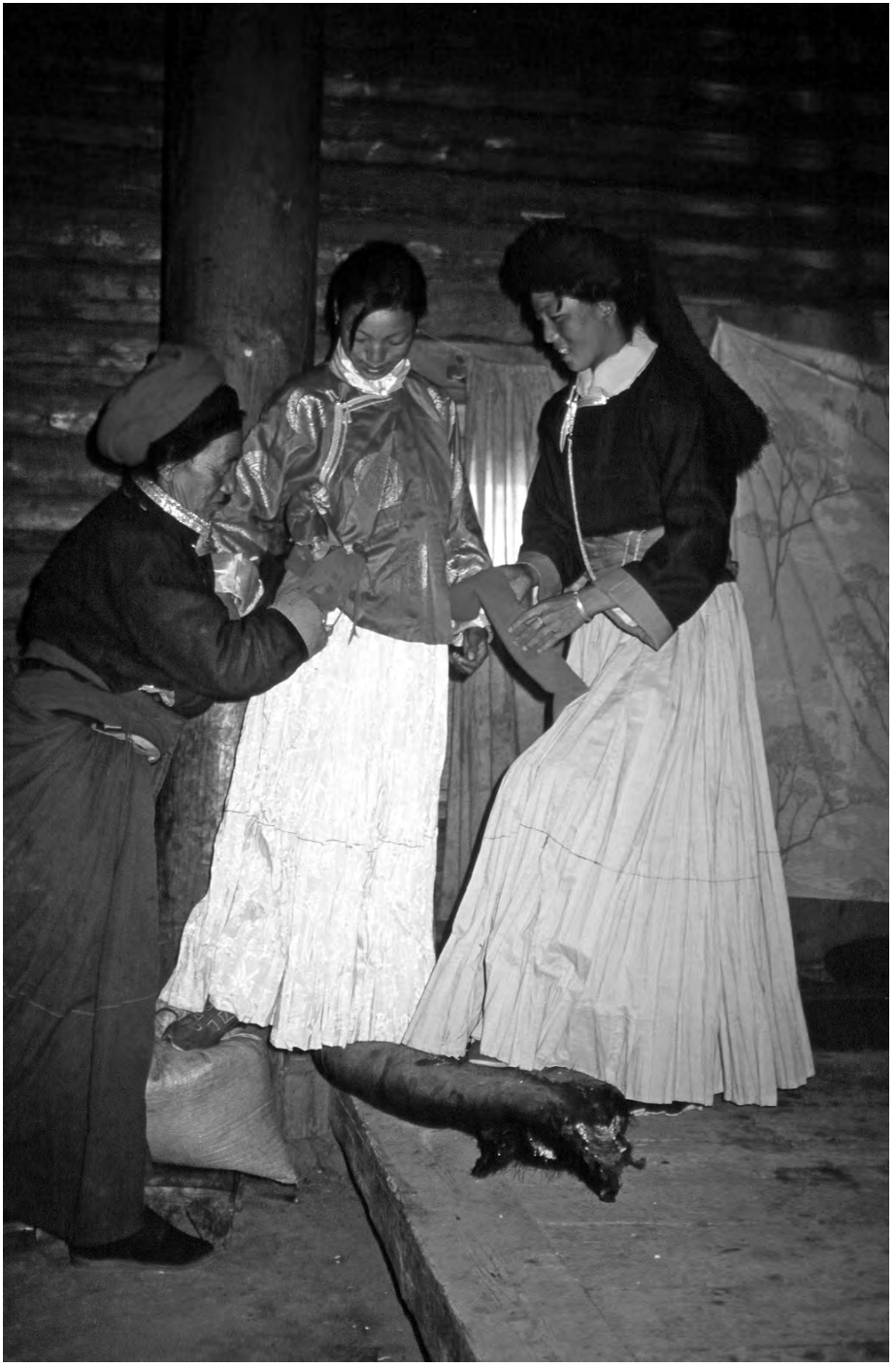


Illustration 5. Mosuo matriarch, older and younger sister at the Initiation ceremony.
Photo: Karin Kastner

goddess of rebirth whose origins can be found in a divine ancestor. According to Mosuo myth, the icy mountain peaks surrounding the landscape are her many lovers. Mosuo women reflect this at the mountain dance festival at summer solstice, where they seek out, and celebrate, new azhu relationships. Women are clearly doing the choosing. Gan mu also protects the entire region; the young people pay homage to her on the mountain slopes in the open air, with prayer flags and sacrificial offerings of food and slaughtered sheep. The offerings to Gan mu are made just in the same way as in the ceremonies for the ancestors.

The matriarchal structures of the Mosuo were, until recently, typical of the entire region, and reflect a close relationship with the equally matriarchal *Wa* or *Wang*.[9] Other peoples in Yunnan Province known to have been matriarchal until recently, are the *Lahu*,[10] *Akha*, and *Jino*.[11] In other research, all peoples of the group of the "Wu-man," or "black barbarians," are considered to be matriarchal—because of their close relationship with the *Wa* and because of historical evidence (Chinese chronicles). The frequent reports from such cultures of "women in official positions," "name in the mother's line and inheritance through the mother" (matrilinearity), and "sexual freedom for women" allow no other conclusion.[12]

Today among these peoples, the situation is rapidly changing. We experienced this first-hand: villages on Lake Lugu were opened up by the central government, in 1983, to Chinese male mass tourism; this brought with it a money economy and increasing family conflicts to this hospitable people. It amounts to the selling off of their culture and the public humiliation of Mosuo women, who are seen as being sexually free for the taking. Meanwhile the departure of young Mosuo—who, under the influence of television and the internet, migrate away to Chinese cities—threatens the viability of the matriarchal family.[13] Additionally, conditions for agricultural activities are becoming ever harder, as the hunger for raw materials of Chinese industry in the lowlands drives deforestation in the mountain regions. On our research travel we saw the results of this clearcutting—barren, desiccated hills and limestone-crusted valleys. The headwaters of the Yangtze River are chock full of huge tree trunks flowing from the regions near Tibet, down to lumber mills in the lowlands. The Mosuo culture, thousands of years old, is seriously threatened; in fact is not less endangered than the Tibetan culture under Chinese occupation—but its problems have not attracted world attention. Instead, the Mosuo are obliged to go along with outsiders' distorted impression of their culture—especially the patriarchal, sexist picture presented by representatives of Western media, whose curiosity and misunderstanding of Mosuo matriarchy in fact degrades their traditions.

5.3 The Chiang People in Northwest China

In Sichuan, Shensi and Gansu provinces in Northwest China, the Tibetan *Chiang* peoples live along the upper reaches of the Hwangho and Yangtze. Compared with western Tibetans, these people, thanks to the remoteness of their habitation, have retained more ancient customs and thus are considered to be the ancestors of later Tibetans.[14] With the minor exception of a small agricultural area, they live as semi-nomads with their herds of yak and sheep. The women enjoy great respect. They advise the men in all matters; the men undertake nothing without having consulted the women. In some areas men care for the children while the women attend to their businesses. In terms of female-male partnerships, the preferred women are those who are older and more experienced; the women themselves choose younger men.[15] The research yields only hazy references to this form of marriage; they mention "levirate" and "brothers-marriage," and it may be that behind these bland terms lies a Chiang version of the western Tibetan brothers-polyandry discussed, a form of the matriarchal sisters-brothers group marriage. Indeed, it is repeatedly emphasized that the "mother right" or "influence of mother right" is quite strongly present with the Chiang.[16]

They still engage in a form of honoring the ancestors involving stones, where large, uncut stones, both female and male, and cut stones in the form of tigers (female) and buffalo (male) are placed next to each other. These are meant above all to bring rain, sometimes also sun, and very often, they are wishing stones for women who want children. They point to a very ancient earth and water worship. There are indications that, in their traditional culture, male sacrificial victims were offered to snake-like water spirits or to the goddesses of springs and fountains.[17]

The Chiang of Sichuan also have traditions and legends that are very interesting. It so happened that a silkworm goddess lived there; in the guise of a little caterpillar, she taught the art of silk production to human beings. This legend, and its many associated silkworm festivals, is found only among the indigenous *"Green Dress" Chiang*; this is the only culture in which silkworm production is anchored in ancient cult practices. According to the Chinese sources, silk production and manufacture goes back to the third millennium in China, appearing only in 300 B.C.E. in the rest of the world. Thus we may reasonably assume that it has originally been developed by the older, non-Chinese Chiang culture and other Sichuan peoples—particularly by women—before being taken over by the Chinese Han dynasty.

The highest Chiang deity is a mountain goddess, "Hsi wang mu." She lives on a cosmic mountain of the Kunlun mountain range, which mythologically refers to

the Western Tibetan cosmic mountain Kailash in the Trans-Himalayan range. These summits are considered to be the navel at the center of the world. "Hsi wang mu" means "Western Queen Mother" (as seen from the Chinese lowlands, the Kunlun range is situated in the west), and it is interpreted as both, the name of a goddess and the title of a queen of a matriarchal people. In the myths, the people and their land were also called "Hsi wang mu," associated with a vast queens' realm.[18]

The goddess Hsi wang mu appears as a wild being with long, loose hair, tiger's teeth and panther's tail, signifying that she is the goddess of darkness, daily swallowing the sun and the moon in the western sky. At the same time she has a loving side as the goddess of rebirth, since in her "hanging gardens" (terraced fields) at Kunlun she raises the peaches of immortality, resembling women's breasts. Emperors, kings and heroes have visited her jade palace on the cosmic mountain, paying their respects to her (among them Mu Wang, a Dschou emperor, and Wu Ki, a Han emperor). Of Mu Wang's visit, it is reported that she inspired him and awakened the power of the spirit in him; she also gifted him with her love, thus facilitating his becoming a man. In the company of gods and happy spirits, he enjoyed such precious delicacies as dragon liver and phoenix marrow; in the end, she gave him the fruit of immortality: the blessing of rebirth. After "watching her attentively for three years" he respectfully took his leave of her, returning to his empire in Eastern China to apply the wisdom received under the tutelage of the goddess. His was to be a long and brilliant reign, and when he died at one hundred years of age, Hsi wang mu brought the dead emperor back to her western spirit realm.

This interesting myth demonstrates a close relationship between early Chinese emperors in the east and the ancient queens' realms in the west. It is not difficult to recognize "Nu kuo" in this story, "the Realm of Women," which is thought to have flourished in exactly the same areas that the Chiang now inhabit. The legend of the emperor Mu Wang reflects the palpable influence of Tibetan matriarchal queendoms on early Chinese culture.

The great creatrix goddess of the vast "Nu kuo" region was accordingly called "Nu kua"; in the same legend cycle we also find the moon goddess "Heng o" and the sun goddess "Hsi ho," her children. Nu kua was imagined as an enormous, snake-like goddess, and she, like Hsi wang mu, lived on a holy mountain. The latter's palace on the cosmic mountain, which is nine storeys high, reflects the heavens, which are also nine storeys. The nine-storey heavens, in turn were build by Nu kua. Using the moon mountain and the sun mountain as foundational arches, she constructed the world out of five-colored, molded bricks; the legs of the water tur-

tle became pillars to hold up the heavens at just the right height above the earth.[19] This cosmology reflects the sacred construction of the world, built upon the five elements and the four directions, including the magic center (which also equals five). Khasi mythology also holds the water turtle sacred, because at the time of the creation it was able to lift the cloud-filled heavens, which were hanging too low, up off the earth.[20] In Asia, nine-storey stone houses are built only by Tibetans, who have constructed these special high rises since ancient times. Furthermore it is said that Nu kua makes the weather, both floods and drought; she created humans out of the yellow earth and founded the social order of living together; not least, she invented music.

Today, in this vast region, especially in Shensi Province, where Nu kua used to be worshipped, there still exists the cult of a female deity—itself a rarity in Shensi, which was patriarchalized very early. The cult of the Old Mother of Li-shan, or "Li-shan lao-mu," refers to the mountain Li-shan, where her temple still stands. Women of the Li-shan clan once were the regents of this region, since both the old name, "Nu kua," and the newer one, "Li-shan," also suggest a queen's title. A woman from Li-shan was in fact empress of China, and she bore a son named Nung, who was an excellent planter. ("Nung" is the term for "agriculture.")[21]

5.4 Yao, Miao and other indigenous peoples

The Tibetan-Chinese *Miao* and *Yao* peoples today inhabit together almost the same area of Southwest China, the hilly regions of Yunnan, Guangxi and Hunan (Yao) as well as Guizhou (Miao). The Yao, who are a very ancient people on Chinese land, once populated all of Central and South China, including the heart of the Chinese patriarchal culture, Hunan. Over the course of their long history they were progressively pushed toward the south, and were dispersed by the circumstances of many wars. In spite of this, they never gave up their traditional ways of living, since to abandon these ways would signal for them nothing less than the end of their history. In South China, together with the *Tan* peoples and later the *Tai*, they developed the southern Chinese Yueh culture (see map 2), to the point where this culture also disappeared, swallowed up by the inexorably expanding Chinese patriarchal culture.

The Miao too have endured a disruptive and painful history. In their determined attempt to remain independent they preferred to pull up stakes, leaving their homes and fields, and to move into remote areas rather than to let themselves be taken over. However, they often have been oppressed, and have just as often resist-

ed it by rebelling; like the Yao, they have been chased out of countless territories and pushed southwards.[22] Even today, the southern migration of the Yao and the Miao still continues in the highlands on flat mountain ridges, where they practice slash and burn farming. Because of this, their tribes are spread over several countries like South China, North Vietnam, Laos and Thailand and are still fighting for the political recognition that they have, to some degree, received in China.[23]

A similar destiny has fallen to the *Lao,* who are part of the first East Asian peoples but were long ago layered over with Yao and Tai lineages. Living along mountain ridges, they too continuously migrated south, in their case, to Laos. The related *Karen* people made their way to Thailand and Burma; they too live along the ridgebacks.[24]

All these peoples clear the rain forest on the mountain tops and till their fields up there. Their dwellings are not particularly refined because after two or three years they move on, in order to find new land for their crops and villages. When they do return to a place they have been before, they do so after a long enough time for the tropical rain forest to have regenerated in the meantime. They have farmed for millennia in similar surroundings; thus the claim that these peoples degraded their environment is unfounded. Rather, the destruction results from the clearcutting of the forest driven by the new, ambitious industrial states of East Asia, who do not care at all about environmental sustainability.

Some Miao have changed over to terraced rice paddy farming; as a consequence, they are now sedentary. The Tai people also practice rice paddy agriculture, but they are in the valleys, and in this respect they are clearly different from the mountain farmers.

All these peoples are completely self-sufficient, in terms of crafts as well; they practice a perfect subsistence economy. The men are both craftsmen and blacksmiths; the women produce textiles and still sew their elaborate traditional dress. The Miao accent their beautifully cut, fitted black dresses with a colorful scarf; only the holiday costume is brightly embroidered and shimmering with silver jewelry. The traditional dress of the Yao women is also black, covered with red braid trimming and white embroidery. Again, the jewelry is all of silver, and is woven like strands of pearls through the embroidery work. This range of colors, white, red and black, is the same as that worn by the *Lahu, Lisu* and *Akha* women (see also the Mosuo women). This is surely not coincidental: the combination of white, red and black are women's sacred colors, and can be found throughout the world in matriarchal contexts; silver should be seen here as the sacred metal of the moon.[25] The Miao sub-groups are even named for the colors of their women's costumes: *White Miao*, *Red Miao*, and *Black or Flower* (flower embroidery) *Miao*; the same is true

of the Tai tribes, who, based on the color of each tribe's women's clothing, are called *White, Red or Black Tai*.[26] This is not surprising, since the women of these and similar tribes originated not only marvelous needlework, but also brocade weaving techniques and the art of batik.

Miao social life has been noted by many observers impressed with the intelligence and musicality of the Miao. They have an excellent memory for their traditional stories, and easily learn foreign languages. They are famous as "lusheng" musicians, a mouth organ made of bamboo pipes that accompanies every festival as well as everyday life. The young woman and men of the Miao enjoy a free love life, and especially like to get together at the spring festivals where they dance and play music, expressing their feelings for each other with charming call-and-response singing. Special areas are set aside for these youthful gatherings, which formerly took place in special longhouses for the young people. Like the Mosuo, the Miao practice women's courtship; that is, young women choose their lovers. In a private place, they construct love nests of bamboo where they receive their chosen one. The young people of the Yao and the Tai celebrate love in the same way.[27]

As for the clan organization of the Miao, Yao and Tai, Chinese sources as well as modern researchers come to contradictory conclusions; this usually indicates that something has been left out or misunderstood. In the Chinese Chronicles the Miao are sometimes credited with a clan structure, and sometimes denied one. The background is that for Chinese authors, only patriarchal clans count as clans. The conclusion is simple: the Miao most probably had matriarchal clans throughout their entire history. Cross-cousin marriage and the authority of the maternal uncle exist in Miao culture, and both indicate a matrilineal clan organization.[28] For Yao and Tai, it has been established that they are organized bilaterally, with co-existing lineages.[29]

Each village consists of a different clan in these cultures, and clan intermarriages are usual between two villages. Here a trace of sisters-brothers group marriage shows up; validated by researchers' vague references to "levirates" (brothers group marriage) and "sororates" (sisters group marriage).[30] A further indication of matriarchy in the Miao and Yao is seen in the traces of matrilocal marriage. Their custom is that right after the wedding, the bride moves back into her parents' house and stays for three to five years. During this time she can sleep with whomever she likes. After the birth of the first child of whom the spouse agrees to be the social father (in matrilineal societies he isn't considered to be a blood relative of the child), the couple move into a house of their own. However, they never really separate from their clans. In other South China tribal groups such as the Tai and the Karen it has been reported that the groom lives for several years in the bride's parental house and works with them until they can start a household of their own.[31]

The Lao, whose lineages have long been mixed with those of the Yao and the Tai, used to practice a classic matriarchal social organization, much like the one that is still practiced by their close relatives, the *Wa* in Western China, and the *Palaung*, *Karen* and *Moi* in Burma and Thailand.[32]

Ancestor worship, sacrificial offerings to ancestors, and festive funeral rites are the unifying spiritual elements in the social organization of all these peoples.[33] It was only later that the Miao, Yao and Tai added vernacular Taoist practices to their ancestor and nature worship.[34]

All these peoples retain unmistakable traces of the downfall of their old social order, a downfall caused over millennia by the pressure from the Chinese patriarchal culture, with its banishments and extinctions. Throughout long historical times they have been resisting, or escaping like refugees in migrations from north to south; this continues today. Gradually they lost the ancient matriarchal culture that bound them together, in spite of valiant resistance. Today some of them have been involved in guerrilla wars in Indochina and are subject to the oppression of various regimes.

5.5 The peoples of the Yueh Culture in Southeast China

"Yueh," referring to the very ancient, highly evolved culture of South China that was partly destroyed, partly assimilated by the Chinese empire, is an umbrella term for several different peoples who developed the Yueh culture. We have already encountered them, but will now take another look at these peoples from a historical point of view.

The most significant carrier of the Yueh cultural tradition are the *Yao;* the Chinese sources call them "Mountain Yueh," because they live on the mountain ridges. The term "Yueh culture" has been directly taken over from these sources. The *Tan* are a branch of the Yao; early on they developed a specialized niche for themselves living on water. To do this they transformed themselves from mountain dwellers to river navigators, and little by little spread out with their boats along the coastal waters. There, they became accomplished sailors and settled in coastal areas such as Hainan Island (the *Li* people) and Taiwan (the *Paiwan* and *Bunun* peoples). Once again it became necessary to specialize; this time the smaller group stayed on land and became woodworkers and bambooworkers (starting as boat builders). The other group so completely became sailors, that they, even today, spend their entire lives on the boats that are their homes. One of the historical causes for this was the fact that they were forced from their lands by Chinese conquerors,

and were driven into the water, just as others had been driven into the remote mountain landscapes. Life on the boats was their only way of life, and they lived from fishing and pearl-diving. The third group within the historical Yueh culture are the *Tai,* called "Chuang" in Chinese sources. It is probable that the Tai came from Guangxi, from where they migrated eastward (Yueh) and south (Thailand). Geographically, they lived thoroughly mixed together with the Yao, with the one preferring to inhabit the mountain ridges and the other preferring to be down in the valleys. These clear frontiers of separation broke down only when the Tai were driven out of the valleys by the Chinese colonizers, forcing them to flee higher up into the mountains to survive. Thus in South China the Yao and the Tai formed a relationship out of which the unique Yueh culture emerged.[35]

The Yueh culture was most probably a classic matriarchy. Its prominent features were nature and ancestor worship. The nature worship manifested itself particularly in a dragon and serpent cult, which is not surprising. Serpents and many-armed dragons are symbols of the sometimes life-giving, sometimes awe-inspiring power of all water, but particularly of the huge rivers of China. For the Yueh, the rivers and the sea were their home, and the source of life. For the Tan boat people, the serpent cult remains to this day in the practice of snake tattoos. Later on, this cult entered into a creative relationship with the Taoism practiced in the cultures of South China.

The ancestor worship was no less developed; it accompanied the construction of megaliths. The typical form was a combination of earth-altar and ancestor temple. In the ancestor temple there were, and still are, panels bearing the names of the ancestors, who are regularly honored. The tomb itself was, and still is considered to be the residence of the dead, after the multiple celebratory funerals are completed. Even today, food for the dead is placed on the graves, a practice associated with joyous feasts where the whole family shares food upon the grave.[36] These devotional practices are particularly fostered in Southeast China, including in the bordering islands, that is, in the realm of the ancient Yueh culture. And megaliths—such as menhirs, dolmens and grave constructions—are typically found in areas where the mountain peoples live, especially in Tibet, Gansu, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Taiwan. In Central China these stone monuments have disappeared, but many place names attest to the fact that they used to exist.[37] The ancestor cult as well as the cult of Mother Earth, have existed from time immemorial on Chinese soil.[38] Ancestor worship, along with the ubiquitous dragon cult, have by now been completely absorbed into Chinese patriarchal culture.

The ancient, deep-rooted Wu cult associated with ancestor worship was quite a bit harder to assimilate, and appears even today among the mountain peoples (Yao,

Miao). The word "Wu" refers to shamanism as medical and spiritual activity of priestesses, combined with ecstatic dances and trance journeys to the Otherworld.[39] All non-Chinese peoples of China practiced shamanism, and the interesting thing is that it was formerly practiced only by women, who as healers, priestesses and rainmakers played a leading role in their tribes. The Chinese character for "Wu" depicts a dancing female person (the character for "male shaman" is derived from the one for "female shaman"), and female shamans had a much more significant role across all of Chinese history than did the later, male ones.[40] There is evidence of the tradition handed down from tribes in Northeast China that the eldest daughter doesn't marry, but remains in the household as the family shaman; there are peoples in the northwest of whom the same is true for the youngest daughter.[41]

The institution of female family shamans is closely associated with ancestor cult practices; and it is an enlightening statement that shamanism—the usual assertions to the contrary—does *not* derive from men's so-called "hunting magic," but rather from ancient, familial funerary cults practiced by the women, practices that are intimately connected with concepts of rebirth. Evidence for this is that in the original shamanism, the main ritual involves the living embodiment of the deceased family members in the bodies of the younger family members at the feast of the dead; the female ancestor is embodied in her granddaughter, the male ancestor (mother's brother) is embodied in his grand-nephew (in Western kinship terms). Here is the source of the time-honored notion that grandparents come back into their own clans through their grandchildren. In matrilineal cultures the granddaughter is clearly more important, since it is she who embodies the direct lineage of rebirth. Because of this, she takes on the role of shaman, and on her dancing trance journey she is able to bring the bodily souls of the dead back from the Otherworld.

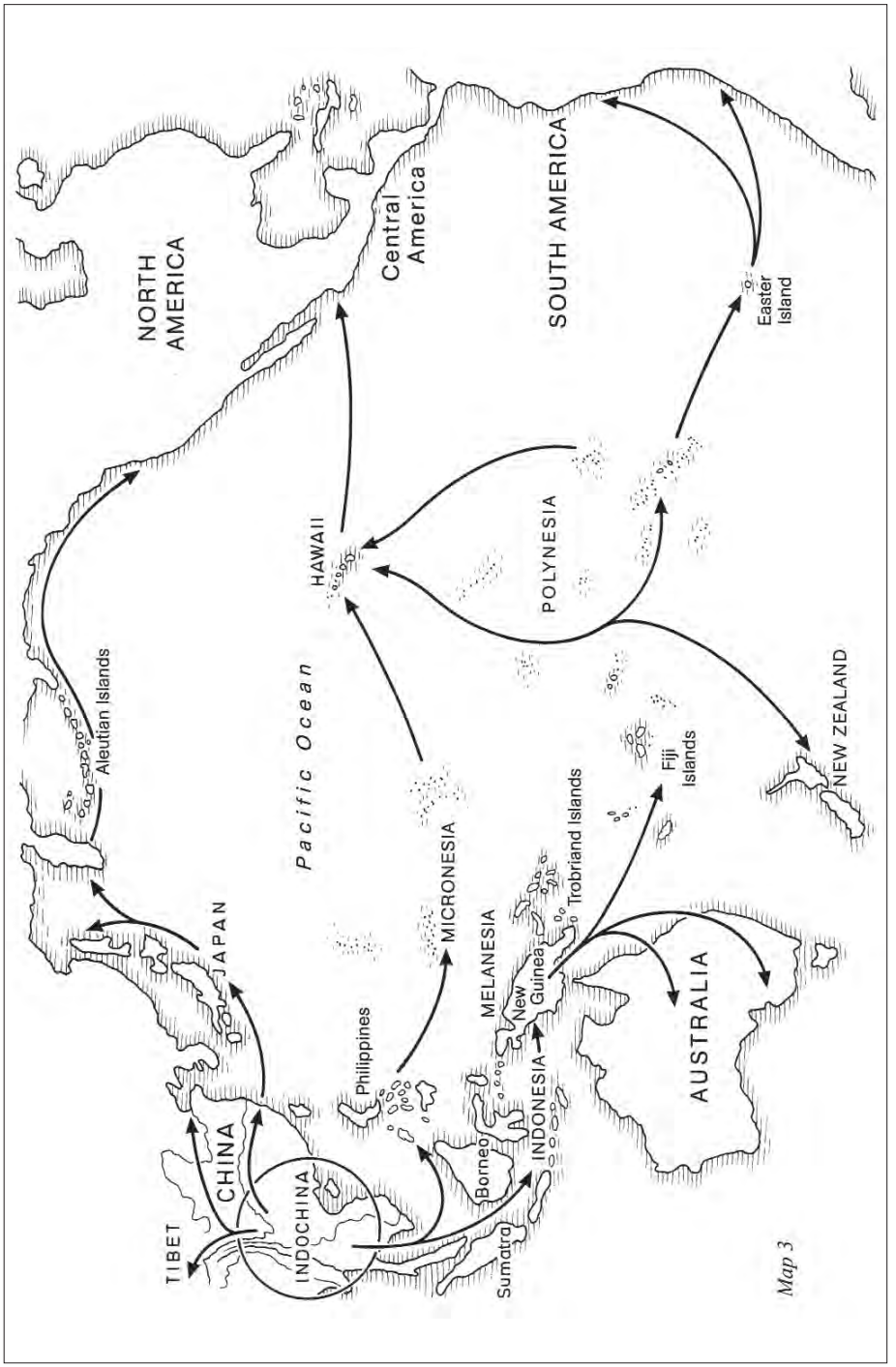
Funerals were not just mourning rituals, but also served as gatherings for all the members of the clan and its related marriage clan; as such, feasts for the dead have a straightforwardly sensuous component. Happy reunions would be celebrated at these feasts, with erotic encounters not excluded. Since the ancestors' souls would not want to miss anything interesting, the shaman would dance in her loveliest costume; she was "beautiful as an orchid-maiden." At these feasts she was the most perfect, most elegant woman present. With her flowered garments, extravagant grooming, musical singing and dancing, and her surrender to a trance state, she represents all the women of the clan, erotically enticing the spirits of the dead. For these spirits are meant to enter into the bodies of the young women: thus funeral celebrations were associated with hope for the actual return of a female or male ancestor. Thanks to the rollicking atmosphere, the banquets, the drinking and the love trysts, nine months later this return did, in fact, take place.[42]

Because of their ability to catalyze rebirth, only women could be shamans in this original form of shamanism. The situation changed with the advent of patrilinearity, where sons and grandsons took over the role of shaman and women lost their exclusive rights to perform priestly functions. As a result, shamanism lost its old meaning of searching for the souls of the ancestors. Instead, as a healer the shaman went, in search of the soul of a sick person, into the Otherworld where the soul was being held prisoner by a demon. In this form, alienated from its original meaning, anthropologists encountered the phenomenon of shamanism: it is understandable that they had no satisfying explanation for it. But an explanation is not hard to come by if we start out, as some researchers have, from the female origin of shamanism. This is reflected in the wonderful account of the young shaman Nisân, who, unlike her male colleagues, can bring a dead back to life.[43]

In patriarchal China the Wu cult was never completely stamped out and never completely assimilated; the emperors even felt obliged to include a Wu shaman as a representative in the Imperial court.[44]

In its prime, the Yueh culture not only held influence over the developing patriarchal Chinese empire, but also was widely dispersed across the entire Asian side of the Pacific Rim. After all, the Yueh peoples were the ancient boat people of China, creating a highly developed, highly mobile maritime culture. Several researchers have been amazed at the marked similarity between the culture of the Chinese-Tibetan Yueh peoples and the culture of the Malayo-Polynesian peoples who inhabited the entire Pacific. Ancient Chinese megalithic features like earth altars and ancestor temples are found all over the habitable coasts and islands of the Pacific. Based on the archaeology of early history and on anthropology, some researchers have assumed that in Neolithic times (which we take as the basis for our investigation as the time of the development of classical matriarchal societies) the following events took place:[45]

- first, *Indonesian peoples* came from Central and South China (Eastern Islands Asian or Yueh peoples); via Indochina and Malaysia, sailing from island to island in their ever-improving boats, they settled the entire Indonesian archipelago;
- second, *original Polynesians* came from North China, especially from the Hwangho delta (Yellow River delta), and were able, with their constantly improving navigational capabilities, to risk ever-further journeys upon the high seas, settling in Taiwan, the Philippines, Micronesia, Hawai'i and Polynesia; their hardy seafaring finally brought them to New Zealand in the south, as well as Easter Island and the coast of South America in the far east;


NORTH AMERICA
Central America
SOUTH AMERICA
Aleutian Islands
HAWAII
Pacific Ocean
POLYNESIA
Easter Island
JAPAN
MICRONESIA
Philippines
MELANESIA
New Guinea
Trobriand Islands
Fiji Islands
NEW ZEALAND
TIBET
CHINA
INDOCHINA
Borneo
INDONESIA
Sumatra
AUSTRALIA

Map 3

- third, *Melanesian peoples* also migrated away from the coast of East Asia, interbred with peoples of various dark-skinned tribes, and in the course of their migrations settled Melanesia and Australia (see map 3).

All these peoples were originally from the Chinese Southeast Asian region and emigrated before patriarchal Chinese culture was established. This has wide-ranging consequences for our investigation of matriarchal societies in history and in the present.

In contrast to the distant outward migrations listed above, these peoples did not migrate from elsewhere into the mountains and lowlands of China. There have been internal migrations in China from north to south and from west to east, as we have seen. But there is no archaeological evidence that these peoples came from the outside into China, so we have to assume that they always lived here. In particular, the Sichuan highlands are held to be the starting point for migrations of the original Eastern Asians and original Tibetans; from there they moved west (Tibet) and southwest (Assam), following the great rivers. Likewise, the original Eastern Islands Asians (Yueh peoples) and original Thai also traveled from Sichuan, following the great rivers to the south and the east (see map 2). Well into the first century B.C.E., their various cultures covered the entire area of China, so that the core area of the patriarchal Chinese culture in Hunan was very small. This core area bordered several of these cultures' regions, and the resulting overlap and melting-pot dynamic must have catalyzed the first glimmer of patriarchal Chinese culture.[46] For our purposes it is exciting to see that this validates the assumption that the highlands of the upper reaches of the great East Asian rivers were one of the birthplaces of matriarchy.

5.6 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the economic level:

- The economic basis of matriarchies usually was, and still is, agriculture. Widely-held belief to the contrary, there were also matriarchal herding cultures (stock breeding cultures). These were, however, not independent cultures, but developed, as a rule, from agricultural societies and were dependent upon them (as in Tibet).
- All aspects of textiles—weaving, embroidery, specialties such as brocade, batik and other techniques, the art of silk production and manufacture—were invented by women in matriarchal cultures.
- Matriarchal cultures were the originators and master builders of many types of houses, particularly massive wooden clan houses and multi-storeyed

stone palaces. The oldest style of house was very adaptable (oblong, with gabled roof, partially or completely constructed on piles).
- In matriarchal cultures, in general, women run the local markets (agricultural products, manufactured products, pottery, and metal, among other things).

At the social level:

- In matriarchal cultures older, more experienced women are the preferred marriage partners.
- Pressure from patrilineal or patriarchal families does not necessarily change matriarchal clan structures into patriarchal ones. Matriarchal societies have the ability to consciously maintain or regenerate their social order, owing to strong traditional values for women and men; if the pressure becomes too strong, they choose struggle of resistance or migration of the entire people.

At the political level:

- Based on this it is not possible, contrary to received opinion, for a matriarchy, in and of itself, to develop into a patriarchy as a result of its so-called internal deficiencies. Such theories provide only a (patriarchally biased) pseudo-explanation that defies historical facts (see the discussion on the Mosuo and other peoples).
- Matriarchal social structures are changed from outside, through powerful pressures from patriarchal societies. This takes place very slowly due to resistance, both passive and active, by the matriarchal peoples.

At the cultural level:

- In the matriarchal cult of death and rebirth (funeral and ancestor celebrations) the priesthood originally was female; women were the family priestesses.
- The priesthood of women was shamanistic. The female shaman attempted, through dance, music, ecstasy and trance journeys to the Otherworld, to draw the souls of the ancestors back to this world for a new rebirth.
- Shamanism, which began in the ancestor cults, was most probably developed by women and was, for a very long time, a purely female phenomenon.

Spreading of Matriarchal Culture:

- There is much evidence that the mountain highland region containing the upper reaches of the great East Asian waterways (especially Sichuan Province) is one of the birthplaces of matriarchies.

- From there, matriarchal cultures spread along the great rivers throughout East Asia to China, Indochina, Tibet, Assam. Little by little, matriarchal peoples became great seafarers in the Neolithic, migrating out from East Asia, and settling in Indonesia, Melanesia, Polynesia—and all the way across the Pacific Ocean.

Notes

1. See Albert Herrmann (ed.): *An historical Atlas of China,* Norton Ginsburg (gen. ed.), prefatory essay by Paul Wheatley, Edinburgh 1966 (new edition), Edinburgh University Press; based on Albert Herrmann (ed.): *Historical and Commercial Atlas of China,* published in 1935 by the Harvard-Yenching Institute (Monograph series, vol. 1), Cambridge, Harvard University Press. See also W. Eberhard: *Kultur und Siedlung der Randvölker Chinas,* Leiden 1942, Brill, p. 278.
2. Inez de Beauclair: *Tribal Cultures of Southwest China,* Taipeh 1970, Oriental Cultural Service, pp. 3–8.
3. For a comprehensive survey of the 800 marginalized peoples of China, see: W. Eberhard: *Lokalkulturen im Alten China,* Leiden 1942, Brill.
4. See A. Herrmann, ibid., W. Eberhard *(Lokalkulturen),* ibid.
5. See Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchat in Südchina. Eine Forschungsreise zu den Mosuo,* Stuttgart 1998, Kohlhammer Verlag. The trip took place in co-operation with China expert Iris Bubenik-Bauer. The indigenous Mosuo anthropologist, Prof. Lamu Gatusa, was also extraordinarily helpful.
6. For this and the following discussion see, besides my own research, the work of the Chinese anthropologist Ruxian Yan: "The Kinship System of the Mosuo in China" (pp. 230–239); the indigenous Mosuo anthropologist Lamu Gatusa (Shi Gaofeng): "Matriarchal Marriage Patterns of the Mosuo People of China" (pp. 240–248); and the indigenous Mosuo researcher Danshilacuo (He Mei): "Mosuo Family Structures" (pp. 248–255); all in: Heide Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* Toronto 2009, Inanna Publications, York University.
7. See J. F. Rock: *The Ancient Na-khi Kingdom of Southwest China,* 2 vols., Cambridge (Mass.) 1947, Harvard University Press, vol. II, pp. 388–391; and: *The Zhi mä Funeral Ceremony of the Na-khi of Southwest China,* London- New York 1972, Johnson (earlier edition, Wien-Mödling, Austria, 1955).—Rock fails to acknowledge that he stumbled upon matriarchal structures—just to mention him as an example of many others of his kind. He explains them like this: Lama monks resided part of the time in the cloister, and part of the time at home, where they produced children, whose mothers they never married. The result was "a horde of illegitimate children, who didn't even know their father" (*Kingdom*, p. 391). This is followed by the author's moralistic attack on the generally very free love life of the people. His blindness has two origins: one is the usual patriarchal-Christian prejudice; the other is Rock's very one-sided situation of research. During his years among the Mosuo, he exclusively lived with the patriarchal elite and had no regard for the people living matriarchally.—The matriarchal structures of the Mosuo were first brought to light by Prof. Wang Shu Wu (Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, Kunming), who, starting in 1954, did pioneering research in the region. (See interview with Wang Shu Wu, in: Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchat in Südchina,* ibidem.) After Wang Shu Wu, Yan Ruxian continued the study of the Mosuo.

8. Before the Tibet-trained lama priests supplanted them, an older, indigenous priesthood, the Daba priests, practiced among the Mosuo. These Daba priests were the guardians of oral tradition, which they recited at celebrations. The role of women as house priests clearly was not affected by this, since women still have this role today.—Today's lama priests are themselves Mosuo, but no longer hold the Daba ceremonies, which are on the point of dying out. (see Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchat in Südchina,* ibidem)
9. See Eberhard, *(Lokalkulturen),* ibid., p. 120.
10. See Ruxian Yan: "A Living Fossil of the Family—A Study of the Family Structure of the Naxi Nationality in the Lugu Lake Region," in: *Social Sciences in China: A quarterly Journal,* vol. 4, pp. 60–83, Beijing 1982, Social Sciences in China Press.—In the older literature the Mosuo are wrongly identified as "Na-khi" or "Naxi"; this is politically based, as they had been assimilated by the regionally dominant majority, the Naxi. They mounted a struggle for recognition as a National Minority of China unto themselves.
11. See Exiang Zhi, in: *Chinas Nationale Minderheiten,* vol.I, Reihe *Die Große Mauer,* ed. „China im Aufbau", Beijing 1985, Fremdsprachen-Druckerei, p. 99 f.
12. See Eberhard, *(Lokalkulturen),* ibid., pp. 124–126, 128 f.
13. See Lamu Gatusa, ibidem; and Danshilacuo, ibidem.
14. Beauclair, ibid., p. 3.
15. Eberhard, *(Randvölker),*ibid., pp. 275–277.
16. See details in Eberhard, *(Lokalkulturen),* ibid., pp. 83–87, 94–96.
17. For this and the following discussion see: Eberhard, *(Randvölker)*, pp. 245, 347–355; for the silk-caterpillar goddess, see p. 335 f.
18. For this and the following see: Eberhard, *(Randvölker),* ibid., pp. 245, 253 f., 278; and E. Rousselle: „Die Frau in Gesellschaft und Mythos der Chinesen", in: *SINICA* 16, Frankfurt 1941, China-Institut, pp. 145, 146.
19. See Rousselle, ibid., p. 147–149; Eberhard, *(Randvölker),* ibid., pp. 255 f., 266 f., 278 f.; E. Erkes: „Das Primat des Weibes im alten China", in: *SINICA* 10, Frankfurt 1935, China-Institut, p. 174.
20. W. Schmidt, ibid., p. 42 f.
21. Eberhard, *(Randvölker),* ibid., pp. 359–362.
22. See Beauclair, survey in ibid., pp. 4–8.
23. Jacques Lemoine: „Die Yao in Nord-Vietnam, Laos und Thailand", in: *Bild der Völker,* Wiesbaden Brockhaus Verlag, vol. 6, pp. 174–177; and „Die Miao in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand und Birma", in: *Bild der Völker,* ibid., vol. 6, pp. 220–225. Originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.) and Tom Stacey (editorial director): *Peoples of the World,* vol. 11, London 1972–1974, Tom Stacey Ltd.
24. Beauclair, ibid., p. 6; and R. Kennedy Skipton: „Die Karen in Thailand und Birma", in: *Bild der Völker,* ibid., vol. 6, pp. 254–257. Originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* ibid., vol. 11.
25. Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *The Goddess and her Heros,* ibidem.
26. On this see the illustrations and references in: *Chinas nationale Minderheiten,* vol. I, ibid., pp. 114f.,130–132; and Jaques Lemoine in: *Bild der Völker,* ibid., vol. 6, pp. 174–177, 220- 225, and p. 283. Originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* ibid., vol. 11; and R. Kennedy Skipton: „Die Bergvölker von Yünnan. China", in: *Bild der Völker,* vol. 7, ibid., pp. 197–201. Originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* ibid., vol. 13; and G. Fochler-Hauke: „Sitten und Gebräuche einiger Urvölker Süd- und Südwestchinas", in: *SINICA* 10, ibid., p. 244 f.
27. Beauclair, ibid., pp. 113 f., 121–123; and *Chinas nationale Minderheiten,* vol. I, ibid., pp. 191 f., 204 f.

28. Beauclair, ibid., p. 7.
29. Beauclair, ibid., p. 130 ; Eberhard, *(Randvölker),* ibid., series 53.
30. Beauclair, ibid., pp. 130, 133.
31. Briffault, vol. 1, ibid., p. 298; Eberhard, *(Lokalkulturen),* ibid., pp. 176 f., 196 f., 250 f., 326; and Beauclair, ibid., pp. 133, 184 f.; and S. R. Clarke: *Among the Tribes in South-West China,* London 1911, China Inland Mission, p. 131; and W. Koppers: „Die Frage des Mutterrechts und des Totemismus im alten China", in: *Anthropos* 25, 1930, Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel, pp. 993–997.
32. Beauclair, ibid., p. 173 f. ; Koppers, ibid., p. 996 f.
33. Beauclair, ibid., p. 131.
34. Jaques Lemoine in: *Bild der Völker,* vol. 6, ibid., pp. 176, 224. Originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* ibid., vol. 11.
35. Eberhard, *(Lokalkulturen),* ibid., pp. 176 f., 306 f., 326–331, 331 f., 342–346; Beauclair, ibid., pp. 5–8.
36. Emily M. Ahern: *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village,* Stanford/California 1973, Stanford University Press, p. 245 f.
37. Byung-mo Kim: *Megalithic Cultures in China,* Seoul, Korea, 1983, Hanyang University Press, p. 65 f.
38. Ahern, ibid.; Shun-Sheng Ling: "Ancestor Temple and Earth Altar among the Formosan Aborigines," in: *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica,* no. 6, Nankang/ Taipeh (Taiwan), 1958, The Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica, p. 47 f.; and "Origin of the Ancestral Temple in China," in: ibid., no. 7, 1959, p. 177; and P. J. Thiel: „Der Erdgeist-Tempel als Weiterentwicklung des alten Erdaltars", in: *SINOLOGICA,* 5, Basel 1958, Verlag für Recht und Gesellschaft, p. 150 f.
39. Mircea Eliade: *Schamanism,* Princeton 1964, N. J. Bollingen Series; and Tscheng-Tsu Sang: *Der Schamanimus in China. Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der chinesischen Wu,* Hamburg 1934, Dissertation Universität Hamburg, pp. 43, 50, 76.
40. Tscheng-Tsu Sang, ibid., p. 2 f., 73 f.; and J. F. Rock: "The Birth and Origin of Dto-mba Shilo," in: *Artibus Asiae,* vol. 7, p. 16 (footnote 1), Zurich 1937, published by the Museum Rietberg, Zurich, in co-operation with the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.
41. E. Erkes: „Der schamanistische Ursprung des chinesischen Ahnenkultes", in: *SINOLOGICA,* 2, Basel 1950, Verlag für Recht und Gesellschaft, pp. 257–260.
42. Erkes, ibid., pp. 253–262.
43. Margaret Nowak/Stephen Durrant: *The Tale of the Nisân Shamaness,* Seattle and London 1977, University of Washington Press.
44. Erkes, ibid., Tscheng-Tsu Schang, ibidem.
45. Beauclair, ibid., pp. 8–10; Shun-Sheng Ling: *(Origin),* ibid., pp. 182–184; Heine-Geldern, *(Megalithen),* ibid., pp. 276–315; Kwang-chih Chang/G. W. Grace/ W. G. Solheim: "Movement of the Malayo-Polynesians," in: *Current Anthropology,* Chicago 1964, University of Chicago Press, p. 359 f.
46. Eberhard, *(Lokalkulturen),* ibid., pp. 418–421.

6

Women Shamans in Korea

For the Mudang, Korea's women shamans

6.1 Megalith cultures in East Asia and the Pacific Rim

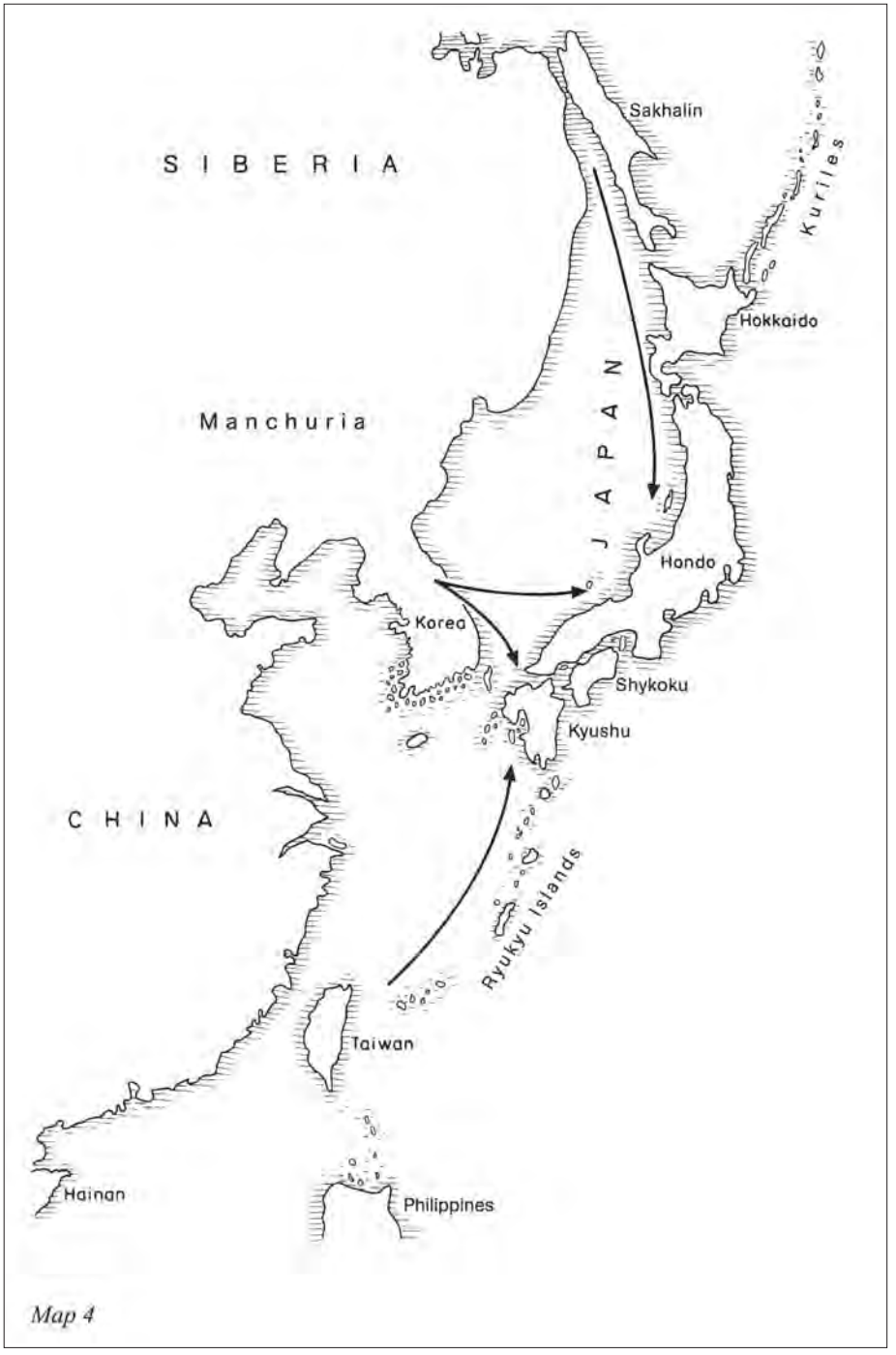
Agricultural matriarchies spread, during the Neolithic period, from the Chinese-Tibetan mountains (one of several places they originated) and throughout the Asia-Pacific region, including the islands of the open Pacific. The best evidence of this is the diffusion of megalithic culture. In Eastern China many megalithic monuments are still discovered, but even now it is clear that megalithic cultures were carried, by the mobile, seafaring Yueh people and others, over the sea. Indeed, these were the first people to inhabit the Pacific islands.[1]

Western researchers' assumption that the East Asian megalith culture had a Mediterranean and European origin is a product of their Euro-centrism rather than of their science.[2] But this doesn't mean we have to conclude the reverse, that the Mediterranean megalithic culture came from China. They could have originated in similar circumstances, and then radiated out from both regions into surrounding areas. The special thing about the Asian-Pacific megalithic culture, in comparison with the Mediterranean and European ones, is that there the traditions are still being practiced, the megaliths still in use. Menhirs, dolmens and grave construc-

tions are still used in many places, with new ones being added from time to time; in Europe they are nothing but fossils.[3] Dolmens and menhirs are the oldest forms that show a gender differentiation; female and male stones are distinguished either by the way they are positioned (lying or standing), or through markings that indicate sexual organs (both naturally occurring and humanly fashioned). Gradually, the horizontal stones came into use as high tables, or roof-like structures. To climb up to the table, stones in the form of steps were later added; this gave rise to the stubby pyramid of graduated steps. All these forms—menhirs, dolmens, stubby pyramids that are sometimes surrounded by a stone-walled courtyard–have multiple meanings. There were many forms of ritual use, but three main purposes are clear: they served as monument for graves; as commemoration sites, or "beds of the ancestors"; and as altars or temples.[4]

Off the eastern coast of China, in Taiwan, over 80 dolmen constructions have been found. This large island seems to have been a junction in the migration of megalithic culture northwards and southwards.[5] North of Taiwan, the Ryukyu Islands chain, extending all the way to Japan, is thickly marked with megaliths (see map 4). The highest density of megalithic construction ever found in East Asia was discovered in Korea, across from the Hwang Ho delta and the Shantung peninsula. These monuments are similar to those made by Chinese mountain peoples and those of the seafaring Yueh people. Megalithic construction, along with agriculture, started in Neolithic times in Korea, and lasted throughout the Bronze Age and up until the Iron Age.[6] Japan's southern tip extends toward Korea; there, where the southernmost island of Kyushu faces the Sea of China, over 200 megaliths lie closely crowded together. Bearing an amazing resemblance to the Korean ones, they dot the seacoast and riverbeds; originally (they are now partially destroyed) there were 500 constructions. On other Japanese islands, continuing north, there are stone circles, always on a hilltop with a splendid view of the surrounding area. This is not surprising, as they served as observatories to watch the rising and setting of the stars—which requires the vast, nearly flat horizon afforded by coastal sites. Also, cultivation of paddy rice was spread by the builders of megalithic stone circles over all of Japan, even to its eastern and northern extremities.[7]

In South Asia, megalithic constructions are all over Indochina, extending to the Malay peninsula (see map 3). They are found on all the large Indonesian islands; that is, in the Philippines, Sumatra, and much more numerously on the island of Nias (west of Sumatra), on Java itself, and on all the Javanese islands (such as Bali, Sumbawa, Sumba, Flores and Timor), on the west and north coasts of Kalimantan (Borneo), and on Sulawesi (Celebes). From all these places, megalithic culture spread


SIBERIA
Sakhalin
Kuriles
Hokkaido
Manchuria
JAPAN
Hondo
Korea
Shykoku
Kyushu
CHINA
Ryukyu Islands
Taiwan
Hainan
Philippines

Map 4

out to the islands of Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia—and from there to Easter Island, where the impressive menhirs with faces stand. In fact, over the entire Pacific area there are menhirs (with or without faces), dolmens, low graduated pyramids, and stone-walled courtyards. The similarity among these sacred places, not only in terms of their forms and ritual uses, but also in the names used to designate them, extends all the way west to the Assamese territory.[8]

6.2 Women in the history of Korea

Megalithic culture indicates the presence, in this entire area, of a matriarchal social organization, at least in the Neolithic. Step by step, we will pursue this question.

In Korea over the last centuries, a patriarchal family structure patterned on the Chinese Confucian model has prevailed. But it was not always so: in earlier times, in a bloodline-oriented society, the matriarchal clan was the norm. The transition to a patriarchal family system happened extremely slowly, and was strictly enforced only in the upper classes, who patterned themselves after the Chinese culture.[9] Since in Korean tradition people had carried only a personal name and a local name (based on a sacred megalithic site), this transition to a new system meant they had to be given family names as well.[10] The old way of naming had rested on matrilocality, with inheritance in the female line: in this system, clan names were not necessary for preservation of the matriarchal clan.[11] Written testimony indicates that early kings (Silla Dynasty) continued to practice matrilocal residence, they lived with their spouses' parents. In matrilineal clans, the throne passes from mother to daughter; kings are just men who marry into the line and receive permission to act as delegates in the outside world.[12] Even three reigning queens in a row were not considered surprising in the Silla Dynasty.[13]

Although patriarchal tendencies were first introduced by royalty and then by the upper classes, matrilocal residence, with daughters' right to inherit, existed among these people until the 14th century. Only in this later era was marriage introduced as a rigid institution by neo-Confucians (Yi Dynasty). Women's residence became patrilocal, and they only recently lost the right to inherit land. All this took place in the service of power-politics. It forced the stiff, hierarchical arm of the state into the family and generated centuries of heavy conflict, since this new doctrine flew directly in the face of Korean clan law. The result is that in the long, drawn-out process of conflict, Korean people have returned again and again to the old family system, or found compromises such as matrilocal-patrilocal living arrangements, in which the wife moves into her husband's house only after a

few years of marriage, and never before their first child is born.[14] This last practice is one we have already encountered with the Chinese mountain peoples, and in this context it indicates—as in the Chinese case—an earlier, matriarchal form of family organization.

Women were dominant for extended periods not only in Korea's clan structure but also, from the beginning, in the ancient, shamanist tribal and vernacular religion. Just as in the Wu cult of China (where "wu" designates only the woman shaman), in the Korean Mu cult the word "mu" or "mudang" similarly refers only to the woman shaman.[15] This is not accidental, since the Korean Mu cult springs from the Wu cult of ancient China. And just like the Wu, the Mudang were originally clan priestesses and tribal shamans. As tribal shamans they worshipped the "Mo," or sacred mothers, tribal goddesses who are in fact deified, primordial female ancestors; for example, the tribal goddess of the kingdom of Koguryo is "Puyo," Silla's is "Song-mo Sosul," and Gaya's "Chong Kyong-mo." In these early kingdoms of old Korea, which were located right next to each other, the women shamans led public ancestor cult rituals that revolved around these sacred primordial mothers.

They also worshipped mountain spirits such as wind, rivers, dragons—which also were goddesses—as well as a generic "fertility goddess" (as western researchers tend to describe her).[16] It would be more accurate to call this deity the goddess of rebirth; matriarchal peoples were not striving for unlimited fertility (see the chapter on Tibet), but rather sought the return—via rebirth—of their ancestors into this world. It is not hard to guess that the tribal women shamans performed this worship at the sacred megaliths, abundant in Korea even today.

According to legend, an exiled princess who succeeded in bringing her parents back from the dead, using the water of life and the tree of life, was the founder of Korean shamanism. The three schools of shamanism that still exist today in and around Seoul are said to have been founded by three ancient female shamans (Mujo) as well.[17] This too suggests that female shamanism has an ancient tradition in Korea, and makes it all the more amazing that shamanism is still a vital occupation of women today. Female shamanism has been practiced for 5,000 years in Korea, and is still alive today as a vigorous power among the people, a power all the more impressive for having survived 1600 years of repression and scorn—first by Buddhists, then by Confucians, neo-Confucians and finally by Christian missionaries.

6.3 Contemporary women shamans

Korea presents the opportunity to experience a living example of female shamanic power—in a modern industrial nation! Not only that, but today Korean shamanism is, as it was in ancient times, an almost exclusively female phenomenon. Statistics show that 95% of shamans following the ecstatic tradition are women, and 95% of the followers of this shamanism are also women.[18] Men, on the other hand, usually are Confucian, and while they practice an appropriately detached, dry worship of their patrilineal ancestors, the women of the house pay homage to their house deities and spirits through the offices of female shamans invited for this purpose. The music, laughter and intense dancing that go along with this process provide a lively, noisy counterpoint to the men's cult. In this way, a dual worship system has evolved in middle and working class families of Korea, in which men and women of the same household worship differently (upper-class fundamentalist Confucian households excepted). Since antiquity, women have remained true to "Mu," Korea's traditional religion—which was, after all, their own religion![19]

Over such a long time, Korean female shamanism has naturally gone through significant changes. This is expressed in the double meaning of the word "Mudang" which means both "hereditary priestess" and "inspired woman shaman." It used to be that Mudang was the public religious office held by the most important women in the tribe or kingdom, as illustrated by the legend of its royal founder, the princess-shaman referred to above. This religious office was hereditary. As intermediaries between goddesses and humans, tribal priestesses looked after the spiritual life of their society; this was their profession. They also served as family priestesses, and took care of funeral rites and ancestor worship in their clans. At the same time, they worked on two levels as medicine women and healers: physically, by practicing their understanding of herbal medicine, and psychically, through exorcism of disease-spirits. Finally, they were seers and soothsayers.[20] Today nothing remains of the public office of hereditary priestess. The Mudang today are almost exclusively "inspired shamans"; they are healers and soothsayers, and look after the family rituals of their followers' families, to whom they themselves are no longer related. This demonstrates the transition of female Korean shamanism from public religion to home cult.

Like the Wu in ancient China, the Mudang of Korea perform ritual dances in their richly colored costumes, whose colors and tailoring conform to a specific tradition. The beauty of the costume and dance is meant to entice the deity or spirit to erotically enter her, bringing her into a state of ecstasy in which she utters the spirit's words as prophecy. The individual deities or spirits to whom the shaman is bound

in lifelong service are considered to be her personal spirit-lovers. Sometimes during a ritual she will wear several sets of costumes, one over the other, in order to be able to instantly transform herself in case there are several spirits waiting to enter her. On her head she wears the tall, stiff Korean hat of varnished horsehair, and in her hands she carries objects that symbolize her deities, or a fan with their names on it. This costume constitutes such a classic expression of shamanism in Korea, that the few existing male shamans wear the same thing. These men perform their rituals in women's traditional clothes, with long skirts over harem pants, womanly hair arrangements topped by the stiff hat, and carrying the fan; obviously, only if they are in women's clothes can they be attractive enough to warrant possession by the spirits.[21] This indicates that priesthood and shamanism, which can never be completely separated, have their roots in a female phenomenon; we know that in many cultures throughout history it has only been possible for men to perform their priestly office dressed as women. Catholic priests' vestments carry an analogous history; these priests say mass dressed in the historical costume of Mediterranean priestesses: a long garment with lace borders, an embroidered cloak and a stole.

In Korean villages there are still isolated instances of female tribal shamans who have inherited their role. At certain festivals, they act out singing, dancing and comedy scenes of the spirits or deities they serve. This continues a long folk tradition. In cities, shamanic practitioners don't inherit the role, but are inspired to take it up, after being struck by the so-called "shaman sickness." By performing rituals, they guide the families—their followers—through each stage of life. They arrange feasts of ancestor worship and feeding, or for relevant house deities; they heal and exorcise spirits of sickness; and in difficult cases where not enough children are born, they lead pilgrimages to the sacred mountains. They are advisors on a myriad of life's questions, they make prophecies and serve a broad spectrum of religious and psychic needs for the women who trust in them.[22]

When a woman shaman is invited to a ceremony by the matron of the house, she first builds, with great care, a house altar appropriate to the spirits who will be called, depending upon the event itself and the season. Fruit, flowers, rice, fish and pork, along with symbolic figures made of paper, are the most important sacrificial offerings. Then, accompanied on the classical drum and cymbals by her women musicians, she begins to dance for the spirits or deities. She dances until she falls into an ecstatic trance, feeling herself possessed by the spirit she has summoned. Her movements are no longer the precise dance steps she began with, but rather reflect the movements the spirit, embodied by her, is making. In this ecstatic state she speaks or sings prophecies; these are understood by the women to be not her words, but rather the words of ancestors, spirits or deities who are temporar-

ily residing in her body. If the words are positive, if the news is good, the matron of the house, in her white ceremonial dress, grasps the sides of her skirt, spreading it out wide to receive—for her house—as much blessing as she possibly can. When the shaman returns from her ecstatic state, she continues to dance, and continues to repeat the gestures of the spirit that possessed her. She pleases the spirit with her dance, and lets him go with a rendering of thanks. Usually the women themselves begin to dance, until the house shakes with music and loud festivities. Banquets follow, often lasting two or three days. These celebrations allow the women, to some degree at least, to keep participating in their traditional culture and its joyfulness, in spite of the straight jacket of Confucianism. Men keep their distance from these "ribald" events: they prefer to honor their male ancestors on other occasions in quieter, more orderly, rigid, and "dignified" ways.

If a woman shaman has not inherited her role—and today inherited shamanism is rare—her life entails significant difficulties. The shamanic vocation announces itself through the so-called "shaman sickness," which can develop at any stage of life but appears most often at puberty. It is recognized by the appearance of symptoms such as having dreams and visions of deities, hearing the voices of spirits, intuitive expressions of prophecy that come true, and other mystical experiences. When they belonged to Korea's patriarchal upper classes, women with these symptoms traditionally were killed, while in the modern patriarchies of Europe and North America they are caught in the grinder of psychiatry. For archaic peoples, this condition was considered sacred; in their eyes, it was a manifestation of spirit possession. But not every person overtaken by "shaman sickness" could—and can—actually become a shaman; before the time comes for an initiation by an experienced woman shaman, there must first be an investigation into whether this is a case of true possession or just ordinary spirit tricks. In other words, an experienced shaman can perfectly well distinguish between a traumatic manifestation of true spiritual power and a psychotic episode. Only in the former case an initiation ceremony can be performed, after which the young novice is apprenticed to an experienced woman shaman. Because she must learn such an enormous amount, a person who is physically, psychologically or spiritually weak would not be able to cope with the workload. She must be able to hold her culture's entire mythic tradition in her memory in order to express it properly in dance and song. In addition, she must learn a variety of rituals that are prescribed in minute detail, from the sacrificial altar and ritual clothing to the precision of the music and dance. She must also practice techniques for achieving and maintaining an ecstatic state, so that when she enters a trance she does go not wildly out of control, but instead is expressive within the development of the ritual framework. And by no means the least

important item in this curriculum is the intensive training that will give her the endurance necessary to dance for hours in heavy costumes. Knowledge of prophecy, herbal medicine and spiritual guidance are related subjects.

After completing this training, which goes on for years, the young shaman takes her first steps on the path to independence. It is a rocky path, because she inherits no more than a few families of devotees from her predecessor. Most of her clients must be won over through successful healing and other kinds of assistance. Above all, women shamans in today's Korea are disdained by Buddhist, Confucian, and Christian male elites who make it much more difficult for them to operate. Families whose members include shamans are socially isolated, and the families that are able to invite these shamans tend to be from the lower classes. Because of this, shamans are as poor as their clients. For all these difficulties, though, a young shaman may never leave the deeply worshipful service of the deities and spirits who have called her to this vocation, and must follow their instructions absolutely, to the point where she often seems to have no life of her own, living only to serve these powers. So it frequently happens that a shaman begins to have doubts about her profession, and makes an effort to give it up; but then the pre-initiation symptoms return and she is obliged to go back to serving the spirits. When a shaman has managed to overcome all these conflicts and crises, and has developed a large body of experience, both human and spiritual—and by this time she is usually an older woman—then and only then is she a mature shaman. Then she can serve her families or her village as a wise healer and benevolent spiritual guide, and is able to enjoy a measure of trust and respect, at least from her followers. In her maturity she will in turn have young women as her students, guiding them along their own paths to shamanism.[23]

It is not a simple task to gauge what this female shamanism means in Korea today. In earlier times, it was seen in terms of the power of a female priesthood, while today it is more of a consolation prize for women's repressed lives. Although it has preserved a fragment of ancient matriarchal tradition up to the present day, this fragment is no longer associated with a sense of historical or political resistance. Even now its power should not be underestimated: since Korean women have been able to use it to maintain some autonomy, both in their spiritual lives as shamans and in their domestic lives as matrons who have the right to invite shamans. In this sense they were a step ahead of the women of patriarchal China, who formerly were utterly imprisoned in the straight jacket of Confucianism.[24] Also, they have been able to carry on a women's spiritual tradition that in Europe has been completely eliminated as a result of the persecution and extermination of European shamans (so-called "witches").

At the moment Korean shamanism appears to be gaining prestige. In the course of an awakening national consciousness in South Korea, more and more Korean researchers are investigating this aspect of their culture, without really being able to explain it. Nevertheless, the research is being done carefully and relatively objectively. In this way, the best women shamans have achieved a reputation that far exceeds the limits of the families they serve, and sometimes they officiate at national events, performing rituals witnessed by hundreds of people, and sometimes even by broadcast on radio and television.

6.4 Understanding the Structure of a Matriarchal Society (continuation)

At the cultural level:

- Religious practice for women in matriarchal cultures took the form of shamanism. It exists today as a vital area for women only in exceptional cases, such as Korea.
- There are two kinds of women shamans: the clan or tribal shamans (inherited honor) and the inspired shamans (ecstatic-spiritual abilities and a long training period).
- Female and male shamans are the keepers of the oral tradition of matriarchal peoples, a tradition they present through ritual, dance, song and ceremonial events.
- Their responsibilities include: the maintenance of spiritual and intellectual tradition; ancestor worship and funerary rites; healing with herbal medicine, spiritual exorcism and midwifery; psychic guidance as spiritual guides, clairvoyants, and diviners.
- Female shamanism was a respected profession in matriarchies and was practiced by the most important women. In patriarchal societies it has been degraded, the shamans suppressed and hunted down, and in the most extreme cases exterminated (e.g., the European "witch" burnings). In patriarchal societies this shamanism has survived only in the lower classes.

At the social level:

- The process of patriarchalizing a society takes place from the outside, against the resistance of the people, and requires *external* patriarchal pressure (e.g., China's indigenous mountain peoples). Internal patriarchaliza-

tion of a people is accomplished through patriarchal pressure *from above*; in these cases either the power elite is foreign or is in thrall to foreign, patriarchal models (e.g., Korea).

- When this succeeds, it is only in spite of sustained resistance by those not in power, from women and men who resist from below.
- Another form of resistance from below is the splitting off into two parallel cultures—a ruling men's culture and an oppressed women's culture—which co-exist in a fragile balance (e.g., Korea).

Notes

1. See Shun-Sheng Ling: *The Dolmen Culture of Taiwan, East Asia and the Southwestern Pacific,* Nankang/Taipeh (Taiwan), 1967, The Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica.
2. See R. Heine-Geldern, *(Megalithen),* ibidem.
3. Shun-Sheng Ling, ibid., pp. 148–150.
4. Heine-Geldern; ibid., pp. 276–315; Shun-Sheng Ling, ibidem.
5. Shun-Sheng Ling, *(The Dolmen Culture),* ibidem; and *(Ancestor Temple),* ibidem.
6. Byung-mo Kim, *(Megalithic Cultures),* ibid., pp. 41–60.
7. Byung-mo Kim, ibid., pp. 4–33.
8. Byung-mo Kim, ibid., pp. 73 f., 99 f.; Shun-Sheng Ling, ibidem; Heine-Geldern, ibidem.
9. Hyeryung Choi: *Die Veränderung der Familienstruktur in Korea,* dissertation at the University of Gießen, Germany, 1981, published 1983, Frankfurt/Main, Haag und Herchen, p. 5.
10. Hyeryung Choi, ibid., p. 19; Kwang-Kyu Lee: "Development of the Korean Kinship System with special Reference to the Influence from China," in: *Bulletin of the Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica,* no. 59, Nankang/Taipeh (Taiwan), 1985, The Institute of Ethnology Academia Sinica, p. 168.
11. Hyeryung Choi, ibid., p. 10 f.
12. Kwang-Kyu Lee, ibid., pp. 164–166.
13. Yung-Chung Kim: *Women of Korea. A History from Ancient Times to 1945,* Seoul, Korea, 1976, Ewha Womens University Press.
14. Kwang-Kyu Lee, ibid., p. 180 f.; Hyeryung Choi, ibid., pp. 9–19.
15. Eui-Ok Kim: *Die Entwicklung der sozialen und politischen Organisation der Frauen in Korea bis Ende des 2. Weltkrieges,* dissertation at the University of Marburg, Germany, 1979, published: Hochschulschrift Marburg, Universität, Fachbereich Gesellschaftswissenschaft, p. 34.
16. Eui-Ok Kim, ibid., p 33 f.; Hyeryung Choi, ibid., p. 5.
17. Hung-Youn Cho: *Koreanischer Schamanismus—eine Einführung,* Hamburg 1982, Hamburgisches Museum für Völkerkunde, p. 90 f.
18. Alan Carter Covell: *Ecstasy. Shamanism in Korea,* Seoul/Korea-Elizabeth/New Jersey, 1983, Hollym International Corporation, p. 10 f.; and Ch'oe Kilsong: "Male and Female in Korean Folk Belief," in: *Asian Folklore Studies,* Nagoya, Korea, 1984, Nanzan University, p. 230 f.
19. Laurel Kendall: *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits. Women in Korean Ritual Life,* Honolulu 1985, University of Hawaii Press, p. 25 f.
20. Eui-Ok Kim, ibid., p. 34; Han-Kuk Sasang ui Wontschou: *Ursprung des koreanischen Denkens,* Seoul 1973.

21. A. C. Covell, ibid., p. 11, and illustrations; Hung-Youn Cho, ibid., p. 113; Laurel Kendall, ibid., p. 27.
22. Laurel Kendall, ibidem; Hung-Youn Cho, ibidem, and: „Mudang. Der Werdegang koreanischer Schamanen am Beispiel der Lebensgeschichte des Yi Chi-san", in: *Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde,* no. 93, Hamburg 1983, OAG.
23. A basically important work on this topic is: Mircea Eliade: *Shamanism,* Princeton, 1964, N. J., Bollingen Series (first edition, Paris 1951); and most important for shamanism in Korea: Hung-Youn Cho, *(Mudang),* ibidem; and Young-Sook Kim Harvey: *Six Korean Women. The Socialisation of Shamans,* St. Paul, USA, 1979, West Publishing Company.
24. Laurel Kendall, ibidem.

7

The Islands of Japan: Women's Cultures of the South and North

For Amaterasu, Sun Goddess of Japan, and Kamui Fuchi, Fire Goddess of the Ainu

7.1 Japan's Shinto Religion

The female shamanism of the "Mudang" in Korea resembles that of the "Miko" in Japan. Going back to the most ancient times, the Miko were dominant in the original religion of Japan, Shinto. Within Shinto, three main eras are delineated, eras that correspond to the development of Japanese culture:[1] from the Neolithic up until the Iron Age (4500 B.C.E.–600 C.E.) there was the original Shinto, in which the Miko were the tribal priestesses and inherited their office; they held the entire spectrum of religious practices in their hands. From the Middle Ages until Japan's modern period (7th–19th century) this was followed by formalized, or State Shinto, which accompanied many centuries of forced centralization and patriarchalization in Japan. The formalized State Shinto of the emperors and officials was separated from popular Shinto, which became a not officially recognized folk-religion. In both, women were employed as Miko shamans, although not exclusively in the state-run Shinto. There, men were made official priests, but they bore

female names and wore women's clothes.[2] In the course of the intensified centralization process of the nationalistic, misogynist Meiji Restoration and Period (1868–1912), women were excluded from all officially recognized priestly functions and the office of Miko in popular Shinto lost many of its duties. State Shinto was "cleansed" of all magic and religious elements and was dedicated to State ceremonial functions only. It developed to justify imperial rule and was often forced upon Japanese people and colonized subjects. With popular Shinto, on the other hand, banning the old customs was not able to exterminate them. At present, as a result of the breakdown of the power of the Japanese throne after World War II, State Shinto has become a private matter for the emperor and his family. At the same time, new religions are taken up by the people; these are very often started by women, who are thus resorting back to the old ways of the Miko. Only recently, the Shinto priesthood was opened up to women, and there are now about 10 percent female priests of the total body of priests.[3]

In the time of the original Shinto, women held, as Miko, the highest positions. Chinese and Japanese histories that chronicle this epoch list numerous reigning queens who were also shamans with charismatic authority. There is evidence that there was a queen Himiko as late as the 3rd century C.E.; this was not a unique figure, but probably the last in a long line of shaman-queens with the hereditary title of "Himiko." From the Neolithic until the 3rd century C.E., the female priesthood in the original Shinto was equivalent to the highest ranked sovereignty in various queens' realms, and is the basis of many researchers' straightforward argument for matriarchy in ancient Japan.[4]

This sacred queenship followed the pattern that we have already identified as a classically matriarchal model: the highest religious authority was a woman, whose brother or son served as her delegated representative in administrative matters, a task that today we would call "profane," or secular, although matriarchal cultures made no distinction between sacred and secular. The priestess-queen rarely allowed herself to be seen by the outside world, but was attended by "a thousand women servants" (Wei-Chih writing on the Himiko). These thousand women were certainly not servants, but rather royal advisors who formed the queen's network connecting her to the matriarchal clans of her people. The priestess-queen who officiated in the original Shinto therefore stood in close relationship to the goddess, especially the Sun Goddess Amaterasu as giver of light, life and fertility, whom she worshipped and by whom she was possessed in shamanic ritual. In a state of ecstasy the priestess-queen was the embodiment of the goddess herself. This reflects the Japanese concept expressed by the word "Kami" for a deity, as this term can mean both "serving the deity" and "being the deity"—and these two meanings are not

distinguished from each other.[5] The brother of this sacred queen was the one who made sure that the divine oracle was applied in practice.

With the patriarchalization of Japan, which at its beginning saw the rise of the royal Yamato clan and the unifying of much of Japan under its hegemony by military force (Kofun Period, 300–710 C.E.), State Shinto was strictly separated from popular Shinto. State Shinto appropriated many ideas from the original, popular Shinto and masculinized them. Now it was the emperor who acted not only as the political ruler, but also as the high-priest of official Shinto and the chief of the royal ancestor worship. The Sun Goddess Amaterasu was seen as the tutelary goddess and ancestress of the royal clan, and the emperor—as her direct descendant—became a manifestation of God. One of his daughters was allowed to become the "Saiô," or cult princess of the imperial ancestor temple; however, she no longer possessed any political rights and lived a cloistered life as a virgin at the State Shrine of Ise.[6]

In original, matriarchal Shinto, not only queens became priestesses, rather, all woman did. Any woman who completed the rites of initiation possessed the title of Miko, and could perform spontaneous rituals—all the more so if she were a mother, or clan mother, who celebrated the familial rites for the well-being of her children or the entire clan. Only later did this generalized sacred function of all women become differentiated into roles like diviner, sacred midwife, necromancy priestess (which, in ancient times, meant going into a trance to contact the spirits of the ancestors), and dancer, musician, singer (Geisha) (Ill. 6). The sacred women who served only one goddess were called "Himmo" or "Shômo," which means "divine mother."[7] In this context the multiple meanings of the ancient Japanese word "Imo" are very interesting: sister, love, and spouse are all signified by this word. This usage refers back to the close relationship between sister and brother in matriarchal cultures, as is reflected in the situation of the Himiko queens, who as a rule had their brothers at their sides as co-rulers and perhaps also as lovers.

7.2 Sister and brother in the Ryukyu Islands

The spiritual ascendancy of sisters and the close sister-brother relationship in Japanese culture is not just history. Japanese anthropologists studying the Ryukyu Islands to which Okinawa belongs have researched relationships that provide a tangible image of life in ancient Japan. The Ryukyu Islands spread out in a chain from the southern tip of Japan to Taiwan. On a clear day it is possible to sail from Taiwan to Japan along these islands without having to use navigational instruments (see

Illustration 6. Japanese Geisha women in traditional costumes. Photo: Susan G. Carter

map 4). Because of the remoteness of island life, traditional ways of life have been preserved that are characteristic of life in ancient Japan. In fact, until the last century the high-priestess, who was the king's sister and held the title of "Kikoe no Ogimi," was considered to be a goddess, as were the other shrine priestesses. This indicates that the king's sister was actually the regent, a great, charismatic figure who protected the king and possessed a high degree of power in the realm.

Such sister-brother alliances were not limited to noble women; all the women of the Ryukyu Islands were worshipped by their brothers as "Onari-gami," which means "living soul of the sister," or "sister-goddess." When the men went out to sea they always took a couple of hairs from their sisters' heads, as these women were simultaneously priestesses and tutelary goddesses for all the members of their clans.[8] As the oarsmen of the Ryukyus sing:

> "Our own sister, you goddess, you have come to protect us.
> The soul that lives in our sister will become a beautiful butterfly,
> an extraordinarily beautiful butterfly."

The butterfly is both a messenger from the Otherworld and a symbol for the sister-goddess. After all, she officiated as family priest at the clan tomb, and in her state of shamanic possession an ancestor's soul would enter into her body, giving counsel and direction to the clan through the voice of this clan sister. Ancestor cult and female shamanism are clearly related here.[9] The unity of belief between the nobles and the people is typical of matriarchal societies, for the nobles are people from the same tribe, rather than conquering foreigners.

The Onari-gami belief encountered in the Ryukyus indicates that parts of the ancient Japanese matriarchal culture must have come from the south. Japan's oldest and extremely long cultural epoch is the Jomon era (16,000–300 B.C.E.), when gatherers and hunters came from the north via the island of Sakhalin, lying at the mouth of the Siberian River Amur. In the Middle Jomon phase (4500–2000 B.C.E.), these people developed permanent settlements, the first agriculture (arid rice-growing), beautiful ceramics and a multitude of artistic goddess figurines (the "dogu figurines"). These were most probably made by women, while the men built stone circles in the form of sun-clocks. All this characterizes this phase as Neolithic, and it was Japan's classical matriarchal epoch. In the Late Jomon phase (2000–300 B.C.E.), the population began to decrease, but the people's artistic abilities and sensibilities remained.[10] Today, descendants of the Jomon people still live on the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido: the Ainu, the oldest indigenous people of Japan, who have no patriarchal customs and foster an egalitarian society.[11]

In the following Yayoi Period (300 B.C.E.-300 C.E.), the cultural isolation of the Jomon Period ended with the arrival of immigrants from the south. Foreign people with fully developed agriculture reached Japan and brought with them new material technologies: diversified forms of agriculture combined with hunting and fishing, continuously used settlements, refined pottery and artifacts of ritual use, and bronze metallurgy. The bronze artifacts include weapons (spears and swords), bells and mirrors. We have already come across the Yueh people, whose culture still is seen today in the Yao, Tai and Miao of South China, and here they played a central role (see chapter 5). From South China, the matriarchal clans and tribes of the maritime Yueh culture settled the Philippines and Taiwan, sailed along the coast to South Korea, and along the Ryukyu Islands to South Japan (see map 4). Additionally, from the northern Chinese mainland, and from Korea, came immigrants who were fleeing the patriarchalization of eastern China by the Han people (480–221 B.C.E.). There they encountered the Ainu, from the north, with whom they never interbred. Although the Ainu retreated farther north, there was little conflict between the cultures in most of Japan. The newcomers brought the rice paddy culture and the cultivation of garden produce; they domesticated animals and built the great megalithic constructions of Korea and Japan. With the Yayoi peoples of Japan, the East Asian proportion was most heavily represented, which related them to the oldest Southeast Asian peoples.[12]

Although during the Yayoi Period the society changed quite rapidly—it became agriculturally based and socially stratified, and engaged in armed conflict over land and resources—sacred queens still played an eminent role, and the culture remained matriarchal.[13] Around 300 C.E., the early patriarchal Kofun Period began (300–710 C.E.). According to Chinese chronicles, conquering groups of mounted Siberian-Altaic warriors, carrying iron weapons, came across Korea into South Japan; by means of subjugating matriarchal peoples they succeeded in founding the Yamatai Kingdom. More recently, scholars have suggested that the Yamato kingship in Japan developed on its own, when several Yayoi chiefdoms were unified by force under the Yamato hegemony and a centralized throne was installed. However it came to beds, patriarchy had arrived.[14]

That period also marked the split between official religion and that of the people. Much later Japan, through the introduction first of Buddhism and then of Confucianism as state doctrine, would—like Korea—become a "Chinese cultural province," with the commensurate suppression of women.[15]

7.3 Matriarchal mythology

Viewed against the background of the Yayoi epoch it is not surprising to find, in the mythology of South Japan, elements that point to other peoples of Southeast Asia.[16] The dominant note is once again the sister-brother theme, for example, in the story of "Izanami" and "Izanagi," the primordial sibling-pair who created Japan itself. Standing on a heavenly suspension bridge, Izanagi, the Divine Brother, aims his "spear" into the roiling primal waters. His Divine Sister, Izanami, consequently gives birth to the islands of Japan. Later on, Izanami gives birth to the goddesses of the rivers and the sea, of the wind, the trees, the mountains, the fields of grain: all earthly, agrarian deities. The way she populates Japan marks her as Mother Earth, while Izanagi takes on the character of Father Sky, allowing the sun and the moon to be formed out of his eyes. But the primordial mother Izanami dies giving birth to the fire god, and so becomes the goddess of death of the underworld. This clearly reflects a cyclic vegetation myth, in which the goddess of plants goes down to the underworld (fire will burn vegetation) and cyclically returns each year.

In the further unfolding of this myth we see Izanagi rebelling against this cyclical law of life and death. He goes down to the underworld where, in spite of the interdiction against it, he looks upon Izanami, the goddess of death, then magically escapes, avoiding the consequences. This means he wants to look death in the eye without dying, which goes against the cosmic law of growth and decay that even Izanami obeys. Izanami is enraged, and now imposes the law of life and death upon humans: she wants to cause a thousand people to die every day. Izanagi fights this, erecting 1500 birth huts so that more people will come back from the realm of the dead into a new life. But here his great wisdom runs into a dead end, because only Izanami, the "Great Goddess of the Realm of the Dead," can send children up out of the underworld to be reborn. Here we see the tension between Izanami and Izanagi, added by the patriarchal authors of this myth—with the main target being the old matriarchal belief about life, death and rebirth. There is evidence that the great power of the male partner, Izanagi, who as creator-god is here faced off against the goddess, was a later addition, and that Izanami, originally the great triple goddess of heaven, earth and the underworld, gave birth to the cosmos out of herself. In this version, Izanagi would have been no more than the brother-lover at her side. In any case, even in the patriarchalized myth she is portrayed as the giver of law, while he is the transgressor of law.[17] Various versions of this myth are to be found in the Ryukyu Islands, including Okinawa; on Taiwan; among the Miao, Tai and Yao in South China; among the Thai, Khmer and other peoples of Indochina; and on the large Indonesian islands and the small

Polynesian islands. These are the same areas once populated by the Neolithic matriarchal agricultural peoples.[18]

The theme of the sister as law giver—determining cosmic and human order—and her brother as transgressor of law also turns up in Japanese mythology in the tale of the Sun Goddess Amaterasu and her brother Susanoo, and with Princess Toyotama and Prince Hoori. It gives us a glimpse into matriarchal queens' culture-creating activities and their occasional problems with "fractious," patriarchally influenced brother-regents.[19] If Izanami is the ancestral mother of Japan, Amaterasu, the most important popular goddess, must have been considered a sort of intermediate ancestress of many matriarchal tribes in the time before she was appropriated by the early patriarchal emperors, who claimed her exclusively as the ancestress of the imperial line. She was regarded as mistress of the world, which she had made livable using typically matriarchal arts:[20] she cultivated the heavenly narrow rice paddies and heavenly long rice paddies and annually tasted the rice. She loved to linger with her women, weaving divine clothing in the sacred weaving hall. The nights were spent in her celestial rock cave. Her brother, Susanoo, was the master of storms and the sea, that is, of untamed nature. His visits to the heavenly dwelling of his sister were accompanied with so much noise that it set off an earthquake; this caused the mountains to shake and the rivers to foam. So Amaterasu always met him very cautiously. After a contest with his sister, which he won, he was in such high spirits that he completely lost his self control: he ravaged her rice fields, destroyed her irrigation canals and wrecked havoc with everything. This is a perfect picture of the typhoons that rage over Japan, with their cloud-bursts, thunder, and lightning. But Susanoo's impudence didn't stop there: he skinned a horse and threw the cadaver through the roof beams—whose tiles he had already destroyed—of the sacred weaving hall, where Amaterasu was sitting with her women. They died of shock, and the sun goddess, full of pain, and bearing bitterness against him, bolted herself inside her celestial cave dwelling and refused to come out. A terrible, endless eclipse of the sun shadowed the earth.

This part of the myth most likely goes back to the political transition when the early patriarchal horsemen from Korea crossed into Japan, ravaged the farmers' fields and besieged the matriarchal queens.[21] The myth demonstrates that they did away with the regency of the clan mothers (Amaterasu's women "died"), but the sun goddess was so deeply rooted in popular belief that the invaders couldn't get rid of her.[22] To the contrary, the sun goddess defended herself with a darkness that enveloped the world, and as the story continues it is very interesting to note that at that point, only a Miko, a divine woman shaman, could help: crowds of gods gathered at Amaterasu's cave, but they prayed and begged and lamented for nothing. The out-

raged goddess wouldn't come out. Then they had all the roosters crow together, the rooster being the sacred sun creature who wakes up the sun every morning. But they still couldn't get her to emerge. Finally, the goddess-shaman Ama no Uzume was called. At the cave she performed a ritual, droning dance in which she finally surrendered to erotic ecstasy, first baring her breasts and finally throwing off all her clothes. This made the crowd of gods break out in laughter, and the roar of their laughter was so loud that Amaterasu finally stuck her head a little ways out of the cave. "What's going on?" she asked, and the Miko answered, that the gods had found a better mistress than Amaterasu and they were celebrating their luck. With that, Amaterasu pushed aside the sliding door a little to get a better look at this new mistress. Just then the god of strength shoved it completely open and Amaterasu's brilliant light shone. She looked in the sacred mirror the gods held in front of her, and there indeed she saw the new mistress: herself!

In this myth it is made clear that only the Miko, by means of her ecstatic dance, is able to bring the sun out of her dark cave; she can do this because she is familiar with this matriarchal goddess. The figure of Miko, resonating with eroticism, reflects a very ancient layer of the Amaterasu myth. Probably the priestess of the sun goddess was herself named Amaterasu, performing all the sun goddess's actions in festival rituals, and her brother-spouse was Susanoo. In this way, she was, at least during the rituals, a living goddess for the people, and they worshipped her under the title of "Your Highness the Shaman." The worship of the shaman as goddess during the performance of her official duties is still customary in the Ryukyu Islands; and in Japan itself, solely the shaman families who lived near the sacred shrines remained matrilineal and matrilocal, almost up to the present day. In these families the role of shrine-shaman was inherited, passing directly from mother to daughter; even the wandering female shamans came from these villages near the shrines.[23] However, at the Shrine of Ise things went differently: after the traditional religion was transformed into State Shinto, there an imperial daughter was installed as Amaterasu's cult priestess, shamanic rituals were no longer tolerated, and the cult became more and more artificial.

Nevertheless, popular worship of Amaterasu has never ceased; today she is still worshipped at numerous shrines all over Japan, and every year more than six million people visit her Shrine at Ise.[24] The traditional religion also lives on in images and customs. These turn out to be much more layered, much richer than the rituals of the tame state religion. These surviving elements connect Japan's lower classes not only with the neighboring cultures on the southern islands, but also with the remaining matriarchal peoples of East Asia. It isn't coincidental that the myth of the sun disappearing and coming back with the help of a female shaman or a

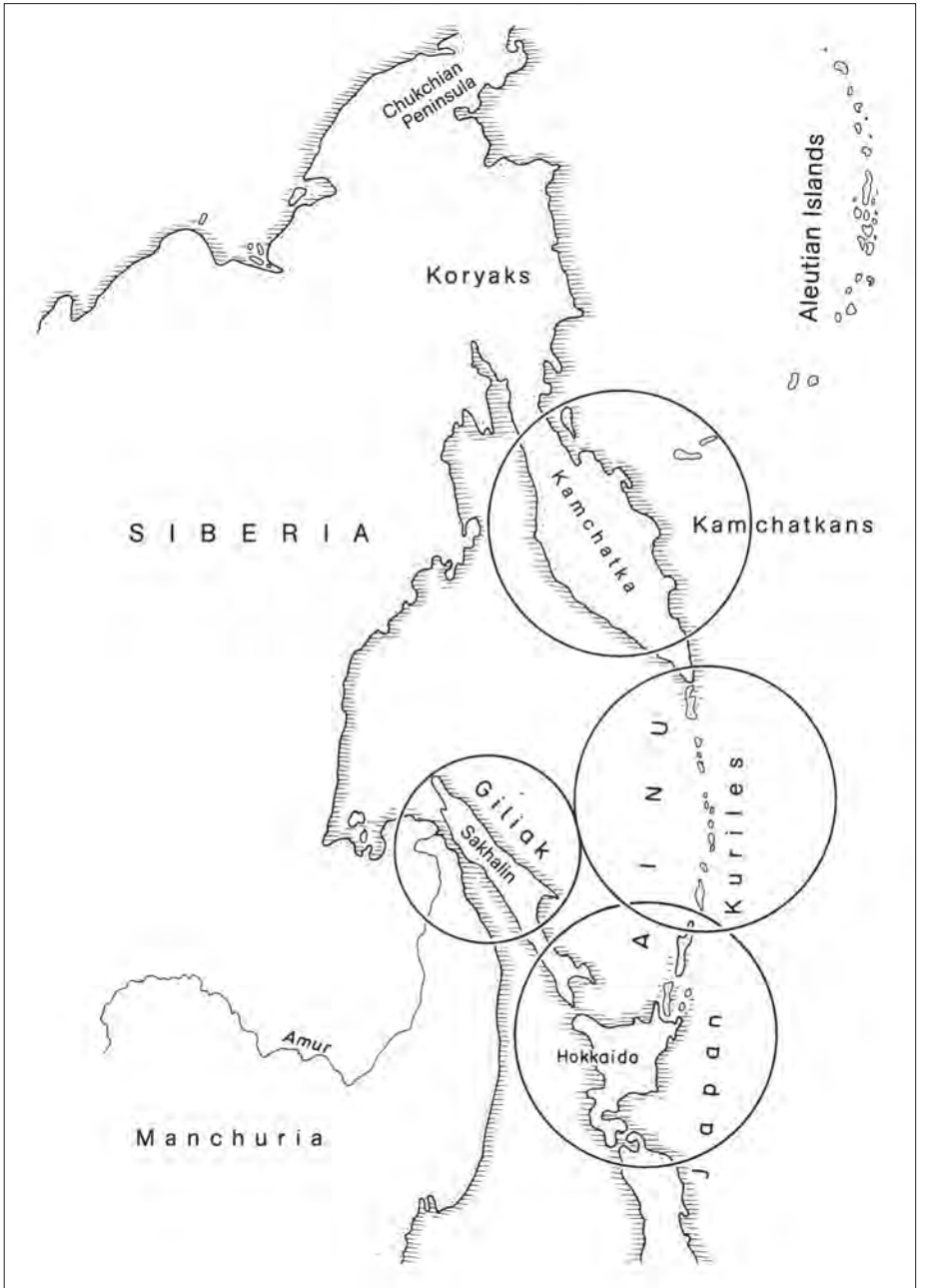
rooster turns up among the Miao in South China and the Khasi of Assam.[25] The same goes for farmers worshipping clan and farmyard goddesses, who are also their ancestral mothers.

A very ancient earth and forest deity is the goddess "Yama no kami" or "Yamahime," the "Mountain Goddess" or "Mountain Princess." Foresters in particular picture her as a beautiful woman bent on having an erotic adventure, and there was a whole array of erotic traditions that were celebrated in forests and on mountains. The cult of the mountain goddess was also associated with guiding the journey of dead souls, performing rites for fertility, divining how good the harvest would be. And it included the dangerous stone-throwing contests between groups of young men, in which the mountain goddess picked one or the other as a sacrificial victim for herself. Japan's sacred mountain, "Fuji Yama" ("Fire Mountain"), is home to a goddess by the name of "Sengen-Sama."[26] This tradition is connected to the cults of other great mountain goddesses all over East Asia. Only with the most recent wave of western-influenced industrialism in Japan have these traditions lost influence and died out.

7.4 The Ainu in Northern Japan

Northern Japan is the home of descendants of Japan's oldest indigenous people, the *Ainu*. Today their territory includes the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido, the southern tip of Sakhalin Island, the Kuriles chain of islands, and the southern tip of the Kamchatka peninsula (see map 5). Hokkaido and the northern islands are, unlike southern Japan, surrounded by cold ocean currents, resulting in a sub-arctic climate with long winters that last from November to May. Amidst pine and birch forests, salmon fill the rivers, deer and large brown bears live on the mountains, and seals, walrus and whales swim in the sea. These are the Ainu's valuable goods, whose traditional lifestyle consisted, until recently, of hunting, fishing and gathering. The region is too cold for extensive farming, so Ainu women have nothing but sporadically grown, meager crops to supplement the meat diet with.[27] In fact, many aspects of the Ainu hunter-gatherer culture correlate with those of Paleolithic peoples, and we can use this living example to find out whether this ancient cultural epoch was matriarchal or not. Both school books and scientific treatises alike characterize the Paleolithic as being stereotypically patriarchal.

Evidence that we are not mistaken in asserting Ainu culture's connection to the Late Paleolithic Period, or to the Early Jomon Period (16,500–4500 B.C.E.), is provided by the archaeology of Japan. In this cultural era, the indigenous Ainu


Chukchian Peninsula
Koryaks
Aleutian Islands
SIBERIA
Kamchatka
Kamchatkans
Gilyak
Sakhalin
AINU
Kuriles
Amur
Hokkaido
Japan
Manchuria

Map 5

populated almost all of Japan. The Early Jomon Period belongs chronologically, as well as in terms of its techniques, to the Neolithic era, but its economy and lifestyle remained back in the Paleolithic hunter-gatherer culture.[28] In spite of their partial suppression by the patriarchal Japanese, and their bitter fight for survival, the Ainu maintained these traditional lifeways until recently. At the end, they lived on Hokkaido on reservations, packed together in a rigid conservatism, until Japanese settlers took over their last hunting grounds—a history much like that of the North American First Peoples. In today's process of relentless capitalist globalization they are in grave danger—as are North American indigenous peoples and the Inuit—of losing what remains of their ethnic identities, in spite of their significant efforts to fight to reclaim their lands and culture.[29]

They are a very ancient Asiatic people with an ancient language and culture. They populated Northeast Asia even before the invasions of what today are the Mongolian peoples, with whom they have little in common. They are light-skinned, with round eyes that lack the extra fold, and the men, unlike the Japanese, wear flowing white beards. The Japanese use of the derogatory nickname "hairy Ainu" refers to this custom. Anthropologists consider them to be of Indo-European type, comparable to the Caucasian, an Indo-European people who live in the Mount Caucasus far away in Western Asia at the Black Sea. This raises several questions: are they an eastern branch of the light-skinned ancient Asiatic peoples from whom Indo-Europeans descended? Indo-Europeans are supposed to have come from their original territory in Central Asia, and didn't arrive in Europe until relatively late, in the waves of migration that broke over Europe from the east. Could the Ainu be a remnant of this original Asian peoples, surviving unchanged on remote East Asian islands for a very long time, while Northern and Central Asia were being occupied by the spreading waves of Mongolian migration?[30] These questions will be discussed later.

On the Kuriles (Russian Federation) the Ainu have been best able to retain their traditions, as there they have not had to defend themselves against Japanese influence all this time. The traditions practised by the Kuriles Ainu provide the best window on the original Ainu culture.[31] Here we see a society in which the two genders are clearly separated, and where the women clearly have the upper hand. Their occupations, spiritual lives and even their genealogies are differentiated according to male and female. The men hunt and fish, and because of these occupations their social role, in terms of Paleolithic culture, is much exaggerated in most scholarly textbooks. In the case of the Japanese Ainu the men also occupied themselves with war against the Japanese who were displacing them; this war-making was not indigenous to Ainu culture and had the effect of partially patriarchalizing their social pat-

terns. In traditional Ainu culture women's important role is already expressed in the economy: as gatherers of wild fruit, managers of the sparse fields, collectors of firewood, providers of meals and clothing, and educators of the children they were not only in a position to be completely self-sufficient, but they also provided the men with regular nourishment—since hunting success was more or less based on happenstance.[32]

Ritual matters are also clearly divided: men practise rites associated with hunting and fishing, while shamanism, with its whole range of practices, belongs to women. Women shamans are "Tusu Ainu"; they invoke the ancestors, and are healers as well as bearers of Ainu culture, who recite the myths and epics while dancing. Their guiding spirits surround them, and through "Kamui Fuchi," their most important goddess, they are connected to other deities. For this they use no temple, but rather a sacred place in the open air, or the hearth at the center of their homes. Kamui Fuchi is the goddess of fire, who lives at the hearth and keeps humanity alive with her benevolent warmth.[33]

Even genealogy is differentiated: women trace their lineage through the female line, men follow the male lineage. The kin-based support system only works along the lines of the female or male lineage; this contributes to a strong cohesion among women on the one hand, and men on the other. The apparent symmetry masks an imbalance, however, as strict rules of exogamy pertain to the mother's line, but not the father's. The women of the same clan wear secret belts under their clothing, which no man may see. These belts are a sign of clan relationship and solidarity; magic powers are attributed to them. A man cannot marry a woman who wears the same belt as his mother.[34] This demonstrates that the women of the mother's lineage are definitely regarded as being more closely related to each other than the men of the father's line. Since the mother's line is more important, it is not the father but the maternal uncle who often acts as the primary male family member. Attention to the male line is a fairly late addition, is relatively unimportant and not at all patriarchal.[35] All this permits us to make the assumption that the Ainu once practised undiluted matrilinearity.

Many other cultural practices point to the pre-eminence of woman: she initiates courtship and it is she—in conformity with clan rules—who chooses her husband. Lovers are also available to her. A charming story tells how a young Ainu woman doesn't hesitate to court a foreigner, a European ethnologist.[36] After getting married, according to the oldest tradition, a husband moved into his mother-in-law's house, and she would adopt him. (This is an example of pure matrilocality.) In later times, a house was built for the wife, near her mother's house, and then the husband would join her in her own house (uxorilocality). Later still,

when the Ainu came into contact with patriarchal Japanese, the woman remained in her parents' house for a couple of years until giving birth to her first child, and after that period moved into her husband's house. In the Kuriles the woman's partner still doesn't live with his wife, but visits her in her house.[37] It is in the household that the important position of women is expressed, in that they direct the men, who fetch and carry for them.[38] Before men undertake anything, they have to get the agreement of the women, but in women's events such as pregnancy, birth, and death of a female clan member, the women keep strictly to themselves.[39]

Some researchers wonder why these women have achieved such ascendancy over their men, men who are otherwise unwilling to obey the direction of their own chiefs! But right here we have the non-patriarchal, non-hierarchical pattern, because women have always been the keepers of the ancient clan equality principles. Robert Briffault notes laconically that the confusion stems rather from these researchers' own biased perspective, who can't accept that the man has not been the lord and master since the beginning of time. If women had held no other position than slaves or chattel since Paleolithic times, it would be impossible to imagine how they, as descendants of the surviving original peoples, could have achieved such high social status. Just as dryly, he asserts that the theory of Paleolithic monogamy is a purely theological fiction (Adam and Eve) and thus utterly indefensible. There is no known case of an original people practising monogamy.[40]

7.5 Paleolithic worldview

Much in the Ainu society can help us to better understand the lifestyle of Paleolithic gatherers and hunters, even if the former no longer use stone tools and have moved from caves into wooden houses. Their worldview is still an archaic one: the most important clans (all of them matrilinies) are named after the great bear, considered to be the mountain deity, and after the killer whale, regarded as the ocean deity. Like other animals, these are regarded as deities in animal form, and are worshipped as totem animals (tribal or clan animals). If an animal is killed in the hunt, the men ritually honor it with songs, and present it with wood-carvings. The Ainu believe that the animal is happy to leave its fleshly body behind if its spirit is loaded up with human gifts, especially songs, when it returns back home to its divine animal ancestors. Then the animal will be marvelled at by its animal ancestors. If, however, it comes back to its ancestors without human offerings, crying and complaining, they will be cross, refusing to send any more animal descendants for the hunt. These beliefs, going back probably as far as the Paleolithic, are held in common with all the hunting peoples of Siberia and Northern Asia.[41]

Paying homage to slaughtered animals is derived from the practice of honoring human dead; humans, like animals, receive ritual burial with much song and abundant provisions. The job of caring for human ancestors was, and is, done by women, who hope to receive souls to give birth to. The site of this ancestor worship is the open hearth at the center of the house, following the ancient Ainu belief that the hearth is the gate to the Otherworld. It is probable that the dead used to be buried in the ground under the hearth. At the same time, this fireplace, built with its four corners pointing in the compass directions, embodies a sacred image of the world. In highly ritualized Ainu life, the house is the spiritual center; at the center of the house itself is the hearth, and at the hearth we find the woman, the owner of the house. The woman, especially the female shaman, is the social and spiritual center; through her, household rituals establish the connection to the ancestors and the deities. In every ritual Kamui Fuchi, the goddess of the hearth fire, is worshipped and called upon; without the co-operation of this divine ancestress, the great-grandmother of all women, no celebration is possible. In daily life the Ainu take good care of this fire goddess, who resides at the center of their world. In the evening she is covered with ashes, and then she "goes to sleep"; in the morning she is awakened by blowing puffs of air. The fire on the hearth must never go out; if this misfortune would nevertheless befall a keeper of the fire, it would be her greatest shame.[42]

The Mongol peoples of Siberia and Northern Asia also have a sacred hearth in the center of their huts and yurts; again, the women are the fire-keepers. And the women know the following prayer to the fire goddess, a prayer that might be similar to those of the Ainu women: [43]

> "I bow down and bring sacrificial offerings to You, my mother, Fire Queen,
> who arose when the fatherly Sky still had no cloud,
> when the Earth Mother, Ertügen, was no bigger than a footprint.
>
> With the breastbone of a long-horned sheep I sacrifice this offering to You, my mother, Fire Queen,
> who arose when the oceans and rivers were no more than muddy pools,
> when the powerful, guardian mass of the mountains was no more than a little hillock."

After the prayer, Kamui Fuchi helps the shaman to dance herself into possession. An ancestral spirit or a divine animal spirit possesses her and ushers her into ecstasy; in this state of possession she passes on messages from the ancestors, spirits and

deities. Or she sings the elaborate oral epics passed down through the shamanic tradition, long, beautiful songs of Ainu goddesses, and of the noble deeds of Ainu heroes. Or she dances in the open air: when she dances quietly, the wind is soft, but if she dances wildly, the wind turns into a storm. Indeed, the wind goddess does just as the shamans do: she dances on the mountain peaks and engenders ocean storms. But when the wind goddess stays, like the shaman, occupied with some task at home, the weather stays calm. Here is the ancient function of female shamans as weather-makers.[44]

The Japanese word "Kami" for a divine being comes from the Ainu word "Kamui"; the Ainu goddess Kamui Fuchi gave the volcano Fujiyama ("Fuchi Yama") part of its name—the Ainu worshipped this mountain as a goddess long before the Japanese arrived. In other ways as well, the Ainu pantheon is largely female: another eminent goddess is Spider Woman, who not only originated the yarns to be woven, but—as goddess of birth—spins the threads of life itself. She, too, is a goddess of the women shamans, and when she appears in the shamans' epics she is a goddess, superior to all the men. In addition to Mother Earth, who provides the forests' plenitude, and whose daughters and sons are the animals—such as bear god and wolf goddess, which serve as role models for hunters—the water goddess of the oceans and rivers is a great, nourishing mother. She saves humanity from hunger: in the guise of an orca whale, from time to time she impels a whale to wash up on the beach; the people can live a long time from this food. She taught the men to hunt and fish, and to practice these arts respectfully; the owl god keeps watch to make sure her rules are followed. Furthermore, the crow goddess still brings oracular messages and prophecies to the people.[45]

The Ainu economy, lifestyle and worldview have several parallels with the Mongol peoples of Northern Asia and Siberia, such as the *Gilyaks* on Sakhalin Island, the people on the great Kamchatka Peninsula, the northern *Koryaks*, and the *Chukchi* on the Northeastern Asian peninsula, separated from Alaska only by the narrow Bering Straits (see map 5). The inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands—which also stretch over to North America—practice related customs.

During the Paleolithic Ice Ages, the two continents were connected by Asia's Chukchi Peninsula and Alaska's Seward Peninsula, just as the Aleutian Islands archipelago was connected to the Alaskan Peninsula. The geography provided a solid land bridge in both cases. Therefore, a theory has been developed in which it is assumed, but not proven, that the path of migration to North America led, for the gathering and hunting peoples who used them, over these two northern routes. Thus, says the theory, their culture was spread: from Siberia to Alaska and down the Canadian west coast, and from there across the continent to the Great Lakes

region. This Ice Age migration theory remains speculative because of the lack of Paleolithic data for Alaska and Canada; as a result, the theory about the "first American" coming across the Bering Straits is very shaky. Contact by migration between the two continents via these northern routes took place much later, probably in the Neolithic—as indicated by the spread of pottery. [46]

In light of these contacts, it is not surprising that today's Koryaks and Chukchi bear a remarkable physical and cultural resemblance to indigenous Northwest Coast peoples of North America. And in all these cultures, the women were of great importance.

7.6 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the cultural level:

- In a matriarchy, female shamans held the highest positions, as every queen was also the top shaman.
- Shamans were worshipped as goddesses in the process of carrying out their official function, because goddesses, gods, spirits, and ancestors spoke through them. Therefore the titles they held were often the names of goddesses.
- This shows that in matriarchal cultic practice, there was absolutely no separation between divine and human. Deities are not abstract, transcendent beings outside the realm of humans, but are, in nature and in humans, immanent powers.
- Hereditary shamans passed the role directly from mother to daughter (or from aunt to niece); shaman families lived apart at the sacred sites, and for a long time maintained the traditional matriarchal clan arrangement (as in Japan).
- In matriarchies, the sister is sacred to her brother. She is the rebirther of the ancestors, and as family shaman is the protector goddess of the clan. The two core emotional relationships are between mother and daughter, and sister and brother. All other emotional relationships are subordinate.

At the political level:

- Matriarchal queens have their sons or brothers as executive co-regents at their side; the brother is usually also the queen's spouse (this is not true for the population at large, but is frequent in royal families).

- Matriarchies are characterized by a congruence between the beliefs of the nobility and those of the people. Not until the emergence of conquering patriarchal societies did the dominators make use of the prevailing religious currents to consolidate their power (patriarchal state religions), while the people long maintained the traditional beliefs that were ignored by the rulers (matriarchal vernacular religion).

At the social level: (working hypotheses)

- The notion of Paleolithic monogamy and patriarchy is fictitious; social arrangements of gatherers and hunters were most probably a gender-separate society, with clear divisions between economic activities, genealogies (insofar as there is any evidence at all) and ritual practice (see the Ainu).
- In this type of gender-separate society women have an important position, in the sense that they are at the center.
- Based on an assumption of Paleolithic gender-separate societies, with women in a central position, it is easy to understand how they progressively evolved, without interruption, into classic Neolithic matriarchal social patterns. There is no counter-explanation as to how Neolithic matriarchies could have developed out of an alleged Paleolithic patriarchy.

Notes

1. Haruko Okana: *Die Stellung der Frau im Shinto,* Wiesbaden, Germany, 1976, Harrasowitz; and M. Eder: *Geschichte der japanischen Religion,* Nagoya, Japan, 1978, *Asian Folklore Studies,* Nanzan University, p. 218 f.
2. H. Okana, ibid., p. 23.
3. Susan Gail Carter: *Amaterasu-o-mi-kami: Past and Present. An Exploration of the Japanese Sun Goddess from a Western Feminist Perspective,* dissertation at the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco 2001, Ann Arbor/Michigan 2005, UMI Press, pp. 275–277, 287; and personal communication.
4. H. Okana, ibid, pp. 22 f., 27, 30, 35; Edward J. Kidder: *Himiko and Japan's Elusive Chiefdom of Yamatai: Archaeology, History and Mythology,* Honolulu 2007, University of Hawaii Press.
5. See to this concept M. Eder, ibid., pp. 1–49.
6. H. Okana, ibid., p. 27; Susan Carter, ibid., pp. 179–207; Kidder, ibidem.
7. H. Okana, ibid., pp. 18 f. and 38 f.
8. H. Okana, ibid., pp. 16 f. and 26–28.
9. M. Eder, ibid., p. 223 f.; and Toichi Mabuchi: *Spiritual Predominance of the Sister in Ryukyan Culture and Society,* A. Smith (ed.), Honolulu 1964, University of Hawaii Press; and the Japanese researchers O. Sakima, A. Yamaji, T. Nakayama, T. Hora, all quoted in Okana and Eder, ibid.

10. Susan Carter, *Amaterasu-o-mi-kami: Past and Present,* ibid., pp. 87–99.
11. J. M. Kitagawa: "Prehistoric Background of Japanese Religion," in: *History of Religion,* vol. 2, Chicago 1963, University of Chicago Press, p. 304 f.
12. Kitagawa, ibid., p. 307; Eberhard *(Lokalkulturen),* ibid., p. 418 f.; and U. Pauly: „Japan und die Kultur aus dem Süden", in: *Beiträge zur Japanischen Ethnogenese,* Kreiner (ed.), Bonn 1980, Japanologisches Seminar der Universität Bonn; in regard to matriarchy see p. 74 f., in regard to the Yueh see pp. 79, 119.
13. Susan Carter, *Amaterasu-o-mi-kami: Past and Present,* ibid., pp. 142–174.
14. See C. and A. Covell: *Japan's Hidden History. Korean Impact on Japanese Culture,* Elizabeth/New Jersey and Seoul/Korea 1984, Hollym International; Kitagawa, ibid., p. 310; Eder, ibid., p. 268 f.; Susan Carter: *Amaterasu-o-mi-kami: Past and Present,* ibid., pp. 179–182.
15. Eder, ibid., p. 279.
16. Taryo Obayashi: "The Origins of Japanese Mythology," in: *Acta Asiatica,* no. 31, Tokyo 1977, T h Gakkai, pp. 1–23; Pauly, ibid., pp. 78–80.
17. Pauly, ibid, pp. 78–80; H. Okana, ibid., pp. 71–73.
18. Pauly, ibid., pp. 78–90.
19. The myths of Amaterasu were written down in the late 600s and early 700s C.E., but her oral myths were at least 2000 years old when they were first recorded; see: Susan Gail Carter: *Amaterasu-o-mi-kami: Past and Present,* ibidem, pp. 64–86; and "The Matristic Roots of Japan and the Emergence of the Japanese Sun Goddess, Amaterasu-o-mi-kami," in: H. Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* Toronto 2009, Inanna Publications, York University.
20. See for the following Odette Brühl: "Japanese Mythology," in: *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology,* London-New York 1974, Hamlyn Publishing Broup Ltd., p. 409; and A. Wedemeyer: „Das Verbergen der Sonnengottheit in der Felsenhöhle", in: *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens,* Tokyo 1935, Seishi-Bunsha.
21. See also for the interpretation of this myth: Eder, ibid., pp. 225 and 266; Okana, ibid., pp. 73–81.
22. Over the course of Japan's history, this ancient myth was repeatedly given new, historicizing interpretations; for example, at the dawn of the Yamato clans' dominance it was glossed as symbolizing the unsuccessful revolts by the enemies of the Imperial Court.
23. Regarding matrilinearity and matrilocality in Japan see: Briffault, ibid., vol. 1–3 (index: "Japan"); for shaman families see: Eder, ibid., p. 220; Okana, ibid., pp. 32–34.
24. See Susan Gail Carter, "The Matristic Roots of Japan and the Emergence of the Japanese Sun Goddess, Amaterasu-o-mi-kami," in: H. Goettner-Abendroth (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* ibidem.
25. Taryo Obayashi: „Die Amaterasu-Mythe im alten Japan und die Sonnenfinsternismythe in Südostasien", in: *Ethos* no. 25, Stockholm 1960, Etnografiska Museet.
26. Nelly Naumann: „Yama no Kami—die japanische Berggottheit", in: *Asian Folklore Studies,* no. 22, Nagoya, Japan, 1963, Nanzan University, pp. 133–366; O. Karow: „Utagaki-Kahagi", in: *Opera Minor,* Wiesbaden, Germany, 1978, Harrassowitz, p. 21 f.; Eder, ibid., p. 107 f.; U. Pauly, ibid., p. 75 f.
27. Neil Gordon Munro: *Ainu. Creed and Cult,* London 1962, Routledge & Keagan, Paul, p. 1.
28. A. Leroi-Gourhan: *Archéologie du Pacifique-Nord,* Paris 1946 Institut d'Ethnologie; and C.

Melvin Aikens/ Takayasu Higuchi : *Prehistory of Japan,* New York 1982, Academic Press.

29. D. L. Philippi: *Songs of Gods, Songs of Human. The Epic Tradition of the Ainu,* Tokyo 1979, University Press, pp. 4–16; Munro, ibidem, introduction.
30. Philippi, ibid., p. 7.
31. R. Briffault, ibid., p. 295.
32. Philippi, ibid., p. 44.
33. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney: "The Shamanism of the Ainu," in: *Ethnology,* n0.12, Pittsburg 1973, University of Pittsburg.
34. Philippi, ibid., p. 45 f.
35. M. A. Czaplicka: *Aboriginal Siberia. A Study in Social Anthropology,* Oxford 1914, Clarendon Press, p. 104 f.
36. Briffault, ibid., p. 120 (according to S. Landor)
37. Briffault, ibid., p. 295 (according to Siebold, Batchelor, Czaplicka).
38. Briffault, ibid., p. 326.
39. Philippi, ibid., p. 46.
40. Briffault, ibid., pp. 303, 327.
41. Philippi, ibid., p. 87.
42. Munro, ibid., 55 f., 58; Philippi, ibid., p. 68 f.; Ohnuki-Tierney, ibidem.
43. Exhibition about the Mongol peoples, at Munich, May 1989, Haus der Kunst.
44. Philippi, ibid., p. 168 f.
45. Philippi, ibid., pp. 66, 75, 78 f., 99, 108.
46. Leroi-Gourhan, ibidem; N. N. Dikov: "The Stone Age of Kamchatka and the Chukchi Peninsula," in: *Arctic Anthropology,* no. 3, University of Wisconsin Press 1965/66, p. 10 f.; and J. L. Giddings: "The Archeology of Bering Strait," in: *Current Anthropology,* Chicago, March 1960, University of Chicago, p. 121 f.; Abramova, Dragoo, Mochanov, contributions in D. L. Browman (ed.): *Early Native Americans,* Paris-New York 1980, Mouton; W. Jochelson: "The mythology of the Koryak," in: *American Anthropologist,* no. 6 (1904), Reprint 1975, New York; Czaplicka, *(Aboriginal Siberia),* ibidem.

8

"Alam Minangkabau" The World of the Minangkabau in Indonesia

For all the Induah, clan mothers of the Minangkabau

8.1 Matriarchal cultural patterns in Indonesia

"Alam Minangkabau"—the world of the *Minangkabau* of Sumatra—was the original social form of all Malay peoples. This world was matriarchal, and has, up until recent times, remained so for the Minangkabau. Today they continue to be the most populous, best-known matriarchal people—their "Adat," or matriarchal tribal law, is a living system, and not just a reflection of the ancient social order that existed all over the region. Still, Western researchers refer to them as being only a "matrilineal" people; this is much too narrow and misleading a description, and ignores or misinterprets a wide array of evidence. At present the Minangkabau, like other matriarchal societies, are in a difficult situation, feeling the pressure of centuries of increasing patriarchal influences. Even so, they demonstrate a strong will to resist these influences; they possess a striking inventiveness in undermining patriarchal leanings. They have not become a defensive regressive society, but are expanding peacefully, thanks to their trade activities. They are doing this with the full understanding that they have a very special form of social organization, a "matriarchy," as they proudly say of their Minangkabau identity.

In early historical times East Asian peoples, migrating from South China, settled the entire Indo-Malaysian archipelago. It includes the long stretch of the Malayan peninsula as well as the large islands of Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan (Borneo), Sulawesi (Celebes), the Philippines and many smaller islands. Indeed, East Asian peoples settled not only here, but also spread out to Melanesia and Polynesia, as archaeological research has shown (see map 3).[1] We know they brought a matriarchal social arrangement with them from South China, an arrangement that subsequently became widespread. So over this region, it is not only the Minangkabau who are still matriarchal, but also the *Chams* in Vietnam and the *Negri Sembilan* on the Malayan peninsula.[2] Earlier research indicated that in Indonesia, women generally were held in high esteem, taking part in all public events in Seram (the *Alfurs*); being sought-after advisors in political transactions and represented in all public functions in Sulawesi, often with more authority than men (the *Minahassa*). Reports from Kalimantan (Borneo), among the indigenous *Dayak* (original Malayan tribes), present women as unlimited masters of the household, even sometimes of the tribe, accompanying their men in battle and often taking upon themselves the responsibility for military defense.[3] For the *Kenyah Dayak* the entire control of agricultural activities and production is in the hands of women. In politics, the women make the practical, day-to-day political decisions in their long houses, while the men make ritualized speeches in the village council. These speeches have the character of rote performances, where everyone is in agreement before they start.[4] Matrilocal marriage is also common. This matriarchal form of social organization, typical of the indigenous First Peoples of the whole region, has been successively layered over in the course of centuries by Hindu, Christian, and Islamic influences that produced the patriarchal family pattern.

The situation of the Minangkabau of Sumatra is equally complex; nevertheless they most clearly maintained the original Malaysian Adat, or matriarchal tribal law. In the Minangkabau heartland, or "Darek," tucked into the fertile hill-country of Padang in West Sumatra, Adat is the law of the land for the three million Minangkabau who live there, cultivating rice on terraced paddies. Another three million or so Minangkabau live outside the heartland, in "Rantau" (the word indicates moving away along waterways), which includes East Sumatra, all of Sumatra's large cities, and all of Indonesia's large cities as well. Engaged as merchants, traders, and administrators, these former migrants are active in business, politics and culture: there is not one modern profession that the Minangkabau have not taken on. In Indonesia they are regarded as well educated, highly cultured and cosmopolitan, with great business acumen. In Rantau communities the pressure to conform to patriarchal arrangements was significantly stronger; this brought

about a culturally mixed situation. Still, the emigrants derive their identity and pride as Minangkabau from the vitality of the Adat in the heartland, which they adhere to, at least in their own consciences, and which they also frequently support economically.[5] Darek and Rantau are not in competition with each other, but are mutually linked; each offers important advantages. These two poles of Minangkabau life have existed for a long time, and have contributed significantly to the adaptability and vitality of the matriarchal Adat up until today.

8.2 Minangkabau social order and culture

The Adat is deeply rooted in the Minangkabau heartland. Here, clans practice strict matrilinearity, matrilocality, and "visiting marriage," where men are visitors, going back and forth between the houses of their mothers (where they live) and the houses of their wives, where they are merely guests. "Paruik," or "mother's lap," is the name given to the house-community where, in earlier times, a group of 40, 60 or even 80 persons, from three generations of women, lived together in a large motherhouse. This matriarchal clan is the main functional unit, and operates under the informal, but very influential, leadership of the "Induah," female clan elder or matriarch. The Induah not only brings together all the lines of relationship within the Paruik, but also integrates all important clan house decision-making processes: as the natural authority, equilibrium rests with her. The "Rumah gadang," or great clan house, is ideally constructed for this kind of democratic, grassroots discussion: not only is it beautifully carved and covered with a many-horned, pagoda-like roof, it also offers a spacious hall for discussions, dining and celebrations (Ill. 7). Not all Minangkabau can still afford to live in these beautiful, traditional houses: upkeep is very expensive, and many prefer smaller, modern dwellings.

The clan or family house belongs to the clan women, as do clan land; this land is inherited through the female line, and may not be sold. In addition, all the proceeds from commerce—both women's and men's—is incorporated into the clan's property, of which the Induah is the custodian. Small wonder that her words, clear and to the point, tip the balance in the decision making process when no consensus is found in the assembly meeting.

The next-largest social unit is the "payung," or "kampu-eng," that includes several related village houses. The intermediary between these elements is the "Panghulu," one of the matriarch's brothers, who is their link with the outside world. He is chosen from the group of mother's brothers ("Mamak"), who act as social fathers for their nieces and nephews. His interventions must be mild and

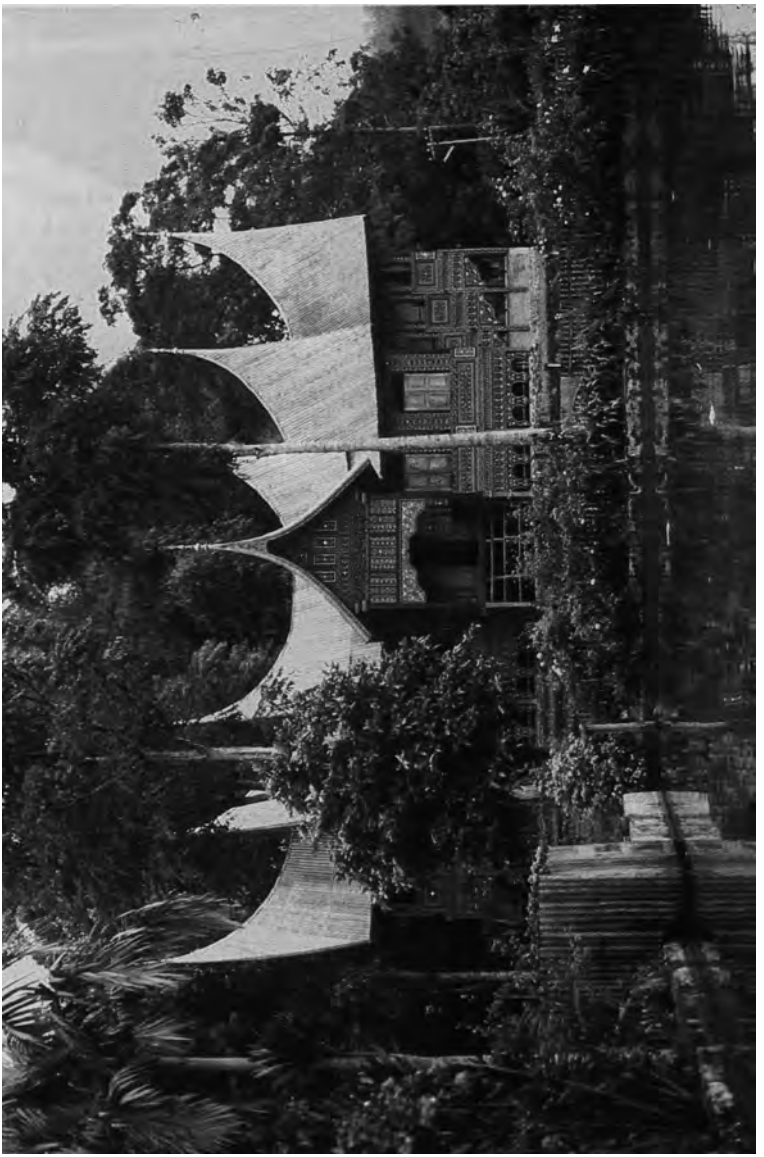


Illustration 7. Clan house of the Minangkabau. Photo: Cillie Rentmeister (in C. Rentmeister: Kulturkontakt—Kulturkonflikt, vol.2 No. 28, Frankfurt)

friendly, patient, tolerant and dignified, he must be "like a good mother." It is his duty to act as formal representative of his relations' houses in the village, communicating with them and representing them to the outside world. In this role, however, he does not have decision-making power—decisions are reached within the clan houses. As their delegate, he may communicate their decisions; his way of communicating is eloquent, but careful and circumspect—especially with the women, who speak their minds. In spite of the seeming blandness of his role, one of the highest honors a man can achieve is to be Panghulu; this is not based on achievement for himself or his private interests, but rather is the honor of representing the clan of his mother and sisters.

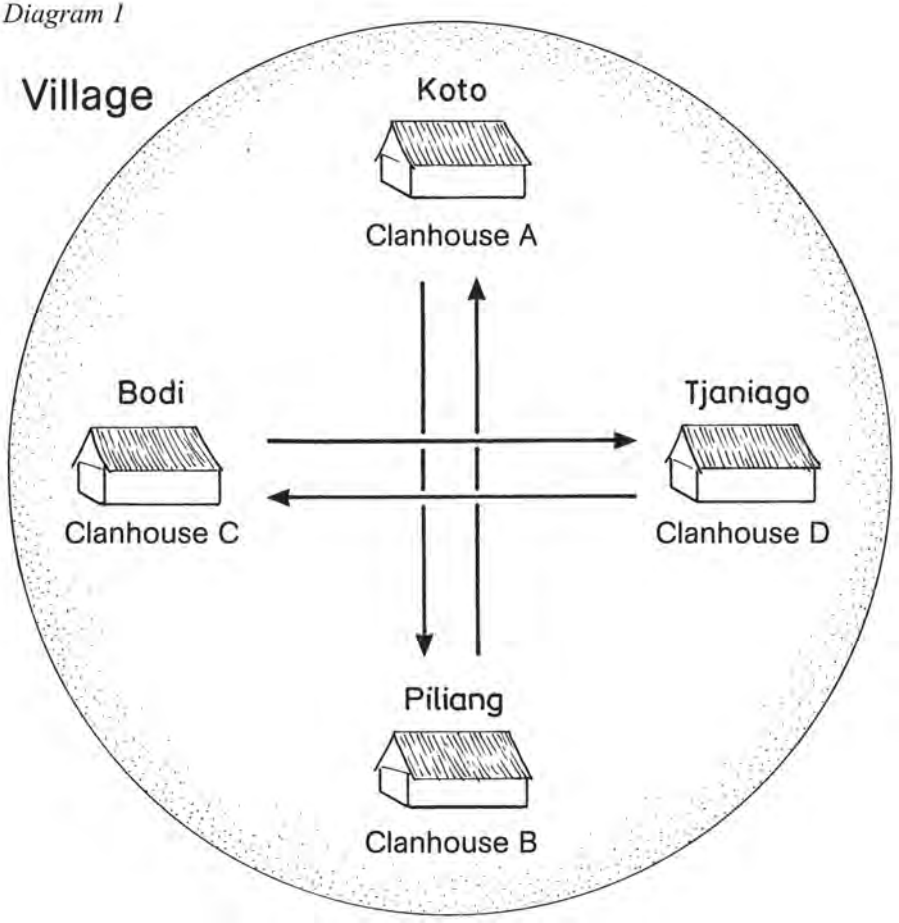
The largest unit of social organization within the Adat is the "suku," or clan, which includes several lineages, extending—at least for the larger clans—over several villages and areas. All the lineages within a "suku" lead back to a common female ancestor. Originally, each village community was made up of four ancient Minangkabau clans: Koto, Piliang, Bodi and Tjaniago.[6] Even today these names are the most widespread and honored ones, as almost all Minangkabau descend from these four clans. It was their ancestral mothers who created Adat.

Here is yet another interesting peculiarity: these four clans are paired two-by-two, that is, the Koto-Piliang and the Bodi-Tjaniago, which means they are paired marriage clans. In their original traditions, the Minangkabau populated the oldest villages with these four clans, around Mount Merapi, in a strictly compartmentalized way, each clan dwelling in one of the four directions—this also has a spiritual meaning. The four sections, or clans, were bound together through cross-cousin marriage. For example, let us suppose that the Koto lived in clan-house A and the Piliang in clan-house B. Young Piliang men, as direct or indirect blood brothers (their mothers are sisters) to each other, became husbands in "visiting marriage" to the young women of the Koto clan (direct or indirect blood sisters to each other). At the same time, young Koto men entered into "visiting marriage" with young Piliang women. The same holds true for the other pair of marriage clans, Bodi and Tjaniago (see diagram 1).

Here once again we encounter ancient matriarchal sisters-brothers intermarriage between two clans. It is the traditional common "brothers' exchange" between two matriarchal clan-houses, where the Mamak, or maternal uncles, inducted their nephews, as husbands, to the designated parallel clan house. This marriage system could once have been a sisters-brothers group marriage—which is no longer the case for Minangkabau, who today practice clan-based pair marriage.

It is clear that cross-cousin marriage can only come about on a foundation of ongoing mutual intermarriage between two clans; marriage between cousins is then

Diagram 1


Village
Koto
Clanhouse A
Bodi
Clanhouse C
Tjaniago
Clanhouse D
Piliang
Clanhouse B

the genealogical consequence. Along with this "ideal" marriage arises the proscription against "inappropriate" marriage between parallel cousins, that is, marriage between a daughter of a mother and a son of the mother's sister. These two young people live together in the same clan-house, where both genders of the female lineage all live together. Such a liaison would break the rule of mutual intermarriage between two clans, as it would involve marriage within one house. That is not permitted: individual clan-houses are strictly exogamous, while paired clan-houses are strictly endogamous (they don't seek spouses elsewhere). This is not to be confused with the oft-cited and misunderstood "incest taboo." To the contrary, couples who marry in this generations-long tradition of mutual intermarriage between paired clans are extremely close blood relatives, which indicates that these people had no concept of "incest" in the first place. Rather, the strict exogamy of individual clans is about creating the ongoing ties that hold a social net together, as the clan-houses affected by this arrangement are mutually responsible for each other, and bound to help each other. The marriage rules serve to weave this net of reciprocal support. They are meant to tie the knots between the four clans, or parts, of a village; because of this, people are not permitted to marry within their own clan-house.[7]

Minangkabau culture is expressed in its rich traditional ceremonies and in a social philosophy whose principles are handed down to each generation in the form of proverbs and the formal rhetoric of the men.[8] They express this philosophy in metaphors drawn from Nature, which they take as their model. For example, they see their social duty in terms of rice planting: the tender sprouts are quite weak, but through proper care, and watering, they grow large, and finally feed humankind. In this same way society shall nurture and care for the small and the weak (the young generation); through this, society will grow strong. The guiding values are not competition and aggression, but motherly care and nurturing, upon which the philosophy and social order of the Minangkabau is founded. In light of this, matrilineal descent comes naturally to them, as they see it everywhere in nature: it's the mothers who bring forth and nurture the next generation: "In nature, every living being was born from a mother." (Pak Idrus) [9]

The Minangkabau men, especially the Panghulu in their role as Adat scholars, are particularly concerned with reinterpreting the old wisdom and presenting it to the outside world. Their role as men is pictured as the curled frond of a fern, which surrounds the spores like a protective shell—this is the way for a man, as father, to protect his family from the outside, or to guide his sister's children, as maternal uncle, or Mamak, through their educational journey. The Minangkabau do recognize biological fatherhood; it is honored, but has no significant role in the social order. Further, Adat law emphasizes solving conflict through negotiation and con-

ciliation; it is the men who are masters of this art, in their official functions as Mamak or Panghulu. The main thing is always to achieve a peaceful consensus. Men are also experts in speechmaking at official ceremonies, in which they eloquently explicate the wisdom of the Adat.[10]

Women, on the other hand, don't speak of the Adat and don't write about it. They are the heart of the Adat, and live it; they call their way of practicing the Adat "Adat Ibu" ("ibu" means "mother"). This occurs most notably at public life-cycle ceremonies such as births and weddings; here the women are the main actors. They bring the traditional ceremonial food, direct the proceedings, construct the stage for the men's speeches, and then invite them up at the right moment. The practice of Adat Ibu is most recognizable when, at these events where members of more than one clan come together, the women tie the knots and weave the fabric of their multiple kinship relations. This takes place during preparations for the festival, as they work together to get everything ready, as well as during the festival itself. At such events, matriarchal communities manifest the typical cycle of gift giving—for the food, drink, speeches and other forms of celebration are offered in a system of reciprocal giving—and everyone participates fully. Gift giving is based on motherly values, and helps form good relationships. It is the ongoing circulation of rice, bananas and male spouses throughout the whole village, which reaches its zenith at the festivals.[11] This is a typical example of the matriarchal gift economy (as formulated by Genevieve Vaughan);[12] but here it appears not just within the clan, but also in the whole village community.

At these village festivals, particular homage is paid to the older woman—in her role as Induah or matriarch—as a figure of both motherliness and leadership, she is the embodiment of "Bundo Kanduang." This image has an impressive mythic and historical background, as Bundo Kanduang is the royal title of the mythical ancestress and founding queen of the Minangkabau. Each older woman bears this title while performing the sacred ceremonies. In this role, she is compared to a butterfly, a sacred symbol taken from nature, too. It characterizes the Induah, dressed in her most beautiful, colorful Adat costume and weighed down with presents; she is the bringer of happiness and well being for all, just as the divine ancestress Bundo Kanduang was. The Induah is also compared to the clan house's central column; during construction, this column was erected first and bears all the weight. For the origin and center of the whole society was once the mythical founding queen, and every subsequent matriarch is her reflection.[13]

8.3 "Darek" and "Rantau": two ways to keep patriarchy out

Historically, in times of overpopulation, when there was not farmland to feed the people of a given Minangkabau village, the remedy always came down to Rantau—the practice of moving away. In the oldest type of Rantau, the entire village split up: daughter-clans separated from mother-clans and founded new settlements, still based on the foundation of the Koto-Piliang and Bodi-Tjaniago families. The direction of migration followed the waterways: "Rantau" means "riverbank," "coastline," or "overseas."[14]

These original circumstances—which can be established through various indicators—have changed over the course of more recent Minangkabau history, under the pressure of foreign expectations; what has not changed is Adat. And neither has "Nagari," which refers to the village as a large or small politically self-determining republic. The Nagari, individually quite different from each other, nevertheless repeatedly mounted successful campaigns against the attempts of different patriarchal cultures to centralize them in the course of history.[15] That the power of Adat could not be broken is due to the fact that all the Nagaris' agricultural land belongs to the clans, and is not for sale under any circumstances; it is "harta-pusaka"—handed down by the clan mothers to the women of their bloodline. Men, on the other hand, do not own land as their clan heritage, and they may not sell agricultural produce. Women, who are completely self-sufficient, exclusively carry out trade in farm and household products; this is the economic basis of Adat and of the villages.[16]

In the 14th century, the attempt at centralization of the Minangkabau by a Javanese-Minangkabau king—using the patriarchal-Hindu example as a model to rule and to impose patrilinearity—ran aground here: the independent village-republics rejected any royal meddling in their affairs. Nor could the king build up an army by collecting taxes from the Minangkabau in order to wield his influence, as the women held fast to their clan lands—so there was nothing to take. In this way, this royal house remained a formal authority, to which the Minangkabau politely paid their formal respects.[17]

When Islam spread throughout Sumatra during the 16th century, it presented a more difficult situation. Every village had to have a mosque; these replaced the men's houses where young men used to spend time away from their mothers' houses. The mosque served as a Koranic school for men, which brought Islamic education and literacy. But in the village, the Koran teachers stood in opposition to the Panghulu, who were the distinguished representatives of matriarchal clans, specialists in the teaching of Adat, who watched over the observance of its rules. Finally, a compromise was reached. This was essentially that "Adat is based upon Islam, and Islam upon Adat" (Minangkabau proverb), and by outwardly accept-

ing it as part of their religion, they held Islam within bounds. The women, meanwhile, supported each other in their clan houses, and governed their affairs themselves. No Panghulu was permitted to present opinions in the outside world unless the women could hear him first, to make any necessary corrections.[18]

In the 19th century, Islamic fundamentalists led the Padri War against the Minangkabau, seeking to abolish matriliny and matrilineal inheritance; the war was ended through the intervention of the Dutch, who had their eye on Minangkabau land. The Minangkabau, however, cleverly played Dutch and Muslim claims off against each other, cultivating gardens on land the Dutch intended for plantation, thus making them effectively into Minangkabau clan lands—which could not be sold. The strategy worked, and as the Dutch feared a rebellion would result if they touched clan land, they established their plantations in the Rantau, or borderland areas. Meanwhile, in the Darek heartland, Dutch attempts to make a profit from farming ended in failure.[19]

Centralization was again attempted over the past few decades by the Indonesian government, which abolished the independence of the Nagaris and with that, weakened the autonomy of Minangkabau women. After 30 years, 1991 saw the return of the Nagari system by governmental decree and the restoration of women's official roles as Bundo Kanduang.[20]

Social relationships were most markedly changed in the Rantau areas that resulted from the industrialization and capitalism tied to Western influence on Sumatra's cities. But even so, Minangkabau women and their Panghulu found ways to use modernization to strengthen, rather than weaken, Adat in the heartland. Thus, many emigrants return home to their clans as commuters, fulfilling their duties and contributing their earnings to the mother house. Especially in a foreign city, it is crucial for Minangkabau to assert their identity as members of a flourishing Darek. Also, the clan finances single-family dwellings on land belonging to the women of the clan; these houses belong to the wives (uxorilocality)—this protects them in case of divorce. Even when they relocate to cities, to have access to education and training, Minangkabau women own their own homes, aided by their clans.[21] Further, inheritance laws stipulate that the private property a man can acquire in the Rantau can be held for a single generation, as a gift to his children; after that it reverts back into the possession of his mother's clan—that is, back into the hands of the women of his clan.[22]

The wise strategies used by Minangkabau clans to fend off "new-fangled" patriarchal tendencies are in fact unique, and demonstrate the high level of consciousness with which the Minangkabau maintain their matriarchal Adat. The special situation of the Rantau appears to contribute to this maintenance in two

ways: firstly, through the outward migration of redundant Minangkabau men, who nevertheless are bound, philosophically and financially, to the heartland, and secondly, through the knowledge the Minangkabau men, are acquiring in the Rantau with respect to each new patriarchalization process. They bring this knowledge with them back into the Darek, where the women and the Panghulu promptly apply it to developing appropriate, and pre-emptive counter measures against the new ways, and are not taken by surprise.

As the example of the Minangkabau demonstrates, we can never assume that one patriarchal threat, or even a whole wave of them, automatically leads to a revolutionary change from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society. Such a profound change is no mere mechanical process; the system of values that women and men learn from their social order, and their awareness and appreciation of their culture, also determine the direction of its development.[23] Here we witness the amazing flexibility of the Adat, a matriarchal social framework that has continued to develop, despite a history of provocations, among them: patriarchal kingship, missionary activity, colonialism, and industrialism.[24] As the Minangkabau say, "The Adat neither wilts in the rain nor cracks in the sun."

8.4 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the economic level:

- In matriarchal societies necessities of life such as land, housing, and food are clan property; as such they are in the hands of women, who manage these goods and pass them on in the female bloodline. Economic strength in the hands of women distinguishes matriarchal societies from merely matrilineal ones.
- Women's economic strength serves the greater well being of the community, for in matriarchal "gift economy" the goods benefit everyone.
- Keeping the necessities of life in women's hands and maintaining strong solidarity between women, is the basis for matriarchal societies' long-term ability to resist patriarchal influence (as with the Minangkabau).

At the social level:

- In matriarchies, individual clan-houses are strictly exogamous, while paired clan-houses are strictly endogamous.
- Matriarchal clans are paired two-by-two, which means they are paired mar-

riage clans. In their original traditions, matriarchal peoples populated their oldest villages with clans in an even number (4, 8, etc.) to create this pairing.

At the political level:

- Matriarchal settlements are self-governing village republics that can wield considerable resistance to patriarchal centralization. The resistance is founded on the way the women hold onto their original clan lands, and the way the men defend their matriarchal society against the outside world.
- Both ceremonially and politically, women and men are afforded equal dignity; they are in balance. Women and men respect each other's dignity and value.
- In matriarchies, men defend their own matriarchal culture, which signifies their ethnic and cultural identity. The evidence does not support the argument that men would "feel oppressed in matriarchy," and "mount an internal revolt" against their own society; this idea is just another case of Euro-centric thinking.
- The political means available to matriarchal men to defend their cultures range from intellectual discourse to armed resistance.
- In general, matriarchal societies have a highly developed ability to integrate outside influences and new elements; this reflects "matriarchal tolerance." This ability does not mean, however, that they give up the key aspects of their own that pertain to the matriarchal patterns.

At the cultural level:

- Matriarchal societies' ability to integrate outside elements means that even patriarchal religions can be—superficially—accepted. At the same time, however, ancient matriarchal beliefs and traditional worldview live on in ceremony.
- In matriarchies, motherhood is not only a biological, but also a culture-creating act. Mothers, especially in the role of matriarchs, establish the net of matrilineal relationship, and create a society that follows the "Symbolic Order of the Mother" (Luisa Muraro).[25]

Notes

1. Peter Bellwood: *Prehistory of the Indo-Malaysian Archipelago,* Sydney-New York-London 1985, Academic Press; and *Man's Conquest of the Pacific,* Auckland-Sydney-London 1978, Collins.
2. Bellwood, *(Prehistory),* ibid., p. 144 f.

3. Briffault, ibid., vol. I, pp. 287 f., p. 320 f.
4. Carol J. Pierce Colfer: "Female Status and Action in Two Dayak Communities," in: *Women in Asia and the Pacific,* Madeleine J. Goodman (ed.), Honolulu, Hawaii, 1985, University of Hawaii (Women's Studies Program), p. 183 f.
5. Tsuyoshi Kato: *Matriliny and Migration. Evolving Minangkabau Traditions in Indonesia,* Ithaca-London 1982, Cornell University Press; Susanne Gura: *Die sozialökonomische Rolle der Frauen in der ländlichen Entwicklung West-Sumatras,* Saarbrücken 1983, Verlag Breitenbach.
6. See for this and the following: Josselin de Jong: *Minangkabau and Negri Sembilan,* The Hague 1952, Nijhoff pp. 10–14, 60–63, 66–76.—It is grotesque to see an outstanding scholar such as Josselin de Jong tilting Claude Lévi-Strauss's patriarchal theory over his own excellent studies. This leads him to speak of Minangkabau "exchanging and circulating of wives" (as if they are objects), although it is the men in visiting marriage who are "exchanged" and are "circulating" between the houses; and he speaks of the "givers of wives," although women remain in their familial homes and no one "gives" them away into an other clanhouse. Further he speaks of "phratries," or fraternities (a term that refers to patriarchal clans), when he means matriarchal clans. And Lévi-Strauss's theory of the origin of tribes through wars and contracts is dragged in, although there is no evidence to back it up. To the contrary, there is much to indicate that tribes originated and grew because of births, for which women—as female ancestors—were worshipped, and that tribes divide and spread out through peaceful migration (Rantau). Here again we have an example of how even one's own scholarly researched material can be distorted through a patriarchal lens.
7. It's an open question whether marriage between close blood relatives leads to physical and mental degeneration. To automatically regard this situation with alarm is a result of patriarchal and Christian bias, since research reveals that inherited defects are not solely the result of intermarriage, but rather of defective genes combined with intermarriage (see H. Maisch: *Incest,* London 1973, Deutsch Verlag). Intermarriage between close blood relatives has always been the rule in tribal societies; they have remained physically and mentally healthy over thousands of years. This demonstrates that in the absence of genetic defects intermarriage is not only not a problem, it actually would be an advantage. If genetic defects had arisen in tribal communities who intermarried closely, these communities would have died out in a few generations, and we would know nothing of them. For those communities that survived according to the principles of natural selection—and these are the only ones we are dealing with—no such situation arose. Furthermore, there exist reports of the elaborate process of aboriginal Australian women's (and other indigenous women's) knowledge of dozens of generations, and their ability to use this knowledge to choose their children's spouses to ensure a healthy future generation.
8. For this and the following see the excellent study by Peggy Reeves Sanday: *Women at the Center. Life in a Modern Matriarchy,* Ithaca-London 2002, Cornell University Press, in which she fully presents Minangkabau ceremonies. Sanday straightforwardly calls the Minangkabau culture a matriarchy, which respects the people's self identification as the "Adat Matriarchy." This led her to re-define matriarchy in her way.
9. Sanday, ibid., p. 24.
10. Sanday, ibidem; and Peggy Reeves Sanday: "Matriarchal Values and World Peace: The Case of the Minangkabau," in: Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past,*

Present and Future, ibidem, pp. 217–227.

11. Sanday, *(Women at the Center),* ibidem, chapters 5 and 7.
12. Genevieve Vaughan, ibidem.
13. Sanday, *(Women at the Center),* ibidem, chapter 2; see also the indigenous Minangkabau researcher Usria Dhavida: *The Role of Minangkabau Women,* in: Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* ibidem.
14. Kato, ibid., pp. 77–85.
15. For the history of the Minangkabau see: Kato, ibid., pp. 94–101, 104–117; Josselin de Jong, ibid., pp. 7–10.
16. Joke Schrijvers/Els Postel-Coster: "Minangkabau Women: Change in a matrilineal society," in: *Archipel,* no. 13, Paris 1977, Chabannes, p. 96.
17. Kato, ibid., pp. 38–40.
18. Schrijvers/Postel-Coster, ibid., p. 99.
19. J. S. Kahn: "Tradition, Matriliny and Change among the Minangkabau of Indonesia," in: *Deel,* no. 123, Gravenhage 1976, Nijhoff, p. 92; and Cillie Rentmeister: *Frauenwelten—Männerwelten,* Opladen 1985, Leske und Budrich, (based on Kato).
20. Usria Dhavida, ibidem.
21. Schrijvers/Postel-Coster, ibid., pp. 86, 96.
22. Kato, ibid., p. 173.
23. For a discussion of the various forms of "Merantau" (emigration) see Kato, ibid., p. 29–32. The diversity in the Minangkabau situation has resulted in openly contradictory accounts being produced by researchers. These contradictions spring from the lack of an adequate definition of matriarchy; from ignoring historical evidence; and from the lack of attention to the complex overall situation of the Minangkabau.—See various authors' views of the Minangkabau: Josselin de Jong, Kahn, Rentmeister, Schrijvers/Postel-Coster, ibidem. See also: Nancy Tanner: "Minangkabau," in: F. M. LeBar (ed.): *Insular Southeast Asia: Ethnographic Studies,* vol. I, New Haven, Conn., 1976, Human Relations Area Files, Inc.; and Susanne Gura: „Wie Frauen ihren Grundbesitz verlieren. Die matrilineare Gesellschaft der Minangkabau in Sumatra", in: *Modernisierung der Ungleichheit. Beiträge zur feministischen Theorie und Praxis,* no. 23, Cologne 1988, Verein Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung und Praxis für Frauen; and Franz von Benda-Beckmann: "Property on Social Community," in: *Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde,* no. 86, The Hague 1979, Nijhoff; and H. W. Bachtiar: "Negeri Taram: A Minangkabau Village Community," in: Koentjaraningrat (ed.): *Villagers in Indonesia,* Ithaca-New York 1967, Cornell University Press; and Anette Benad: *Grüne Revolution in West-Sumatra,* Saarbrücken 1982, Verlag Breitenbach; and J. V. Maretin: "Disappearance of Matriclan Survivals in Minangkabau Family and Marriage Relations," in: *Deel,* no. 117, Gravenhage 1961, Nijhoff.
24. See T. Kato's excellent study, ibid., in general, and especially pp. 25 f., 239–250; Schrijvers/Postel-Coster, ibid., p. 82.
25. Luisa Muraro: *L'ordine simbolico della madre,* Rome 1991, Editori Riuniti.

9

Matriarchal Patterns in Melanesia

For the spirit children of the Trobriand people

9. 1 The Trobriand Islanders

The many groups of small and large islands called Melanesia, or "Black Islands," derive their name from the colonizers' view of the inhabitants' skin color. Equidistant from New Guinea and Australia in the west, and the Polynesian Islands in the east, Melanesians are descended from very dark-skinned Papua New Guineans and the light-brown Polynesians who settled all across the Pacific (see map 3).

Trobriand Islanders, inhabitants of lush, coral islands near the eastern tip of New Guinea, are a Melanesian people. Beautiful people living in a paradisiacal environment, adorned with sea shells and colorful fibre skirts, in surroundings graced by picturesque fishing vessels and splendidly decorated storehouses: this picture fits the West's exotic image of the inhabitants of the South Sea. Indeed, to some extent they have been able to maintain traditional life-ways, in spite of European colonial and missionary influences. The exemplary work of the early 20th century ethnologist Malinowski made them famous by perceptively and precisely describing their complex economy and life-ways, including their "Kula," an extensive friendship system based on mutual gift giving; this system is maintained through visiting other islands by canoe, travelling 2000 miles in a vast circle.[1]

Trobrianders live from gardening and fishing. From the rich soil surrounding the villages they harvest root vegetables such as taro, yams and sweet potatoes: these tubers can be kept for long periods of time and thus are ideal for sea voyages. Every village is laid out in two concentric rings: an inner ring of beautifully carved yam storehouses, an outer ring of family houses. The center of the village is both the ceremonial ground and the burial place for the dead; this proximity lets them stay near the living.[2]

In their traditional society, every village had four matrilineal clans; these were descended from the four Trobriander lineages—Malasi, Lukuba, Lukwasisiga, and Lukulabuta. Each clan had its own place in the over-arching, four-part system that divides Trobriand culture into totems and compass directions, and each one arose from an original ancestress who emerged, along with her brother, from the mouth of a sacred cave. This original ancestress generated offspring on her own, and her brother was there to protect and provide for her. According to traditional Trobriand Island beliefs, a woman does not need a man's sperm in order to bear a child.[3]

Thus, clan membership is determined exclusively by the mother, and goods, spiritual knowledge, titles and prestige—including that of chieftainship—are inherited through the female line. "Dala," the matrilineal clan, is maintained by women—not only by giving birth to children, but also by carrying out clan ceremonies and gifting each other with prestige goods. Dala ceremonies are women's rites; they express long-term, communal values held by the women and men of the clan. Meanwhile, in gift giving ceremonies associated with men's communal canoe expeditions in the oceanic Kula ring, the values expressed are those of personal prestige, especially of the chiefs' prestige—values that are short-term, and individually based.[4]

In traditional Trobriand society, the most important social relationship—and this is typically matriarchal—is between sisters and brothers of the same matrilineal clan. The complex traditional sharing circles of the Trobrianders, a "gift economy" in the true sense, hinges on this relationship. At the same time, there are some definite departures from classic matriarchal patterns: for example, not daughters, but sons remain in the village of their matrilineal clan. In the matrilineal clan's gardens the men do the work; they till the earth, and plant and tend the produce until harvest time. But this produce is returned to the women—their sisters. The sisters live virilocally; that is, with their husbands in another village nearby. The large clan house lifestyle no longer exists, but this doesn't mean they are patriarchal, as is sometimes assumed. The spouse of a Trobriand Island woman is not considered to be the father of her children; fatherhood in the Western sense is unknown. He lives in his matrilineal clan's village, works the land of his clan, and gives the fruits of his labor to his

sisters, in the village where they live. This way the harvest of yam—the staple food—circulates among the households and continually reinforces internal relationships within the matriarchal clan (brothers and sisters), and between the paired marriage clans of two villages (in-laws).

When they bring the fruits of the harvest to their sisters' household each year, and fill the elaborately carved yam storehouses, Trobriand Island men care not only for their sisters, but also their sisters' children (as a sister's children belong to his own matrilineal clan, not to her spouse's clan). The husband is also provided for along with the family—an offering that can be seen as recognition of the service he provides by looking after his wife and her children. In fact, he takes affectionate care of his wife's children, helps raise them, and is there as a play-companion throughout childhood. The children cling to him, calling him „tama"—which means not "father," but "mother's husband." As soon as they are grown, the mother's brother, the "kadagu" from the other village, asserts the rights of the matrilineal clan and ushers them in. He teaches them that in their tama's village they are outsiders, while in their kadagu's village they will find their nearest blood kin and natural allies, along with their clan membership and their rights. The mother's brother expects them to do their clan service, and his authority protects them; meanwhile the influence of the tama becomes progressively weaker.[5]

The circulation of the yam harvest produced by the men brings them prestige, but that is all. The better the brothers provide for their sisters, the higher the clan's prestige. Trobriand Island women are thus well-provided for by their brothers—actually, they are quite rich—while the men own nothing but their houses and their boats. So it is very important for a man to be on good terms with his wife (the tendency toward monogamy can be traced to this) so that he can share in the food her brothers provide. The wife, on the other hand, remains independent of her spouse, and can easily divorce him at any time, returning to her matrilineal clan. Their children belong to her, and her brothers will continue to provide for them.[6]

In traditional Trobriand Island society all prestige stems from the ability to give, and thereby form good relationships—which is typical of a "gift economy." As we have seen, men's gift of the yam harvest is done for prestige, and their great ambition is to produce a good harvest. Although a man's harvest belongs to his sister, it is given not to her directly but through her husband, in a mutual system of gifting between the men as brothers-in-law. This clearly places the emphasis on giving, not owning it; this is often misinterpreted. Neither brothers nor husbands own the yam harvest; the owners are the sisters, who prepare the food for the family.

Within the logic of giving, women also have sharing circles of gifts to enhance their reputation. This is the giving of "Doba": skirts of colored grasses, which are

the traditional female garment, and bundles of dried, hand-worked banana leaves. The production of these things is complex, and some must therefore be acquired in exchange with other women. For this, yam come into the picture as exchange goods, and recently also the monetary earnings of the husbands, in order to invest it in worked banana leaves. To this extent, Doba gifts are high-value.[7] Just as the yam offerings are presented only at public harvest festivals, and thus highlight the men's gift circle, so also are the women's gifts only given at public festivals, putting the spotlight on the women's gift circle. These latter festivals are especially significant, as they are funerary celebrations for the dead. This is where women from the dead person's clan—his or her sisters—publicly give Doba gifts to the women of the marriage clan, who host the funeral. This makes the gift circle of the women as sisters in-law visible. It is important to avoid the pitfall of rating the men's gift system more highly than that of the women: though the Doba gifts seem less valuable to us, Trobriand Islanders have a different value system.

Through these rituals of gift giving between men, and between women, the relationships between siblings and in-laws are more deeply interlocked and the bonds correspondingly reinforced in public. Both kinds of relationships constitute the social network in traditional Trobriand Island society.

9.2 Ancestor children in Trobriand Islands society

From the Trobriand Islanders viewpoint, women's most valuable possessions are, in the long-term, their children. Through their children, women constitute the clan, the tribe, their identity as a people and the future of the entire society (Ill. 8). Motherhood is defined not only by the biological function (to which mothers in patriarchal societies are so crassly reduced), but is also a culture-creating act. It imbues their symbolic thinking—for example, garden magic with the earth as "mother" and the fruit as "children"—and is apparent in the women's "dala" clan ceremonies centering around the continuity of life in the whole community.[8]

The power of Trobriand Island women emerges most clearly in their ceremonies and rituals of death and rebirth. These women are the caretakers of a very ancient, original belief in rebirth. They maintain a very concrete cult of the ancestors that begins with extensive and loving funeral rites to bury the dead in their graves at the center of the village green. Here the dead are laid to rest in stages, with their bodies being exhumed and reburied a few times, until only the bare bones are left. In the process, women give away many bundles of dried banana leaves, which go to the women of the affiliated marriage clan, the sisters-in-law. That means members of the affiliated clan are symbolically repaid for effort and work expended relative to the dead

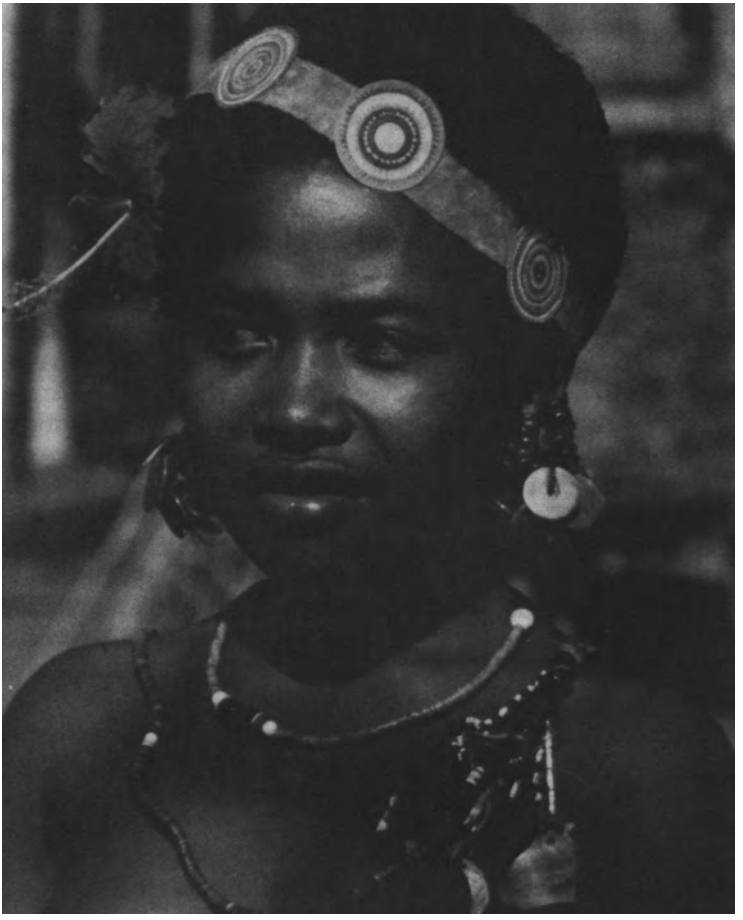


Illustration 8. Melanesian young woman from the Trobriand Islands. Photo: Annette B. Weiner (in A. Weiner: Women of Value, Men of Renown, Austin-London 1976)

person, and so, with the debt satisfied, the dead sister or brother can be brought back into their own clan. This is an impressive demonstration of matriliny, clearing the way for the dead to be born again into the mother clan.[9] This makes it clear that the women's Doba gifts have a higher value, in spiritual terms, than the yam offerings of the men, for their effect reaches beyond the grave into the next life.

Meanwhile, the soul of the dead person has migrated to Tuma, the Island of the Spirits, to the west of the Trobriand Islands. There—according to traditional belief—they have a fairly good time: the realm of the dead is full of joy and erotic games. The spirits are always playing "ulatile" (boys' love visit) and "katuyausi" (girls' love visit), which are the love-affairs enjoyed by Trobriand Islands youth, who have sexual freedom from childhood on.[10] Nevertheless, the spirits eventually decide to come back to life, into their original clan and village. This way no one gets lost: each dead woman and man comes back through a woman, born again as a child in the same mother clan. So all the children of the Trobriand women come not from men, but from ancestral spirits. The real origin of every birth is to be found in a spirit's wish for rebirth; the special dignity and sanctity of a woman is based on her ability to help this spirit, bringing the clan member back into life by physically giving birth.[11]

This belief in the conception of spirit children is concretely demonstrated in many traditional customs where the spouse and the brother play special roles. The spouse is there solely to open the gate of a woman's vagina; without this opening, a spirit child cannot slip in. The child, however, travels very differently to its future mother. A spirit, seeking to be reborn, must first of all undertake the journey from Tuma to the Trobriand Islands, where it hopes to find a woman who wants to give birth. Therefore, the spirit goes into the sea, which rejuvenates each spirit. It becomes smaller and smaller, as small as a child, and then, clinging to a floating twig, a leaf or a piece of seaweed, it surfs the waves. Sometimes you can hear these spirit children calling out, crying during the night. Young women who want to avoid pregnancy therefore abstain from bathing on days when there is a lot of flotsam on the water. On the other hand, a woman who does seek to have a child will ask her brother to bring a jar of seawater with bits of organic matter in it to her in the house, so she can get pregnant. This task is one that only the brother—not the spouse—can fulfill, since the latter is not blood kin to his wife's children; the brother is their closest male relative. Later, through his sister, he will provide for them, sharing responsibility for their education, while the sister's spouse obligingly helps out as a co-caretaker and playmate for the children, but nothing more. Before the brother has performed the act of bringing sea water, or some other meaningful act, the woman herself will already have had a dream in which a godmother or godfa-

ther from the spirit world tells her that a spirit child would like to be accepted by her. The spirit godparents are really those from whom the woman gets the child: they put the child upon her head or her belly, and from there it slips by itself into her womb. Then the woman becomes pregnant, and according to Trobriand Islands custom, nourishes the child with her own absent menstrual blood, thus forming its likeness. Birth is always "parthenogenic"; in Trobriand Islands belief, this means it comes from the realm of the ancestors and is brought to life by the woman alone, without being sired by a man.

Questions of "siring" and "fatherhood" would seem to a Trobriand Island woman both irrelevant and laughable. These questions pertain to individual persons, and they miss the point with respect to the world of clan alliance, where members remain together throughout life and after death. For Trobriand Islanders, these questions would broadcast a profane ignorance, as they reduce the scope of the sacred spirit realm and the secrets of rebirth. Reports indicate that Trobriand Islands women—and men—did not understand these questions when they were posed, or strongly rejected them as "missionary nonsense," just as they rejected attempts to convince them of the existence of God the Father and God the Son.[12]

The belief in ancestral spirits, and their essential role in the process of rebirth, is an ancient matriarchal tradition. It was widespread over all of Melanesia, as well among the peoples of Papua New Guinea, before indigenous cultures fell victim—in many places—to Christian missionary activities. Of the Papuans, it is said that they ask the ancestors' advice in all matters. They do this through conversing with wooden poles, bearing faces and noses, that function as mediums for the spirits of the dead.[13] These male and female wooden figures are common in other regions of Southeast Asia and its islands; they are substitutes for the more difficult to elaborate stone pillars. Before patriarchal religions such as Hinduism, Christianity and Islam invaded, this ancient matriarchal religion, with its characteristic elements of ancestor, spirit and nature worship, existed in Melanesia as well as Indonesia. In Indonesia shamans were almost exclusively women, and in Melanesia, up until the arrival of the Spanish, there were no male priests.[14]

Trobriand Islanders' concept of spirit children is key to understanding why matriarchal societies don't acknowledge biological fatherhood, and don't seem to be bothered by it. Their way of thinking is shaped by spiritual concerns, not by biological determinism: the ancestors are much more important than an individual biological "father." Even where fatherhood is recognized, it has no real significance in the society, although the matriarchal father is supportive of the mother and looks after the children's welfare. This contrasts markedly with patriarchy, where fatherhood has always meant male domination of the family and subjugation of women and children.

9.3 The Kula ring and chieftainship in the Trobriand Islands

Belief in rebirth means that both this world, and the Otherworld, are included in the matriliny; and the two realms are connected. This explains the great significance of Doba gifts of the women at funeral ceremonies, discussed above. In the value system of Trobriand Islanders, spiritual gifts are privileged over instrumental ones, as their way of thinking does not reduce the social order to utilitarian or economic dimensions. Similarly, men have a spiritual gift system, too, the Kula. The gifts which circulate in this system—two different kinds of shell jewelry—are accorded greater value than the harvest gifts of yam.

Transporting Kula gifts, the men sail out in their beautifully decorated, seaworthy outrigger canoes to other islands, in order to give goods to other Melanesian peoples whose culture is related to theirs and who participate in the Kula. Their voyages take them, in a great arc, to large and small archipelagos which, far out in the ocean, opposite the eastern tip of New Guinea, form a big circle (Marshall Bennet Islands, Laughlan Islands, Louisiade Archipelago, East End Islands, D'Entrecasteaux Islands, Amphlett Islands). The travels along this island circle constitute a circulating route about 2000 miles long, in which trade goods and Kula gifts are mutually given between various peoples. This is the famous "Kula ring."[15]

The remarkable thing is that the Kula ring, as a ceremonial system of circulating meaningful gifts, uniquely takes place not among relatives—as was the case before—but between people who are in no way kin to one another. No one keeps these extremely highly valued Kula objects for long; the men sail back out to sea and pass them on in a strictly determined order. The long necklaces of red mussel shells go clockwise, the white mussel shell bracelets go counter-clockwise around the vast Kula ring. This way Kula voyages are ordered according to rules and rituals, and each visit and each gift is carried out with full ceremonial pomp.

This way the same gift giving partners meet up again and again, and within the Kula ring are linked in lifelong friendship. The widely travelled gifts are generally reciprocated with appropriate return gifts, but this reciprocation cannot be demanded—otherwise the practice would lose its freely giving character. This creates a broad network of friendly relationships among a large number of Melanesian peoples—and this is really the point of the Kula ring. The giving of Kula gifts is much more significant than is the exchange of trade goods—which are also taken along on these expeditions. Trobriand Islanders distinguish between the two types: "Kula," or gift giving, and "gimwali," or trade. This latter can involve bargaining, which doesn't happen with Kula giving, because this would violate the spiritual char-

acter of the Kula gifts. Both donors and receivers of Kula gifts acquire social status and reputation through the giving, not possession or power; furthermore the Kula relationship is maintained with great love and affection. It permits maintenance of gift giving over a vast region, for Kula voyagers receive hospitality on the basis of brotherly equality everywhere in the Kula ring. The Kula ring is a symbolic gift economy, and is associated with a complex mythology, replete with rich rituals that indicate that this vast, complex social institution is a very old and stable one.[16]

Obviously, activities associated with Kula ring expeditions require thorough preparation, especially if the voyage involves dangerous stretches of open sea. A large group of men must set out together in several canoes, make their way across the sea, and arrive at ritually arranged times on the other islands. New canoes are often being constructed, the right equipment and sufficient foodstuffs prepared, and Kula gifts and trade goods attended to. And not least, all this must be done in accordance with proper ceremonial accompaniment.

This requires organized work crews and economic resources; these are provided, in the Trobriand Islands, by the chieftains. The latter enjoy a range of privileges that make it possible for them to accomplish such enormous tasks. The chieftain is allowed to marry several wives, from various clans and villages, which makes these groups feel very close to him. He alone practice polygyny—a woman considers it an honor to become the chief's wife, even though this special marriage cannot be easily dissolved. The purpose of this institution is economic: the many wives of the chief are well-provided for by their brothers; this means the chief has many more store-houses full of yam than the ordinary man does. He is thus the richest man in the village. Furthermore, all his male in-laws from other clans and villages will come to his aid when necessary; he has the right to expect this.

This great advantage enjoyed by the chieftain in the otherwise egalitarian Trobriand Islands society cannot be used for his own private interests, as he is obliged to disburse the yam harvest not just at the large festivals, but also—and especially—to supply the Kula ring expeditions. The elaborate, costly preparations for these voyages are also up to him, although he is helped by his numerous relatives. This brings him prestige, but not political power. Prestige for Trobriand Islanders—as for all matriarchal cultures—is very highly valued. [17]

In the 20thth century the well-regulated traditional society of the Trobriand Islands changed as a result of colonial domination, missions, and trade with European Australians. The worst threat to their culture today is burgeoning Australian and Japanese tourism. The recently introduced monetary economy has partially destroyed the reciprocal system of giving yam gifts, with more and more

food products being bought in western-style stores. The network of social relationships associated with gift giving has also suffered damage, although today's Trobriand Islanders have kept alive the Doba and Kula ring gift systems—which for them are more important than the trade relationships. Nevertheless, due to a massive reduction in the scope of their influence, the chieftains' ability to outfit Kula expeditions has also been negatively affected. In 1968 Trobriand Islanders founded a movement for their economic and cultural self determination, which was active until 1980, in order to bring tourism under indigenous control.[18]

Regarding the traditional organization of the complex and vast symbolic gift economy of the Trobriand Islands society, the two essential requirements for settling the immense area of the Pacific are of historical interest for us, in regard to the demise of matriarchal patterns. This settlement took place very early in human history. It was not possible to cope with the many difficulties of such endeavours unless:

First condition: the voyages took place as well-organized expeditions in seaworthy vessels. And the voyage could not just set out into the wild blue yonder; it had to be undertaken in the context of definite sea routes and vast friendship networks constructed along typical matriarchal lines. This was the only way such vast expanses of ocean could be opened up.

Second condition: such enterprising expeditions required common group effort. This required the development of a centralized co-ordinator, which in this case manifested as the chieftain. Because of the privileged state of the chieftain, some of the matriarchal patterns were de-commissioned—though the impact of this had a somewhat milder effect in the Trobriand Islands culture.

But the region sailed by the Trobriand Islanders is, compared to the entire Pacific, relatively small. Conditions were much more extreme for the Polynesians, as they sailed the entire Pacific in ancient times, settling in its farthest reaches. In the following chapter we will see how this affected their culture.

9.4 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the social level:

- Even in cases of virilocal residence of the wife in the husband's house, we can still say that matriarchal patterns are in play if matriliny is consistently maintained, and the wife is economically provided for by her matrilineal relatives, and is, in this regard, independent of her husband. In these

cases, the significant relationship is the matrilineal bond between sister and brother.

- Matriarchal societies practice gift economy not only at the clan and village level, but they can also extend this broadly, so that numerous tribal groups over an immense area share in the process (for example, the symbolic gift economy of the Kula ring of the Trobriand Islands culture). The mutual giving of gifts is always intended as an entry into and a way to maintain good relationships, and is more highly valued than the trade with utilitarian goods.

At the cultural level:

- Motherhood in matriarchies is not only a biological, but also a culture-creating role.
- Matriarchal belief in rebirth explains why matriarchal societies don't know of biological paternity, or, if they acknowledge it, don't seem interested in it. Children are not seen to be sired by men, but are accepted back into life from the world of ancestors. They return from the afterlife through being reborn into their own clans. Even where paternity is recognized, it plays no particularly significant role in society.
- When biological paternity is recognized, the matriarchal father takes affectionate care of his wife's children and helps raise them. This stands in stark contrast to patriarchal fatherhood, which has, since the beginning, meant male domination of the family and subjugation of the wife and children.

Notes

1. Bronislaw Malinowski: *Argonauts of Western Pacific,* New York 1923, Paul Reynolds; and *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia*, New York 1926, Paul Reynolds; and *Coral Gardens and their Magic,* New York 1935, Paul Reynolds.
2. See Malinowski, *(The Sexual Life),* ibidem.
3. Malinowski, ibid., p. 384 f.
4. Anette B. Weiner: "The Reproductive Model in Trobriand Society," in: *Mankind* no.11(3), 1978, Sydney University Press, pp. 175–186; and Marilyn Strathern: "Domesticity and the Denigration of Women," in: Denise O'Brien/Sharon W. Tiffany (eds.): *Rethinking Women's Roles: Perspectives from the Pacific,* Los Angeles 1984, University of California Press, pp. 18–23.—This work is a very good feminist critique of anthropology's male-dominated perspective, which usually distorts the actual situation. See especially the contributions by: Denise O'Brien: "Women Never Hunt: The Portrayal of Women in Melanesian Ethnography," p. 53 f.; and Sharon Tiffany: "Feminist Perceptions in Anthropology," p. 1 f.
5. Malinowski, *(The Sexual Life),* ibid., pp. 21/22.

6. Malinowski, *(The Sexual Life),* ibid., pp. 111–114.
7. See for this and the following: Anette Weiner: *Women of Value, Men of Renown,* Austin-London 1976, University of Texas Press; and "Stability in Banana Leaves," in: Etienne/Leacock (eds.): *Women and Colonisation,* New York 1980, Praeger, pp. 270–289.
8. See Weiner, *(Women of Value),* ibidem; and Marianne Brindley: *The Symbolic Role of Women in Trobriand Gardening,* Pretoria 1984, University of South Africa.
9. See Weiner, ibid., p. 288 f.
10. Malinowski, *(The Sexual Life),* ibid., pp. 340 f., 170–191.
11. Malinowski, *(The Sexual Life),* ibid., p. 129.
12. Malinowski, *(The Sexual Life),* ibid., pp. 125–144; and Susan Montague: "Trobriand Kinship and the Birth Controversy," in: *Man. New Series,* vol. 6, pp. 353–368, London 1971, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.
13. See J. B. van Hasselt: „Die Neoforezen", in: *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie,* no. 8, Berlin 1876, Verlag Reimer, p. 194–196.
14. See Briffault, ibid., vol. II, pp. 474 f., 709 f., 525 f.; and vol. I, pp. 293 f., 451 f., 490, 493; and Nancy McDowell: "Complementary: The Relationship between Female and Male in the East Sepik Village of Bun, Papua New Guinea," in: O'Brien/Tiffany (eds.), *(Rethinking),* ibid., p. 32 f.
15. Malinowski, *(Argonauts),* ibid., chapter III, pp. 115–135.
16. Malinowski, *(Argonauts),* ibid., chapter XXII, pp. 548–551.
17. Malinowski, *(Argonauts),* ibid., pp. 195–201; and *(The Sexual Life),* ibid., chapter V, 4.
18. Fritz Kramer: „Nachwort", in the German translation of Malinowski *(Coral Gardens): Korallengärten und ihre Magie,* Frankfurt, 1981, Syndikat, pp. 416–418.

10

Pacific Ocean Cultures

For Hina, Moon Goddess of Polynesia, and for Pelé, Volcano Goddess of Hawai'i

10.1 Of ships, stars, and stones

One of the most significant achievements in all of human history is the art of navigation practiced by seafaring peoples, who were able to populate the islands of the Pacific across endless miles of ocean. In comparison, the journeys made thousands of years later by Mediterranean Argonauts and Northern Atlantic Vikings were short hops across a bit of water separating one land from another. Not for several hundred years after the Vikings would Columbus, in his big-bellied ships, risk crossing the Atlantic. By that time, the entire Pacific area was populated by *Micronesian and Polynesian peoples* (see map 3). Micronesians are different from Polynesians: generally smaller in stature, their Southeast Asian origins are more evident. They settled the widely dispersed, small, low, arid Micronesian coral atolls in the tropics, where they scratched out a living, while the Polynesians settled the vastly larger area of the Pacific, partly in the tropics and partly in the subtropics. The steep volcanic islands where they made their home receive more rainfall and are covered with vegetation. The daring routes of the Polynesians took them as far north as Hawai'i and as far south as New Zealand (Aotea Roa), and brought them

to the remote Easter Island (Rapa Nui), the most isolated spot on earth. In those early days of human habitation, Easter Island probably served as a platform for expeditions along the western South American coast, just as Hawai'i did with relationship to the coast of Central America (see map 3). Throughout the Pacific area, the Micronesian and Polynesian peoples brought with them the highly-developed megalithic architecture that originated with the matriarchal peoples of Southeast Asia and Indonesia. Evidence for this connection comes from linguistic research on the Austronesian languages that traces them back to Southeast Asian roots, especially Taiwan, while archaeology and ethnology provide additional evidence.[1] The latest research on the human genome, as well as on human bacteriology also indicates that the settlers of the Pacific originally came from Southeast Asia (Taiwan).[2]

The ships sailed by oceanic peoples across thousands of miles of open sea look simple to us, yet they were extraordinarily seaworthy special inventions. Even today, Trobriand Islanders still sail stable, richly carved and decorated "Kula" canoes across the open sea to other Melanesian islands. Polynesians are famous for slender, speedy, safely-constructed outrigger canoes in which they fish both lagoons and high seas. Their largest vessels were double canoes, built like outriggers but bound together in pairs, used for expeditions of weeks or months throughout the vast Pacific.

Not just adventure-lust, or greed for treasure, motivated these expeditions, but the absolute necessity of locating tillable land, which is in comparatively short supply, given the vast distances involved in reaching relatively tiny island chains. Hunger, destitution, and increasing aggression due to land scarcity drove these peoples further and further out into the open seas in hopes of discovering a new, fertile island. Such an island could be a flat coral atoll, or perhaps a volcanic summit pushed above the water by one of countless underwater craters. This search led these seafaring peoples into areas that ranged from nearly Antarctic latitudes in the Southern Hemisphere (New Zealand) to the equatorial region and as far as subtropical latitudes in the Northern Hemisphere (Hawai'i). The number of people who went on this search for tillable land, but who never reached their goal, is unknown. However, it has been clearly established that they did not leave these journeys to chance. Departures were well-organized: they were undertaken in groups of about 160 persons—half men, half women—coming from distinct, but paired marriage clans, about 80 individuals per double-hull canoe. Men and women shared equally in the work of sailing and rowing the ships, and women also took seeds and tubers of their agricultural plants with them. A casual journey could not have been counted on to provide the necessities required for a people's new settlement in unknown territory.[3]

Since they travelled only under sail and oars, their sea routes were determined by winds and ocean-currents. In the Pacific, the main direction of the currents and favorable tradewinds is from east to west—that is, from the Americas toward Asia. But the Polynesians went in the opposite direction: from west to east. Since rowing is a very ineffective way to cover oceanic distances, they sailed—which would mean that the Polynesians had mastered the art of sailing against the wind over great distances. Their double canoes were well-equipped for this, with bow and stern constructed identically—which enabled them to change direction without turning the boat. The route to the new islands was not always direct, so they tacked or detoured, modifying their route according to the requirements of the currents and the winds. Returning with the winds was usually easier than the outward voyage, but they used various ocean currents flowing in different directions. They carefully made and preserved maps of these, carving them into the wood of bow and stern of their ships. They also established regular routes in both directions—for example, between Tahiti and Hawai'i, and even between Easter Island and New Zealand.[4] Discovering individual islands in the ocean's endlessness required highly developed navigational techniques. The oceanic peoples navigated by the stars, and possessed an outstanding knowledge of their movement across the sky. Other abilities contributed to their technique: observations of marine animals, like dolphins and whales, by the help of which they discovered the ocean-currents; observation of wave patterns, for which they had special instruments, and cloud formations as well as the behaviour of sea birds, which enabled them to discern how close they were to lands beyond the visible horizon.[5] All this made them the greatest seafarers in human history.

Over their millennia-long history they spread, bit by bit, from west to east—with some reverse movements—throughout the entire Pacific area. In the course of this spread over several climate zones, their original agriculture had to change to accommodate different environments on various islands. This explains the varying economic systems of these islands, from tropical agriculture in Hawai'i to subantarctic gardening, hunting and fishing in New Zealand.[6] It is understandable that with so much diversity on earth, the starry skies provided the common denominator in these seafaring peoples' thinking, particularly with respect to the moon as a way of measuring time. The apparent movements of the sun change dramatically from one climate zone to another: in equatorial regions the sun marks the times of day, but not the times of year, while in the polar regions it marks the times of year, but changes hardly at all with the times of day. The changing arc the sun inscribes at the sky across the different climate zones did not lend itself to the consistent measurement of time, but the moon keeps its regular 28-day rhythm all over the globe. So here in Pacific Ocean cultures—and not only here but in all

ancient cultures—the moon was the original, and most reliable, clock. From Indonesia to Melanesia and Polynesia, time was marked using only the moon calendar, and people marked the time according to the nights, not the days. [7]

In fact, "Hina" (in Maori language "Hine") the moon goddess, was, up until Christianization, the predominant Polynesian female deity, and was highly venerated as the mother of all living beings. As "Hina-kua" in the east, she was the goddess of all those who will be born, and as "Hina-alo" in the west, she was the goddess of all who have been born. Accompanied by "Ku," a male deity, she embraces the entire sky and earth, from east to west. Hina and Ku were the two great Polynesian ancestral deities,[8] but they were not the oldest ones in the evolution story of the universe, as handed down in the Hawai'ian "Kumulipo," or creation chant. In the beginning, there was the night—mysterious, female, endless dark blue night called "Po." She gave birth parthenogenetically to her son "Kumulipo" and her daughter "Po ele." From the mating of these two, there evolved the seas and the earth; their first born was the moon goddess Hina.[9]

That oceanic peoples regarded the moon goddess highly is not surprising, as the effects of her actions are manifested right before their eyes: she determines the phases of the moon, and with it, in these watery regions, the tides and weather. She influences the growth of tropical plants, which are planted and harvested according to the lunar calendar.[10] By the simple changes of light and dark, she illustrates the transition from life to death and from death back to life. Indeed, for all Pacific cultures—Indonesia, Melanesia, Micronesia, Polynesia—she was the goddess of life, death and rebirth.

Her mythic son was "Maui" (or "Tiki"), characterized by both divine and human attributes. In his divine role, he was defender of the moon: he fought against the sun, to stop it from outshining his mother; another time he slowed the sun's passage for her, so she would have more time to make her cloth. For her, he separated heaven from earth, discovered the use of fire, reached into the sea's depths and fished out islands to inhabit, and saved his mother from a sea monster (lunar eclipse). In his human role he was a shamanic priest-king, culture creating hero, and great seafaring discoverer of new land, dedicated to the well-being of humanity. As a magician he went in search of his own, and humanity's, immortality. He entreated his mother to grant humans immortality through simple recurrence, as she herself did every month, but she refused. So Maui tried to crawl into Hina through her mouth—in some versions, her uterus—in order to achieve immortality, but this attempt failed as well. He remained the child of the moon, subject to mortality.[11]

This very old and widespread Polynesian myth reflects the ancient matriarchal pattern of the sacred kingdom dedicated to the goddess, which was the symbolic

pattern at the beginning of the Polynesian kingdom. Kings regarded themselves as being direct descendants of the moon goddess and Maui, and they bore the title "Lord of the Moon" in Tonga, while in Samoa the death proclamation for a king was, "The moon has fallen."[12]

Polynesian ancestor veneration and king-worship are also expressed through erecting large stones and constructing megalithic monuments. They were at once open temples, sacrificial altars, astronomical observatories and sentinels for ships, fitted with seashell reflectors that glittered in the sunlight. Sometimes they were even built in the form of a ship, as in the case of Easter Island.[13] In Hawai'ian folklore the low, rounded stones are female ("papa") while the standing, pointed stones are male ("pohaku").[14] Certain stones served the chief's wives as birthing chairs.[15]

The striking similarity between megalithic constructions of matriarchal peoples such as the Khasi in north-eastern India and the Polynesians—a similarity that includes language relationships—points to a very old cultural connection via the link provided by seafaring peoples of Southeast Asia. Thus, the rectangular Polynesian places of worship are called "Tohua," while in Assam, places of worship are stone circles called "Tehuba." A graduated, squat pyramid that houses a sacred grave is "Ahu" for the Polynesians, while in Assam it is "Dahu."[16] The elements of rectangular places and squat pyramids, along with the tall menhirs representing the ancestors, which serve as thrones for the kings and chiefs, are combined in the "Marae," or Polynesian open temples. In the various island cultures, they have acquired different characteristics, sometimes simpler, sometimes more complex. The graduated pyramids in Tahiti can be up to 40 feet tall, while Easter Islanders adorn their Ahus not only with menhirs, but also with huge stone figures. Yet they all are regarded as the "Beds of the Ancestors," where the pre-eminent men of the tribe may come into beneficial contact with the spirits.[17]

10.2 Women in Polynesian society

When Polynesian island cultures were discovered and investigated by Europeans—Captain Cook was the first, in 1772—it appeared that they were no longer matriarchal. Chiefs and kings, who had once been integrated into sacred kingships dedicated to the service of the moon goddess, had by now made themselves their own masters. Society was subject to a stringent hierarchy, where ordinary people worked for royalty and for the chiefs' great expeditions. Women were regarded as "unclean," and were forbidden to touch food, which accordingly made agriculture and food preparation men's domain. The women spent their days working in the house, occupied with singing, dancing and beautification. They were not permit-

ted to visit the Marae, where men celebrated their secret rituals.—Or at least this is the picture we get from reports by European seafarers and researchers, who were exposed to, and gave accounts of, the male world only.[18]

In spite of its apparently masculine character, old Polynesian society was not a patriarchal system. Its matriarchal epoch lay in the not-too-distant past, and was, in many ways, still visible. The voices of indigenous women researchers provide a valuable corrective to the earlier, one-sided perspective; they present a different picture of social relationships.[19] Traditionally, the Polynesians believed the evolution of life proceeded from the feminine principle, as in the myth of Po, the Night, who gave birth parthenogenetically. This concept permeated traditional society and was the basis of the matrilineal Polynesian social order and all its corollary life-ways. Just as important was the concept of "pono," or life-balance—seen as a proper balance of feminine and masculine that must be in accordance in all human behavior and activities. This is reflected in mythology by the divine pair Po Ele and Kumulipo, as well as by Hina and Ku. Both concepts: the feminine origin of the world, and the social balance between feminine and masculine, are classic matriarchal ones.

The matrilineal social order in Polynesia—as elsewhere—not only led to worship of female ancestors by the women, who received "mana wahine," or wisdom and power, from them; it also dictated the rank and title of every person through the bloodlines of their mother, and their father's mother.[20] But through migration and dispersal over many widely separated small islands, the overall matrilineal clan-organization broke down. In spite of these difficulties, there were some matrilocal marriages (on Raratonga, Marquesas, Rotuma, Bowditch Island). On Samoa and the Nicobar Islands, at the time of first European contact young men still routinely lived with their wives' relatives (Ill. 9).[21]

The high valuation of women in traditional culture can also be seen in the Samoan practice of calling a newborn female child "Tama Sa" (sacred child), while a newborn male child is "Tama Tane" (male child). Women have the exclusive right to establish a family, that is, they choose their spouses, and have the power to bless and to curse—a power inherited by their daughters. A further, extremely significant consequence of Polynesian matrilinearity is that the primary familial relationship was not between parents and children (they did not all belong to the same clan); nor was the primary familial relationship, in spite of the very common virilocal marriage of women in Polynesia, between husbands and wives. Rather, the closest alliance, called the "covenant," was the relationship between sisters and brothers. Brothers respected sisters and provided for them and their children their whole lives. As in Melanesia, Polynesian brothers and male matrilineal relatives considered themselves honor-bond to see that their sisters were represented to their hus-

Illustration 9. Polynesian Woman. Private photo.

bands and their families as best as they could. Nevertheless, wives could easily separate from their spouses, in order to find better ones.[22]

The balance of feminine and masculine activities was also maintained. Men were responsible for gardening, agriculture and deep-sea fishing, while women took care of the inland fisheries in rivers and lagoons. Men cooked the meals and served the women at table (Tonga und Hawai'i), while women gathered edible fruits and medicinal herbs, and were well versed in medicine. Furthermore, they also mastered the production of "kapa," cloth from the fine fibers of the paper mulberry tree; this they produced by beating and extending the fibers, putting layer upon layer, and finally decorating the cloth with painted designs.[23]

Polynesian women also participated in politics: traditional villages had one house for the men's council, and another for the women's council. No decision could be enacted by the men's council without consulting the women's council—in that way they arrived at consensus.[24] It was the particular political task of women to make peace; however, they could also participate in war, in defence of their land and their children. In war, no one dared to kill a woman (on Samoa).[25]

10.3 Pele's clan

Despite the power of chieftains and the status gap between aristocrats and the people, significant matriarchal elements were evident among the aristocracy as well. The aristocrats banded together in brotherhoods, called "Areoi." These groups demonstrate traits in common with men's societies in South America (see chapter 11), but their lines of relationship show traces of matriarchal clan organization. For example, a married man has the right to all his spouse's sisters, while his wife has the right to all his brothers—the pattern of the sisters-brothers group marriage we have already encountered. In the Hawai'ian Islands this is called "Punalua," or "a multiplicity of spouses." Punalua marriage was widespread in the Polynesian islands and was ultimately maintained by the aristocracy (on Hawai'i, Tahiti, Easter Island). In New Zealand it was, by the time of conquest, no longer in place as an institution, but remained a factor in Maori mythology. There were similar customs in Micronesia.[26]

Within aristocratic families, too, a man's sister played an important role. Though women were excluded from the Marae, the male ancestor temples, religious clan ceremonies on Samoa were performed not by the male head of the clan , but by his sister. Across Polynesia, the chief's eldest sister played a significant role; she was usually the family priestess and was ceremonially worshipped. On Tonga she

bore the title "Tamaha," and was considered to be more sacred than the chief himself. He had to pay homage to her and humble himself before her, as she was the "greatest person on the islands of Tonga." The aristocratic family's deity was represented not in the brother's descendants, but the sister's. Originally the Polynesian throne was a matrilineal inheritance; the sons of a royal mother had to marry their sisters in order to share the throne. The queen mother held the highest position of all; she was head of internal affairs; the king took care of external affairs. She ruled the land during the king's expeditions abroad, which could last a long time, and which would never be undertaken without consulting her. Not only the queen mother, but also her daughters—the king's sisters—were ruling queens. Since the early 19th century there have been at least three instances where sisters of kings have been rulers, in Hawai'i alone; in the dynastic registers of Tahiti there are as many ruling queens as kings, the most well-known being "Oberea" and "Aimata." The female-male double nature of Polynesian royalty is the foundation of its stability.[27]

The Hina-Maui myth clearly reflects the ancient matriarchal relationship between queen mother and king. In the myth of the Hawai'ian goddess Pele, the original matriarchally organized clan makes an appearance: Pele is the female head of a clan of fire goddesses; she channels the lava flowing from the volcanoes—regarded as the menstrual blood of the earth.[28] But she is not just a goddess of fire, as is shown by the way her sea voyages and quest for land are portrayed. She is said to have come from the Tahiti Islands, voyaging across the sea with her ships; it is she who first discovered the Hawai'ian Islands. Once there, she made her way from island to island, sheltering in the craters she dug in the mountains. She did not stay in any one place until she dug the Kilauea crater on the island of Hawai'i (the Big Island); there, surrounded by boiling lava within the island's highest mountain, she remains today. Her travels tell the story not only of the various geological eras of the Hawai'ian volcanoes, but also of the successive waves of land-acquisition by the Pele clan in earlier times; the settlement of Hawai'i was accomplished over the course of about 1500 years.[29] Evidence of an actual Pele clan can be found all over the Hawa'ian Islands; these people regarded Pele as their ancestress. In this clan the dead, or bones of the dead, were carried up to "Pele's house"—the Kilauea crater—and thrown in; thus they returned to their ancestress.[30] The Pele clan probably goes back to the first immigrants from Tahiti to Hawai'i, a migration that took place under the direction of a matriarchal queen.[31]

Along with this migration myth, another sign pointing to a matriarchal era is the fact that this goddess, under the name "Pele honuamea," or "Pele the Earth Woman," also is the earth goddess. Her mother Haumea (the Earth) had two brothers: the god of heavens, and the water god, Lono. The hearth was sacred to Pele's

mother, and was guarded by her brother Lono. So Pele has no father, her male relatives are her maternal uncles; her uncle Lono, the water god, accompanied her on her travels, and later watched over her own sacred places, the craters on the Hawai'ian Islands. Lono only makes himself visible when one of the craters erupts, appearing in the cloud of steam that rises above the sea when the glowing lava flows off the coast; this is the cloud that turns into volcanic weather and lets off lightning, thunder and rainstorm.[32]

Over the course of her sea voyage to Hawai'i, Pele had carried her little sister, Hi'iaka, in an egg under her armpit, and looked after her like a lap-dog, to make sure she arrived safe and sound. When Hi'iaka grew up, she went on a courting voyage for Pele; this indicates that early Hawai'ian culture practised the courting of men by women.[33] Hi'iaka was a "witchcraft" expert; that is, she invented and supervised the sacred "hula dance" and song, purely shamanic rituals, meant to bring on rain and fertility. The hula songs are not considered to have been created by mortals, but rather taught in dreams by Pele spirits to female worshippers of the goddess. The vast mythological Pele cycle that developed from these songs was recounted episodically during hula dancing, and the prayers in the dance were directed to Laka, one of Pele's sisters, the goddess of forest fertility and all earthly forces. Young dancers, both female and male, adorned themselves with tropical flowers and leaves from the forest, wearing them in their hair and in garlands round their necks. The dancers thus reflected the beauty of Laka and were regarded as possessed by the spirits of Pele.[34] This shows that the women of Hawai'i were not occupied with "singing, dancing and beautification," but with the most holy rituals and ceremonies of the Polynesian culture; they had a significant role in traditional religion.

Pele is said to have had a son called "Menehune," a further interesting point in the Pele cycle. Menehune are beings regarded in folk narrative tradition as fairy-like forest spirits, invisible but very ingenious with handicrafts. These stories present interesting parallels to the fairy and forest spirit beliefs in Japan (mountain princesses) and Europe (Ireland, the Pyrenees, Central Europe). These beings are said to have built the "Menehune Trenches" of Waimea on Hawai'i, a system of joined blocks of stone that fit together tightly without mortar for channelling water to irrigate fields. It is considered the most important archaeological site on Hawai'i, one marvelled at by researchers because of its excellent construction. Not only these trenches, but also dams, roads, aqueducts and above all, the great earth ovens which contained the sacred fire, are said to have been built by the enigmatic Menehune. Their population increased rapidly, but later, when the Polynesian warlords came to the islands, they retreated into the dense forests and up the mountains, where they "became invisible."[35]

There are researchers who correctly assume that the Menehune were the first

people of Hawai'i.[36] They clearly had matriarchal social patterns and a peaceful culture, as shown by the Pele myth cycle associated with them. "Menehune" was perhaps the title of their sacred kings. When this people was conquered by the proud warrior kings of the second wave of settlers from 1000 B.C.E.-1000 C.E., the "Raiatea," the Menehune were forced to flee into the forests; some left the islands, or ended up as ordinary humans at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The new masters consigned them to the realm of folklore and appropriated their arts, not without changing the once sovereign status of the women—a practice all too well known in other parts of the world.

The most important argument in favor of the Menehune as first people of Hawai'i is the fact that they still exist on the Tahiti Islands and on the Marquesas Islands; that is, precisely where, according to legend, Pele's clan came from.[37] There they are called "Manahune" or "Makaainana"—simple, working people, highly skilled at handicrafts. Those people who bear the brunt of the work were later also called "Makaainana" in Hawai'i.[38]

10.4 Warrior chiefs in Oceania

What could have led to masculinization of early matriarchal societies in Oceania? This question can be answered fairly precisely, but only by looking at concrete conditions, and not through abstract speculation. In Oceania's special geography, with vast areas of water and tiny areas of inhabitable land, the primary causes are easily discernible.

Briefly, these causes are scarcity of land and the resulting extreme migrations over the ocean, i. e., extreme in both distance and hardship. Only a small number of people can actually live on any of the Pacific islands, and conditions for habitation and survival resources are nowhere more limited than in Oceania. All across this area people were therefore engaged in strictly regulated practices for limiting population: the most important of these were abortion and maternal rejection of the baby. Only one or two children were permitted to a couple, even as many as four children would have been exceptional. In some areas up to two-thirds of the offspring were killed after birth. Many women used medicine to make themselves infertile. Not having children was also a means of social advancement: childlessness was considered genteel; excessive maternity, on the other hand, not adequate to one's status. The killing of new-born children also had religious significance: child victims were considered to be nourishment for the souls of the dead.[39]

In spite of these strict limitations, procreation was unavoidable and the population grew gradually, finally leading to overpopulation and famine. This creat-

ed one of two possible responses: complete disappearance of the will to live, so that extinction was seen as preferable;[40] or departure from the island on a journey into the unknown vastness of the Pacific Ocean. Expeditions in search of land were the driving force behind the settlement of Oceania. Groups of islands that were arid, whose fertility was limited—as in the Marquesas—again and again became places of departure for seafaring peoples.

In Oceanic matriarchal societies, ship building and ocean fishing were usually men's work, as were friendship and trade journeys. As we saw with the Trobriand Islanders, these are favourable conditions for the chieftain to easily become a centralizing "chief operating officer." The so-called "charismatic leader" could have emerged in these circumstances, and his followers would gather around him in the face of deprivation and catastrophe along the journey. Bringing them into a newly-discovered island, his special position was his reward. Gradually this evolved into a chieftaincy or kingship that made his deeds legendary, bestowing privilege upon him. This state of affairs was already apparent in Melanesia (Trobriand Islands culture), where the chieftaincy resulted in the eclipse of certain matriarchal guidelines. Following this migration from west to east, this special social situation becomes ever more marked, intensifying in proportion to how far the people in question has travelled over the course of its history.

The situation again intensified when, after completing a successful expedition, chiefs were also able to overpower and drive out an already existing population. From then on, expedition leaders had also to be warrior chiefs, and obviously the only new arrivals who survived were those whose followers pledged unconditional allegiance and had been well-drilled in obedience. These conditions created the figure of the Polynesian Raiatea chief, the warlord. The Raiatea chiefs were successful leaders, conquering the land and erecting a two-tiered class society—with the previous inhabitants constituting a subordinate class. A strict hierarchical order proceeded downwards from the chiefs, through the aristocracy, all the way to the bottom: everyone knew his or her place. Tribute had to be paid to the godlike chiefs, and this put increased pressure on the already delicate natural environment. With every new wave of population, forests were cleared to build ships and make room for fields, and paying tribute to the chiefs meant the people needed more fields, which made the situation even worse. Thus, in many island cultures of Oceania, a typical internal cycle took place: first or second settlement, development, expansion to the point of congestion, followed by decline and then departure—with the hope of finding new land.[41] Over a period of 2000 years (1000 B.C.E.-1000 C.E.) this cycle fed the progressive development, from west to east across the Pacific, of an ever more dominant chieftaincy

as the central authority—which meant an increasingly masculinization of Polynesian culture.

In the Hawai'ian Islands, this development intensified, demonstrating clear patriarchal tendencies. Along the back-and-forth sea routes between Tahiti and the Hawai'ian Islands, chiefs' ships—and power—grew ever greater. Hawai'i developed a rigid hierarchy, with the chiefs, nobles and priests at the top. Rivalry developed, as in many island cultures, springing up between the chiefs of different clans, and the clans began fighting among each other. The ordinary people were obliged to work not just the fields of the chiefs and the nobles, but also to serve as fighters in their feuds. This bettered their situation not a whit. Due to his divine status, no one could approach the chief without risking his own life. Anyone could be taken and killed, without reason, as a human sacrifice for the temple, often simply to pacify the chief's or a priest's bad mood.[42]

When Captain James Cook got to Hawai'i in 1778, these warlike feuds had already led to formation of four strong chieftaincies. In the following ten years these groups fought each other viciously, until the chief from Kamehameha emerged as the most powerful, and ruled the Hawai'ian Islands until 1810, unifying them under his kingship. He ended the bloody conflicts, enacted laws to improve the situation of the ordinary people: they were granted safety for life, and a better economic situation. He founded the Kamehameha dynasty which, before 1893, produced eight kings and two queens. However, in the meantime more and more foreign white settlers acquired land, developing large plantations; in 1893 they toppled the indigenous monarchy in their own selfish interests and founded the republic of Hawai'i. This in turn was annexed by the USA in 1909 for strategic reasons.

This process unfolded in a much more unfortunate way on Easter Island (Rapa Nui). The small island formed by the rubble of three volcanoes lies about 2000 miles from the next island to the west of it, and about 3500 miles from the coast of South America. Although today it is a bleak steppe, pollen found by archaeologists indicate that the island was once covered by a rainforest that included the largest palm trees in the world.

There is evidence of settlements prior to the arrival of the Raiatea-chiefs from central Polynesia—who reached the island in about 1200 C.E., after an expertly organized voyage.[43] According to indigenous tradition, the first settlers came to Easter Island much earlier, arriving from two different regions: from the east under male leadership and from the west under the leadership of a woman named "Hotu Matua." Like the clan queen Pele, she was a seafaring queen who, with her people, discovered Easter Island (then called "Waitangi Ki Roto"). Probably she came from the Tahitian, Tuamotu or Marquesas Islands; the male leader, named "Kiwa,"

could have come from South America. The two very distinct peoples intermarried, just as their leaders did; with the addition of a somewhat enigmatic third people, the "stone people," who also lived on the island, they formed a new and peaceful society.[44] The people from the west, led by their queen—as well as the "stone people"—call to mind the Menehune. This new society, created from three cultures, apparently enjoyed a sophisticated culture, in which they created artistic stone systems—such systems are also attributed to the Menehune. They also erected immense stone figures, the "Moai" (Mohai, Mokai), and were the only ones in all of Oceania to use a hieroglyphic type of writing.

This first *Easter Island culture*, which had a matriarchal character, must have developed during the first centuries of the Common Era. According to indigenous tradition, it was not long before the people undertook further sea voyages, which led to the discovery—and first settlement—of New Zealand (Aotearoa) in the 2nd-3rd century. They developed a regular ocean route between Easter Island and New Zealand, which they sailed several times in both directions. They also undertook voyages to and from „the vast land to the east" of Easter Island—the former being their name for the South American continent.[45]

Not until 950 C.E. would New Zealand be discovered again, this time by Polynesian sailors from Tahiti; and only in the 13th century would it be permanently settled by the Maori. Easter Island had been reached in around 1200 C.E. by a double-hull canoe of the Raiatea chiefs—an arrival that may be related to by another strand of indigenous narrative in which it is said that the "Long Ears" lived on Easter Island, and that many generations later came the "Short Ears," from the west. These later Polynesians brought with them a male oriented, hierarchically organized society, which they reproduced on Easter Island. The Short Ears adopted the culture of the Long Ears, but not their social organization, and by virtue of this compromise, the two peoples were able to live together peacefully.[46]

At the zenith of Easter Island's cultural development, during the "Ahu-Moai phase" (1200–1600 C.E.), an immense number of the huge, exclusively male, stone figures carved out of the tuff of the craters, was created and transported to temples of the male nobility on the sea coast. The remains of these figures are, even today, characteristic of Easter Island. The ambition of various chiefs surely came into play here, for the statues of male ancestors served the aristocratic men's societies as magnificent embellishments of the open temples. Here they celebrated their secret rituals that excluded women and ordinary people, while they bonded and strengthened their hierarchy. But according to indigenous legend, after several centuries of peaceful co-existence a fight broke out between the Long Ears and the Short Ears over the Moai; this led to civil war and the complete destruction of the

Long Ears. Their bodies were burned in a special place; this has been located, providing archaeological evidence.[47]

Various theories have been advanced about the outbreak of this civil war. One suggests that the forest that once covered the Easter Island had gradually been cleared for houses, ships and for funeral fires.[48] Additionally, the chiefs' ambitions played a fatal role: constant pressure to produce more and more Moai figures meant the labor force, made up of ordinary people, was increasingly exploited. Meanwhile, greater numbers of trees were felled to make rollers for transporting the huge stone figures, and this clear cutting led to soil erosion. At the height of this extravagance—and exacerbated by overpopulation (about 15,000—20,000 inhabitants) and the beginning of famine—total civil war broke out. The Moai were toppled in revolt, and the crisis left chiefs and clans fighting each other in an awful massacre that lasted for more than one century (from about 1600 to 1750 C.E.). Thus overpopulation on the one hand, and the impossibility of getting away from the island on the other—with no wood left for shipbuilding and no neighboring island in sight—had led to this long phase of chronic civil war and social disintegration. The destruction of the culture, according to this theory, was the result of ecological collapse.

A more recent theory contradicts this idea of ecological collapse and the self-destruction of Easter Island culture, based on notes made by Jakob Roggeveen, the captain of a Dutch merchant ship, who landed at Easter Island on Easter Sunday 1722 and stayed only a few days.[49] Roggeveen reported on lush fields that didn't require much work, small coconut palms and toromiro trees; he describes unlimited fish in the sea and numerous chickens on land, and the beautiful, healthy people. So we have to assume that the Short Ears, who were the Polynesian chieftains, in time recognized the impending ecological danger and stopped exploiting the trees; they refused to erect any more stone figures. This was followed by a struggle with the Long Ears, who probably were against this policy. The outcome resulted in the destruction of the Long Ears, which obviously made it possible for the indigenous people to live on under good conditions.

In 1770 the island was again "discovered" by Spaniards embarking from Peru, but when Captain Cook landed in 1774 he found the population decimated and in dismaying conditions. They were no longer able—as they had been earlier with Captain Roggeveen—to outfit him with provisions.[50] Was this due to a new outbreak of civil war, or did the Spaniards bring a fatal disease with them?

No matter how, or how much the Easter Island inhabitants had harmed their Island and their society in the past, it was minor damage compared to the effects of the subsequent contact with whites. From 1805 on, ships arrived more often—

kidnapping people for the slave trade and raping women: 1500 indigenous persons were shipped to Peru alone. After that, diseases such as syphilis and smallpox spread throughout the island, reducing the population even more. This was reported in 1864 by the first missionaries to the island. They were followed in 1868 by a sheep breeder who forced the missionaries off the island, took it over and locked up the remaining indigenous inhabitants in a ghetto. A French anthropologist who arrived in 1877 reported that only 111 people were left—documenting the worst genocide in the history of Polynesian peoples. Only in 1966 did the last inhabitants receive Chilean citizenship, and their ghetto fences were torn down.[51]

The fate of Easter Island is a brutal illustration of what happened to many Pacific cultures. All of these indigenous societies were pushed to misery and cultural disintegration by Cook's successors—the Europeans, and North and South Americans—and their predatory visits delivering alcohol, disease, colonialization and Christianity. Recently the situation has been made worse by tourist amusement parks, nuclear bomb testing and nuclear waste dumping in their waters.[52]

Today, organizations such as "Ka Lahui Hawai'i," "Rapa Nui Maori," and many other indigenous peoples all over the world have been raising their voices at international human rights fora in the long-term struggle for self determination and their rights to land, territories and natural resources, as well as to their own languages, traditional knowledge, customary law, and much more. These rights particularly affect women and children, and also involve gender rights.[53] There is still a very long way to go—but then Polynesian peoples are well-versed in the art of very long journeys.

10.4 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the cultural level:

- Megalithic constructions are encountered all over the world, wherever matriarchal, agriculture based societies have settled. Basic forms are: stone rows, stone circles, stone rectangles, and pyramids, whether serving as open temples or megalithic grave monuments. Stone figures are often a feature of these constructions (for example, the "Moai" on Easter Island).
- Megaliths of matriarchal cultures comprise not only sacred, but also secular constructions: ditches, dams, roads, water pipelines (aqueducts). The workmanship of the stones laid without mortar is often very artful (for example, the "Menehune" ditches of Hawai'i).

At the social level:

- Patriarchal tendencies began because of land scarcity, and resulted in extreme migrations in search of inhabitable land. Over the course of these migrations, charismatic leaders appeared and gathered followers around them, including secret warrior societies, thus masculinizing the society. In cases where another people is displaced, these warriors effectively become the victors (as happened in Oceania).
- Cultures with these first patriarchal tendencies simultaneously exhibit some remnants of matriarchal characteristics, such as the pattern of matriarchal kingship—which was usually a female-male double regency. The queen mother, or her daughter queen, ruled internal affairs in case of the king's absence or disability; then the mother or daughter queen assumed full powers of governance. The king, as son of the ruling queen mother, could only claim title to the matrilineal throne if he married the daughter queen, his sister (so-called "dynastic incest," which rather has to do with matrilineal inheritance regulations—see the Polynesian nobility).
- Even where men have their own temples, forbidden to women, the queen mother or her daughter is still the royal clan's family priestess, as such she is the highest sacred authority (e.g., the Polynesian nobility).

Notes

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3. Howard, ibid., p. 88; Ben R. Finney: "New Perspectives on Polynesian Voyaging," in: Highland/Force/Howard/Kelly/Sinoto (eds.): *Polynesian Culture History,* ibid., pp. 141–166. See also: *Song of Waitaha. The Histories of a Nation,* Indigenous oral traditions, reported by Te

Porohau Peter/Ruka Te Korako et al., Darfield, New Zealand, 2003, Whaririki Publishing Ltd., p. 72.

4. Finney, ibid., pp. 152–160; *Song of Waitaha,* ibidem.
5. Finney, ibid., pp. 150–152; *Song of Waitaha,* ibid., pp. 67–79.
6. Kirch, ibid., p.22 f.
7. Alfred Métraux: *Ethnology of Easter Island,* Honolulu/Hawai'i, 1940, Bishop Museum Press, pp. 49–52, and: *Easter Island. A Stone-Age Civilization of the Pacific,* London 1957, Andre Deutsch; C. and E. Handy: *Native Planters in Old Hawaii,* Honolulu/Hawai'i, 1972, Bishop Museum Press, pp. 37–41; *Song of Waitaha,* ibid., pp. 67.
8. Martha Beckwith: *Hawaiian Mythology,* Honolulu/Hawai'i, 1970, University of Hawaii Press, p. 12 f.; Briffault, ibid., vol. II, pp. 529, 712.
9. See the indigenous scholar and activist Mililani B. Trask: "Aia Na Ha'ina i Loko o Kakou—The Answer Lei Within Us," in: Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* ibidem.
10. Handy, ibid., p. 37.
11. Briffault, ibid., vol. II, pp. 657, 712, 718; Martha Beckwith, ibid., pp. 13, 214 f.; Mililani Trask, ibidem; Hans Nevermann: *Götter der Südsee. Die Religion der Polynesier,* Stuttgart 1947, Spemann, p. 105 f.; *Song of Waitaha,* ibid., pp. 37–45.
12. Briffault, ibid., vol. II, p. 718.
13. H. Helfritz: *Die Osterinsel,* Zurich, Switzerland, 1953, Fretz & Wasmuth, p. 55.
14. Martha Beckwith, ibid., p. 13.
15. Thomas Thrum: "Kukaniloko: famed birthplace of aliis," in: *Thrum's Hawaiian Annual,* 1912, Black & Auld, pp. 101–105.
16. Heine-Geldern, ibid., pp. 294–302.
17. Heine-Geldern, ibid., pp. 299, 314.
18. See quotations in: Kirch, ibidem; Briffault, ibid., vol. II, p. 529; Handy, ibid., p. 301 f.
19. See Milinai Trask, ibidem; and Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese: "Restoring Liberative Elements of our Cultural Gender Arrangements," in: Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* ibid., pp. 108–113.
20. Mililani Trask, ibidem.
21. Briffault; ibid., vol. I, pp. 589, 294.
22. Kiwi Tamasese, ibidem.
23. Kiwi Tamasese, ibidem; Mililani Trask, ibidem.
24. Kiwi Tamasese, ibidem.
25. Mililani Trask, ibidem; Briffault, ibid., vol.I, p. 322.
26. Briffault, ibid., vol. I, pp. 723–725.
27. Briffault, ibid., vol. I, p. 26 f. and vol. II, p. 529
28. See for this and the following: Martha Beckwith, ibid., p. 167 f.
29. P. V. Kirch: *Feathered Gods and Fishhooks (Hawaiian Archaeology and Prehistory),* Honolulu/Hawai'i, 1985, University of Hawaii Press, pp. 52–66, 181 f., 284 f.
30. Handy, ibid., p. 335 f.
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33. Handy, ibid., p. 173 f.
34. Nathaniel B. Emerson: *Unwritten Literature of Hawaii. The Sacred Songs of the Hula,* Tokyo, Japan, 1965, Tuttle, pp. 23–25, 186–201, 260–263; and Handy, ibid., pp. 180 f., 360.
35. Handy, ibid., p. 403 f.
36. William Westervelt: "Fairy folk of Hawaii," in: *Paradise of the Pacific,* no. 14, February 1901, Press Pub. Co., pp. 11–13; and Katharine Luomala: *The Menehune of Polynesia and other mythical Little People of Oceania,* Honolulu/Hawai'i, 1951, Bernice P. Bishop Museum Press, pp. 40–51, especially the theories of Buck and Emory.
37. Finney, ibid., pp. 161–164.
38. Luomala, ibid., p. 46.
39. Georg Eckert: „Der Einfluss der Familienorganisation auf die Bevölkerungsbewegung in Ozeanien", in: *Anthropos,* no. 31, Wien-Mödling, Austria, 1936, Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel, pp. 789–799.
40. Eckert, ibid., p. 793.
41. Kirch, *(Feathered Gods),* ibid., pp. 284–298.
42. See for this and the following: Kaori O'Connor : „Die Hawai'i Inseln", in: *Bild der Völker,* ibid., vol. 1, p. 196; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* ibid., vol. 1.
43. Thomas Barthel : *Das achte Land,* Munich 1974, Verlag Renner; and Métraux, ibidem.
44. *Song of Waitaha,* ibid., pp. 33–35.
45. *Song of Waitaha,* ibidem.
46. See for this and the following: Thor Heyerdahl: „Die Bewohner der Osterinsel", in: *Bild der Völker,* ibid., vol. 1, p. 222–229; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* ibid., vol. 8.
47. Heyerdahl, ibidem, p. 227.
48. See for this and the following: Jared Diamond: *Guns, Germs and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies,* 1997, W. W. Norton, p. 53 f.; and: *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive,* London 2005, Allan Lane; and Kirch, *(Polynesian Chiefdoms),* ibid., pp. 264–278.
49. Paul Rainbird: "A message for our future? The Rapa Nui (Easter Island) eco-disaster and Pacific islands environment," in: *World Archaeology,* no. 33(3), 2002, Taylor & Francis Ltd., pp. 436–451; and Benny Peiser: "From Genocide to Ecocide: The Rape of the Rapa Nui," in: *Energy&Environment,* vol. 16, no. 3&4, 2005, pp. 513–539, Multi-Science Publishing Co. Ltd.
50. Heyerdahl, ibidem, p. 225.
51. See Peiser, ibidem.
52. John Clammer: „Die Europäer und der Pazifik—eine verhängnisvolle Begegnung", in: *Bild der Völker,* ibid., vol. 1, pp. 166–171; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* ibid., vol. 8.
53. See Mililani Trask, ibidem; Kiwi Tamasese, ibidem.

PART II

Indigenous Matriarchal Societies in the Americas, India, and Africa

In this second part the characteristics of matriarchal societies in our times will be further explained, in their general outlines and particular variability. The focus will be on, among other things, the large-scale forms of social and political organization that matriarchies have developed. I explicitly refrain from using the term "state," although these large-scale forms would indeed be examples of what we call "states"—refuting accusations that matriarchal societies are primitive in character because they failed to develop large-scale political institutions. The reason I do not call these large-scale forms "states" is that this concept is generally used in relation to patriarchal empires and nations, and is characterized by centralized domination, strict hierarchy, and a class system with its attendant oppression, and the use of armed force to maintain this precarious construct. All these attributes are untypical for matriarchal large-scale forms of social and political organization—which are formed and held together by other powers.

At the same time, there is great variation among matriarchal forms of political organization, as can be seen with the Iroquois Confederation in eastern North America, the Nayar society in South India, the realms of queen-kingship of Africa, particularly West Africa, and the political forms of the nomadic Tuareg in North Africa.

11

Matriarchal Cultures in South America

For Amana: Moon Woman and Great Serpent, Creatrix of the Universe

11.1 The Arawak

After Columbus "discovered" America in 1492, indigenous peoples endured an overwhelming epidemic of terror: disease, slavery, cultural destruction and genocide. Today, over 500 years later, the horror continues. The first fleet across the Atlantic made landfall in the Bahamas, and from there Columbus stopped off in northern Cuba and Haiti. The first indigenous people he encountered were the *Arawak*, then living in what is now the Greater Antilles and Lesser Antilles. On these islands they had created a highly developed culture, now called *Taino culture*. After Columbus left, the Arawak destroyed his fort. On his second trip (1493–96), he discovered all the islands of the Greater Antilles, established a permanent settlement on Haiti, and "pacified the Indians"; that is, he made them pay taxes. Every three months they had to come up with a certain amount of gold. When he made his third trip in 1500, he installed a Spanish governor to rule Haiti and enforced the taxation system all over the island. However, since the indigenous people of Haiti were not in a position to deliver on the payments, gold mines were built, and the male half of the Taino Arawak population was put to work in the gold mines

or on the colonial masters' plantations. As far as the Spaniards were concerned, this was all done in the "Indians' best interests," as it gave them the privileges of learning Spanish and converting to Christianity. In spite of these measures, the enslaved Taino Arawak starved to death or committed suicide. Mothers killed their children to spare them their fate. Smallpox was rampant, decimating the population. By 1535, only 500 Taino Arawak remained on the island.[1]

To replace the lost manpower, the Spaniards imported Taino Arawak people from other Caribbean islands (Puerto Rico and Jamaica), thereby condemning them to the same fate. At the same time the Spanish overlords began to trade in African slaves, since the indigenous Taino Arawak proved to be "incapable of working." When the latter resisted this treatment and rebelled, their revolts were quickly and brutally quelled, and the prisoners horribly massacred. Between 1540 and 1550 the Haitian gold mines were depleted; the nearby islands never had much in the first place. So the Spaniards migrated away to the fabled goldfields of Mexico and Peru, where they carried out the same destructive process. In Haiti slavery was abolished, but it was too late to benefit the indigenous peoples: by the time Sir Francis Drake arrived in Haiti in 1585, there was not one Indian to be found.[2]

Still, even today scattered groups of Island Arawak live in other places. About 2000 of them were able to hide on the Antilles island of Cuba, while others escaped from Cuba to Florida. After the conquerors lost interest in the Antilles, and stopped the practice of slavery, the Taino Arawak of Cuba were able to live in their settlements in relative tranquility. They intermarried with the Spaniards, and adopted their culture, so that by 1900 only 400 Taino Arawak remained. At the other end of the Antilles, on Trinidad, where Columbus landed in 1498, the Island Arawak also survived, as the island had no further purpose for the Spaniards except as a departure point for finding "El Dorado," the goldfields in the south. Even so, slavery, revolt, and disease reduced their numbers: in 1830 there were only 726 Arawak Taino and today the number is down to 200.[3]

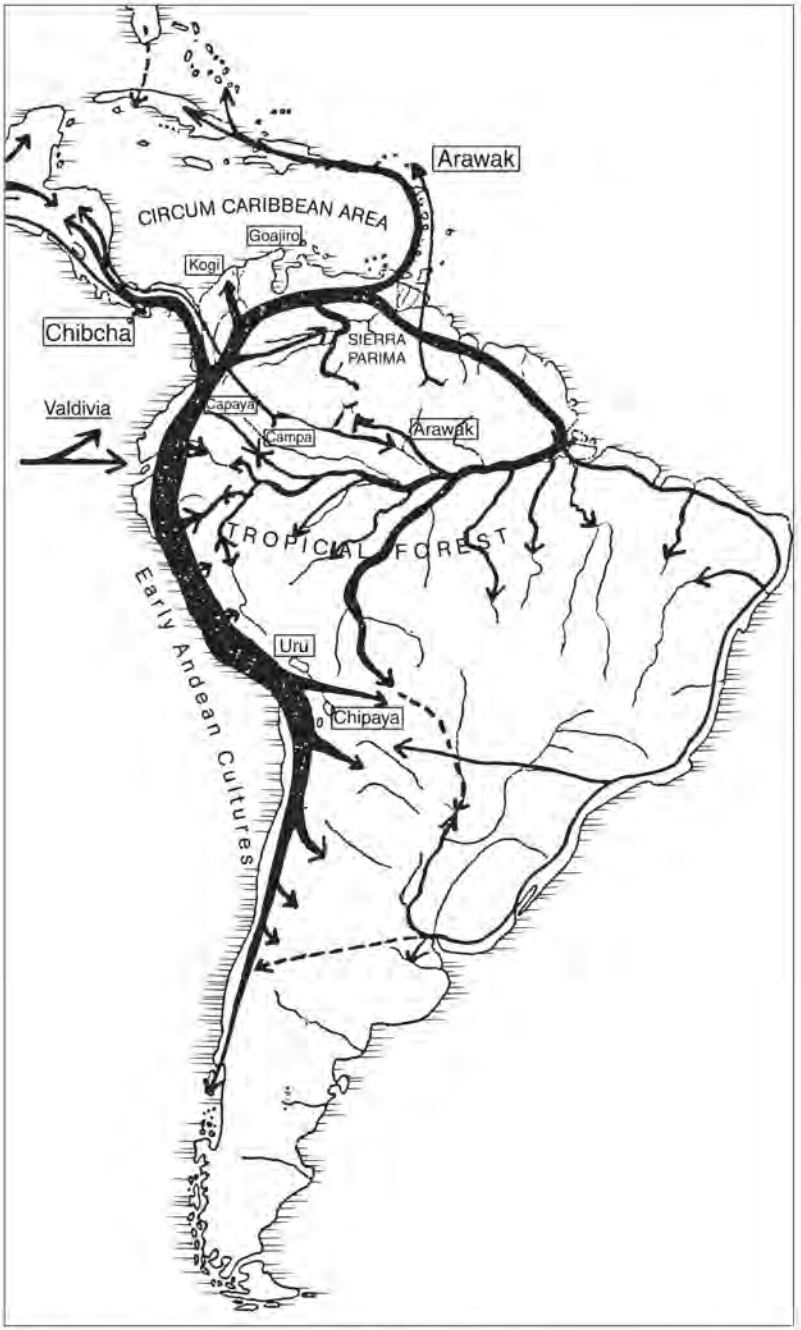
The history of the Arawak goes back to the very first agrarian settlers in the Americas, an ancient and mysterious people. In pre-Columbian times, the people now known as the Island Arawak migrated north from South America across Trinidad to the Lesser Antilles and, following these islands like stepping stones, made their way to the Greater Antilles. In early times, the Arawak settled over vast areas of northern South America. They also lived on the coast of Colombia and Venezuela (circum-Caribbean Arawak) as well as in the rain forests of Guyana and northern Brazil (Forest Arawak). Their culture spread out along the waterways of the Orinoco basin and the Rio Negro, all the way to the Amazon basin. Traces of this culture are found throughout

the headwaters of the Amazon and in enclaves at the mouth of the Amazon. They were very clever marine and river navigators in their dugout canoes.

Today sub-Andean Arawak peoples such as the *Campa* still live in eastern Bolivia and eastern Peru. Also there are isolated, Arawak-related peoples such as the *Uru* around Lake Titicaca, and the *Chipaya* near Lake Copaisa in the Andean highlands. They all bear witness to the widespread geographical distribution of these peoples (see map 6).[4] Throughout this enormous region, they were the providers of material culture and shapers of the social order.

Although the material culture of these peoples has developed in various different ways, formed by the distinct geographically-determined lifestyles they have adopted, they are bound together by shared language and unique social and religious patterns. Social organization is matrilineal and matrilocal: in a word, they live in matriarchal clans.[5] Certain indications of the matriarchal pattern, such as matriliny, can be found in neighboring communities as far away as southern Brazil and Argentina (*Ge, Bororo*) and go back to the Arawak.[6] These peoples believe in a primordial goddess, Mamona, who is both the Earth Goddess and the mother of the God of Heaven; her brother, at her side, protects her.[7] Often, this God of Heaven is absent entirely, and the Moon Goddess is worshipped, as a second primordial goddess, in his place. All over the Caribbean, this culture shows intriguing similarities with that of the ancient agricultural Andean period of pre-Inca times (Chibcha in Colombia, Tiahuanaco in Bolivia) around 550 C.E. . These cultures, in turn, go back to the even older Andean Chavin culture (1000 B.C.E.). This in turn has its roots in the very ancient Valdivia culture of Colombia's Pacific coast, one of the oldest agricultural people dating from 3000–1500 B.C.E. (or even earlier).[8] Where did they come from, and just how ancient *is* the Arawak culture, with its earth mother and moon goddess beliefs and its matriarchal clans?

We will come back to this question later on, after outlining the more recent, post-contact history of the Arawak. All across the South American continent, wherever the Spanish invaders found them—having already annihilated the Antilles Arawak–, the fate of these peoples was the same. In the face of exploitation, disease, and war, whole tribes collapsed under the weight of the struggle for survival. The ongoing genocide meant that along the coasts and large waterways, indigenous peoples were quickly eliminated or assimilated. Neither did those who managed to hide from the invaders escape: they suffered the damaging consequences of being on the run, and the effects of disease, even before the whites made "contact." For the indigenous peoples, it made no difference if the foreigners came as invaders, colonial masters, missionaries or settlers: the results were the same. Indeed, missions were often the point of first contact, but these people were also invaders; they



Map 6: Migrations and spreading of the Arawak

brought in contagious diseases, not to mention cultural destruction wrought through Christian values forced upon the people.[9] Groups who stayed at the missions were the first to die out, while their stubborn relatives retreated into the forest and went back to the old ways of living. These survivors, forced out into the most inhospitable parts of the continent and being separated from other branches of their people, had no way to maintain the elevated culture that they once knew, and to which the archaeological evidence bears eloquent testimony. Utter breakdown of the culture followed.[10] They simplified their lives, living as basic rainforest dwellers, as did the *Campa*;[11] or, alternatively, they managed to survive as secondary stock breeders under harsh desert conditions, as did the *Goajiro* on the Guajira peninsula in the Gulf of Maracaibo (Colombia).

With a population of 60,000, the Goajiro Arawak are the largest indigenous society surviving in Colombia and Venezuela, and one of the largest in all of South America. Creative adaptability enabled them to master their destiny: when the Spaniards came, they were already living on the arid Goajira peninsula, where they made a living by fishing and engaging in pearl culture, whose secrets they were privy to. Before that, they had probably been agriculturists driven out of their lands by other peoples, migrating to the peninsula long before the Spaniards arrived.[12] Unlike gold, pearl culture was not so easy for the Spaniards to plunder, and trade was established with them. The Goajiro Arawak received domesticated animals such as goats, sheep, pigs, chickens, cows and horses in trade with the Spaniards, and developed a nomadic, animal breeding economy as a new basis for survival. They also began to sell salt harvested from marine salt-pans. Today, many work in the petroleum industry on Lake Maracaibo. They have responded to the scarcity of water on their desert peninsula with the building of sophisticated well pits. Their houses, befitting a nomadic lifestyle, are very simple. In places where there is enough affluence to permit a permanent village of 200–250 inhabitants, they build strong brick houses and roof them with split cactus shingles, enclosing the village with a cactus hedge.[13]

The matrilineal Goajiro Arawak are organized into about 30 big clans, each one with a different animal as identifying emblem, each with its own territory. The eldest woman, the clan mother or matriarch, holds each clan together. Her eldest brother is the clan's representative to the outside world; he enjoys great respect. The village chief is elected from among the male clan representatives, and it is always the most well-to-do who gets elected. This chief must dedicate himself totally to the village, since it will now be his duty to use his own clan's wealth to protect all the others. In this way his clan's wealth shrinks considerably. Soon after his means are reduced, another affluent man is elected as village chief, with the same responsibili-

ties. This intelligent method results in keeping village goods in circulation, preventing the accumulation of goods by the few, so that the general standard of living always balances out. Most significantly, these chiefs have no commanding authority whatsoever; they are simply charged with representing the village.[14] They and their clans gain nothing but honor by distributing their goods. However, added prestige does insure that in time of need, they will not be forgotten.

The life history of each individual is inseparable from that of the clan; represented by the clan mother, the clan safeguards its members. They reciprocate by doing everything they can to defend and strengthen their clan. The economic basis of every clan is its livestock, which is owned and cared for communally. Men pasture and water the animals, while the women do the milking and cheese-making, and cook the butchered meat. Stealing cattle is a crime akin to rape: both are punished with the harshest penalties, as they injure the honor of the entire clan.[15]

The Goajiro clans are exogamous (they marry outside the clan), and clans are permanently linked together in pairs. That is, pairs of clans are connected to each other through permanent intermarriage; for example, the Urania clan with the Puschania clan, and the Epieyues clan with the Secuana clan. Communal marriage no longer exists, and has been replaced by individual marriage. Nowadays, the young woman moves into her husband's house when she marries, and her mother-clan receives cattle from his clan as a wedding present. This is not a question of "bride price"; on the contrary, not only will the bride feed and clothe her spouse, but she is free at any time to divorce and return to her mother's house. The wedding present of cattle will be cared for and bred by her own clan, and in that sense it remains her own. In the event of divorce, it becomes her personal property.[16]

When a young woman gives birth, the only people permitted to attend the birth are women from her own clan. The birth of a girl is favored over the birth of a boy. A boy's birth is celebrated "like that of a little horse," while a girl's birth is celebrated "like that of a little cow," since cows are the clan's greatest treasure (according to a Goajiro source). After birth, the mother gives the child both the name of a female or male ancestor and the name of her own clan; additionally, it receives the name it will present to outsiders. Only members of the mother's clan celebrate this event. The father's lineage is known, but considered insignificant. The children first live with their mother; later an aunt on the mother's side takes over the further education of the girls, while an uncle on the mother's side does the same for the boys. In this way, members of the mother's clan raise the children.[17]

The Goajiro Arawak treat their livestock as well as they treat their own clan members. Just as one may not marry members of one's own clan, one may also not eat the cows that belong to one's own clan, since they are seen as close relatives.

When a cow is sick it is brought to the shaman, just like a person would be.[18] When a Goajiro clan member dies, cows are sacrificed in order to feed the guests who come from other clans. According to Goajiro belief, the spirits of the sacrificed cows accompany the dead person on the journey to the Otherworld, and add to the number of his or her clan spirits.[19]

Although the Arawak culture of the Goajiro has, in the face of various threats, gone through many changes, their matriarchal origins are still visible. Moreover, this culture serves as a good counter-example to the widely propagated legend that livestock breeding must, of necessity, be associated with patriarchy.

Drawing on archaeological and ethnological sources, it is possible to discern the basic traits of the ancient, fragmented, yet still-existing Arawak culture. Economy was based on agriculture, and was conducted partly as gardening, using digging sticks (Antilles), partly as semi-nomadic slash and burn farming (Amazonian rainforest), partly in open fields, associated with terraces and irrigation systems (mountains, hills, savannas in the sub-Andean region and in the Orinoco mountains). Nearly everywhere, planting was women's work, while men did the clearing.[20] Fruit and vegetable produce was complemented by hunting and fishing. Arawak fished with nets, hooks, harpoons and baskets, and hunted with clubs, slingshots, spears, and traps, and with the help of dogs and decoys. Bow and arrow were unknown.[21] All property was communally owned by the mother clan; in certain tribes the fields and houses were owned exclusively by the women.[22] Personal property, as well as titles and honors, were inherited solely through the female line. [23]

Large communal clan houses of the coastal Arawak (circum-Caribbean cultures) and Island Arawak (Antilles) still existed as late as the 20th century, and a settlement of up to 3000 people consisted of several such large houses. Clans were exclusively matrilineal, with the bridegroom moving into his mother-in-law's house for varying lengths of time and working for her clan. The espousal followed the rules of strict intermarriage between two clan houses in the same settlement (local endogamy). For the rainforest Arawak (in Guyana, Brazil, and the basins of the Orinoco, Rio Negro and Amazon) the settlements were significantly smaller and further apart; since a village consisted of just one clan, clan intermarriage took place between two villages (local exogamy).[24] Here too, the husband moved into his wife's house and worked for his mother-in-law's clan; i. e., they observed strict matrilocality.[25] As usual, these rules resulted in cross-cousin marriages over the generations. In general, pair, rather than communal, marriage seems to have become established, but according to researchers there were occasional instances of sisters polygyny and brothers polyandry; these fragments point to the old custom of communal marriage.[26]

The honor of chieftainship could only be inherited through the female line. In any case, the chiefs had no great power. They were village peacemakers and featured as singers and dancers at festivals; they represented their village to other communities, welcomed guests, took the lead in the hunt, and in feuds. They could easily be voted out.[27] The real power belonged to the clan mothers and the women of the clans in their clan houses; there are also instances of Arawak female chiefs.[28]

With all these characteristics, the Arawak culture demonstrates typically matriarchal structure in its social organization. Not insignificantly, frequent references are made to female Arawak warriors fighting against the Spanish, a phenomenon we will pursue below. Nevertheless, unlike their neighbors, the Caribs and the Tupi, they are reputed to be quite peaceful. The Arawak were not, in general, war-like and ferocious, and because of this—before European contact—the aggressive, patriarchalized Caribs with their superior weaponry had already pushed them out of their former territories. They fled to the coasts and migrated northwards toward the Lesser Antilles. The Caribs followed, so that by the time Columbus arrived, the Lesser Antilles had been conquered by the Caribs, while the Arawaks had moved up to settle in the Greater Antilles. [29]

The Caribs, who were the hereditary arch-enemies of the Arawak, had special practices: they routinely carried out raids against the Arawak Taino in order to capture female prisoners, who were then forced to marry the Carib chiefs, systematically weakening the female lineages of the Arawak Taino. Male captives were tortured, killed and eaten; their bones, especially their heads, were made into trophies (shrunken heads). The customs of using captives for human sacrifice, cannibalism, and head (or scalp) hunting—all of which are quite prevalent among rainforest peoples—were also widespread in other parts of the world. The most numerous instances come from North, Central and South America, as well as the islands of the Pacific. It was practiced in Africa, East Asia and, in some cases, in the Mediterranean region. The various forms of cannibalism were usually practiced in a ritual context and served religious purposes—whether as a form of ancestor worship or in service to the gods.[30]

These customs were alien to Arawak cultures.[31] When they took captives, they adopted the prisoners into their own clans, married them to their daughters and treated them as sons-in-law.[32] Arawak were therefore never very successful in defending themselves against the Caribs; so in their long tradition they preferred to move out of the way of aggressive patriarchal peoples like the Caribs and Tupi.[33]

Equally alien to the Arawak were the men's houses and men's secret societies associated with Caribs, Tupi and many other peoples in South America. Every con-

tinent on earth has its history of men's secret societies, and the early history of Europe is no exception. Usually, these served as a matrix to foster the growth of patriarchal attitudes and patterns, to weaken the surrounding matriarchal societies, or to impose an unformed, still unstable patriarchal order.[34] Here too, religion plays a role, for the societies were generally associated with gods of war. The common characteristics of these male secret societies—whatever culture they developed in—were, first, that they were used for warrior rituals, which included, in some regions of the world, cannibalism and competition for human trophies. Second, youths accepted into male secret societies were subjected to harsh initiation rites, by which they were reborn into the world of men; this changed them, at childhood's end, into "men." Third, women were excluded from these societies. Fourth, the men's houses served as secret temples from which all spiritual activities sprang, activities which passed on patriarchally reinterpreted traditions that—once upon a time—had had other content. Fifth, raids and wars against other communities were also planned here, as well as the apparitions of "ghosts," meant to terrify the women and children in one's own community. In this context, the women lost the spiritual authority they had once held.

In contrast to this, the matriarchal Arawak had no men's houses or secret societies. Rituals associated with the family "Zemis" (ancestor idols), holy plants and animals were open to all clan members and celebrated communally in the clan houses, while rituals for the village Zemis were open to everyone in the village, and carried out in the chief's clan house.[35]

Long before Columbus, territorial wars between indigenous peoples threatened the ancient matriarchal order of the Arawak. Wars over territory were accompanied by increasing patriarchalization, a process that interrupted or distorted matriarchal traditions. An example of this is the pursuit of human trophies by the warlike Caribs. Matriarchal clans practiced multiple reburials and cared for the bones and skulls of the ancestors. Also connected with this custom is the cult of honoring the ancestors and feeding them, helped by Zemis, the cherished ancestor idols. The careful handling of the heads, or skulls, of the dead insured these ancestors' rebirth. Over the course of their long history, the Arawak were often displaced by occupying peoples and had to move on; however, since they did not want to be parted from the bones and skulls of their ancestors, they developed the practice of taking these relics with them in urns or baskets.[36] This was the only way their ancestors could be assured of being reborn into their own clans. Enemies made sure to target the heads and skulls after subduing and killing Arawak warriors, above all in order to prevent them from being reborn.

Although the mythology of South American indigenous peoples, and especial-

ly the Arawak, was nearly stamped out by missionaries as being "pagan superstition," some interesting fragments were retained. Patient research has put these fragments together: there was an ancient earth goddess, who had five names and five different animal heads, and she was worshipped in caves.[37] Reflecting her, every human being has five souls, bound to the earth with bonds of varying strength. After death, the brightest, most celestial soul of these five wanders through the spirit realm and is then reborn.[38] Just as ancient as the earth goddess is the moon goddess, Amana. The "Moon Mother" and the "Stone Mother" (earth) are the ancestral mothers of all the Arawak.[39]

Amana, the Moon Goddess, is the virgin mother who is the creatrix of the entire universe. No one gave birth to her, but she gave birth to everything. She can take any and all shapes, but usually she takes the shape of a marvelously beautiful young woman whose body ends in a snake's tail. Her skin is as white as the moon, she has long, black hair, and sparkling eyes, and her forehead is adorned with seven stars. Here is how she speaks to her people:

> "You call me the Great Snake, but that is not who I am. I have often been a snake. I am I. I constantly change my skin. I am she who remains young while she ages."

She, who, like the snake, constantly rejuvenates, is the being who represents time (moon as measurement of time) and destiny. At the same time, she is the motherly spirit of all plants and animals, deities and humans, and of the magic, language, song, and learning that are encompassed by culture. As snake, she also personifies the spirit of water, especially the rivers and the great waterways that, in the Arawak view, wind their way across the land like snakes.[40]

She resides in the celestial waters, or heavenly ocean. On earth, the sea reflects the heavenly ocean, and with all its fish and water snakes, mermaids and mermen, it too is Amana's realm. In fact, earth reflects everything that happens in the heavens, which suggests the ancient matriarchal principle connecting the macrocosm to the microcosm. Amana's palace is the Pleiads, the seven stars, that are the "Head of all the Stars." This is because at the time of year when they appear in the sky, the rainy season and the renewal of nature signal the beginning of the year.[41]

The moon goddess usually rides the turtle. Even in the daytime sky Amana appears as Rainbow Serpent, whose bright colors the birds borrow for their plumage. As Great Snake she not only encompasses all bodies of water and all the spirits of the world, but also, as Rainbow Serpent, she embodies all light and color.[42] This ancient symbolism generally refers to the great moon goddesses of the Pacific area, including Australia (Rainbow Serpent) and East Asia (rivers as serpents; turtles as ancestral animals).

The first principle of polarity arose from Amana: the bright and dark sides of the cosmos, illustrated by the bright and the dark sides of the moon, and reflected in the sea as ebb and flood. The goddess incarnated this principle in her two sons, elder Tamulu, and younger Tamusi. Tamulu, the Dark One, was born at twilight while the Tamusi, the Bright One, was born at dawn. The wives of these sons are the two bright/dark aspects of Amana herself: she is their mother and their two lovers.[43]

Tamulu, the Dark One, embodies all beings of nature and the nature-power that also exists in humans. He is the giver of the laws of magic, he is the first judge and medicine man, and in all things he is the executive spirit of the Goddess—she who is the world herself. On the other hand, his younger brother Tamusi, the Bright One, embodies human consciousness; but his intellect is less than dazzling, and he often falls into egotistical trickery, getting himself into trouble. His quarrels are held responsible for causing the end of the Golden Age on earth. Most of the time, the two brothers are good friends, except during an eclipse of the moon: then the elder brother Tamulu, in the form of the Great Black Jaguar, tries to eat younger brother Tamusi. As Jaguar, his role is to avenge the mischief that Tamusi has caused in the world. And as Wild Hunter, Tamulu sometimes appears with thunder and lightning, in order to temporarily extinguish Tamusi's light. He always lets him go free again, for the moment. But at the end of time, when all of creation has been spoiled, Tamulu, as Blue Jaguar, will come back to destroy the world and devour all of humankind.[44]

This classic matriarchal mythology reveals an ancient stratum of indigenous thought in South America. It appears most clearly with the Arawak. For the other, patriarchalized peoples, the bright side of the moon, Tamusi, is definitely made over into the male, beneficent principle, while the moon woman as ancestral mother is replaced by a heavenly "grandfather." Finally, the militant, patriarchal sun cult of the Inca in Peru and the Aztec in Mexico replaced the matriarchal worldview of the Arawak culture.

Arawak cultures was definitely highly evolved; their archaeological record includes megalithic construction, as well as artistic ceramics, whose shapes suggest animal and human forms. The Arawak are said to be the bearers of the art of pottery in South America,[45] and amazingly refined megalithic constructions have been found throughout their territories.[46] These megaliths are still venerated today by the Arawak; they care for them to insure that stones are not damaged or lost. Furthermore they believe that these stones can bring rain and happiness, and heal disease.[47] The most striking examples are the "ball fields" found in every settlement. These are rectangular fields, sometimes as long as streets, surrounded with stand-

ing stones (slabs and menhirs). These stones, like megalithic gravestones and caves, often bear petroglyphs. Sometimes the ball fields are also round or oval. They bear an extraordinary resemblance to the Marae, or open temples, of the Polynesians in the Pacific. All these spaces are ceremonial grounds, and the "ball games" associated with them have ritual and political meaning. Archaeologists have found perfectly round stone spheres as tall as a person. In Central America, indigenous cultures were acquainted with the ball fields and the ball game, too (for example the Aztecs of Mexico). They played the game with a large ball made of rubber, fiber, and cotton, and it was a game of life and death—where the leader of the winning team was ceremonially sacrificed.[48] The Arawak also played with a rubber ball on their ceremonial grounds.[49] The neighboring peoples lack this game.

How should we understand this ball game? Politically, the purpose probably was to deflect hostilities and settle conflicts between different communities or peoples. The spiritual meaning is associated with the symbol of the ball itself—was it a symbol of fate, or of the moon, or the entire universe? We don't know what this symbol meant in a matriarchal context, but I would nevertheless wager that it was associated with a female deity. We have indirect evidence for this, as to the later, patriarchal Aztec, the ball stood for the cyclic journey of the Sun God through the Otherworld, and then up into the heavens.

11.2 The Amazons of the Amazon

The above-mentioned archaeological records call attention to the convoluted migrations and puzzling origins of the Arawak and their culture. To try to solve this riddle, we will once again take up reports of South American female warriors, a phenomenon that is frequently noted but poorly understood by male western researchers.[50] Reports of women fighting in highly trained groups, who resisted Spanish invaders alongside men or, in their absence, defended the villages alone, have been received from many South America indigenous peoples.[51] But in Arawak territories, reports of female military prowess are multiplied; they amount to clear evidence of the building of all-female cities and realms. This hints at the still less understood phenomenon of the Amazons, independent female warriors and founders of societies without men. To understand the socio-historical significance of Amazon warriors, it is important to clearly distinguish them from the much more common female co-fighters who fought at the side of their menfolk. Now the question arises: Why did the phenomenon occur right there, in the same area as the reportedly peaceful matriarchal Arawak, who did not—unlike their neighbors—engage in wars and ferocious deeds?

Let's follow the trail of reports from outsiders: In the Antilles, especially on the island of Santa Cruz, Columbus found not only men, but also Arawak women fighting against him.[52] As patriarchal Christian men, the Spaniards were not used to seeing such things, and so noted them down in detail. These women were co-fighters at the side of their menfolk, but the picture soon changed, as reflected in a Warraua myth recorded in Guyana.[53] According to this narrative, there existed a small, independent Amazon realm on a mysterious island called Matenino (Tobago), near Trinidad. Women arrived there without men, and lived as wealthy, armed warriors with beautiful clothes and magnificent weapons. This legend, also known in the Antilles, points to the fact that there were women warriors long before the Spanish armies arrived, and that these women fought independently, and created societies without men: they were indeed actual Amazons. [54] How did this happen?

The Spaniards did not encounter the Amazons near Trinidad; however, the invaders did dangerously encounter the *Amazonian Amazons*. This Amazon realm was very much alive at the time of the Spanish conquest, and the reports cannot be relegated to the realm of legend. After the Pizarro brothers had destroyed the Inca kingdom in Peru, brutally crushing the indigenous peoples of the Andes, they decided that in order to find more gold, they would explore the legendary, vast waterway to the east, which they had heard of from the indigenous peoples. The actual "discoverer" of the Amazon River was a Spanish officer on that expedition, whose name was Orellana—the river was originally supposed to be named after him. But because of the surprises encountered by Orellana, the greatest river on earth was given another name. In 1542 he and his expeditionary team reached the Amazon River via two tributaries; the priest Carvajal, the expedition's scribe, accompanied them.[55] Carvajal reported that they observed settlements along the banks of the river, where signs of sovereign territory were set up; on these signs a city surrounded by walls was represented. Indigenous residents stated that these signs of sovereignty were the emblem of their Mistress; as her subjects, they brought colorful parrot feathers to her temple in tribute. This Mistress ruled over the Land of the Amazons, which lay north of the great waterway in the interior.

Further downriver, the Spaniards sighted many more settlements with these sovereignty signs; but the inhabitants were not always friendly, and the first conflicts arose. On June 24, 1542, not far from the mouth of the Rio Negro, the Amazon's largest tributary, they had a memorable encounter with the Amazons themselves when riverbank dwellers called upon their queen to help them fight the invaders. Ten or twelve large canoes full of warriors approached the Spanish boats, and at the prow of each canoe was an Amazon commander. These women fought

so unrelentingly that none of their people dared to retreat, and if one of them crouched for cover, the Amazon commander would attack him with a stick, right before the Spaniards' eyes. They entered into perilous combat: the Spanish boats were in such difficulty that "they looked like porcupines, with arrows sticking out of them all over" (Carvajal). These Amazons were described as being tall and white-skinned (probably painted white), with long, black hair braided around their heads. Muscular and completely nude, they shot arrows from their bows with great strength, and Carvajal asserts that any one of them fought as bravely as ten men. The Spaniards stuttered out short prayers; clearly they needed courage from their Lord to fight against the Amazons. In the end, they managed to escape from this perilous situation.

An indigenous prisoner of war reported afterward that the entire region around the river belongs to Lord Couynco, but that he is subject to the Amazons. This is why they were protecting the riverbank. He further reported that the Amazons lived completely without men, and that their queen was called Conori. Her realm lay seven days' journey north of the river, and the prisoner giving the account knew of 70 Amazon settlements that he mentioned by name (as a tribute-bringer he often traveled there). Unlike rainforest villages, these settlements were not constructed of wood and straw, but were towns built of stone, with gates and streets. When the prisoner was asked how the Amazons got pregnant, he answered that from time to time, when they got the urge, the Amazons declared war on a neighboring people and after they won, took the men back to their own lands and kept them there until pregnancies resulted. Then they sent the men back home with presents. When boys were born, they killed them or sent them back to their fathers; but when they bore daughters they raised them with great ceremony, and taught them the arts of war. In regard to the size of the Amazon realm—he reported that all the neighboring territories around the entire area of the Amazon lands were subject to them. Sometimes other indigenous peoples traveled all the way down the river from the Andes, a 1400-mile journey, just to visit the Amazons. But no man was allowed to stay there; males had to be out of Amazon towns by sunset.[56]

So it came to pass that the greatest river in the world has been called, up to the present day, "Rio las Amazonas," the River of the Amazons, named after the female fighters the Spanish called "Amazons," after the Greek heroines of that name. The 1542 report led to further, but unsuccessful, European expeditions in search of the Amazons. In 1580, Walter Raleigh sailed the coast of Guyana and heard of an Amazon realm located east of Guyana in the Amazon River delta. The place was represented to him as being rich in gold and silver, where ordinary household objects were made of precious metals. Upon parting, the Amazons were said to pre-

sent their lovers with green stones, called "amazonite"; probably, the color green is a general symbol of fertility. In this same region of large delta islands, archaeologists recently unearthed a very old urban culture; the people had corn plantations, highly sophisticated ceramics, large clan houses built on artificial hills, and goddess figures strikingly similar to those of the earliest, women-centered agricultural societies on the western coast of South America (Valdivia and subsequent cultures).[57]

In 1639 yet another Spanish officer tried to find the wealthy Land of the Amazons, but he got no further than a northern tributary of the Amazon River which was reputed to flow out from their lands. There he learned that the Amazons lived on high mountains where storms rage the whole year through, and that they could make the entire world rich with their immeasurable wealth. In 1744/45 another expedition was undertaken by the French La Condamine. Indigenous people told him that after the arrival of the invading white men, the Amazons had retreated even further up into the remote mountains along the Rio Negro, all the way up to the source of the Orinoco. The last attempt but one was made by the German explorer Schomburg in the 19th century, who never glimpsed an Amazon—but did bring back a legend of the founding of their realm, according to which the Land of the Amazons is situated in the Sierra Parima.[58]

The source of the Orinoco is found in the Sierra Parima mountains, along with the source of some northern tributaries of the Rio Negro—the largest northern tributary of the Amazon River (see map 6). This mountain range continues into the Sierra Pacaraima; both are part of the extensive Orinoco Mountains of Venezuela, which rise up to 3,000 m and separate the Orinoco basin from the Amazon basin. This remote mountain landscape is surrounded by rainforest, and stretches far to the east. Beyond the broad valley of the Rio Branco (another large northern tributary of the Amazon River) the range continues in the Roraima, the Acari, and then into the Tumucumaque Mountains (an inaccessible and very little explored region that reaches 1,000 meters), finally ending high above the Amazon delta. This vast area must have been the ancient home of a great Amazon realm: what better place could the women have found to build their numerous stone cities, providing shelter against the cold mountain winds; where else could they have mined their gold and silver? From here, Amazon mariners could easily have navigated the entire Orinoco river system, which ends just in front of the islands of Trinidad and Tobago (see Warraua myth). And from the northern tributaries of the Amazon, which flow down from all these mountain ranges, they would have been able to travel long distances on the Amazon River system, from the Rio Negro to the Amazon delta, subjugating the other indigenous peoples along the way. Their

realm must once have been overwhelmingly vast, with its outer boundaries perhaps formed by the island of Tobago, just beyond the Orinoco delta in the north, and stretching out to the islands of the Amazon River delta in the east.

Furthermore, all these indications taken from accounts over many centuries agree in their exact descriptions of the social order and cultural level of the Amazons, which was more highly refined than the cultures of the rainforest peoples, in the sense that the Amazons were cultivated urban builders who created city walls, gates, temples and roads, all from stone. Though sometimes unclothed due to the hot, humid climate of the rain forest, they also had precious metals and jewels, and often dressed in beautiful clothing and armor. Domestic arts such as pottery and weaving were well developed, and the hammock was in use. Indeed, to create their vast realm they brought all their collective background in the womanly arts that are typical of matriarchal cultures.

A long-established, biased and misleading practice on the part of patriarchal researchers has repeatedly consigned such clear and consonant accounts—by eyewitnesses or indigenous informants—to the domain of fiction and legend. The point is, these accounts from South America are not unique in human cultural history. With regard to the Amazons of the Amazon, any remaining doubts should be laid to rest after the eye-witness account of the only white man who has ever been allowed to speak to them. This happened in the 1950's—that is, in our own time.

Because of its uniqueness I will devote more space to it:

The Brazilian Eduardo Prado, who grew up in Manaus, in the heart of the Amazon Basin, and deeply understands the rainforest and its peoples, gathered, first of all, reports from the indigenous people about the "Ycomiabas," or "women without husbands," as the Amazons were called. They were said to live at the headwaters of the Rio Nhamunda and the Rio Trombeta, and at the source of the Rio Jari at the foot of the Tumucumaque Range—all northern tributaries of the Amazon. There was a lake that lay between two mountains—called Yacura, or "Mirror of the Moon"—where they were said to celebrate their ceremonies; from this lake they also took green stones, or amazonite, from the water to give as talismans to their lovers.[59]

Having organized a canoe expedition accompanied by friendly indigenous guides who were well-acquainted with the Amazons, and along with one of the best camera men in Brazil, Prado went up the Rio Nhamunda in 1954. Near two tributaries of the Nhamunda they indeed found that lake, flanked by two mountain peaks, and gazed upon six villages of the Amazons, symmetrically arranged with the lake in the center. Here they no longer were living in the cool, windswept mountains, but at their foot in the rainforest—and this had changed their way of life.

The women gave a friendly welcome to their guests, as they took them for the suitors who came to visit once a year. They came to an understanding with the help of an interpreter, and the confusion was quickly cleared up—the Amazons saw the humor in it. They were strong women with proud bearing, dark brown skin and luxurious black hair that hung down their backs; from the hips down they were clothed only in body paint and tattoos. Prado describes their hospitality as overwhelming: their entire stay consisted of an unbroken series of banquets with fine dishes of fish, game, fowl and fruits. Young women, barely out of childhood, went on the hunt—where their skill, speed and strength amazed the researchers. Their respect for these women increased even more after being invited on a dangerous alligator hunt, which the women successfully accomplished with extraordinary boldness. Three young women—armed only with a short spear—were even able to kill a jaguar.

All the practical things of everyday life took place cheerfully and open-mindedly, but also with good manners and discipline. The researcher credited the extraordinary friendliness of the female chief, Kuyta, as the reason he was able to experience some aspects of the Amazons' social life. In the villages of adult women there were no children to be seen; rather, there was a special girls' village, where they grew up under the guidance of the eldest woman. There was also a special boys' village, where they lived up until their 10th year. After that, they were taken to the men of the Mundurucu, Bares, Parintintin, or Macuxi, who paid annual suitors' visits to the Amazons—an event much anticipated by the boys as they approached their 10th year. When the bush telegraph—the drums—announced that a troop of suitors from the Parintintin tribe was on the way, one hundred or so young women, judged to be old enough for sex, were bejewelled and painted by two priestesses. The researcher Prado was astounded to notice that the patterns painted on the women were nearly identical to those used by archaic cultures of the Andean Plateau, such as the Tiahuanaco.

When the suitors arrived, they performed a prolonged ritual dance, while the young women eyed them critically, finally choosing their lovers. More rituals followed, joined by the female chief in her marvellous, shimmering rainbow costume. As the prolonged feasting got under way, with the women offering their lovers exquisite foodstuffs, the expedition team slipped discreetly away, so as not to disturb the love feast. After two weeks, Prado came back in time to witness the goodbyes, the lovers going back home with abundant presents, along with the ten year old boys, who were presented to them with great celebration. The Amazons stood in two rows on the riverbank, singing melancholy farewell songs. Prado ends his account by saying that here he had been able to get a glimpse of a way of life that

stemmed from an ancient tribal tradition and that had been proven useful over a very long period of time.

Actual Amazon realms—not so rare as one might think—are a special form of social organization, generated by extreme conditions. These conditions must be studied and analyzed; that is, the issue of "Amazon realms" needs to be opened up for explanation, rather than being a taboo subject.[60]

Before explaining the South American Amazons, I want to address the question to which indigenous peoples they belong. Though there is no direct evidence, there are convincing indications: territories ascribed to the Amazons are identical with the Arawak territories, that is, Trinidad and Tobago and surrounding regions, the Orinoco Mountains, the Orinoco basin, the Rio Negro and Amazon River basins, the Amazon River delta (see map 6). Further, although they no longer live in the Amazon region, the Arawak speak an Amazonian language, and in their enclaves have largely retained their special matrilineal and matrilocal traditions until the present day.[61] Above all, the Arawak are thought to have been the active bearers of certain arts like ceramics, loom weaving, basket and hammock plaiting, which they passed on to other rain forest peoples.[62] Also, there is archaeological evidence of all types of stone building and megalithic construction in Arawak territories. All these various points resonate with each other, and permit the conclusion that the Amazons were Arawak women who built their realm upon a foundation of their very ancient, matriarchal culture. But what made certain groups of Arawak women do something so special as to establish an Amazon realm?

The legend of the Amazons, recounted by Schomburg, gives us a clue as to how it might have come to pass that an Amazon realm was created in the Orinoco and other mountain ranges. The narrative, "Conspiracy of the Jaguar," comes from the region inhabited by the Worisianas;[63] whose name translates as "Land of the Women who come from the Mothers": [64]

> Under the leadership of the courageous Toeyza, wife of the chief, all the married women of the community got together and formed the secret Jaguar Society to resist their husbands' tyranny. (The jaguar represents the dark side of the moon and also Tamulu, the cosmic judge and avenger of injustice.) That was because the men forced the women to work constantly, humiliating them daily. But their secret society was exposed by three men, and the sacred jaguar killed right before the women's eyes. The women then poisoned their husbands and walked away through the forests to a distant land in the east. They took provisions, hammocks and weapons with them, proclaiming their freedom and calling themselves "the women-people" (Worisianas). Hunted down by their husband's allies, they successfully defended themselves with bows and arrows, eventually settling down

> and founding their own realm in the Sierra Parima. The social code decreed by Toeyza, their first queen, was still in practice when the explorers came to learn about the Amazons.

This narrative is not "a legend created by men to justify their domination over women"—as patriarchally influenced scholars would have it for this kind of narratives. In fact, the relevant question is, why did married women suddenly rebel against the status quo? If this poor treatment at the hands of men was the only form of marriage they knew, what would make them suddenly dissatisfied with it? It is much more likely that being enslaved to men was a new condition for them, having previously lived in a matriarchal culture. Their experiences within that social order had given them enough self-confidence and strength to resist the male coercion described in this legend. Certainly Arawak people did have this kind of matriarchal background, thus the actions the women undertake in the legend are reasonable ones. They reflect the changeover from matriarchal to Amazon patterns, which they adopted in order to resist the men's first brutal patriarchal attempts to enslave them.

But who were their husbands? They cannot have come from the women's own people, as those men would not have been acquainted with the practice of having permanent spouses, nor with the concept of degrading women. Their husbands must have been members of *other* communities, tribes who attacked and conquered the communities the women belonged to, and forced them to marry them. Situations like this have been reported by ethnologists; for example, with the patriarchalized Caribs and Tupi, as the Caribs' aggressive behavior constantly pushed the Arawak out of their home territories. They attacked the Arawak, killed the men and forced the women into marriage and slavery.

Arawak peoples responded to these increasing threats in several ways. Many avoided the patriarchal peoples, they fled, moving farther and farther away towards the east, and then out to the Antilles. Through retreat and emigration, they were able to retain their ancestral matriarchal culture for quite a long time. Others, who had already been conquered, developed the Amazonian-type patterns associated with women's rebellion, and appropriated the weapons of the enemy—the bow and arrow—to defend their freedom. Still other conquered people assimilated into their opponents' communities, so that the conquerors took over the cultural characteristics and traditions of their forced-marriage Arawak brides. For example, coastal Caribs sometimes show signs of matriliny or matrilocality, and are acquainted with the so-called "Peito" system, that is, the son-in-law's long-term service marriage in the house of his wife. The women are, however, shut out of the spiritual events of the men's secret societies.[65]

Over the millennia, co-evolution between a matriarchal culture and influx of ever more strongly encroaching patriarchal peoples demonstrates how a peaceful agricultural society could have given rise to certain realms of female warriors. Amazonian social patterns develop in the long, difficult, painful transitional eras when nascent patriarchal structures collide destructively with ancient matriarchal cultures.

11.3 The seaway to South America

Amazons founded their realm in mountainous territory because that was the only place where they could build their cities out of stone. They had brought the art of stone masonry, as well as all their handicraft arts, from another mountainous region where the Arawak used to live: the Andes of Colombia and Peru. Long before the time of the Inca expansion around 1440 C.E., several centers of culture existed here, resting on ancient agricultural traditions and a matriarchal social order. A newer hub, which appeared at the time of the Inca state, was the Chibcha culture, with its five huge, successive empires comparable in importance to those of Mexico and Peru.[66] Chibcha culture began after 500 C.E. as a matriarchal farming and trading society; it held many cultural elements in common with the Arawak.[67] The archaeological record shows that the Chibcha had settled in the Colombian Andes, and in Central America as far as the Yucatan Peninsula, bringing with them such things as stone houses, terraced farming, irrigation systems, roads, dams and megalithic constructions. In the process, they spread their culture as far as the headwaters of the great river systems that flowed vigorously down from the Andes into the eastern sub-Andean rainforests. Only after they had reached the vast, flat areas of the rainforest did the Chibcha culture fade away. Under pressure from new patriarchalized immigrants, such as the Caribs, the Chibcha culture became more male-centered, finally developing patriarchal empires similar to that of the Inca. It is easy to understand how the Arawak, probably the most ancient bearers of Chibcha culture, retreated from the path of the western Andean peoples (now Peru and Colombia) and migrated into the northern coastal regions and eastern rainforests. With them they brought their ancient, highly developed culture. Certain Arawak communities would have been subjected by the newcomers and assimilated into their patriarchal empires.[68]

Relatives of the Chibcha still exist today, and though they live in more remote, less "advanced" circumstances than their forebears did, they still show some characteristics that are relevant to this discussion. In the mountain forests of Ecuador,

the *Capaya* still practice matriliny, build large clan houses on piles, and have a highly developed seafaring culture. [69] Another example is that of the *Shipibo* in the rainforests of Eastern Peru; their social organization still shows matriliny and matrilocality, and Shipibo women possess an extraordinary degree of self-confidence compared with women from other Amazonian peoples (Ill. 10).[70] In Colombia's Sierra Nevada live the *Kagaba-Kogi*; they are bilaterally organized (mothers are related to daughters and sons to fathers) and practice clan intermarriage and believe in a great creatrix goddess called Gauteaovan, whom they venerate in the form of a human womb. Heaven as well as earth, all the mountains and every temple are understood to be wombs, and the nine levels of the cosmos reflect the nine daughters of this ancestral mother.[71] Like the highly developed historical Chibcha culture, the megalithic Tiahuanaco culture on Lake Titicaca in Bolivia (from 500 C.E.) and its surrounding archaeological sites very probably go back to the Arawak. In the Bolivian highlands small groups survived whose cultural level decreased; these ancient cultural groups, and their language, are related to the Arawak: the *Chipaya* on the banks of Lake Copaisa,[72] and the *Uru*, who until recently lived on the banks of Lake Titicaca.[73]

The ancestors of the Chibcha and the Tiahuanaco cultures were the early farming culture of Chavin (from 1000 B.C.E.) in the Peruvian Andes, along with the culture on the Paracas Peninsula (from 600 B.C.E.) and followed by the Nazca and Moche centers of culture (from 0 C.E.), all of which are located on the Pacific coast of South America.

It is quite possible that the original source of all these cultures is the Valdivia, one of the most interesting early matriarchal cultures in the Americas, replete with powerful female chiefs and a plethora of refined goddess sculptures (3000–1500 B.C.E., or even earlier, starting from 5000 B.C.E.). Although simple pottery does occasionally appear before this, in Valdivia there appears to be a sudden flowering of unusual, highly developed ceramics and sculpture—seemingly out of nowhere. Examples of these arts are to be found on the Atlantic coast of Colombia in the north, as well as at the mouth of the Amazon in the east—which has been Arawak territory.[74]

Agriculture made sudden progress here as well. Important crops such as maize, manioc, pumpkin, beans and potatoes had been cultivated very early in South America (ca. 7000–4000 B.C.E.), which indicates an autochthonous Neolithic development. But it took a long time until they became a staple food and the basis of the economy.[75] In the area surrounding the Valdivia culture, and almost at the same time, the Machalilla culture (like the Valdivia, associated with fishing) grew

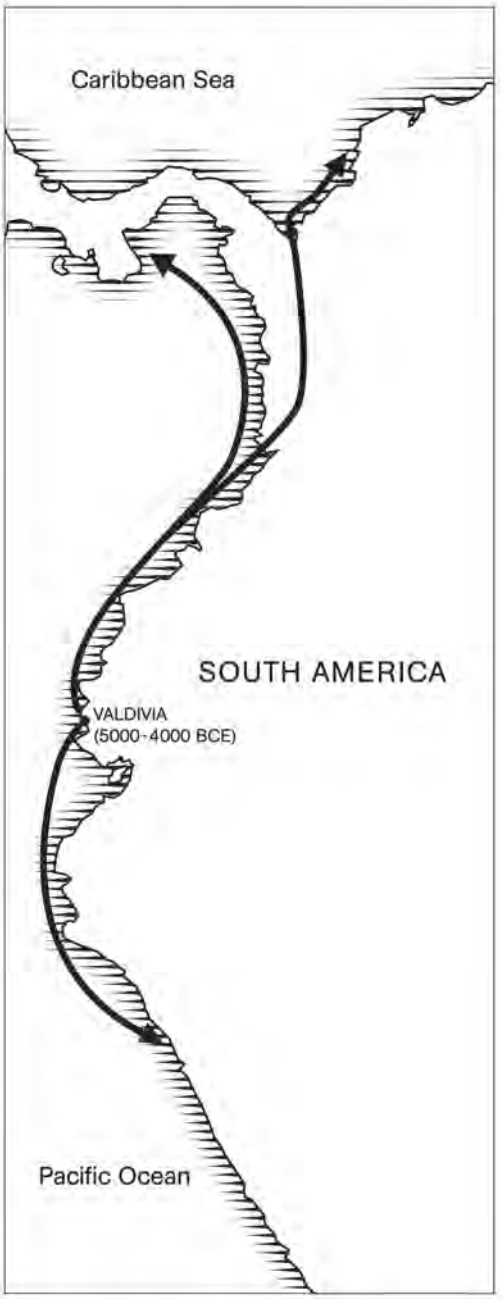
Illustration 10. Shipibo elder woman. Photo: Sandra Schett

manioc and potatoes. For the Valdivia at this time, the main part of the diet was plant-based; and the Chorrea culture (located on the banks of a nearby stream) that followed it enjoyed a fully developed farming culture.[76]

This very early center of culture around Valdivia on the Gulf of Guayaquil (Ecuador) had an important influence on further cultural development in South and Central America. This is indicated by its spread—not just along the Pacific coast both north- and southwards, but also along the northern Atlantic coast of South America, and throughout the great Orinoco and Amazon River systems. Associated with this culture are a developed agriculture, highly refined ceramic arts, and matriarchal social order—as reflected in the vast area of distribution of the Arawak culture (see map 7). In the Americas, in terms of agriculture, the cultural current flowed not from north to south but from south to north.[77]

And here is another striking connection: matriarchal agriculture in South America, and also in Central America, began on the Pacific coast; it then spread not only from south to north, but also from west to east. Where did they come from, the bearers of this culture, who settled the coasts? A possible conclusion—that has also been reached by other scholars—is that very early on, prehistoric cultural migration occurred sporadically over the Pacific Ocean, reaching all the way to the coasts of South and Central America. Striking similarities exist between early matriarchal cultures, with their ceramic arts, in East Asia—such as the Jomon of Japan and the Yueh of South China—and the cultures associated with the Valdivia; these have often been objects of detailed studies.[78] Unfortunately, researchers have based their investigations on the improbable theory that the Pacific travelers made their journey in one long, uninterrupted voyage, serendipitously setting out from Japan and China and somehow ending up all the way over in South America, perhaps simply tossed there by the movement of the ocean. But this ignores the much more plausible explanation that this cultural migration took place over thousands of years of organized emigration, leading from island chain to island chain over the vast Pacific. The clearest evidence for this interpretation is the substantial similarity between the Pacific Island cultures and early South American cultures.[79]

This sheds light on the otherwise bewildering myths and reports from Polynesia. During the two millennia when the Polynesian warrior chiefs were conquering and settling those islands (1000 B.C.E.-1000 C.E.), they found inhabitants who had come before them (this was true on Easter Island as well). These peoples could only have arrived the way the Polynesians themselves arrived—that is, with unusually seaworthy rafts and boats. These first peoples practiced agriculture and were matriarchally organized, as indicated by the myths about Pele's clan in Hawai'i. Pele was a goddess-queen who arrived in the Hawai'ian Islands by ship along with



Map 7: Migrations and spreading of the Valdivia and other early cultures

her people, long before the Polynesian warrior chiefs came on the scene. Pele's son, like all her people, was called *Menehune,* and the Menehune were said to be extraordinarily talented in all the arts: this is how they could build walls of perfectly dressed stone, erected without mortar (Hawai'ian archaeological record). They used the same technique to build houses, terraces, irrigation systems, aqueducts and roads. They are considered by some scholars to be the earliest indigenous people of Hawai'i and the Polynesian Islands, and they probably also lived on the Tahiti and Marquesas archipelagos as well as on Easter Island. Later, when the Polynesian warrior chiefs arrived and waged war against them, the Menehune fled into dense mountain forests and "disappeared" from the different islands without a trace. Today they are thought to have been the stuff of legend, not reality. Where did they go? Most likely they used the wood of the forest trees to build boats and moved on, like their ancestors before them, fleeing from west to east from their pursuers. In that way some Menehune clans could have managed to arrive at the Pacific coast of South and Central America.

This suggests the way in which Valdivia may signal an early, matriarchal agricultural society, one that came from across the sea and incited further agricultural development in South and Central America. This would explain the uniqueness of this culture. Prehistoric contact between Polynesia and South America is indicated by the widespread cultivation of the sweet potato both in the Andes and in Polynesia.[80] Modern human genetics also supports the existence of such contact: there is one genetic lineage in the Americas that does not point to Siberia or Alaska, these northern regions from whence all early peoples in the Americas are said—wrongly—to have come.[81] This lineage is most strongly represented in South and Central America. Its origin appears to be in Southeast Asia.[82]

The South American Amazon realm reflects a much later phase of that matriarchal culture, a development that grew out of the attempt to flee the ever threatening constraints of patriarchal peoples that pushed the matriarchal peoples eastwards out of their own homelands. The Amazons constituted a way of dealing with constant patriarchal threats: a different response to an extreme situation. Finally, the dramatic South American contest between matriarchal and patriarchal peoples was violently ended by Columbus and the Spaniards, who brought with them a very different kind of patriarchal threat.

11.4 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

In general:

- The first developed agriculture societies in the Americas started in the South, probably on the western coast of South America (and on the western coast of Central America), and spread out from there into the northern and eastern part of the continent.
- The migration of some matriarchal agricultural peoples to the continent of South America took place via Pacific Island cultures (southern route).

At the social level:

- The phenomenon of matriarchal women in the role of warriors who fought alongside their men was widespread, occurring in situations where invaders threatened to destroy matriarchal cultures.
- Amazon realms did exist (on several continents). Amazons are to be distinguished from the matriarchal women who fought at the side of their men: instead, Amazons were professional warriors who built up societies that did not include men. Amazon realms are a special variant of matriarchal social order.
- Amazon societies arise in times of transition between matriarchal and patriarchal cultural epochs. It is a form of response by matriarchal societies to being conquered by patriarchalized peoples and their men's societies.
- Men's secret warrior societies are entities of the patriarchalization process. They arise when land scarcity and population displacement makes it imperative to have charismatic leaders and professional fighters.
- Men's secret societies are parasitically attached to their culture as a whole: they depend economically upon the societies' resources; and they form secret hierarchies and enforcement bodies with someone in the top position of authority. In regard to culture they promote real or imagined patrilinearity as a cultural innovation. Young men are "reborn" through their association with the other men.

Notes

1. I. Rouse: "The Arawak," in: *Handbook of South American Indians*, vol. 4, pp. 517–519, New York 1963, Cooper Square Publishers. [Handbook S.A.]

2. I. Rouse: "The Arawak," [Handbook S.A.], ibidem.
3. I. Rouse: "The Arawak," [Handbook S.A.], ibidem.
4. Julian H. Steward: "South American Cultures. An interpretative Summary," [Handbook S.A.], vol. 5, p.763, Washington D.C. 1949, U.S. Government Printing Office; Map of the peoples of South America, in: Bernatzik/ Krickeberg (Hrsg.), *Große Völkerkunde*, vol. 3, Leipzig 1939, Bibliographisches Institut.
5. Steward, ibid., vol. 5, p. 763.
6. W. Schmidt: *Das Mutterrecht*, Mödling near Vienna, Austria, 1955, Verlag der Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel, pp.75–78.
7. Rouse, ibid., vol. 4, p. 538.
8. Steward, ibid., vol. 5, p. 763.
9. See the documentary of Gordian Troeller/ Marie-Claude Deffarge about the Campa: *Abschied vom Lachen,* Reihe *Frauen der Welt,* CON-Film, Bremen 1981.
10. Steward, ibid., vol. 5, pp. 763–766.
11. J. Elick: „Die Campa des Gran Pajonal, Peru", in: *Bild der Völker*, Wiesbaden, Germany, 1974, Brockhaus Verlag, vol. 5, pp. 174 ff.; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.) and Tom Stacey (editorial director) : *Peoples of the World,* vol. 10, London 1972–1974, Tom Stacey Ltd.—See also the documentary by Troeller/ Deffarge, which does a much better job of presenting Campa women's positions: *Abschied vom Lachen,* ibidem.
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16. Kirchhoff, ibid., pp. 151–153.
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19. Baring, ibid., p. 147.
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22. R. H. Lowie: "Social and Political Organization of the Tropical Forest and Marginal Tribes," [Handbook S.A.], vol. 5, ibid., p. 353.
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24. Kirchhoff, ibid., p. 147 ff.
25. Kirchhoff, ibid., pp. 155 ff; and Steward, ibid., vol.5, p. 718.
26. Lowie, ibid., vol. 5, pp. 314 ff.
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30. See Peggy Reeves Sanday: *Divine Hunger. Cannibalism as a Cultural System,* New York, Melbourne 1986, Cambridge University Press.
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32. Kirchhoff, ibid., pp. 138 ff.
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37. Rouse, ibid., vol. 4, p.538 and ill. 92.
38. C. H. de Goeje: "Philosophy, Initiation, and Mythos of the Indians of Guayana," in: *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, vol. XLIV, Leiden 1943, Brill, pp.8 and 15.—From any perspective, this book is an excellent reconstruction of the nearly destroyed mythology of the indigenous peoples of South America (especially that of the Arawak culture).
39. Schmidt, [ZfE], ibid., p. 1071.
40. Goeje, ibid., p. 26.
41. Goeje, ibid., p. 27.
42. Goeje, ibid., pp. 28 and 31,32.
43. Goeje, ibid., pp. 35,36.
44. Goeje, ibid., pp. 39–41.
45. Schmidt, [ZfE], ibid., pp. 1067, 1068.
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47. Marquis de Wavrin: *Rites, Magie et Sorcellerie des Indiens de l'Amazonie*, Monaco 1979, Ed. du Rocher, pp. 116,117.
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49. Steward, ibid., vol. 4, p. 25.
50. For the widespread extent of female warrior-craft see R. Briffault: *The Mothers*, New York-London 1969, vol. 1, pp. 451–459.
51. Steward, ibid., vol. 5, p. 723.
52. Steward, ibid., vol. 5, p. 723.
53. K.R. Röhl: *Aufstand der Amazonen*, Düsseldorf-Wien 1982, p. 157.
54. The term "Amazon" is used here in the sense of the mythic and very probably historical all-female fighters of the Mediterranean area, reported by Herodotus (5th century B.C.E.) and others.
55. H. C. Heaton (ed.): *The Discovery of the Amazon according to the Account of Friar Gaspar de Carvajal and Other Documents*, with an introduction by Jose Toribio Medina, and translated from Spanish by Bertram T. Lee, New York 1934, American Geographical Society; see the passages in Röhl, ibid., pp. 145,146.
56. Carvajal, see in Röhl, ibid., pp. 147–150.

57. See Anna C. Roosevelt: *Moundbuilders of the Amazon: geophysical archaeology on Marajo Island, Brazil,* San Diego, California, 1991, Academic Press; and A. C. Roosevelt (ed.): *Amazonian Indians from prehistory to the present: anthropological perspectives,* Tuscon, Arizona, 1994, University of Arizona Press. See also an article of M. Leite: „Die Spur der Amazonen", in: *Bild der Wissenschaft*, no. 11, Nov. 1989, Stuttgart, Deutsche Verlagsanstalt.
58. Röhl, ibid., pp. 150–153.
59. Eduardo Barros Prado: *The Lure of the Amazon,* London, 1959, Souvenir Press, pp. 131–155, photos of the amazons on pp. 73, 74 (first edition, Buenos Aires 1958, Ediciones Peuser).
60. It should be noted that Amazon social organization does not amount to a typical matriarchy (as is assumed—wrongly—by Prado and many others who confound "matriarchy" with "women's domination"). Rather, it is a special form of matriarchal social order, which developed out of extreme circumstances. These conditions must always be separately investigated and explained.
61. Steward, a.a.O., Bd. 5, S. 763.
62. Steward, a.a.O., Bd. 5, S. 763.
63. Röhl, ibid., pp. 141–143.
64. See to this etymology: Goeje, ibid., pp.15,17,19.
65. Kirchhoff, ibid., pp. 123–146.
66. H. Trimborn: „Das Recht der Chibcha in Kolumbien", in: *Ethnologica*, Leipzig 1930, Hiersemann, pp. 6,7.
67. Trimborn, ibid., pp. 34 and 49–55; Lowie, ibid., vol. 5, p. 327.
68. Steward, ibid., vol. 5. pp. 759,760.
69. M. Altschuler: „Die Capaya in Ecuador", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 5, ibid., pp. 160 ff; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.) and Tom Stacey (editorial director) : *Peoples of the World,* ibid. vol. 10. See also Lowie, vol. 5, ibid., p. 328.
70. Carolyn Heath: "Women and Power: The Shipibo of the Upper Amazon," in: *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* (ed. Heide Goettner-Abendroth), Toronto 2009, Inanna Press, York University, pp. 92–105.
71. G. Reichel-Dolmatoff: „Die Kogi in Kolumbien", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 5, ibid., pp. 168 ff.; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.) and Tom Stacey (editorial director) : *Peoples of the World,* vol. 10, ibid. See also: W. Z. Park: "Tribes of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Martha Colombia," [Handbook S.A.], vol. 2, ibid., pp. 885 ff.; and Krickeberg/ Trimborn/ Müller/ Zerries: *Die Religionen des alten Amerika*, Stuttgart 1961, Kohlhammer, p. 95; and Th. Preuss: *Forschungsreise zu den Kágaba*, Mödling near Vienna, Austria, 1926, Verlag der Missionsdrukerei St. Gabriel, pp. 64–68 and 118.
72. T. Morrison: „Die Chipaya in Bolivien", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 5, ibid., pp. 222 ff.; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.) and Tom Stacey (editorial director) : *Peoples of the World,* vol. 10, ibid.
73. R. K. Skipton: „Der Titicacasee und die Kulturen der Vor-Inka-Zeit", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 5, ibid., pp. 204 ff.; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.) and Tom Stacey (editorial director) : *Peoples of the World,* vol. 10, ibid.
74. See Coe/ Snow/ Benson, ibid., pp. 8,9 and 178.
75. Chriss Scarre (ed.): *Past Worlds, The Times Atlas of Archaeology*, London 1988, Times Books Ltd., pp.208,209.

76. See Coe/ Snow/ Benson, ibid., pp. 171,172.
77. Meggers/ Evans/ Estrada: *Early Formative Period of Coastal Ecuador: The Valdivia and Machalilla Phases*, Washington D.C. 1965, Smithsonian Institution; and Steward, ibid., vol. 5, p. 759.
78. For an excellent discussion of this subject, and a good critique of the theoretical isolationism of many Americanists see: S.C. Jett: "Precolumbian Transoceanic Contacts," in: *Ancient North Americans*, J. D. Jennings (ed.), San Francisco 1978/1983, W. H. Freeman, pp. 557 ff.; and G. F. Ekholm: "Transpacific Contacts," in: *Prehistoric Man in the New World*, Jennings/ Norbeck (eds.), Chicago 1964, Universitry of Chicago Press, pp. 489 ff.; Betty J. Meggers: "The Transpacific Origin of Mesoamerican Civilization," in: *American Anthropologist*, no. 77,1 (1975), American Anthropological Association, Arlington, pp. 1 ff.; and Meggers/ Evans/ Estrada, a.a.O.; Steward, a.a.O., vol. 5, pp. 744,745.
79. See R. von Heine-Geldern: „Die Megalithen Südostasiens und ihre Bedeutung für die Klärung der Megalithenfrage in Europa und Polynesien", in*: Anthropos*, Nr. 23 (1928), Wien-Mödling, Austria, Verlag der Missionsdruckerei St. Gabriel.
80. See Chriss Scarre (ed.): *Past Worlds, The Times Atlas of Archaeology*, ibid., p. 268.
81. This assumption that all early peoples in the Americas have come from Siberia and Alaska is very shaky, because there exist much older dates also for Paleolithic artefacts in South and Central America (Pikimachay Cave, Peru, 20,000 B.C.E., or even earlier) than for such artefacts in North America (Clovis, New Mexico, 9,000 B.C.E.), and no such early dates for Alaska, Canada, USA; see Coe/ Snow/ Benson: *Atlas of Ancient America,* ibid., p. 30.
82. See Bryan Sykes: *The Seven Daughters of Eve,* ibid., p. 311.

12

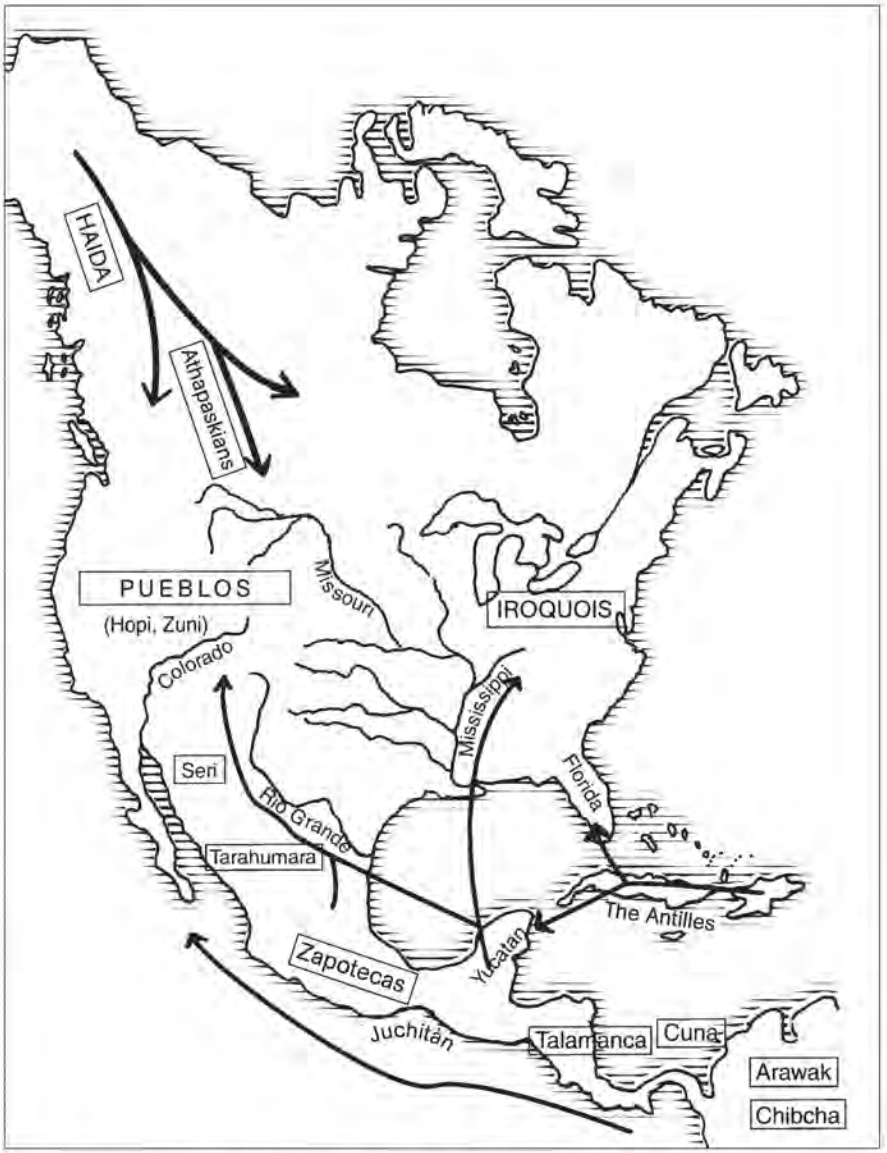
The Spread of Matriarchy to Central America

For Mu Olokukurdilisob, Great Mother Earth and Blue Butterfly Lady of the Kuna

12.1 The Kuna, the "Golden People"

The Circum-Caribbean region extends over the Antilles and along the northern coast of South America: Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana. It also includes part of southern Central America: Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and the Yucatan Peninsula, reaching all the way across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to Mexico (see map 8). This entire region had a functioning economy based on agriculture, with a dense indigenous population, as well as large population centers. Though the individual cultures adapted in various ways to the very different natural features of their environments, they possessed certain characteristics in common, attributes that had existed in earlier historical epochs of the Andean culture. There must have been ongoing migrations from the Andean region of northern Colombia, migrations that moved from south to north (and not the other way around), ending up all over Central America. The territory populated by these early cultures once extended from the Andes to Mexico, extending across the Mayan region.[1]

The bearers of this Circum-Caribbean culture were the tribal groups of the Arawak; their most ubiquitous cultural patterns were pivotal for the entire Caribbean region.[2] Ecuador and Colombia are the regions where their culture came from.



Map 8: Migrations from North and South into North America

From there, in the early Formative Period (Late Neolithic Period), it spread southwards to the Andes with the archaic centers Chavin, Tiahuanaco and others; eastwards to the Amazon and Orinoco river systems and to the Antilles; and northwards to all of Central America.[3] The ongoing migrations of other, more aggressive tribal groups into Colombia and western South America led to a population pressure; consequently the ancient Arawak peoples were pushed out into in the sparsely settled eastern and northern areas.[4]

What we know about the Arawak culture of the Antilles is that they were fundamentally matriarchal, and in certain groups, they still are. The same goes for Central America: here too, the cultural pattern that spread first—forming the basis for the special development of the patriarchal kingdoms that came later—was matriarchal. The political units were the villages or village associations, formed around religious centers and governed as autonomous village-republics, as big cities did not yet exist. Agriculture, especially the cultivation of a very ancient type of maize, was carried out, depending on the terrain, with terrace farming and irrigation systems with dams, canals, and aqueducts. Sacred mounds, stone altars and public ceremonial grounds (ball fields), as well as stone figures (zemis) were known throughout the region.[5]

In southern Central America, too, Carib peoples arrived in droves after the Arawak and, to some degree, intermarried with them, taking on aspects of their culture. This constellation was further layered with an early form of the *Chibcha society* who were a mix of Arawak, Carib and other peoples. While its cultural center in Colombia gradually became patriarchal, the outlying edges of this society, which reached as far away as Central America and the Antilles, retained older social forms. With the European invasions and subsequent damage to indigenous cultures, this situation was permanently changed. Nevertheless, certain widely separated groups of indigenous people have persisted, peoples who still retain their ancient matriarchal heritage.[6]

Closest to this old cultural center of Colombia live the *Kuna people*. They are descendants of the Chibcha and still speak the Chibcha language; the level of their culture was more sophisticated in former times, before they were under pressure from European conquerors.[7] Thanks to their tenacious resistance and the remoteness of their territory, they managed to remain independent, and were able to salvage the foundations, at least, of their culture. They used to inhabit the entire Isthmus of Darien, stretching from Colombia to the Isthmus of Panama. Swamps, rain forests and mosquitoes make this region so inhospitable that even the Pan American Highway—which stretches from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego—is interrupted here. Along the entire length of region, there are no roads.[8]

Here, deep in the rainforest and along hidden rivers, the Kuna were able to maintain their ancient cultural traditions. In canoes made from single trees, they travelled the rivers inland from the Darien Mountains as far as the coast of Panama. During the siege of the Spanish conquerors they fled from the mainland to the coast and out to the San Blas Islands off the Atlantic coast of the Isthmus of Darien (see map 8). An epidemic of malaria, which had decimated the mainlanders, also contributed to their flight to the islands. They reached these flat coral islands, which are fanned with a refreshing breeze and overgrown with coconut palms. The breezes and lack of dense vegetation offer welcome protection from mosquitoes. Today the San Blas Kuna inhabit 50 of the 400 islands in the archipelago, islands that lay like a chain of pearls within sight of the coast, all the way from the Gulf of San Blas to Cape Tiburón, protected from the open sea by a large barrier reef.

Some Kuna stayed behind in the Bayano, the interior of Darien, living in voluntary isolation (Mountain Kuna). Others settled along the coast (Coast Kuna), where they are visited often by the San Blas Kuna. To get fresh water, the women travel in their canoes to coastal villages they can see from their own, and the men come in their boats for other necessities that are lacking on dry coral islands. In their strong, mahogany dugout canoes the women have mastered the art of navigation as magnificently as the men.[9]

Along the entire length of the Isthmus of Darien, largely within the national boundaries of Panama, and to a lesser extent of Colombia, the Kuna population (according to various sources) numbers somewhere between 30,000 inhabitants in 1993 and 60,000 in 2006. They are numerically one of the largest indigenous groups in Central America to have retained their indigenous culture. They call their land "Kuna Yala," and they defiantly secured it by their "Dule revolution" in 1925 (with the help of the United States) from the government of Panama. Kuna Yala is politically independent and so strictly guarded that—until recently—no outside visitor is allowed even to spend the night. Their contemporary policy works so well that they are able to retain their own culture while still being considered "modernized" by the Panamanian government, Christian missionaries and even ethnologists. The Kuna consider this status to be a result of their successful diplomacy, and are justly proud of their creative—yet conservative—approach to modernity.[10]

Nevertheless, many of them have been acculturated today due to the missionary activities of the Catholic Church, the urban lifestyle of Panama City, and an increase in tourism.[11] But here the focus of my analysis is on their traditional culture, practiced for millennia, which continues today in the bush villages of the mainland and on many islands.

They call themselves the *Olodule*, the "Golden People"; much about their appearance validates the name. They are rather small, yet strong, people with

bronze-colored skin and thick black hair. Many Albinos are born, called "Moon Children," who are credited with special spiritual abilities.[12] Before Christian mission schools were built in their territories, men used to wear nothing but a golden penis-holder and feathers; today they wear inexpensive western clothing. The women, on the other hand, are well dressed. They used to wear only a cloth wrap-around skirt, but were adorned from head to hips with their own creative and elaborate body painting in a great variety of fantastic forms. They also wore the family gold on their bodies as heavy, round plates in their ears and around their necks, supplemented by golden breastplates and nose rings. Although missionaries insisted that Kuna women cover themselves, they stayed true to traditional styles: as talented painters, they transferred body painting designs to post-contact cotton blouses, and later began to practice their art in the form of needlework. This needlework, which adorns their blouses, or "molas," still expresses the fantastic forms that portray the entirety of their mythical cosmology—including modern images derived from American television commercials. Molas have been sought as prized possessions by ethnologists, and more recently by tourists; Kuna women sell them for US dollars as part of their independent economy.[13] In general, they have also retained their gold jewelry, which represents the clan's wealth and honor (Ill. 11). Today, silver coin jewelry supplements the gold, and strings of glass beads have replaced the gold arm bands and leg bands. Girls are adorned from birth: female babies are preferred to male ones, and as soon as they have been bathed are given some of the clan's gold jewelry.[14] In her traditional costume of hip cloth, headscarf, mola, and elaborate jewelry, every Kuna woman is, even today, an impressive sight to behold.

The Kuna women's economy is not limited to the sale of molas. They also own the clan house—framed in hardwood brought over from the mainland, with walls made of loosely interwoven bamboo strips, and a roof of palm fronds. Inside are hammocks, wooden stools, and, in earlier times, the horizontal, Arawak-type weaving looms.[15] Women own land that can never be sold, along with everything that grows on it—especially the coconut palm. The men harvest coconuts and hand them over to the women, who sell them to merchant ships. Almost all clan wealth derives from the coconut palm. Fishing substantially supplements tropical farming, which is also done by men: maize, manioc, yams, rice, sugar cane, tobacco, pepper, cocoa, coffee, and bananas are grown solely for the clan's own use. Additionally, men collect the great variety of fruits that grow in the rainforest, and occasionally they go hunting. All in all, it's the men who procure the foodstuffs, but they hand everything over to the women, and in particular to the clan mother or matriarch, so that the food belongs to the women. The women prepare and distribute the food to the clan, and thus are seen as being the family providers. The clan mother decides who needs what, and what needs to be done in the fields; she also parcels out

Illustration 11. Kuna woman. Photo: Gudrun Frank-Wissmann

domestic duties among the women.[16] In addition, many men work as wage-laborers in the Canal Zone; the cash they earn goes into gold jewelry, which the women wear for their own and the clan's honor as a holiday display.

A Kuna woman lives together with all her female blood relatives—the matriarch, her daughters and their children—in a single house. There—though densely crowded together—they live in harmony with one another, and a woman has always shelter in her mother's hut. The clan mother's husband and her sons-in-law are also part of the household, for Kuna social order is matrilineal and matrilocal. Relationship is traced through the female line, and women related by blood live together in their mother's house, while their brothers and sons move away to the houses of their mothers-in-law. The word for "husband" is "sui" which means a man who is a "collector of food," which is the task a man takes on when he marries. If a food collector does not behave in accordance with the will of his wife, or of the family matriarch, he is expelled and must return to his mother's hut.[17]

The influence of Christian missionaries has introduced the practice of pair-marriage and bilateral relationships (lines of relationship traced through both sides). Children now know the identity of their biological father, but the men's line is relatively unimportant. A pair-marriage can easily be dissolved by either side, whereupon another relationship may begin. Strict compliance with the rules is exacted by the father-in-law, the spouse of the matriarch, as his sons-in-law work directly with him. Tyrannical tendencies, however, rarely appear, as he is always being sharply observed and, if necessary, publicly criticized, by the young men's fathers, who live in the same village. People always marry in the same village, as Kuna practice follows the classic matriarchal pattern of clan-exogamy coupled with village endogamy (marriage outside the clan but within the village); this indicates that mutual intermarriage between two specific clans might once have been practiced in every village. The clan mother's spouse acts as her delegated intermediary at the councils, and with the outside world—a role misinterpreted by ethnologists as "head of household." In fact, all economic and social power rests with the matriarch: she understands it as her responsibility, and uses it for the well being of the entire clan.[18]

12.2 Kuna beliefs and religious ceremony

The extremely rich religious faith of the Kuna people has been fundamentally retained, even where the culture has been superficially Christianized. The official carriers of the tradition are the chiefs ("saila"), shamanic song healers ("kandule"), and male and female seers and prophets ("nele"), whose roles can no longer be strictly separated. The kandule and nele hold the same rank as the saila (chiefs), who are,

in practice, also involved in the actions of the nele and kandule. These wise men and women are the singing memory of their people, and keep traditions and religion alive. Two times per week, in the assembly house, they sing the rich treasury of myth in singing units of several hours for an audience comprised of the women and the men; and sometimes the chiefs of several islands have a combined singing of stories which can last from three days up to a week.[19]

In the assembly house, the men also discuss the affairs of the community, as they dedicate themselves to the realm of politics. They call their congregation "the congress," and their topics of debate are the fate of their islands, improvement of the infrastructure, matters of conflict, or the organization of celebrations. The assemblies are led by the chiefs. All chiefs are elected to office, and are easily unseated. Most of them are delegated by their clans, representing to the congress the positions of their clan members, especially the women, while others are temporary chiefs, as keepers of order, or interpreters of the old ritual language of the songs. The conduct of the chiefs is minutely observed, and all actions must be justified. In the assemblies, they never decide anything alone, and are limited to leading the decision-making process. They must behave better than ordinary people, but at the same time, the worst is expected of them. The Kuna spend a lot of energy on surveillance of the chiefs, and this vigilance has protected them from chief collaborations with the surrounding colonial powers.[20]

In presentations of the long, mythological songs that enshrine history and cosmology, and strongly affect their sense of identity, the chiefs, healers and seers traditionally used a form of religious writing involving non-standardized pictographs; today this has apparently died out. The pictographs—which employ forms closely related to the symbols and pattern of the molas—served as an aid to memory, legible only by men in respected positions. In the past, they called it "singing the images." The same language, based on the same secrets of life, is shared by all these Kuna traditions: the women's art of story telling with images, the traditional mola patterns, the names of which are words of the ritual songs , and the sacred songs sung by the wise men.[21]

The dynamic vividness of this mythological heritage has contributed significantly to conserving Kuna culture. Among the most tightly guarded secrets is that of Great Mother Earth and her moon daughter and male sun child—carefully protected after negative experiences with missionaries who wanted to force a "father-god" upon them.[22] In fact, the idea of Great Earth Mother goes back to the earliest Kuna cosmology. According to tradition, she has had different names during the different eras of the world: at various times she has been called "Mu Gabayai," Grandmother of the Kuna; "Nana Dummad," Great Mother; or "Olodilisobi" (in the longer version, "Olokukurdilisob") referring to her predilec-

tion for appearing as a shining blue butterfly lady. Her fertility makes her the creatrix of all: plants, birds, animals, and humans, beginning with the red, yellow and white turtle. As primordial mother she also gave birth first to her daughter "Olowaili," the moon, and then to her son "Ibelele," the sun, and then to seven sacred beings at once—which have been interpreted as the planets. But her powers go further: she is also the goddess who shapes life in the next world. Culture was brought to the Kuna by the "nele," who originally were exclusively female prophets. They descended as three beautiful women on a golden disk from the sky, and once down on earth they met three brothers. One, called Nadili, stayed with the brothers and became the mother of the Kuna people. This is the reason Kuna women still wear the golden disks.[23]

Mother Earth is connected to her son, the sun—also her husband—through the Tree of Life.[24] For the Kuna, this sacred tree is the sabdur tree (Genipa Americana), whose red sap is seen as the menstrual blood of the goddess.[25] Around the central axis formed by the tree, the celestial world and underworld revolve, each encompassing its own four spheres, which are all richly populated by the spirit world. This makes it easy for the Kuna to place the Christian idea of heaven and hell into two of these spheres—one above and one below—but otherwise to retain their indigenous worldview.[26]

In their world, everything has a soul: rocks, water, wind, plants, animals and people all possess souls.[27] Even the goddess has a soul, and this soul has its place in the Pleiads—as it does in South American cultures.[28] After death, the souls of mortal beings such as plants, animals and humans journey through the Otherworld, presumably until they are born again (a belief the Kuna scarcely utter anymore, due to Christian missionary influence). At the very least, though, they still believe in the rebirth of children who die very young; these little ones are buried under their mother's hammock, in order to facilitate a quick return into the mother's womb. The souls themselves decide if and when to come back; those that don't want to be reborn will remain in the great womb of Mother Earth—where, in bodies of solid gold, they live a blessed life.[29]

Interestingly, people in the Otherworld can take on the shapes of plants and animals, while the souls of plants and animals can take human shapes as well. The plant souls are women and the animal souls are men. The Kuna explain this exchange opportunity by the fact that plants, animals and humans are equal. Animal and plant souls can apparently be wiser than human ones, since they come to humans as teachers; for example, when they show people how to use a given plant or animal for healing and food. This understanding gave rise to the idea of the "nutchu," protective spirits whose figures are carved from balsa wood and used in healing ceremonies.[30]

The most sacred Kuna festival is "Diwe Inna," the girls' initiation into womanhood. For boys, there is no ceremony for the passage into adulthood, and no other Kuna ceremony has as much meaning as this one does. The Diwe Inna festival takes place one year after the puberty ceremony celebrating menarche (which used to be a purely female rite), and constitutes the girl's initiation into adult womanhood. This is not the wedding ceremony; in fact, that ceremony—quite a simple one—comes later, and includes, among other things, the group game known as "Catch the Groom." In contrast, the Diwe Inna ceremony is much more significant, and the entire village participates. The girl receives her woman's name, becomes a full member of the mother clan and of the nation, and learns the matriarchal mythology that undergirds the cosmology of the Kuna.[31]

The symbolism of the Diwe Inna ceremony is directly based on religious belief in the Great Mother Earth. The goddess is the mystery at the beginning of all life, and the girl in the process of maturating into a young woman corresponds to her. The young woman now is physically, as well as socially, in a position to participate in the continuing creation of life, just like the goddess does; this gives her a share in the renewal of life in the clan, the community, and the world. In a special closed room, in the presence of twelve other women including her mother, she will be initiated into the most sacred songs, sung by a "kandule," or song healer. Here she learns that it is not the stag from the rainforest or the dolphin from the sea who brings children; rather, they come from the fusion of female and male eroticism, which is modeled on the example of Mother Earth and her Son-Lover, the sun. The song healer symbolically embodies Ibelele, the sun god, playing on his long, phallic flute. The twelve women accompany him with gourd rattles, the quintessential women's instrument, because the gourd shape suggests a pregnant belly with its navel, or the female breast with its nipple.[32]

Next, the life story of the young woman is recounted, beginning with her conception, in elaborate song, dance and pantomime. Her "new birth" from the goddess is celebrated, and at the high point of the days-long feast, she receives a newly woven marriage-hammock. It should be noted that at this point in her life her long, maiden's hair has already been cut by an "iyedule"—a highly respected ceremonial priestess—at the "Disle Inna" festival held when the child is 5 or 6 years old. In this process, locks of her hair fly away like "soul birds" into the Otherworld, perhaps to let the dead know that here is a little girl who will one day grow up into woman, giving them another opportunity for rebirth through her. And even when the hair-cut does not take place until she is older, short hair and the nose ring are the signs of a married woman. Now, at the Diwe Inna, her face and hands are painted with the juice of the sabdur fruit, which is colorless at first but quickly turns black when it dries at the air. She receives her sacred, secret

woman-name and is initiated into the secret knowledge of women: menstruation, fertility cycles, pregnancy and childbirth. The male song healer, at this point, is already absent, because the secret knowledge of women is a taboo for men. It is connected with knowledge of women's medicine, and is handed down exclusively from woman to woman: from mother to daughter, or from female healer to her apprentice. There is no comparable secret knowledge for men. Therefore, as the ceremony develops, it is an all women's ceremony, of which the main role is performed by the iyedule, the priestess, in a dance symbolic of midwifery. After the completion of the spiritual "new birth" the young woman is brought out into the public festivities, and greeted by the crowd with joyful dancing.

In the meantime, the public has not been idle. Each clan is obliged, on the occasion of one of its daughters' Diwe Inna ceremony, to feed the entire village and to get them drunk on chicha, a type of maize beer. Everything must be available in abundance, to be handed out in the large ceremonial house. Vessels for serving food and drink embody the uterus of the goddess, from whom all abundance comes; the alcoholic beverage is equivalent to her amniotic fluid, from which the spiritually newborn initiate has emerged. It is therefore considered a sacred duty for everyone to drink as much of the "water of life" as possible, in order to take part in the initiate's rebirth out of the goddess. At the start of the festivities, the initiate will have distributed the first beverage cups, and everyone will have taken their first sip directly from her hand.

In Kuna belief, at the time of the creation of the world, the oceans were made from the amniotic fluid of Mother Earth. So at this celebration, after the first sip from the hand of the initiate, and after much subsequent drinking, dancing and tobacco-smoking to make the sacred ceremonies invisible to evil spirits, there is a great deal of bathing in the sea, in direct contact with the amniotic oceanic fluid of the earth goddess. Afterwards, the participants, dressed in new clothes, continue to dance and drink until the "longed-for child," the initiate herself, is finally brought into the circle of the celebrating villagers at the end of her ceremony. The feast ends as it began, with dancing, exhilaration and intoxication.[33]

In matriarchal societies, as exemplified by the Kuna, the girl's initiation is the most important celebration, because by renewing the fertility through the young woman, hopes are fostered for the continuation of life on earth. Every female youth embodies the renewed, life-giving goddess herself. Additionally, the initiate is the embodiment of one of her female clan ancestors, reborn in her, who will now be able to carry forth the life of the clan.[34] Matriarchal societies honor women's fertility not only because it makes giving birth possible, but primarily because it can give rebirth; that is, it is the ability to transform death into life. It is this spiritual context that gives women their sacredness.

Panama is bordered in the north by Nicaragua and Costa Rica. Traces of Arawak migration northwards from South America are still perceivable there. Chronologically, Chibcha migration followed the northward migrations of the Arawak, and Chibcha culture grew out of Arawak culture. The territory of Chibcha-speaking peoples extended to the Maya-speaking regions on the Yucatan peninsula (see map 8).[35]

Many archaeological indications point to this conclusion, but for now we will focus on the ethnological evidence. When Columbus landed in Costa Rica in 1502, indigenous peoples were friendly towards the Spaniards, while the latter admired their exquisite gold jewelry. These indigenous peoples had achieved superior levels of mastery in woodworking, stone carving and metallurgy. They lived in large, thatched-roof clan houses in the midst of their fields; their society was politically and religiously complex. They spoke Chibcha, and all of their cultural traditions sprang from northern South America.[36]

Soon, however, conflict and fights developed between the Spaniards and the indigenous people. In those difficult times, the *Talamanca people* of the Talamanca region of Costa Rica (see map 8) never capitulated, not to the Spaniards, and not to their missionaries. They didn't have established cities and cultural centers in Costa Rica as the peoples did in Peru and Mexico, so they carried out a program of ongoing resistance that couldn't be broken by the loss of any one key site. They were warlike in their resistance, often being led by a female chief. So they have managed to retain, up until the present day, the most important elements of their traditional social organization: they still live in matrilineal, exogamous clans related to each other by mutual clan intermarriage. Status and honor are inherited through the female line. Land is owned by the clan, which organizes family and economic events communally. Chiefs are tightly bound to the clans, for without clan agreement they cannot make any decisions. Ancient traditions are handed down through the songs of the song healers.[37] All of this clearly recalls the culture of the Kuna.

The Talamanca peoples' talent for craftsmanship is associated with clan structure: certain tasks, such as woodcutting, hunting, and cultivating particular crops, belong to specific clans, and are off-limits to all others. The spiritual content of their practical activities of daily life—practical and spiritual are never separate in matriarchal cultures—is indicated by symbolic plant or animal patterns displayed on their clothes, ceramics, and plait-works, and each clan is known by a specially designated pattern. All these things carry precise messages about the basic socio-political system, messages understandable by everyone who can read the symbols. Therefore, the social structure and interaction an individual is embedded in is plainly visible to everyone. This symbolic system has an additional function since it also embodies the relationship between humans and nature, depicting the universal order as the Talamanca

people imagine it to be. Each symbol is not so much an "ornament" as a totem within a political and religious clan system.[38] Such a totemistic system—one that is both socio-political and spiritual, and expressed in every physical object—is not unique to the Talamanca people for it is typical of matriarchal cultures in general.

12. 3 The strong, beautiful women of Juchitán

Farther north, in Mexico, one also finds clear traces of the old matriarchal social order. It is no coincidence that these cultures still exist today on the Pacific coast. The Gulf of Tehuantepec is there, and the region is called the "Isthmus of Tehuantepec," describing the way the land here narrows considerably; indeed, the canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific was originally planned for this area, before Panama was chosen. In contrast to the impassable Isthmus of Darien, where the Kuna live, the Isthmus of Tehuantepec has always been a highly-traveled passageway for migrating peoples as well as for traders of every stripe; today the Pan-American Highway traverses this area. One of several indigenous towns along the coast is the city of Juchitán, which today has 100,000 inhabitants; here, the indigenous people have been able to maintain their traditional social patterns to a significant degree. Thus we encounter, in the midst of modern Mexican society, an urban matriarchy (see map 8).

Today, the *people of Juchitán* call themselves Zapotec. One of the most ancient indigenous peoples of Mexico, the Zapotec once controlled a region that included the entire Oaxaca valley. Their religious center was Monte Alban, a high plateau above Oaxaca where the remains of pyramids and palaces can still be seen today. Here the Zapotec fended off the invading patriarchal Aztec chiefs of Tenochtitlan, who were unable to subjugate them.[39]

Differences between today's Highland Zapotecs—who have, in the meantime, also developed patriarchal structures—and the Isthmus Zapotecs, with their matriarchal patterns (particularly the people of Juchitán), are very noticeable today. This suggests that there is a distinct historical difference between the two peoples. Historical evidence appears to weigh against assuming ethnic unity. Not until mid-14th century did Highland Zapotec conquerors subjugate the lowlands and demand tribute. And at the end of the 15th century did the Zapotec dynasty, routed by the invading Aztecs from the north, finally retreat to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Ever since, the lowland population has been assimilated into Zapotec culture and forced to speak Zapotec. In the 16th century, the Spanish invasion added another layer of conquest, exacerbated by their mission to Christianize the peoples they encountered.

Archaeological research in Mexico shows that before the 14th century, there was no cultural connection between the Highland Zapotecs and the Isthmus people on the Pacific coast. These coastal areas along the Gulf, very narrow in some places, are some of the archaeologically richest in the world. The climate is hot and damp and the land fertile; because of the extreme climate the area was not investigated by foreign researchers until rather recently. Through this research, the abundance of many cultures of the early peoples emerged, in spite of the decay of perishable material given the humidity. This is especially true of the Formative Period (from about 2000 B.C.E.). Since the Isthmus cultures are so abundantly represented here, it is often assumed that the Formative Period of Mexico began here, spreading up into the highlands over the following millennia. The Formative Period of the Americas is roughly equivalent to the Neolithic Period in the Old World, because it demonstrates the same cultural characteristics: agriculture, cultivation of plants, domestication of animals, excellent ceramics, a multitude of goddess figurines both simple and complex, and countless earth mounds and platforms positioned closely together, forming the foundations of long, wooden houses and big temples. This period was extraordinarily innovative, and its social order—as on other continents—was matriarchal. A culture of conquest, with its towering monuments, did not develop here as it did on the highlands, where patriarchalization and empire building were established at the beginning of the Classic Period (300 C.E.). The coastal society remained agricultural and egalitarian, continuing the tradition established in the Formative Period of the Pacific Coast.[40] Only much later did the Zapotec—and then the Spanish conquerors—bring new layers of cultural influence; yet the peoples of the lowland, particularly the citizens of Juchitán, retained a significant part of their ancient culture.

The social organization and daily life of Juchitán has been investigated again by Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen and her team. Their feminist political perspective allowed them to illuminate particular patterns in the society that previously had been hidden.[41] According to their analysis, the most striking phenomenon associated with this city is its women—but not primarily because of their impressive sight to behold, with their colorful clothing of brightly patterned skirts and splendid blouses embroidered with huge flowers. Rather, they are remarkable because of their dominance in public life: both in their successful businesses in the marketplace or the huge, well-organized festivals in the streets. But this alone would not constitute a matriarchy if other important, culture-shaping elements were not also present. One of these is that the house belongs solely to the woman; this is done because through a woman's work as a craftswoman and trader, she looks after the financial and organizational aspects of all household affairs: the building of the house, the economics of running it, and the education of the children. Later in life, she hands the house

down to her daughters, specifically to the youngest daughter, who remains with her mother and looks after her in her old age.

Unsurprisingly, in this city the modern western-type housewife, deprived of her own property and made dependent on her husband, cannot be found; here, every woman, as craftswoman and trader, is her own boss, and is completely independent from her husband. At the same time, being confined to the home is unknown here: beginning with the open structure of the house and veranda, which gives onto the road that serves as a sort of courtyard for the house, there is no place for the illusion of privacy. Adding to the public nature of their lives is the fact that women sell their prepared food and crafts in front of their homes, or in alleyways and streets, or in the markets frequented only by women (Ill. 12). All this keeps them in constant communication with their neighbors and passers-by. Their domestic animals live on the streets, too, in between the open houses. Pigs are particularly important: they eat up all the household garbage and, once they have been fattened up, can be sold at market. Women then convert the proceeds into gold coins, which constitute the treasure gained through their business activities, and are displayed, on festival days, around their necks. Larger expenditures, such as building a house or educating children, are paid for with these gold coins.

Juchitán is an agricultural city, and the surrounding lands are its fields. Every morning the men of the city ride their oxcarts—the more modern men ride in trucks or buses—out to the fields. During the day they farm the land using irrigation systems; some fish along the lagoons or on the seacoast. Trade is women's business, while agriculture belongs to the men: they own the fields, passing them down from father to son. However, they cannot realize a personal profit, since all the fruits of their labor—indeed everything the land produces—goes back into the hands of the women and their households. The women process these agricultural goods into roasted corn tortillas, sweet drinks and other ready-made foods that they sell in town, and the proceeds stay with the women. When there is little work to be done in the fields, the men help the women with their crafts, or work outside to earn as wage-laborers. Yet even these wages are handed over to the women. In turn, women provide men with meals and supply them with cash for personal expenses; this is true whether the relationship is between wife and husband, sister and brother, or daughter and father. The entire economy of Juchitán lies in the hands of women, who are the providers—this arrangement is typical for other matriarchal societies as well. There is no struggle between the sexes over this economic order; everyone finds the division of labor to be in order. Women consider their men to be "very helpful" and the men of Juchitán are proud of their "strong, beautiful women."[42]

Illustration 12. Flower market of Juchitecan women. Photo: Cornelia Suhan

Poverty and lack of development, otherwise rampant in Mexico, are unknown in Juchitán, where the women maintain a traditional, regional economy that is, to a large extent, self-sufficient. Resources are not drained out of the region into exploitative national and international markets, which unfairly trade cheap raw materials for expensive manufactured goods. Here everything is produced, processed, sold and consumed locally. Indigenous products are more valued than imported ones are, and people are proud of Juchitán food, clothes, and music. Therefore, outsider companies such as factories and supermarkets have been unable to gain ground in Juchitán. At the same time, the women's activities—directed toward fine food, beautiful clothing and comfortable living—are highly valued, as they relate to all the important aspects of life. This enables the women to run the household and the market economy without outside intervention; they have never lost their sense of ethnic identity, self-respect or dignity. They are not, in fact, "lower class," as is sometimes falsely asserted: indeed, they don't even think in terms of class.[43] The phenomenon of the so-called "Third World" only arises where this kind of subsistence economy, exploited and scorned by a capitalist economic system, no longer allows self-sufficiency. The resulting systemic damage to the dignity and self-worth of women and farmers causes misery and hunger there.[44] In Juchitán, on the other hand, the local economy—firmly in the hands of women—is sufficiently vigorous to maintain prosperity: visibly and for everybody. One expression of this prosperity can be seen in the rounded, full shapes of women, reflecting abundant, good food and therefore valued as seen as the ideal of female beauty in Juchitán.[45]

Another special characteristic of this economy is that the highest prestige is not awarded to those with the most money, but to those who have given the most to others. This is done liberally at the great festivals of which 35 per year are held in Juchitán alone. They are rooted in ancient, agrarian seasonal festivals, and layered over with Christian feasts of the Church year. Also, rites of passage are celebrated, such as the 15-year-old girl's initiation, the wedding ceremony, and the elder's jubilee.

These festivals, or "velas," last two to four days and are attended by 2000–3000 visitors, all of whom are the guests of the woman who hosts and manages the festival—the "mayordoma," who pays for everything. The feasts are primarily an activity of women, who are at the center of the economy. They plan, direct and carry out the events, while men are employed as musicians and otherwise stay in the background. This is particularly the case at women's 50th or 60th birthday parties; these anniversaries are occasions for neighborhood "festivals of merit" to honor the elder women—especially the mayordomas. As mayordoma of the event, the celebrated woman is at the center of the festivities, and though her expenses may be high, the outlay earns her high prestige as well. That is the point: indigenous economy in Juchitán is not based on accumulating personal wealth, but rather on sharing

goods in a way that puts a premium on mutuality. This type of "prestige economy" revolves around strengthening the social ties through a lighthearted communal consumption of goods that continually circulate as gifts, rather than being hoarded by lonely individuals. A mayordoma is both prosperous and generous; society's high regard is her reward for sponsoring her festival of merit, for which she has long planned and saved for. According to the conventions of mutuality and balance, she will be invited to other feasts, and will be given to, just as she has given to others; so it goes throughout the year. The principle of mutuality is essential, and anyone who fails to observe it has slipped out of the community and excluded herself. Isolation, loneliness and insecurity are the consequences.

Women's festivals of merit are extraordinary. In many places around the world, festivals of merit are men's matter, and women the objects of their honor. But not in Juchitán, where the women are the subjects of these feasts, and the actors as well, celebrating publicly in the streets. For this purpose, a length of road might be blocked off for days; traffic must be diverted; a roof of palm fronds or cloth must be erected; folding chairs must be set up in rows; and a dance area must be cleared and decorated with flowers and garlands. Huge amounts of food and drink are prepared, and at least two musical groups perform. Guests arrive in stately procession: at first the women, flamboyantly dressed in luxuriously embroidered velvet skirts and blouses, with white lace underskirts emerging from below the hemline; they wear large flowers in their hair, and an entire collection of gold coin jewelry around their necks. They also are the first to get up and dance, and they sit in the front rows, laughing loudly, cracking jokes, eating abundantly and drinking large amounts of beer. The mayordoma holds forth at the center of the feast. Beside her, a young woman relative acts as the beautifully costumed "Festival Queen." As "madrinas" (partners), female relatives and neighbors assume part of the cost and organizational duties of the festivities. The women dance together for days, and festivities culminate in a parade on decorated wagons, from which fruit is passed out to the crowd by beautiful young women, just as at Carnival.

Commercially speaking, these feasts level the field; this is the intention of giving in an economy based on mutuality and balance. Differences between rich and poor are thus minimized, a prosperous woman is expected to give more, both as host and as guest. According to the guidelines, a portion of the outlay comes back right at the beginning of the feast: every guest brings the mayordoma presents of goods or cash—and again, each is expected to give in proportion to her own wealth. In these matters, there is no prescribed abstract measurement of value (such as money), as this would only be an external gauge, and therefore unjust. But close attention is paid to balance, and the whole city of Juchitán maintains its concern for the concrete implementation

of this mutuality, which is monitored through the grapevine. In the gossip circuit, women constantly talk about each other—but also with each other. If a group of women starts talking about someone who is absent, one of the group will take on the task of advocate, speaking in her defense. In this way norms are always being negotiated and adjusted. Nearly any irregularity will sooner or later be brought back into line: there is no need for codified laws, judgments and punishments carved in stone.[46]

In this sense, these festivals in Juchitán are what drives the economy, and they provide a beautiful further example of a gift economy. Unlike capitalism, the gauge of the economy is not the international market, but the local market, embedded in the wide net of the gift economy. Local, rural markets, embedded within a gift economy, are also typical for other matriarchal societies, and they function very differently from capitalist markets, which are based on profit maximisation, achieved through unfair trade. As in the Juchitán example above, it is not the selling price that plays the key role, but rather the good, neighbourly relationships created and maintained by the conversations between women at the market place. Thus a product may cost more, but one is buying it from a friend—and the sale has deepened the friendship. This is also why foreign supermarkets, such as WalMart (2005), have so far not caught on in Juchitán. As Juchitán women say: "You can't speak there, you can't confer with one another, you can't do anything in there except pay for things!" And they don't go back.[47]

12.4 The life cycle of Juchitecan women

The life cycle of a Juchitecan woman is shaped, from the outset, by the festivals. When she is two years old, the little girl is presented publicly, and her education shapes her towards representing at festivals and acting as host. Very often, a young girl will accompany the young woman acting as "Festival Queen." At fifteen the girl will be at the center of the first big ceremony of her youth, prepared for her by her mother: this is the initiation ceremony for girls (for boys no ceremony of this kind exists). And also at fifteen, she begins to be a tradeswoman in her own right. To help her get started, she receives a little present at her initiation ceremony. And later, if she enters another profession, such as teacher or doctor, she continues as a trader. Every woman in Juchitán is a trader, and is proud of it: this is how she is integrated into the entire network of communication and festival economy.

The bond between mother and daughter is key to all life's relationships, while daughters—and sons as well—are proud of their mothers and of their descent from her. Thus, they never disavow their ethnic heritage: to the contrary, they consider Juchitecan goods and way of life as "better"—doubtless as a result of maternal edu-

cation. The children live in their mother's house, that is, matrilocally, and the husband lives there as well, in his wife's house, that is, uxorilocally. The lines of relationship are officially traced through both parental lineages. However, in practice names are registered as women prefer, and adult children often drop their father's names, as they may have little relationship to them. Because, in spite of official monogamy, divorce is easy and common, so most women have children with several fathers. Children always live with their mothers; thus the common choice of mother's name. Paternal lineage becomes important only when fields are bequeathed, as these are handed down from father to son. In the same way, the house is handed down from mother to youngest daughter. The introduction of monogamy, along with attention to the father's line and inheritance of land from father to son, are all relatively recent developments—historical results of Spanish and Christian missionary influence. Before this time, clear matrilineality prevailed, with inheritance exclusively through the female line; this pattern is attested to by the practices of everyday life, and by means of the terminology of relationship.

A daughter will not do anything against her mother's will, and this applies as well to her marriage opportunities. In fact, through the practice of the "Captured Bride," she does choose her first lover: he abducts her, according to mutual agreement, to his mother's house, where she lets herself be deflowered. After this, her mother—arriving with a delegation of women—arranges matters with his mother, in order to secure the best marriage conditions. Then a great wedding is celebrated—although the ceremony at the household altar, dedicated to the female ancestors, is fundamentally more important than the official church wedding mass. At the household altar, a highly regarded neighbor officiates, acting as female priest in an indigenous ceremony for the couple, giving her instruction in their own language. If the mother of the bride does not consent to the marriage, the daughter returns home to her. But in such a case the mother of the groom must pay high compensation for the loss of the girl's virginity; the young woman herself gets this money, using it as a dowry to open a business of her own. Similarly, if the marriage proceeds, the mother of the groom must still help her daughter-in-law start her own business. To offset these expenses, the bride stays for two years with her mother-in-law to help her. Then she goes back to her own mother, where her children will be reared. She helps her mother, and perhaps inherits the house or else builds her own nearby. Her spouse lives with her, and in case of divorce (which is prevalent) he returns to his mother's house. When other partners are subsequently chosen, there is no second marriage ceremony; the woman simply gets together with her new partner, with no strings attached.

If a young women does not want to go through a marriage ceremony at all, it is not a requirement for entering the stage of independence and sexual freedom.

This freedom is achieved by reaching marriageable age, and not through a ceremony: thus a wedding is not a binding commitment.

In this culture, a boy might wish he were a daughter instead of a son. In consequence, the social organization of Juchitán provides for a choice of genders: if a boy decides to be a "daughter," he will be dressed as a girl, educated as a girl and will practice female activities; that is, commerce. He is considered to be a "muxe," and is definitely considered female, even in matters of love, which he may engage in with a male partner. The same goes for girls; if a girl wants to be a "son"—which is generally less coveted in a matriarchal society—she is dressed and educated as a male, and, as a "marimacha" goes out to work in the fields with the men. She will have women as sexual partners.

These changes of gender-roles also occur in many other matriarchal societies, but the phenomenon is not yet well researched. Still, it demonstrates that same-sex love is not taboo in matriarchies, but seen as a natural preference. What is retained in this switching of gender roles is the traditional appearance and spheres of life associated with each sex—the female-male polarity is not discarded. This is because matriarchal cultures are grounded, at each level of society, in the practical and symbolic equilibrium of both of these polar spheres—no matter how differently these are defined from culture to culture. This way of ordering the world cannot be broken by the personal preferences of individuals.[48]

In general, by the time a Juchiteca reaches maturity, she has become a successful trader. Her business enterprises expand; she no longer is necessarily bound to the city, and long business trips are an established tradition in Mexico. Local specialties, arts and crafts are sold abroad by women from Juchitán, even if made by men. On these trips they visit remote relatives and undertake pilgrimages to places they hold sacred. As "Isthmus traders" the Juchitecas, easily identifiable in their native dress, are famous throughout Mexico; they circulate all around Central America, from Nicaragua in the south to Arizona in the north. They learned Spanish long before their men did, and are to be found today in all the educated professions. A woman reaches the pinnacle of prestige when, at 50 or 60 years of age, she acts as the mayordoma of a large give-away party. In addition, she celebrates the ancestor ceremonies, some taking place at the household altar, where pictures of female ancestors are especially featured. Other ceremonies are held at the cemetery, where substantial honor is paid to the mother after her death; women decorate these graves with many flowers. They retain the traditional belief that the ancestors spend time among the living, and thus every family spends several days a year at the cemetery, celebrating various feasts with the dead. There is great rejoicing at these events, just as at Carnival, and the ancestors are invited to share in the abundant feast spread out before them, the music and balloons, and occasional dancing.[49]

Religious syncretism has allowed them to maintain, in spite of the alienating effects of Christianity, many indigenous practices and beliefs. They use Catholic feast days as platforms to stage their own festivals, consciously tailoring them to their own beliefs. With beliefs that have always been based in nature's life-giving powers, their festivals serve as gifts to the abundant earth, and revolve around prayers for rain, as is always the case in hot, dry regions. To make this happen there needs to be an abundance of food, drink, and flowers; a hidden erotic symbolism undergirds these festivals and processions, and each woman personally embodies nature's fertility through her appearance. The Goddess is the subject of folk songs that praise her mothering, as she takes humans back into her arms when they die. In this figure we can recognize the ancient Mexican Earth Goddess and Mother of all Beings, worshipped under so many different names in the region. For the Zapotec she was Nohuichana and associated with the water and fishing. Through the missionary influence of the Spanish invaders, many Mexican earth goddesses came to be identified with the Virgin Mary, and this was also true of Nohuichana. So it is hardly a coincidence that the little church in Juchitán, called the "Church of the Fishermen," is where women light candles to the Virgin Mary.

The Catholic priests are constantly being replaced, for they are not able to win the people over to official church dogma. They are dependent upon the indigenous women for church festivals, because here, too, the mayordomas underwrite the costs. Priests who go against the women's agenda in their sermons don't last long in Juchitán. Most significantly, mass is often held not in church, but in women's homes, where it is used to embellish their own give-away festivals. Apart from this, every woman is the unchallenged female priest for the family's life cycle rituals that take place in her own home. Therefore, two separate baptismal ceremonies and two weddings are always celebrated: one in church and one at home. Shaman midwives and healers in the city are also highly respected; they come into the houses and perform their healing rituals at the household altars. In this way they continue to observe, then and now, the principles and practices of traditional indigenous cosmology.[50]

In light of this, what do politics look like in Juchitán? Women carry out the realistic politics, while men cover official party politics and city council representation, which are their opportunity to gain prestige. However, no man can get anywhere as a local politician unless the city's most respected women support him, and unless his mother, sisters, and wife stand by him. These women will promote him; *they* will get votes for him from the other women of the city.

Men have no money of their own, and it is difficult for them to get access to women's money. Mayors foisted on the people by the state's centralized government, never were able to exercise power, and eventually the market-women stopped one

of these unpopular mayors from entering the City Hall and taking up his post. Only after a military intervention an arrangement was achieved; according to this, solely indigenous mayors were allowed. These officials tried levying market fees and taxes on earnings, but were once again confronted with rebellious women; there was no money to be gotten out of this city. Men are only able to get something done if they are funded by the central government, and when this is coupled with a misguided idea of economic "development," it can pose a serious danger to the indigenous economy of Juchitán.

Nevertheless, the Juchitán example is extraordinary because here the matriarchal social order has survived—and not in a remote rural enclave, but in a well-frequented transit hub. The social order is not retained natively, but has to be actively produced, and regenerated through each crisis, by the people. It results from solidarity between women, their intractable stance *vis à vis* the outside world, and their continual intervention in the politics of the men. In past centuries, ongoing confrontations between the people of Juchitán and Spanish colonial powers were reported: revolts were frequent, and women always fought alongside men. The Spanish had to exile not only the male leaders, but also the most important women, in order to "pacify" the place. Even today, women are out on the front lines of political action—whether blocking the Pan-American Highway, leading a march against the policies of the provincial capital, or mounting a revolt against the Mexican central government. In internal politics, they treat superiors with no particular respect, and up until now no man has managed to "reform" their market practices or raise taxes.[51]

The lowlands of the Gulf of Tehuantepec include other small cities, which altogether comprise about 250,000 people. Like Juchitán, they function as independent city republics, a venerable political pattern that goes back to the time before indigenous empires. Matriarchal elements like those mentioned above are also found in these other cities, although Juchitán is the most conservative, as well as the most rebellious. With the burgeoning self-awareness among indigenous peoples in Mexico, the women of neighboring cities are increasingly adopting activist strategies from the successful women of Juchitán.

These islands of once-widespread matriarchal culture exist not only in the south and center of Central America, but also in its far north. In the northwestern corner of Mexico, quietly ensconced on Tiburón Island in the Gulf of California, are the *Seri.* In 1956 they were driven from their home island and forced to settle on the coast, but in 1975, they got their island back. Only some hundred people are left of this once-numerous community (see map 8).[52]

Their lifestyle is extreme. In spite of courageous defense they constantly had to flee from invaders, until a final retreat to the Sonora Desert and Tiburón Island.

As a result of constant migrations their material culture degenerated, but they were able to elude all foreign influences by rigorously walling themselves off. Long ago they lost their agriculture, and now live exclusively on fish caught by the men. Nevertheless they have completely retained mother-right practices, as manifested in matriliny, matrilocality, pre-eminence of the mother-clan, which determines all aspects of community life. Mutuality is the ironclad rule, a rule without which the Seri, in their extreme situation, could hardly have survived. Little is known to outsiders of their religion; they celebrate an elaborate initiation ceremony for girls, at which time the face is painted with symbolic lines, under special ancestral protection. Female ancestors guide the dead into the underworld, accompanying them on their otherworldly travels until rebirth. From this underworld, at the beginning of creation, Turtle and Pelican brought the first humans up to this world. Turtle surfaced—like Earth itself—from the primordial ocean, and gave them a place to live, while Pelican gave them motherly protection. Pelican feathers and skins were once made into magnificent clothes for the Seri women. Tiburón Island and a tiny, nearby island are dedicated to the turtle and pelican, and the old Seri mother-clans still bear the names of these animals.[53]

This small indigenous group can be seen as a further example of the still existing matriarchal cultures that extend from South to North America. Nearby, the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico in the southwestern United States are home to Pueblo peoples, all of whom are agriculturalists that have—in their traditional cultures—practiced a full matriarchal social order.

Today, the insularity of the Seri, as one of the last truly autonomous peoples in Mexico, is being tested by Mexican tourist development. Hotels will sprout along the coastline, close to Seri's land, and will force them to confront difficult questions about their future.[54]

12.5 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

In general:

- The migration of matriarchal agricultural peoples proceeded from South America into Central America; that is, from south to north.

At the economic level:

- In matriarchal societies, provisions are strictly in the hands of women, whether produced by women on the clan's fields, or by men—and handed over to women. In any case women always turn produce into nourishment, and thus are seen as providers.

- The economy, based on independent subsistence production, is managed by women.
- Women own the markets where agricultural and domestic products are sold and bought. They manage retail sales, and sometimes also long-distance trade (in Juchitán). However, long-distance trade is generally the province of men.
- Local, rural markets, embedded within a gift economy, are typical of matriarchal societies. They function very differently from capitalist markets, in which profit maximization is achieved through unfair trade. At these local markets, it is not the selling price that matters most, but rather the good, neighbourly relationships created and maintained by the conversations between women at the market place.
- Jewelry made of gold or other precious material is worn by the women, so that their clan inheritance or their own surplus may be displayed. This exhibition of wealth brings prestige, but also the responsibility to be generous.
- At great seasonal festivals and at personal festivals of merit, the goods of a well-to-do clan or woman are shared out and given as gifts to neighbors, fellow-villagers, and members of their tribal lineage. This brings honor to the givers—"honor" in the sense of societal acknowledgement that rewards good social behavior.
- Circulation of goods at these gatherings involves perfect mutuality. This balanced economy prevents class differences between families or clans from arising. Circulation of goods is the expression of a mutual aid system; accumulation of goods is not valued.

At the social level:

- Some matriarchal societies practice adopting alternate gender roles: girls can become "sons" and boys "daughters." Switching gender-specific social identities is associated with adopting the sphere of action specific to the other gender in that society, and also includes acceptance of same-sex love.
- As a matter of principle, however, female-male polarity is maintained in these cultures, as the foundation, both symbolic and real, of every aspect of society. This female-male polarity can be defined and practiced differently in different matriarchal societies.

At the cultural level:

- The initiation ceremony for girls is, for all matriarchal peoples, the most important feast. For boys there is no comparable ceremony.
- At the initiation ceremony the girl's transition to womanhood is blessed,

and she becomes a full member of society. She retains her sacred name; that is, the name of the female ancestor reborn in her (as with the Mosuo). At the same time, she is considered the embodiment of the reborn goddess (as with the Kuna).

- At the initiation ceremony the girl is inducted into the sexual, economic, social and religious knowledge of her society, usually by her mother. She is honored because by having her own children, she will ensure the continuation of the clan and her people.
- Wedding ceremonies are unknown, or accorded secondary importance. The central bond in matriarchal societies is not between woman and man, but rather with the female ancestors and the goddess (see initiation ceremony).
- Later initiation ceremonies of patriarchal men's secret societies are a perverted imitation of the girls' initiation, wherein men give a second, spiritual "birth" to boys in this way.
- Today, women in matriarchal societies still act as female priests for their families and clans. This continues even where patriarchal religions have been superimposed over indigenous practices (e.g., Juchitán).

Notes

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2. Steward, [Handbook S.A.], vol. 5, ibid., p.763.
3. Steward, [Handbook S.A.], vol. 5, ibid., pp. 758–763.
4. Steward, [Handbook S.A.], vol. 5, ibid., p. 760.
5. Steward, [Handbook S.A.], vol. 5, ibid., pp. 758/759; and H. Feriz: „Zwischen Peru und Mexico", in*: Afd. Cultural en Physical Anthropologie*, no. 63, p. 216, Amsterdam 1959, Koninklijk Institiuut voor de Tropen; and W.M. Duncan Strong: "The Archaeology of Costa Rica and Nicaragua," [Handbook S.A.], vol. 4, ibid., p. 142.
6. In a Collective Statement to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples in New York, the Caribbean Antilles Indigenous Peoples described their cultures as "well structured matriarchal societies."—See CAIPCD, January 2006, Saint Lucia, Antilles.
7. Disselhoff/ Zerries: *Die Erben des Inkareiches und die Indianer der Wälder*, Berlin 1974, Safari-Verlag, p. 146 ff.
8. G. Hartmann: *Molakana. Volkskunst der Kuna*, Berlin 1980, Museum für Völkerkunde, pp. 9/10.
9. Parker/ Neal: *Molas. Folk Art of the Kuna Indians*, New York 1977, Barre Publications, p. 30.
10. Disselhoff/ Zerries, ibid., pp. 146/147; and Parker/ Neal, ibid., pp. 26, 69; and D.B. Stout: *San Blas Kuna Acculturation: An Introduction*, New York 1947, Viking fund, p. 13; [Acculturation]; and Hartmann, ibid., pp. 15–17; and A. Moore: "Lore and Life—Cuna Indian

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12. Parker/ Neal, ibid, p. 26; and Hartmann, ibid., p. 23.
13. Hartmann, ibid., pp. 33–38.
14. Disselhoff/ Zerries, ibid., p. 147; and Parker/ Neal, ibid., pp. 33, 35, 36, 39—52, 100; and C. E. Keeler*: Cuna Indian Art: the Culture and Craft of Panama's San Blas Islanders*, New York 1969, Exposition Press; and D. B. Stout: "The Cuna," [Handbook S.A.], vol. 4, ibid., p. 34. [Kuna]
15. Disselhoff/ Zerries, ibid., p.147; Stout, [Kuna], ibid., pp. 259, 261.
16. Disselhoff/ Zerries, ibid., p.147; Stout, [Acculturation], ibid., pp. 25/26.
17. A. Olowaili, [Goldmother], ibid., p. 4.
18. Stout, [Acculturation], ibid., pp. 25–28; Disselhoff/ Zerries, ibid., p. 147.
19. A. Olowaili, [Goldmother], ibid., p. 6.
20. J. Howe: "How the Cuna keep their Chiefs in Line," in: *MAN*, vol.13, 1978, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland; and Stout, [Kuna], ibid., pp. 267/268; and A. Olowaili, [Goldmother], ibid., p. 6.
21. Hartmann, ibid., p. 31; and A. Olowaili, [Goldmother], ibid., p. 6.
22. C. E. Keeler: *Secrets of the Cuna Earthmother*, New York 1960, Exposition Press, p. 11. [Secrets]
23. Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., p. 11; and A. Olowaili, [Goldmother], ibid., p. 5.
24. Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., p. 56; and Disselhoff/ Zerries, ibid., pp. 151/152.
25. Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., p. 126 ff.
26. Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., p. 83; and Stout, [Kuna], ibid., p. 266.
27. Disselhoff/ Zerries, ibid., p. 149.
28. Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., p. 84.
29. Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., p. 285.
30. Disselhoff/ Zerries, ibid., pp. 149/150.
31. Parker/ Neal, ibid., p. 28; Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., p. 255.
32. Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., pp. 255–258; A. Olowaili, personal communication.
33. For details on the celebration of this festival, see: Keeler, [Secrets], ibid., p. 258 ff.; and for Kuna rituals for women only, see: Stout, [Kuna], ibid., pp. 262/263; and A. Olowaili, personal communication.
34. For girls' initiation rituals in other matriarchal cultures, such as the Mosuo (China), see: Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Matriarchat in Südchina*, Stuttgart 1998, Kohlhammer Verlag.
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38. Ferrero, ibid., pp. 100 and 103.
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41. Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen, [Juchitán], ibidem; and: „Die Würde der Frau ist der Reichtum von Juchitán. Kulturelle Barrieren gegen die Verarmung durch Entwicklung", in: *Das Ei des Kolumbus?*, Reihe AMBOS no. 31, (ed.) J. Möller, Bielefeld 1992, pp. 88–100, [Würde]; and: „Gegenseitigkeit statt sozialer Gerechtigkeit. Zur Kritik der kulturellen Ahnungslosigkeit im modernen Patriarchat", in: *Ethnologische Frauenforschung*, (ed.) Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, Berlin 1991, Reimer. [Gegenseitigkeit]
42. V. Bennholdt-Thomsen: „Der Markt: das Herz Juchitáns", [Juchitán], ibid., pp.12–36 and pp. 38–47; Brigitte Holzer: „Mais. Tauschbeziehungen zwischen Männern und Frauen", [Juchitán], ibid., pp. 140–152.
43. Beverly L. Chiñas: *The Isthmus Zapotec: Women's Roles in Cultural Context*, New York 1973, altogether and especially p. 43.—In her assessment of women's situation in Juchitán, B. Chiñas resorts to the unfortunate patriarchal clichés of political economics, referring to "upper" and "lower" classes, in which the "upper classes" (men) are associated with the official sector (politics) while the "lower classes" (women) are associated with the informal sector. Thus, unlike Bennholdt-Thomsen, she is unable to recognize the intentional, independent subsistence economy and misses the totally different, essential role of women in it. Nevertheless, B. Chiñas is a pioneer in that she was the first to describe—albeit with shortcomings in her method—the everyday life of this society of women.
44. See on this topic: Claudia von Werlhof /Maria Mies /Veronika Bennholdt-Thomsen: *Women, the last colony*, London 1988, Zed Books; Claudia v. Werlhof: *Was haben die Hühner mit dem Dollar zu tun?*, München 1991, Frauenoffensive Verlag; and: *Wenn die Bauern wiederkommen*, Bremen 1985, Edition CON; V. Bennholdt-Thomsen, [Würde], ibidem.
45. Cornelia Giebeler: „Politik ist Männersache—Die COCEI und die Frauen", [Juchitán], ibid., p. 89 ff.
46. Brigitte Holzer: „Ökonomie der Feste, Feste als Ökonomie", [Juchitán], ibid., p. 48 ff.
47. Report from Marina Meneses (indigenous Juchiteca), at the "Mother Summit" conference, May 2008, Karlsruhe/ Germany.
48. V. Bennholdt-Thomsen: „Muxe's, das dritte Geschlecht", [Juchitán], ibid., pp. 192–214; and Christa Müller: „Frauenliebe in einer frauenzentrierten Gesellschaft", [Juchitán], ibid., pp. 214–228.
49. Marina Meneses: „Stationen eines Frauenlebens", [Juchitán], ibid., p. 66 ff.
50. Brigitte Holzer, [Juchitán], ibid., pp. 62–64; and R. Briffault: *The Mothers*, vol. 3, ibid., pp. 61–64; and Anneliese Mönnich: *Die Gestalt der Erdgöttin in den Religionen Meso-Amerikas*, Dissertation, Free University of Berlin, Munich 1969, Klaus Renner, pp. 228–232.
51. Cornelia Giebeler, [Juchitán], ibid.; and V. Bennholdt-Thomsen, [Gegenseitigkeit], ibid.
52. Ted de Grazia: „Die Seri in Mexiko", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 4, Wiesbaden 1974, Brockhaus Verlag, pp. 176–183; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* vol. 4, London 1972–1974, Tom Stacey Ltd.
53. Ted de Grazia, ibid., p. 178.
54. Report on the Seri by Manuel Roig-Franzia: "Ancient Tribe at a Crossroads: Mexico's Reclusive Seri Confront the Inevitable March of Development," in: *The Washington Post,* June 28, 2007, p. A18.

13

North America: Matriarchal Immigrants from the South

For Kokyan-wuhti, Spider Woman of the Pueblo Cultures

13.1 The Hopi, the "Peaceful People"

The *Hopi* in the southwest of the North American continent are part of the Pueblo peoples, and refer to themselves as "the peaceful people" (see map 8). An appropriate name, for in spite of the hardships inflicted upon them by Spanish (1540–1870) and Anglo-American (from 1870) oppressors they have never taken up arms against these usurpers. Even in the face of ongoing raids by other indigenous peoples such as the Ute and the Navajo-Apache (who call themselves "Diné") they have taken up arms only in exceptional cases, in order to defend themselves.[1] In their own words, they "would rather die of hunger than die in war." They are persuaded solely by friendliness; force does not influence them at all. Undaunted by authority, they have waged a tough and creative campaign—which still continues in some villages—of non-violent civil disobedience against the United States government, in order to save their ancient culture. Few in number and poor in material wealth, they possess an enormous moral courage.[2]

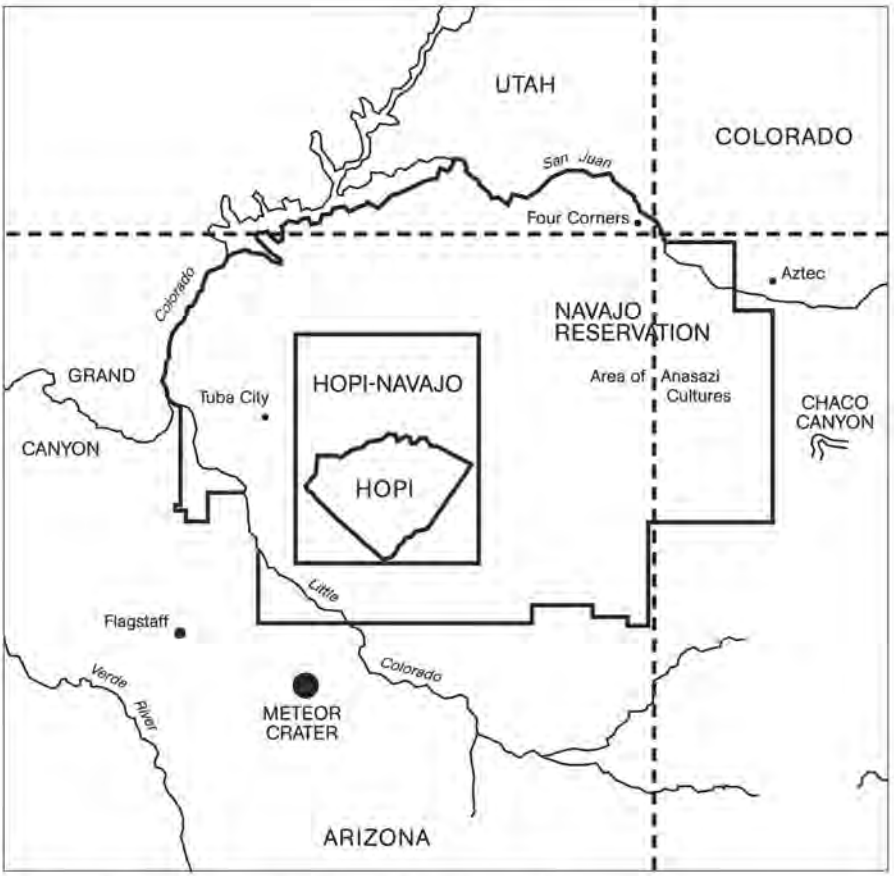
This courage has been honed over the past 400 years, buttressed by a religious conviction that they must resist the pressures and temptations of white civilization.

Beginning in World War II, many Hopi men were conscripted, against their will, into the army; after they were discharged, many took industrial jobs in the cities. So from 1943 on, the Hopi adopted a great deal of white material culture, something that various governmental maneuvers force them into. Hopi life today is a mix of fragments of the old culture and US civilization. The main problem is the demise of their traditional religion.[3]

Hopi villages are located on three steep, remote stone ridges, extensions of the Black Mesa plateau. They are surrounded by the rocky badlands of the Colorado Plateau, at 4500 to 9000 feet, and despite the aridity of these regions, the Hopi and their cultural ancestors have farmed here since ancient times. Springs on these three ridges are fed by sporadic Black Mesa rainfall, and occasional cloudbursts bring water that collects in gullies between the ridges. Hopi cornfields are planted in the sand at the edges of these rivulets, where the current isn't strong enough to dislodge the seedlings. This practice requires a very precise knowledge of the terrain, as well as extremely careful use of precious water; in this way, Hopi agriculture is an example of perfect ecological balance. Nevertheless their crops are always threatened by drought, and a Hopi farmer's greatest concern is rain. All Hopi religious ceremonies, all prayer, dance, and song, are dedicated to the coming of rain, an abundant harvest, and inseparably, the long life of the people.[4]

As in most Pueblo cultures, traditional Hopi stone houses are built on top of one another in multi-layered cubes. In former times, for purposes of defense the bottom storey had no door; instead, there was an opening in the roof, reached with a ladder that could be pulled inside in case of danger. The same was true for upper rooms, which were only reached by ladders. Every village has several "kivas," large, round storage rooms in the earth which are warm in winter and cool in summer. Kivas are also used for the men's and women's sacred ceremonies. Kiva walls are skillfully decorated, and for festivals an altar is set up at one side. A hole is left in the floor, the "sipapuni," which stands for the entrance to the lower world; there is also an opening in the flat roof through which the "ladder to heaven" ascends into the light. In this way, kiva architecture reflects the Hopi conception of the three realms of the world: heaven, earth and underworld.

Typical Pueblo architecture goes directly back to the earlier, well documented Mogollon, Hohokam and so-called Anasazi cultures in the region claimed by the Hopi, based on historical evidence. The Hopi claim land covering a much greater area than their artificially allocated reservation, shrunk to one third of its original size. This land is located in the triangle formed by the San Juan, Colorado and Little Colorado Rivers and extends from the Grand Canyon in the west to the Chaco Canyon in the east (see map 9). The Hopi consider the originators of the



Map 9: Hopi Reservation and Area of the Anasazi Cultures

Anasazi culture to be their ancestors. "Anasazi" is a Navajo word meaning "ancestor," but the Hopi claim them as their ancestors. Hopi legends clearly state that their culture originates in the south. This accords with the observation that their language is related to old Uto-Aztec of Central America. [5]

Around 100 B.C.E. the first phase of the Anasazi culture began to develop in the Four Corners region bounded by Utah, Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. Before that, in the Neolithic (a period that goes back to 2000 B.C.E., with cultural characteristics that originated in the south), round pit houses were built half into the earth, and maize was grown, in the earliest instance of that agricultural practice in North America.[6] In the first Anasazi phase (from 100 B.C.E.), pottery had not yet been developed, but the art of basket and plate weaving flourished, with baskets so well-made that water could be carried in them. Thus archaeologists have called it "basket-maker culture." Furthermore, they had rabbit-fur blankets. Both of these crafts are women's work, and into the 20th century Hopi women still practiced them.[7]

Evidence shows that from 400–700 C.E. kivas resembling ancient pit houses were built for sacred ceremonies; also, ceramics were developed and progressively even more skillfully fashioned and decorated. Artists were women; pottery continues until today to be a female handicraft that has produced potters of renown, such as Nampeyo from the village of Hano.[8]

In the first of the two classic Pueblo phases (700–1100 C.E.) a transition was made from the older agriculture to a highly developed one, while individual roundhouses gave way to adjoining, multi-storied pueblos. At the same time, this culture spread out into all the areas that Hopi claim as their territory. Ceramics surpassed basket weaving in importance, and weaving originally developed as a genuine female craft. Only later did men take over weaving in Hopi culture.[9]

From 1100–1300 Pueblo cultures reached their high point. Numerous small town settlements were built out in the open, as in Chaco Canyon, and in caves and cliff-side crevasses, as in Mesa Verde and Canyon de Chelly. Irrigation systems stretched for more than 60 miles (100 km); handicrafts and trade, as well as the arts, flourished. Kivas for religious ceremonies, with beautifully painted interior walls, were ubiquitous. Each of these eras of Pueblo culture left behind petroglyphs and pictographs, throughout the entire Anasazi region. They adorn the canyon walls in places that once served as public places of nature worship, so most of this rock art reflects religious themes. Completely missing are representations of war or "higher personages" such as kings, nobles or religious elite. This lack has led researchers to conclude that Pueblo cultures were exceptionally peace-loving and egalitarian; they had no class system—something that characterizes them even today.[10]

This period of cultural flowering ended abruptly with the Great Drought of

1276–1299. Migration forced by lack of rain drove the Pueblo people eastwards, where they rebuilt their settlements on the banks of the Rio Grande. The Colorado Plateau was emptied out, except for the Hopi, who stayed on, taking advantage of springs that flowed down from the Black Mesa—the places where their home had always been. They were able to assimilate many homeless Pueblo people; their settlements grew accordingly. Up until the arrival of the Europeans, Pueblo culture was revitalized, both there and on the Rio Grande (1300–1600).[11] The territories left empty by the departure of the Anasazi-culture were not settled until about 1500 when the Navajo-Apache, with their nomadic lifestyle, came in to use the terrain for sheep herding.[12]

All during this time, women appear to have been the architects and master builders. The first Spanish missionaries reported that when they settled among the Pueblo peoples, no man had ever put his hand to the construction of a house. When an indigenous man was ordered by the ignorant Spanish priests to build a wall, he was perplexed, and a crowd of shrieking, laughing women and children surrounded him: for them the most ridiculous thing in the world was that a man should be building a house. In fact, the missionaries' great courtyards and churches, as they themselves reported, were built solely by women and children, while men were busy with weaving, farming and hunting—and if necessary, with fighting. Almost up to the present time, in the Hopi and Zuñi cultures, building—except for raising the heavy roof beams—was exclusively women's work.[13]

The first contact between a small delegation of Spaniards and the Hopi, who lived out in remote western desert lands, was recorded in 1540, but this had no consequences. In 1598 they were subordinated in the name of the Spanish crown, while in 1629 the first missionaries turned up among them. Four years later, one missionary was poisoned, and in the Pueblo Revolt of 1680 the missionaries were all killed. After the revolt, the Hopi took in refugees from the eastern Pueblos; later, in 1700, they destroyed one of their own villages, Awatovi, killing all the Hopi Christians who had gone over to the hated "slave church" of the whites. At this time they moved their villages up to the top of the cliff-sides, where previously only Oraibi village (founded in 1150) had stood. This continued a pattern: wherever a settlement became too large, a "mother" village sent some of its people off to form a new "daughter" village, and at the same time, a third village located at the entrance to the mesa served as a "guard village." On the first mesa, Walpi is the mother village, Sichomovi the daughter village and Hano the guard village, while on the second mesa, the lineup is Shongopovi, Shipaulovi and Mishongnovi. On the third mesa the mother village is Oraibi, the daughter village Lower Moenkopi, and the guard village Hotevilla. The villages had—and still have—ritual connections that express those relationships.[14] Two

Spanish penal expeditions collapsed when they came up against this strategic organization; they couldn't get to the villages, which towered, like fortresses, up on the steep cliff face. Even so, the "blessings" brought by the new masters did reach the Hopi—in the form of smallpox; by 1780, only about 800 were left. Many more departed to join the Zuñi, where they were readily received.

At the beginning of the next century the ongoing conflict began between Hopi and Navajo, and other Apache peoples. These peoples had migrated to the region from the north, surviving as nomads (today they number 90,000, compared to 5,000 Hopi). In 1834, after the collapse of Spanish domination, Anglo-Americans emerged as the new masters, with whom the Hopi tried from the beginning to be on good terms. But for the next 160 years, the "protection" afforded by the new government—with a trading post, a boarding school, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs—overran Hopi culture, split the villages and Americanized the people. A so-called tribal council was set up, an entity the US government invented and staffed with Hopi leaders it controlled. The Hopi had no such institutions: their villages functioned as autonomous village republics. The externally-imposed tribal council proceeded according to the US judicial system, and intervened behind the people's backs to establish principles that contravened those of Hopi culture. Today, most Hopi people live below the mesas, on the street, in cheap American tract houses with electricity, water, and telephone—and they drive cars. Their tribal lands are returned to them as private property, on which they must pay taxes. Their traditional villages on the cliff sides are used for almost nothing but religious ceremonies. Their language is threatened with extinction.[15]

The most enduring resistance was mounted in the village of Hotevilla, which was started by traditionalist Oraibi dissidents in 1906. In spite of massive repression by the US government—such as imprisoning the leaders as „rebels," kidnapping and forced education in residential schools, destruction of sacred places to make way for the not wanted asphalt street and electricity poles (1968)—these courageous people held onto their traditional way of life and continued to celebrate their ancient ceremonies.[16]

Between 1881 and 1944, the Hopi were visited by eminent anthropologists, who recorded—at least for that time period—impressions of the traditional Hopi culture, now considered to be in decline. I have based my understanding of Hopi matriarchal social organization and religion upon these ethnological records, as well as on the statements of some traditional Hopi.[17]

Even in its architecture, the Pueblo-style construction reflects Pueblo matrilocal family and clan formation. Not only because the houses belong exclusively to women,

who have largely built them themselves, but also because the living quarters for daughters are constructed next to, or on top of, the main house. The result is the typical Pueblo construction of adjoining and juxtaposed cubes whose organic, irregular growth reflects the pattern of expansion exhibited by the female clans themselves.[18]

In addition to this form of matrilocality there is also the clear manifestation of matriliny in the form of name giving through the female line; that is, children belong to the mother's clan. If a man speaks of "his" house, he means the house of his mother.[19] Until Spanish missionaries began to influence Pueblo peoples, men and pubescent boys did not live in women's houses, but worked by day in the fields, sleeping in the kivas at night (originally, every clan had its own kiva).[20] Thus, contact between the sexes took the form of matriarchal visiting marriage.

This relationship was strongly criticized by the missionaries and eventually was abolished, so that the Hopi, like the Pueblo, ended up living strictly monogamously. The concepts of "father" and of individual paternity came into their culture then, as well as the exhortation to live a "proper" family life, which meant that the husband had to live in his wife's house (uxorilocal residence) instead of sleeping in the kiva. Still, they stayed true to their matriarchal heritage: today the husband continues to be treated as a guest in the wife's house, children do not carry his name, divorce is easy and does not damage the woman's reputation, and the foundation of life is still the matriarchal clan.

The matri-clan is also the basic Hopi social unit, and its head is the eldest woman. The clan consists of the matriarch, her brothers, her daughters (if daughters are married, husbands live there as guests), her unmarried sons, her grandchildren, and her great-grandchildren. Sisters in the clan rear children communally, and children address all women with the same name: "mother." Adults sometimes don't know who their actual birth mother is. If a sister dies, the other sisters adopt her children immediately; the event scarcely changes the household.[21] Several sisterly lines come together in the clan, and the clan mother, the "so'o," is the eldest woman of the oldest line. Highly respected, she is supported and waited upon by her daughters. Her daughters' husbands provide economic assistance, while the brothers, who live in their wives' households, are also at her beck and call.

The clan mother advises and directs the clan as a whole, ensuring the continuity of its identity by guarding the ceremonial symbols and equipment of the clan, which she will hand over to her brother, the male elder of the clan (mother's brother or maternal uncle) for the celebration of the clan's public rites. This elder's role is to lead the special ceremony of his clan; this is also the purpose of the men's society that includes all the men of his clan. He enacts the role of the "father" of the "kachinas," the deities and ancestral spirits of his clan, which are presented in

a masque by his male relatives in the village square. It is characteristic of Hopi socio-religious organization that each clan has its own ceremony and dance in the course of the annual agrarian cycle, as well as its own healing rituals for certain illnesses. Because of this, every clan used to be a sacred society in its own right, with its own kiva; later relationships blurred, with several clans sharing a sacred society and kiva. Formerly, when a clan died out—when there were no more surviving females—its unique ceremony, necessary for the annual Hopi ritual cycle, died out as well. Later, this threat was alleviated by having several clans share the same ceremony.[22] In this way the society itself is built up in accordance with religious principles: through sharing responsibility for the cyclical rituals, clans are interdependent.

A Hopi man lives as a guest in his wife's home, even if he lives there his whole adult life. He works in her fields, which belong to her clan and exclusively to the women of her clan; at harvest time he delivers all fruits of his labor into her hands. His spiritual home remains with the clan of his mother and sisters. He returns there often, in order to perform the clan's ceremony with his brothers and contribute to the education of his sisters' children. A man does not have these rights with respect to his wife's children, though he plays with them, teaching them—especially the boys—everyday practical tasks.[23]

A woman's main responsibility is to grind into meal the variously colored types of maize that her husband brings home from the fields; and she cooks this meal into a variety of dishes of different colors to feed her family. She is considered the provider, just like the motherly earth goddess whose "milk" is cornmeal.[24] Maize, or corn, is therefore a sacred plant, and cornmeal a holy gift. From the hands of women it nourishes not only humanity, but also the kachinas, or divinities and ancestral spirits, and is a necessary component of every public ceremony. No ancestral spirit can bring blessings if it hasn't been fed with cornmeal by the women, and no masked kachina dancer, embodying the ancestral spirit, can dance if he hasn't been sprinkled with cornmeal by the women, and fed the ceremonial bread, the "piki." Even the most sacred ritual objects such as the mask of the clan deity ("wuya") and her "tiponi"—a figure made from corn cobs and feathers—must be fed cornmeal by the clan mother, their caretaker, so that the clan deity can come to life for the appropriate kachina dance. The tiponi is then called the "Mother of Ceremonies." This highly respected role as provider for the dead as well as for the living confers important status on women, not only in everyday life, but also at the ritual feasts of the annual ceremonial cycle; indeed the whole social support system for the ceremonies comes from them.[25]

Women are not only the active sponsors of the festival cycle and the kachina dancers' societies, but are also their main judges and critics (reported from Zuñi

culture). Their preferences for one kind of presentation or another will prevail, and they insist on this—if they don't get what they want they will not support the alternatives (in a Hopi example).[26] Over all, the role of women in the Hopi ceremonial system has been underestimated; male ethnologists have assumed that women are there either to "observe" the proceedings or to "serve" the dancers. Traditional Hopi men express the opposite point of view: they say that without the women, nothing can happen, and that the women are the only reason they do it all.[27]

With regard to divorce, a Hopi woman makes the decision by herself, without having to give up any of what her fields produce. When she wants to part from her husband, she simply puts his personal belongings outside the door, and he returns to his mother's or eldest sister's house. But women do not abuse their powerful position, as it results from mutual respect and good relationships within the family. The role of the husband, who contributes significantly to his wife's—and mother-in-law's—household, is honored by the practice of having the children pay frequent visits to his relatives. When a child is born, the man's mother is permitted to perform the household ceremony; in addition, the initiation ritual for a young girl, which consists of a four-day cornmeal feast, is held at the house of the husband's sister. However, this practice does not carry with it the idea of his being related to his wife's children.[28] It is to the eldest daughter that the Hopi woman bequeaths house and land, as well as the sole responsibility for the crops and the concomitant responsibility to nourish the clan members whether living or dead.

13.2 Life-cycle feasts and agricultural ceremonies

Hopi traditional life is shaped by ceremonies, the central focus of their world. All life-cycle feasts are held at home, and carried out exclusively by the women of one's own clan and those of one's spouse's clan. Men are not present; during the women's home ceremonies they spend their days in the kiva, and sleep there as well. This explains why women's home ceremonies are largely absent from the ethnologists' accounts; instead, one-sided and exaggerated attention is paid to men's public ceremonies.[29] The most important house ceremonies are for birth, initiation of girls, courtship, and death. The case of the (now lost) girls' initiation ceremony, or "Poli-inte-veplaluwa," clearly demonstrates that in Hopi tradition the woman courts the man, and not the other way around. On the fifth day of the cornmeal feast the young women make "piki," or ceremonial bread, while their male peers hunt rabbits. In this way, young people demonstrate that they are able to feed themselves. In the villages of the second mesa the young women accompany the young men on the rabbit hunt, and if they have not yet found a lover, the girls go hunt-

ing the hunters, and give gifts to their chosen ones.[30] Afterwards, the aunts do up the girls' hair in the characteristic butterfly hair-arrangement, the "Poli-inta," that they will wear proudly at every possible public opportunity, up until the time of their weddings.

The hunt for the hunters is an ancient custom of the Pueblo peoples, as their mythology indicates. Women are generally considered to be erotically more active than men are. In tales of courtship, it is always the shy man who is followed, or actively invited, by the woman. It is not uncommon for the male hunter to run away from the women, in order to escape their supernatural erotic abilities; maidens and brides are considered particularly dangerous. Young men have an extraordinary dread of the wedding night. In one tale the groom runs back home to his grandmother's house when the bride makes advances. The grandmother lets him sleep with her, and fortified by this new knowledge of life, he goes back to accept his bride willingly.[31]

After the initiation ceremony, marriage is not far away, and here too, the future bride takes the initiative. Bearing a gift of cornmeal, she goes to the house of her prospective mother-in-law, and serves her for a certain time, in order to prove that she will be able to feed the woman's son. The young woman does not have completely free choice in this matter, since weddings can take place only between the members of certain clans that are interconnected in an intermarriage system, which functions as a system of mutual support. While the bride has sought acceptance from the prospective groom's mother and sisters by serving them, the women of the groom's paternal line step forward to vilify the bride and her clan (these paternal relatives of the groom do not belong to his clan, as he belongs to his mother's clan). This social game leads to ritualized mud-slinging between the clan of the groom's mother and the female relatives of the father's line; by the time they leave, the house of the groom's mother is a mess. Now the bride has the opportunity to demonstrate her industriousness, hoping to gain the acceptance of the opposition. Finally, when everything has been put back to rights, the women from the father's line of the groom come back, bringing gifts and offering their approval of the wedding. These, too, are exclusively women's ceremonies; the groom only appears at the end of the wedding, during the ritual where the bride's mother and the groom's mother wash the couple's hair in yucca-water and tie it together, symbolizing their connection. The more important rituals, binding the two clans together, come after this. In this way, both clans insure their alliance by reciprocal activities: the groom's clan prepares the bride's wedding clothes, with the women preparing the cotton and wool thread the men will then weave. The wedding outfit will be the bride's festival costume throughout her life; when she dies, it will be her funeral dress. Magical

powers are attributed to this garment.[32] As the production is so elaborate, it takes several years to make, and during this whole time, the bride serves her mother-in-law. When the garment is finished, the bride is dressed in all her finery and taken back to her mother's house, where large baskets of foodstuffs have already been prepared; these are gifts for the groom's clan, offered in appreciation of their work. The mutual help agreement entered into by both clans is publicly sealed when the bride appears in her beautiful wedding clothes at a public ceremony in the village square. She—and not the groom—is the center of all these events.[33]

In Hopi culture there is a free attitude about sex, with no false modesty. Youthful flirtations are considered natural, but they are not flagrant; the girls are reserved. No woman would flaunt herself in front of a man, and likewise, men who publicly ogle women or brag about conquests are despised. The basic rule is that a woman receives a gift from a man in return for any favor she grants him, whether she is young or old, single or married, whether the act takes place outside or inside marriage.[34] There is no violence against women.[35]

At death a woman is wrapped in her wedding clothes, while a man is wrapped in a simple blanket. The face of the deceased is covered with cotton, symbolizing a cloud, and food for the dead is left out. Soon after, and without ceremony, the corpse is laid in a fetal position and buried in an earth pit. A stick with attached prayer feathers is stuck in the ground, so that the "breath body," or soul, can climb out. According to Hopi belief the dead are physically reborn in the underworld, where life works just like it does in this world, but the order of the feasts in reverse, like a mirror image. Solely the breath body is free to move around; it becomes a kachina spirit—a cloud that sails around the heaven and, in the form of intensely desired rain, brings essential water to Hopi fields. Thus the ancestral spirits, in the form of clouds, bring literal blessings to the living. Rain flows even more abundantly from the wedding garments of the clan's dead women.[36]

The cycle of life and death eventually leads, through rebirth, back to life. In the underworld a new embodiment occurs; the breath body of the newborn comes from there, too. So all the dead become re-embodied, after a while, as new children. Just as a death in our world is followed by a birth into the underworld, so departure from the underworld is followed by a rebirth in our world. This way, everyone remains in her or his own clan. With this belief system, for Hopi society, the dead are not lost. They become powerful clan members who have simply had their activities diverted into the underworld and heavens, and will one day return.[37]

Just as the home ceremonies of the Hopi lifecycle are the realm of women, so the public seasonal rites are men's realm—or at least this appears to be so. These rites, about one per month, form an agrarian festival-cycle with the seasonal

rhythms of germination, growth, ripening, harvest, and sowing. Farming activities undertaken by Hopi men are reflected in all aspects of these rituals; they exhibit Hopi men's constant spiritual communication with earth, sky, clouds, plants and underworld. Summoning the ancestral spirits who are the clouds and bring the rain is central to the desert survival of the Hopi community.[38] These agrarian ceremonies can last for anywhere from nine to seventeen days, and each clan organizes their own in the course of the year. No matter which activities for the festivals are undertaken, everything is considered to be prayer: weaving ceremonial costumes, carving and painting kachina masks, creating prayer feathers, fasting, smoking, singing the different kinds of songs that express Hopi mythology and worldview, festive dancing in the kiva, and big public dances performed on the last day at the village square. Prayers for water are addressed to the deities, ancestors and kachina spirits who live up in the sky at the top of the San Francisco Mountains, as well as those in the underworld.[39]

Just as the underworld is a mirror image of our world, the ceremonies of the festival cycle celebrated by the ancestors in the underworld are held in reverse: when winter solstice is being celebrated in our world, the ancestors celebrate summer solstice in the underworld; when spring equinox is being celebrated here, autumn equinox is celebrated there, and so forth. To determine these dates, the Hopi use an extremely accurate calendar: they observe the rising and setting of the stars in relation to special points of the vast, flat horizon that surrounds their mesas. At every ceremony they send prayers to sky spirits (for example, with rising smoke), and at the same time, to spirits in the underworld (for example, by calling down into the "sipapuni," or hole in the kiva floor, by pounding on the ground before the dance begins, and by the stamping of feet that accompanies the dance itself).[40] Underworld spirits also send water—water that bubbles up from underground springs, and they also send the fertility of germination, and the growth of plants.

Most kachina spirits appear in the embodied form of masked dancers who impersonate them. Little children stare at them in amazement, believing that kachinas are really present, while older children and women know that men of various clans are underneath those masks and costumes. Kachina dances are performed exclusively by men, and this is true for female roles as well. Every kachina has a mother, an aunt, a sister—and so kachinas don't turn up alone, but are usually accompanied by their matrilineal kachina clans. Individual deities associated with clans are also portrayed by masked men, as are goddesses. In spite of the occasional presence of traditional clowns, performances are quite serious, as men's kachina dances are geared toward prayers to ancestral spirits for rain. In accordance with the idea of two worlds, these embodied kachinas only dance for half the year in this

world (December—July); it is believed that they spend the other half dancing in the underworld (July—December).[41] Because of this, in the second half of the year no kachina dances are held, and clan mothers store the masks away.

Instead, in this half year a demonstrably older type of ceremony is performed.[42] Hopi participants, ritually costumed and adorned, now pray for blessings as the human beings they are (see ceremonial calendar, diagram 2). Women and girls take part in these ceremonies, in counter-point to the kachina-dances of the first half-year; for example, two girls are an active part of the flute ceremony. For the snake-antelope ceremony, women, who are also fully-fledged Snake Society members, prepare certain medicines. The snake symbolize female strength, while the antelope represents male strength; because the snake dancers dance with live rattlesnakes, they are considered to be more powerful than antelope dancers.[43] At the Wuwuchim ceremony there is a teasing game in which women of the Maraw society lampoon Wuwuchim men. Maraw, Lakon and Owaqöl, celebrated in September and October, are women's ceremonies involving secret women's societies, women's kivas and female leaders of the dances. Women dance in the village square, wearing traditional white, red and black garments (black dress with red and white wrap); this time it is the men who watch. Even if Wuwuchim men now return the teasing, women's ceremonies are respected just as much as men's are. Maraw women and Wuwuchim men are in a religious, sister-brother-society relationship to each other; this too is a pattern that indicates relationships that go back further than the exclusively male kachina dances.[44] The secrets of the women's society have been well guarded, and male anthropologists have obtained almost no information about them.

There is another equally unnoticed, but interesting, aspect of kachina dances. Kachina figures receive widespread attention from researchers and collectors, who enthusiastically collect these small sculptures—carved by Hopi men from special wood—which exactly represent in miniature the more than 300 different kachina types.[45] In earlier times, the Hopi would never have willingly parted with kachina figures.[46] The reason is that these figures—wrongly referred to as kachina "dolls"—were gifts made by kachina dancers themselves; in a ceremonial presentation, these miniature images of the great kachinas were given to women and girls of the dancer's own clan, who would accept them as gifts to increase their fertility. Hopi prayers for earth's fertility always include women's fertility. For women who received a kachina figure and subsequently bore a child, the kachina was considered to be the "heart of the child."[47] Indeed, every child is regarded as the physical embodiment of an ancestor spirit, and women are honored as the re-birthers of the ancestors. In kachina dances, when an ancestral spirit—embodied by a male dancer—gave the carved kachina figure to a woman, it meant that the ances-

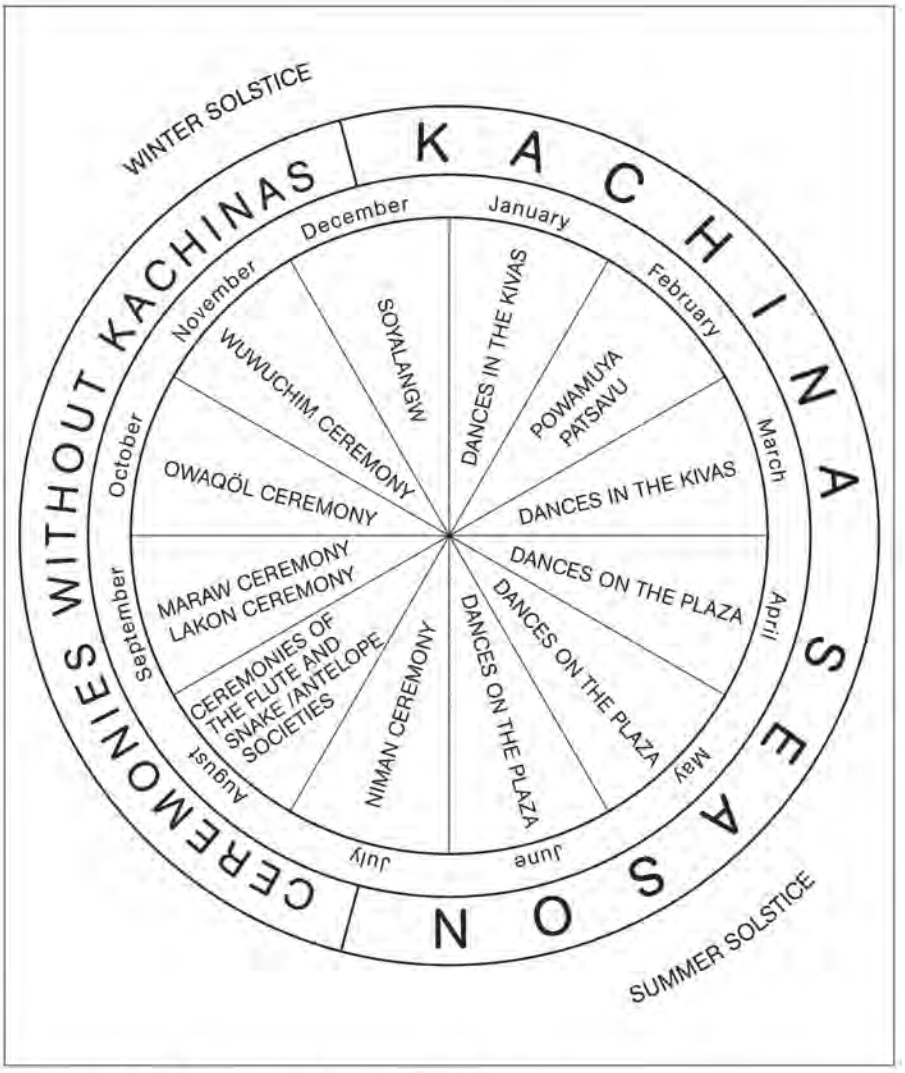


Diagram 2: The ceremonial year of the Hopi

tor was seeking to be reborn back into this world through that woman. Little girls were given kachina figures, not just as an educational visual aid, and certainly not as a plaything. They were given the figures in preparation for the future sacred role as re-birthers of the clan's ancestral spirits. This custom underscores the fact that women were not just spectators at kachina dances; instead, the ceremonies were addressed to women. Boys did not receive kachina figures, but were given bows and arrows for the rabbit hunt.

Often the question arises as to how the cult of kachinas developed. Though it is a sacred society, and not a society of power wielded by male cult leaders, its practices of keeping secrets and excluding women suggest that it is a departure from classic matriarchal spiritual practice. History-conscious anthropologists indicate that *this form* of the kachina cult is not so very ancient. According to Hopi legends, kachina worship, as a form of prayer to ancestor spirits, is as old as Hopi culture itself.[48] But the institutionalized kachina cult and its masked dances represent a relatively recent development. Even after careful research, no archaeological evidence prior to the 14th century could be found for this practice (the oldest image of a kachina mask dates from ca. 1350), and most researchers assume the cult began between 1300 and 1400.[49]

What could have happened at this time—still before contact with Europeans—to change a generally-held set of beliefs into an institutionalized secret society? The cultural phase in question followed the Great Drought (1276–1299) that resulted in deep seated changes to Pueblo culture. As vast reaches of the Colorado Plateau were de-populated, new pueblos were founded on the banks of the Rio Grande, and immigration caused the population of Hopi settlements—in Oraibi in particular—to increase significantly in a short period of time. Population increase was accompanied by a drought-induced spring-water shortage, and the rivulets that fed the fields threatened to dry up. In a stress situation like this, the role of the chiefs became more important for controlling the water supply. Kivas, which had long served as men's dwellings, now functioned as chiefs' headquarters, and from here fields were apportioned and water rights administrated. Newly centralized male authority emerged in individual villages, especially in the capital of Oraibi, leading to stratification of society, with old, respected chief clans being differentiated from newly arrived, dependent clans.[50] Nevertheless, individual villages retained their autonomy as village republics unto themselves, a situation that continues to this day.

The new organizational direction emphasized the developing role of the institutional kachina cult, with ancestral spirits intervening personally as rainmakers and as legislators of morality. At the outset, the kachina cult had just a few different figures, the "chief kachinas," which could only be embodied by men who actually were

chiefs—and this is still true today. The ritual was practiced only occasionally; it was restrictive and secret, and even today the old kachinas are sacrosanct. The varied parade of newer kachinas developed over the 19th century, and is continuously being added to.[51]

Paradoxically, it was due to the oppressive actions of white invaders that this shift in emphasis did not lead to the development of rigid patriarchal patterns. Mission policies drove the kachina cult into even deeper secrecy down in the kivas—but now secrets were kept not from their own people, but from outsiders. Passive resistance practiced by the Hopi against their white oppressors must have kept the kachina cult alive as a powerful reinforcement of cultural identity. Above all, the kachina dances—with large, colorful figures and rich opportunities for artistic expression—brought joy to dancers and spectators alike, which in turn probably contributed to its rapid further development.

As we have encountered before, every man acts as priest in the cyclical ceremonies of the agrarian year, along with all his clan brothers. Similarly, at life-cycle festivities every woman, along with her clan-sisters, acts as priestess. Because of this, Hopi do not recognize a special vocation of priest or priestess. The universal spiritual-religious role of each person is not reserved just for ceremonies, but is part of everyday life. Ordinary actions are symbolic, and are expressed as small rituals. For example, when a man plants corn kernels in the earth, he sees this as fertilizing Mother Earth, whom he venerates along with sowing; when a woman grinds cornmeal and feeds her family with it, she is acting as Mother Earth, because the cornmeal is considered to be milk from the breast of the goddess. The entire world is seen as sacred, along with all phenomena and all beings; therefore every action is prayer or ritual—this is Hopi practice, enacted day in and day out. In light of this emphasis, it is not surprising that ceremonies and festivals are at the heart of Hopi life, and that the social interconnectedness of the clans corresponds to the ceremonies of the annual cycle. This gives a religious character to the organization of each village community, and, along with other manifestations, reflects the sacred character of Hopi society as a whole. It is therefore an excellent example of the way matriarchies function as sacred societies.

13.3 Pueblo deities and mythology

The entire Hopi ceremonial system, along with its detailed ceremonial calendar, is very ancient and parallels, down to the last detail, the ritual calendar and ceremonial cycle of ancient Mexican cultures, particularly that of the Maya.[52] Clearly then, the ancient agricultural peoples—the underclasses upon whose backs ancient

dynastic Mexican cultures, like the Maya and Toltec, built their empires—must have maintained their original matriarchal ways. Based on the Hopi example, we can imagine what peoples' lives might have been like. Sudden collapse of patriarchal Mayan and Toltec city-states may have led to great migrations of these agricultural peoples out of the centralized areas—indeed, this population drop may have caused their disappearance as cultures. We can assume that when the patriarchal tendencies of the ruling classes were too harsh for them, rural matri-clans tended simply to move away—their migrations can be traced from south to north. Thus Pueblo cultures represent the northernmost edge of the migration of matriarchal cultures in Central America, which never developed patriarchal kingdoms. The deep spiritual convictions held by Pueblo cultures led them to continue living simply, as their rural ancestors had done for millennia.

Evidence for this history is encoded in Pueblo myths. The Hopi myth of how humans were created begins in the vast, marvelous underworld that human beings gradually climbed up out of. Seven worlds lead up from bottom to top; humanity has already passed through three of these, and is now living in the fourth. The transition from one world to the next is not easily achieved; each time, humans move because of a catastrophe that destroys everything. These disasters result from the moral decay manifest at the end of each world: power, greed, and thirst for domination hold people in thrall, and as vast cities and kingdoms are built, the path of simplicity is abandoned. Each successive world ends in ruin, but each time a small group of humble, spiritual people survive and are saved; these few are brought, in mysterious ways, to the next world. They are aided in this by the very humblest beings—such as ants or reeds—because this human group doesn't despise them. The main helper, though, in terms of traditional Hopi mythology, is "Kokyan-wuhti," or "Spider Woman," the wise ancient one who is creatrix and guide for humanity.

According to Hopi creation myth, the wide, magical underworld was originally a single ocean, and at the bottom there lived, each in her own kiva, two goddesses—one in the far east, and one in the far west. When the two sister-goddesses wanted to visit each other, they traveled across the rainbow to meet. Out of its original liquid state, these goddesses created the first solid, or hard, substances, such as beads, shells, coral and turquoise. Together, they were known as "Turquoise Woman," which indicates that this was a question of one sole creatrix with two distinct faces. Also, the sky—which was imagined as the ocean of sky—belongs to her realm, as that is where she placed the first hard beings, the moon and the stars. As the primordial creatrix, therefore, she bore the name "Hurung-wuhti," or "Hard Beings Woman," and by her actions, creation took place: not through giving birth, but through her spiritual breath.[53]

As Turquoise Woman of the East, she used to hang fox furs, one grey and one yellow, on top of the ladder sticking out of her kiva. Over on the other side of the ocean, as Turquoise Woman of the West, she hung out a large tortoise-shell rattle. Each morning when the sun climbed out of Turquoise Woman of the East's kiva, it wore the grey fox fur; at midday it wore the yellow one; and in the evening, touching the rattle as she descended, the sun climbed down into Turquoise Woman of the West's kiva. This probably means that each morning the sun was newly created as a hard substance by Hard Beings Woman, who took it back each evening.

The first dry land that emerged—or was also created by Hard Beings Woman—was, from the very beginning, inhabited by "Kokyan-wuhti," or "Spider Woman." She is, according to her mythology, another primordial goddess, or an emanation of Hard Beings Woman herself. The sun could not see Spider Woman from above, for she lived hidden away in her underground kiva, so the sun reported to the double Turquoise Woman that earth was uninhabited. The Turquoise Woman of the East and the Turquoise Woman of the West then decided to start creating birds, wild animals, and people, each in her region in the far east and the far west; and Spider Woman, in between the two, decided the same. In this way, three divine females made all kinds of creatures, including the different races of humans, and taught them different languages.[54] This myth suggests not only that creation itself was an act of female spirit, but also that kivas once were goddess temples.

Though Hard Beings Woman, or the double Turquoise Woman, withdrew herself after the creation, Grandmother Spider Woman has continued to serve humans as a guide and helper throughout all of history, and became the most important goddess of the Pueblo cultures. She is also the mother of the deities, and has almost unlimited power, featuring prominently in many myths, sometimes in human shape, sometimes in the shape of a spider. As a spider she gives advice, perched behind the ear of the ones she guides through danger—such as the boy, Tiyo, whom she brought to the kiva of Turquoise Woman of the West. There he learned the snake ceremony, considered to be one of the oldest ceremonies carried out by Pueblo peoples. Grandmother Spider Woman is still continually prayed to.[55] Her great power to create life goes back to the fact that she stands in the lineage of a primordial underworld goddess.[56] In this role she is also goddess of destiny, since "she holds all the breaths (souls), good and bad, and creates all events and experience, she knows everything in the world."[57] Her image is reminiscent of the Mayan moon goddess, Ixchel, who is also the creatrix; like Spider Woman, Ixchel is the old grandmother, protector of humanity, she spins out the thread of life and weaves the web of fate. (Weaving was indeed a sacred activity for Mayan women, as for Hopi women as well, until Hopi men took over this art.[58]) Even for modern women and men in Pueblo cultures, Spider Woman is still a central figure and

appears as a spiritual power in novels as well, which are based on traditional ways of thinking and ritual forms.[59]

Hard Beings Woman, Turquoise Woman, and Grandmother Spider Woman were not personified in Hopi Kachina dances; they were considered too sacred and too all-encompassing. Instead, "Hahai-wuhti," or Mother Earth, appears in dances. She too is an old woman, mother of all ancestors and spirits. She wears the same ceremonial clothing as every adult Hopi woman; in her hands she carries corn cobs and water. She is presented as funny and vivacious, speaking in a high falsetto voice and sprinkling spectators with water, the elixir of life. In a kiva ceremony, she feeds cornmeal—considered to be her milk—to the mythical water snakes, and sometimes she nurses them at her breasts. Water and corn are the sources of life: both come from Mother Earth, and in this way she provides for all spirits, and all people.[60]

Another important goddess is "Angwus-hahai," or "Crow Mother," thought to be mother of the kachinas (Ill. 13). She is also personified in the rituals. Crow Mother protects young sprouting plants and, as a strict teacher, initiates all Hopi children into the secrets of the kachinas.[61] "Salako-mana," or "Corn Maiden," is a mythical virgin who brought corn, as well as all other plants, to the Hopi.[62] She is known to all Pueblo peoples as "Corn Mother," living in the underworld where she welcomes the dead. Once upon a time she was in the upper world, but stayed only briefly, just long enough to teach humans the art of agriculture. She prepared fields in each direction leading out from the village, where she planted pieces of her heart. From this planting, the corn grew. She spoke: "This corn is my heart, and it shall nourish my people as milk from my breasts." She is not personified in the rituals, because she is literally embodied in each ear of corn. As every "tiponi," or ritual clan-sign, is based on an ear of corn, corn is addressed as "Mother of the People" or "Earth Maiden."[63]

Closely related to the images of Mother Earth and Corn Mother is the figure of the god "Masau'u." Multifaceted, he has more influence than any other deity over traditional Hopi life. Throughout the year he stays with the people: in the first half year, he arises out of the underworld in the shape of a handsome young man bringing life back, as god of life. In the second half he returns to the underworld, and takes life with him: he becomes god of death, in the shape of a dark figure with a bloody, grotesque death's head mask. Master of fire and of the spirits of the dead, he is both benefactor and bringer of death.[64] The Hopi first encountered him when they crawled up into the fourth world through a thin reed, having been saved from catastrophic circumstances in the third world. When the "sipapuni," the deep hole, ended and the passage opened out into a barren landscape, there he sat, with nothing more to offer than the tiniest ear of corn and a planting stick. He made it clear they would only be welcome here if they met certain conditions. Like him,

Illustration 13. Angwus-hahai, Crow Mother, original Hopi Kachina.
Photo: Heide Goettner Abendroth

they would have to be willing to live in peace and simplicity. The Hopi agreed, so he sheltered them from the wrath of the gods and granted them land in the fourth world.[65] As protector of earth and steward of fertility, it is in his power to grant land. He also can burn a ring of fire around the fields at night, which warms the plants so effectively that they grow up high in just one day. Above all, he knows all magic: he can change shape. He is the classic androgynous shape-shifter and trickster-god, also found in many variants throughout European, African and Asian mythological systems as an original partner of Mother Earth.[66] Within his paradoxical being, he can both heal and destroy. Everything he touches transforms, changing into its opposite. Blind during daylight hours, he moves around at night. Hopi are afraid of him, but they also love him: as god of death, Masau'u is everywhere, yet they pray to him for long life.[67]

The *Pueblo peoples* along the Rio Grande were eventually Christianized, which the Hopi have successfully prevented to this day. Nevertheless, even Christian Pueblo peoples along the Rio Grande practice their old beliefs alongside Christian ones; for example, right after church on Sundays they go to the kiva to enact the ancient rituals. Thus their indigenous belief system and ceremonies persist as a subculture until today.[68]

So, in the traditional myths of the *Keres people* in Laguna and Santo Domingo pueblos on the Rio Grande, the great creatrix is "Tse che nako," or "Thought Woman." She is said to have created everything—not by physically giving birth, but through the energy of her thoughts. She brought everything into existence by naming it, and she created language and song. She embodies thought itself, which is the female spirit—and the necessary precondition for all material creation. After this, Thought Woman brought the twin sisters "Uretsete" and "Naotsete" into the world by singing over their medicine bundles, which contained their life force. Her song gave them breath, soul, and life itself: thus they were born. In the same way, the twin goddesses created all creatures out of their own medicine bundles: they brought everything to life through their song. In this way, spiritually, they planted trees on earth, let all animals loose, and became the real mothers of humankind.[69]

"Iyatiku" is Mother Earth and "Irriaku" the Corn Mother of the Pueblo people, they are closely related. Corn Mother is embodied in each perfect ear of corn; through her power, she connects human beings with the heart of Mother Earth. At the same time Iyatiku, Mother Earth, guides her people spiritually through the journey of life—and legends tell that once upon a time she used to appear in person in their midst, to teach them about harmony and peace. For without peace, nothing can grow out of her body! Later she returned to her underworld, where she now welcomes the dead back to her home.

Variants of these mythic goddesses can be found from the Rio Grande in the east to the Hopi lands in the west. Nor do the twin sisters, Uretsete and Naotsete, look the same in every culture: from pueblo to pueblo, they change their gender. Along the Rio Grande they are two sisters; further west, a brother and sister; and for the Hopi, they are twin brothers.[70] Though these aspects are still part of traditional Pueblo culture, the picture will drastically change with the arrival of Christian missionaries. Now the primordial goddesses will be masculinized or replaced by male creators, to fit the contours of the patriarchal European worldview: the concept of the Great Spirit overlays the multifaceted images of creatrix goddesses—since creation from the spirit can, in patriarchy, only be male. Another concept—understood as "indigenous"—of Father Sky and Mother Earth, whose connection brought all creatures into being, is also a Christian-influenced version of creation. It contradicts traditional matriarchal concepts, in which solely the female power acts in the universe, with this power—of her thought (creativity) and heart (womb)—having brought all spiritual and material creatures into being.[71]

Hopi legends of origin say the people migrated from the south. This agrees with the archaeological evidence, which places the first agriculture (corn and squash) at around 2000 B.C.E., coming up from Mexico, as well as all later phases of Pueblo cultures.[72] Furthermore, there are still peoples in Mexico who are related to the Hopi, such as the *Tarahumara* on the Sierra Madre plateau in northwestern Mexico (see map 8). The Hopi themselves consider the Tarahumara, and the historical Maya as well, to be Hopi clans who stayed behind on the great migration to the four corners of the world.[73] According to the legends, this great migration took place after the Hopi had emerged through the thin reed into this, the fourth world. The clans moved on, in all four compass directions; along their way they left markers in the form of petroglyphs on the rock faces—signs that are found throughout the region of the Anasazi culture. This is how they demarcated their land, which they intended to inhabit according to the principles set down by Masau'u. The myth of Masau'u, along with other myths and legends, is also engraved in the rocks, to be remembered forever.[74]

It appears that the matriarchs, or clan mothers, led their individual clans north in search of cultivable land, plentiful water, abundant game and protection from enemies. The Hopi chief Yukeoma reported that every clan was led by its "so'owuhti," or clan mother, completely relying on her wisdom in the search for land. And he said that since this time, Hopi women have played just as significant a role in Hopi life.[75]—Of course they had already played a crucial role before.

In any case, the Hopi people's ancient memory, stored in their legends, is amazing. Not only do they have legends describing the ceremony received by each clan

during the great migration, they also have myths that describe the preceding worlds in great detail: in those remote times, humans had to sail eastward across a wide ocean before they reached the solid ground of this continent. It is said they traveled from island to island, and whenever they wanted to settle down, Spider Woman—their divine advisor—prevented them. So they would move on, always sailing in the direction of the rising sun, until finally they spotted land: a coast whose wall of mountains stretched from north to south, as far as the eye could see. They sailed along this coast until they could make landfall. Finally, they climbed up the mountains, and as they gaze out over the sea, all the islands they had passed by in the long course of their journey were laid out like stepping stones in the ocean. And even as they watched, the islands sank down under the wide sea.

This ancient narrative of migration indicates that these people came across the Pacific in boats or rafts and, little by little, reached the American continent, settling it gradually from south to north. The account is also found in the "Popul Vuh," the sacred Mayan "Book of the Council." From the Mayan region, the Hopi came north, bringing this tradition with them. In this way, the most ancient indigenous traditions confirm that some Southeast Asian matriarchal cultures reached South and Central America via the Pacific, and from there, cultural migration brought them northwards.[76] The ocean crossing must therefore have taken place very early, at least in pre-Polynesian times (see chapter 10). Perhaps the islands that were regarded as "stepping stones" by the people, looking west from the mountains of the American continent, indicate that this happened at a time when, due to the huge polar ice caps, sea level was significantly lower than in the later warmer climate phase. In this warm phase, as sea level rose, the islands sank little by little back into the water, resulting in the geographic situation we have today.

13.4 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

In general:

- Migration of matriarchal farming cultures extended from South and Central America into North America. It stopped at the point where the climate was too dry or too harsh to permit agriculture.

At the cultural level:

- Life-cycle festivals (birth, initiation of girls, wedding, death, ancestor wor-

ship) originally were entirely in the hands of women. They were exclusively women's ceremonies, and were celebrated within the house; for some matriarchal societies this continues today (with the Hopi, among others).

- Events leading up to love and marriage are strictly subject to women's free choice, which means that the woman courts the man—never vice versa. This practice takes a variety of forms (courtship, hunting, abduction).
- Matriarchal societies have a complex, interwoven series of agrarian festivals that follow the seasonal agricultural cycle. These ceremonies carry the symbolism of eternal renewal in the cycle of life and death. Associated with this is a detailed festival calendar.
- The agrarian ceremonies are mainly carried out by either women or men, depending on which gender conducts the agriculture in a given matriarchal society. Originally, women were the sole agriculturists.
- For matriarchal peoples, all artistic expression—dance, song, music, painting, carving, dramatic presentations—serves religion, and should be understood as a form of prayer.
- In matriarchal religions creation of the world is always the work of one or more primordial goddesses. These primordial goddesses are: the cosmos, often associated with the moon and the stars, and the earth, associated with the underworld. They are always spinners of fate.
- The work of populating the world is then carried out by several generations of younger goddesses; these are creators of life and culture.
- The primordial earth goddess often has an ancient underworld god, or god of transformation, as her partner (magician and trickster figure). Within his paradoxical being, he can both heal and destroy. This androgynous shape-shifter and trickster-god is also found in many variants throughout European, African and Asian mythological systems.—The later, culture-creating goddesses are often accompanied by heroes who bring special cultural skills to humans (such as making fire, using new techniques, creating special ceremonies).
- Matriarchal societies are sacred societies in the sense that they observe no distinction between sacred and secular. The entire world is sacred to them; every action is a form of ritual. Society is built upon religious principles.

Notes

1. These conflicts are thought by many indigenous people of the region to have their roots in colonial manipulations by Europeans.
2. E. S. Curtis: "The Hopi," in: *The North American Indian,* vol. 12, p. 3, New York 1970, Johnson Reprint Corporation (first edition 1922).

3. Charles E. Adams/ Deborah Hull: "The Prehistoric and Historic Occupation of the Hopi-Mesas," in: Dorothy K. Washburn (ed.): *Hopi Kachina—Spirit of Life*, San Francisco-London-Seattle 1980, California Academy of Sciences, pp. 25–27. [Spirit]
4. H. Hartmann: *Kachina-Figuren der Hopi-Indianer*, Museum für Völkerkunde (ed.), Berlin 1978, Museum für Völkerkunde, p. 29.
5. Frank Waters: *Book of the Hopi*, New York 1963, The Viking Press; and Hartmann, ibid., p. 20.
6. Woodbury/ Zubrow: "Agricultural Beginnings, 2000 B.C.—A.D. 500," in: *Handbook of North American Indians*, Sturtevant/Ortiz (eds.), Washington D.C. 1979, Smithsonian Institution, p. 43. [Handbook N.A.]
7. Hartmann, ibid., pp. 20–28; and Adams/ Hull, ibid., p. 11; and Clara Lee Tanner/ John F. Tanner: "Contemporary Hopi Crafts: Basketry, Textiles, Pottery, Kachinas," in: [Spirit] ibid., pp. 65–69, 74.
8. Dittert/ Plog: *Generations in Clay. Pueblo Pottery of the American Southwest*, Flagstaff, Arizona, 1980, Northland Press; and Frank/ Harlow: *Historic Pottery of the Pueblo Indians 1600—1800*, Boston 1974, New York graphic society; and Philip Kopper: *The Smithsonian Book of North American Indians*, Washington D.C. 1986, Smithsonian Institution; and Ralph T. Coe: *Sacred Circles. Two Thousand Years of North American Indian Art,* (Catalogue of Exhibition, Hayward Gallery, London), London 1976, Arts Council of Great Britain; and Wade/ Mc Chesney: *America s Great Lost Expedition (Hopi Pottery)*, Heard Museum (ed.), Phoenix 1980.
9. Tanner/Tanner, ibid., pp. 70,71.
10. F. A. Barnes: *Canyon Country Prehistoric Rock Art,* Salt Lake City 1982, Wasatch Publishers Inc., pp. 52–54.
11. Hartmann, ibid., pp. 20–28; and Adams/Hull, ibid., pp. 12–15.
12. Cow / Snow / Benson: *Atlas of Ancient America,* New York-Oxford, U.K. England, 1986, 1988, Fact on File Publications, pp. 74, 75.
13. R. Briffault: *The Mothers,* ibid., vol. 1, p. 479.
14. John Connelly: "Hopi Social Organization," in: [Spirit], ibid., pp. 51,52.
15. This was the situation when I visited the Hopi in 1998.
16. See the reports of the traditional Hopi elders in the documentary: Danaqyumptewa (Hopi)/Anka Schmid/Agnes Barmettler: *Techqua Ikachi. Land—my Life,* Langnau, Switzerland, 2006, MANO Production.
17. These anthropologists were Voth, Fewkes, Stephen, Curtis, Mrs. Parsons, Titiev. See to the recent history of the Hopi: Adams/Hull, ibid., pp. 17–27.—Statements of some traditional Hopi in: Danaqyumptewa/Schmid/Barmettler: *Techqua Ikachi. Land—my Life,* ibidem; and personal comunication.
18. Hartmann, ibid., p. 35.
19. Mischa Titiev: *Old Oraibi. A Study of the Hopi Indians of Third Mesa*, Cambridge, Mass., 1944, Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, p.10; and Connelly, ibid., p. 55.
20. Hartmann, ibid., p. 39; and R. Briffault, ibid., vol. 1, p. 511.
21. Titiev, ibid., p. 10.
22. Hartmann, ibid., pp. 39, 45; Connelly, ibid., pp. 55,56; Titiev, ibid., pp. 103–106.
23. Hartmann, ibid., p. 46; Titiev, ibid., p. 16.
24. Waters, ibid., pp. 23,24; Hamilton A. Tyler: *Pueblo Gods and Myths*, Oklahoma 1964, University of Oklahoma Press, p. 122.
25. Barton Wright: *Hopi Kachinas*. *The Complete Guide of Collecting Kachina Dolls,* Flagstaff, Arizona, 1977, Northland Press, p. 29; Titiev, ibid., p. 103; Connelly, ibid., pp. 60–62; Hartmann, ibid., pp. 64,69.
26. Charlotte J. Frisbie: *Southwestern Indian Ritual Drama*, Albuquerque 1978, University of New

Mexico Press, pp. 319–321.
27. Personal information by A. Barmettler from Danaqyumptewa.
28. Titiev, ibid., pp. 10, 203; Curtis, ibid., p. 41; Hartmann, ibid., pp. 47, 76.
29. Titiev, ibid., p. 7.
30. Titiev, ibid., pp. 203, 204; Connelly, ibid., pp. 56, 57.
31. Ruth Benedict: *Zuñi Mythology*, New York 1969, AMS Press, (first edition 1935), introduction, pp. 21–27; Curtis, ibid., p. 184 ff; Henry R. Voth: *The Traditions of the Hopi*, Anthropological Series, vol. 8, Chicago 1905, Field Museum of Natural History.
32. Titiev, ibid., p. 38.
33. Connelly, ibid., pp. 57–59.
34. Titiev, ibid., p. 205.
35. Ruth Benedict, ibid., introduction, p. 23.
36. Titiev, ibid., pp. 38, 177.
37. Titiev, ibid., pp. 171–177; Hartmann, ibid., p. 76.
38. Titiev, ibid., p. 171.
39. Titiev, ibid., pp. 104, 105, 107, 108, 171, 172; Connelly, ibid., p. 60.
40. Titiev, ibid., pp. 172–175, 103.
41. For a detailed overview of the seasonal ceremonies of the Kachina cult, see: Titiev, ibid., pp. 103–177; Curtis, ibid., pp. 105–184; Waters, ibid., pp. 134–250. For the best overall discussion of Pueblo religion and ceremonial life, see: Elsie C. Parsons: *Pueblo Indian Religion*, 2 vols., Chicago, 1939, University of Chicago Press.
42. On the argument for the greater antiquity of the second-half-year ceremony, see: Curtis, ibid., pp. 143, 155, 180–183; Elsie C. Parsons: "A Pre-Spanish Record of Hopi Ceremonies," in: *American Anthropologist*, vol. 42, Washington 1940, Menasha, pp. 541–543.
43. Curtis, ibid., pp. 137, 151; Waters, ibid., pp. 232–234.
44. Titiev, ibid., pp. 107, 164–170.
45. For more on the collection of Kachina figures: Dorothee K. Washburn (ed.): *Hopi Kachina—Spirit of Life*, ibidem; and B. Wright: *Hopi Kachinas,* ibidem; and Barton Wright/ Clifford Bahnimptewa (Hopi): *Kachinas: a Hopi artist's documentary*, Flagstaff-Phoenix 1973, Northland Press; and H. Hartmann: *Kachina-Figuren der Hopi-Indianer,* ibidem.
46. Hartmann, ibid., p. 92.
47. Hartmann, ibid., pp. 9, 91; Frederik J. Dockstader: *The Kachina and the White Man*, Michigan 1954, Cranbook Institute of Science, vol. 35, p. 97, Bloomfield Hills.
48. Dockstader, ibid., pp. 10, 11, 54, 55.
49. Dockstader, ibid., pp. 12–60, especially p. 40; B. Wright, ibid., p. 8; Hartmann, ibid., pp. 64–66; Adams/Hull, ibid., p. 16.
50. Adams/Hull, ibid., pp. 14–17.
51. Dockstader, ibid., altogether and especially pp. 10, 11, 39, 55; Hartmann, ibid., pp. 66–69.
52. Richard M. Bradfield: *A Natural History of Associations. A Study in the Meaning of Community,* vol. 2, London 1973, Duckworth, pp. 414–435.
53. Paula Gunn Allen (Keres, Laguna Pueblo): *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions,* Boston 1992, (first edition 1986), Beacon Press, p. 14; [Sacred Hoop].—Allen herself translates the indigenous term "Hurung-wuhti" by the English expression "Hard Beings Woman."
54. See for the following: Harry C. James: *Pages from Hopi History*, Tuscon, Arizona, 1974, University of Arizona Press, pp. 1–2; Tyler, ibid., p. 37.
55. James, ibid., pp. 18–22; Curtis, ibid., pp. 105, 143, 155.
56. Tyler, ibid., p. 132.

57. Bradfield, ibid., p. 431.
58. Bradfield, ibid., pp. 430–431.
59. See: Leslie Marmon Silko (Keres, Laguna Pueblo): *Ceremony,* New York 2007, Penguin Books, (first edition 1977); and Paula Gunn Allen (Keres, Laguna Pueblo): *The Woman who owned the Shadows,* San Francisco 1983, Spinsters/ Aunt Lute (reprinted 1994).
60. Wright/ Bahnimptewa, ibid., p. 60; Hartmann, ibid., p. 132.
61. Wright/Bahnimptewa, ibid., p. 23.
62. Hartmann, ibid., p. 181; Wright/Bahnimptewa, ibid., p. 249.
63. Tyler, ibid., pp. 121–123, 132.
64. Hartmann, ibid., pp. 235, 236; Tyler, ibid., pp. 3, 5.
65. Tyler, ibid., pp. 6–8; James, ibid., pp. 2–8; see also statements by traditional Hopi in: Danaqyumptewa/ Schmid/ Barmettler: *Techqua Ikachi. Land—My Life,* ibidem.
66. See the cross-cultural study in matriarchal mythology: Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *The Goddess and her Heros,* ibidem.
67. Tyler, ibid., pp. 3–36; James, ibid., p. 18.
68. Personal communication during my on-site visit.
69. Paula Gunn Allen, [Sacred Hoop], ibid., pp. 13–14, 27–28.
70. Tyler, ibid., pp. 116–119, 125; Paula Gunn Allen, [Sacred Hoop], ibid., pp. 18–22.
71. Paula Gunn Allen, [Sacred Hoop], ibid., pp. 15, 22, 41.
72. Woodbury/ Zubrow, in: [Handbook N.A.], vol. 9, ibidem.
73. Waters, ibid., pp. 126–128; M. Marten: „Die Tarahumara in Mexiko“, in: *Bild der Völker*, ibid., vol. 4, pp. 184–191; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* vol. 4, ibid.
74. See the statements of traditional Hopi in: Danaqyumptewa/ Schmid/ Barmettler: *Techqua Ikachi. Land—My Life,* ibidem.
75. James, ibid., p. 9.
76. Waters, ibid., pp. 35–36, 40–41, 352.

14

North America: At the Cultural Crossroads of South and North

For Aetensic, Iroquoian Sky Woman, Grandmother Moon

14.1 History of the Iroquois

The culture of the *Haudenosaunee*, or *Iroquois*, is well-known through descriptions by Europeans. In 1724 the French missionary, Lafitau, was one of the first to give an account of their social institutions.[1] A century later, Henry Lewis Morgan wrote his classic *League of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois* (1851), which had a major impact in North America and Europe.[2] Morgan owed the precision of his presentation of traditional Iroquois culture to his Seneca informer, *Häsanoan'da* (Chief Ely S. Parker), but with his editorial—where he presented his own stages-of-history theory, or theory of unilinear evolution—he demonstrated typical white racism in regard to other peoples and cultures.[3] Today, indigenous researchers present their cultures themselves, as Barbara Alice Mann has done so well for the Iroquois, focusing on Iroquoian women and the authentic history of their own people, based on traditional knowledge.[4]

According to their oral tradition, the Iroquois peoples came eastwards from the far northwest, finally stopping by the great waters of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers (see map 8). Their relations, the Iroquois-language *Cherokees* and the

Algonkin-language *Lenapés*, tell the same story. For unknown reasons, the Cherokees had left the Iroquois and started moving east much earlier, so that their languages diverged; linguists estimate this to have occurred about 2000 B.C.E. When the Cherokees crossed the Mississippi on their way east, arriving in the vast, fertile Ohio River Valley, they encountered the ancient, impressive culture of the first Mound Builders (called the "Adena culture" by archaeologists). The Cherokees called these people the "Moon-Eyed People"—which is an interesting detail, as it indicates that the Adena people did not resemble the Cherokees, and that they possibly were astronomers.[5]

The Moon-Eyed People, according to archaeologists, had practiced horticulture since about 2500 B.C.E. in certain locations around the Mississippi River Valley—the vast, branched system of waterways flowing south toward the Antilles, Mexico, and the Yucatan. In their early horticulture, sunflower, goosefoot, pigweed, knotweed, mayweed, gourd, squash and some early strains of corn were cultivated alongside traditional hunting and gathering practices. The fruits of these horticultural labors were not yet providing their chief sustenance, but were thought by archaeologists to have been stockpiled as reserves for lean times, although oral tradition suggests that ceremonial uses might then have been primary.[6] This early culture extended as far as the Ohio River Valley, where it developed further into the Adena, from about 1100 B.C.E. . There, the Moon-Eyed People constructed great earthworks that can be seen today—made up of circles, burial mounds, and huge earthen walls some of which are more than 100 meters long. They were constructed as sacred enclosures rather than defensive works, and were accompanied by a great number of burial mounds. The dead were buried with precious grave goods of carved stone and beaten copper—an indication of the vast trade network along the rivers. The most striking of these objects are the expressive tubular pipes, often carved in the form of animals, which indicate that the Moon-Eyed People already had tobacco and practiced ritual pipe smoking.[7]

Some archaeologists claim that indigenous ritualized smoking, as well as the tobacco plant itself, originally came from South America.[8] The plant hybridization that led to beans and better quality corn—which thus became the basis of nutrition—had its origin in Mexico and the Antilles. The architecture of the earthworks also suggests the south, where early Neolithic earthworks are known in the Amazon Delta, and are found in large numbers along Mexico's Pacific coast, extending from Chiapas to Guatemala on the Gulf of Tehuantepec.[9]

The Cherokees came from the southwest around 200–100 B.C.E. into the region of the Adena culture. Contrary to the common assumption, they did not stamp out the Moon-Eyed People, but joined together with them through inter-

marriage. This is evidenced not just by Cherokee tradition, but also by the fact that the Mound Builder cultural practices were continued by the Cherokees.[10] This marriage of southern and northern influences enabled the culture to reach an extraordinarily high level (called the "Hopewell culture" by archaeologists), that flourished until 400 C.E. . The Hopewell culture continued all the Adena traditions, but exceeded them in extent and complexity—they had cities. The very elaborate ceramic and copper grave goods—pipes carved with figures and portraits of people, works incorporating rare metals and precious gems—indicate the presence of a vast trade network, traveled by canoe along the waterways. This network, which followed the watercourses of the Mississippi, Missouri and Ohio Rivers, covered much of the North American continent, and brought many indigenous peoples into contact with the Hopewell culture. Radiating out from the Ohio heartland, the art of burial mounds spread widely; eventually, tens of thousands of these mounds had sprung across the continent, from the eastern forests to the Gulf Coast to the western prairies, and north to what is now Yellowstone Park. Later the Mound Builder culture collapsed at its geographic centers, but because it was so widespread it did not die out. At its outer edges in Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota it continued to develop for another few hundred years and, after 700, created some of the most remarkable effigy mound sites of all. These mounds were formed as earth sculptures depicting panthers, bears, birds, humans; and one famous extant example is the Great Serpent Mound in Ohio.[11]

According to indigenous oral tradition, around 400 C.E. the allied peoples of the Lenapés and Iroquois each journeyed, in the course of their migrations, eastwards to the Mississippi. There, they met up again in the search for a new home. When the Lenapés tried to cross the great river, the Cherokees attacked them, but the Iroquois came to the aid of the Lenapés. After that, the Iroquois and Lenapés fought side-by-side, opening the way east and conquering the Ohio Valley through a series of great battles. By around 550 C.E. they had forced the Cherokees southwards into the Tennessee River region and the Appalachian Mountains, and all the way to the Atlantic coast. The victors divided up the huge region, with the Lenapés settling in the Ohio Valley, while according to their traditions, the Iroquois peoples settled in the vast region that extends from the Atlantic Coast all the way to the Great Lakes—a region they consider their aboriginal territory even today.[12] Over time, they consolidated their small, widely-scattered settlements into villages and towns, surrounded by stockades situated on riverbanks and lakeshores. Each village or town consisted of several longhouses covered with elm bark, and in each longhouse lived a clan. The fortified stockades that developed were in response to increasing attacks by other groups, such as the Algonquins in the north.

From 800 until about 1400 C.E., the Mound Builder culture of the Eastern Woodlands—maintained by many different peoples, including the Iroquois —experienced another enormous revival. There was not only a proliferation of mounds in the vast territories along the Mississippi, Tennessee, and Ohio Rivers, and the Great Lakes region, but also a substantial increase in the size of cities and temple complexes.[13] For example, in Cahokia (600–1250 C.E., Illinois, 10,000 inhabitants) and Moundville (1200–1400 C.E., Middle Mississippi, 3,000 inhabitants), the sacred enclosures were enormous (Cahokia, 13 square kilometers), incorporating a multitude of burial mounds and flattened pyramids as platforms for temples and living quarters, the largest of which is 316 meters long, 241 meters wide, and rises over 30 meters in height. The additional ceremonial earthworks became more and more elaborate: circles, rectangles, squares, octagons (for example, the Newark Earthworks). These cities and sacred places were connected to each other through a network of roads. [14]

From a socio-historical standpoint, the Adena culture—the culture of the Moon-Eyed People, quite likely coming from the South (Antilles or Mexico)—can be understood as a far northeastward extension of a southern matriarchal social order. However, the other peoples that came from the west—Cherokees, Lenapés and Iroquois—also possessed an ancient matriarchal social order. They report that, not only in the earliest times, but also much later, the female clan elders, or "Grandmothers," led their peoples' migrations.[15] This social order is also evidenced by clan and tribal organization, which for the vast territories of the *Natchez* in the southeast, the *Iroquois* in the northeast, and the *Crows, Hidatsas, Mandans,* and *Arikaras* in the northwest, remained matriarchal as late as the era of modern anthropology. According to their own statements, they still are, and are actively reclaiming matriarchy today. The supposed patriarchal organization was forced on them by the Euro-Americans.[16] Matriarchal structures were widespread and ubiquitous in indigenous North America. In light of this background, it is clear that the image of Indian women as submissive, degraded "squaws" must be rejected, and understood as a projection, a fantasy, of white European and American conquerors.[17]

It is remarkable that, in early history, the cultural influence of the Mound Builders was achieved by trade, not war. The Hopewell culture was not an empire: there is no trace of fortifications.[18] Starting from 800 C.E., the importation of new types of Mexican corn brought a good standard of nutrition to central Ohio and the fertile valleys of the Mississippi; however, it also brought increasing population and competition for scarce alluvial land. Patriarchal tendencies such as aggressive conflict and fighting over land began to appear for the first time at certain places, and along the Ohio River, descendants of the Hopewell culture began to use their

expertise in building earthworks to construct fortifications dotted with stockades, as it is the case of the "Fort Ancient culture" of the Shawnees.[19] Cahokia in Illinois and Moundville in Alabama developed into city-states with patriarchal, Mexican-style class structures. This period, known as the Middle Mississippi culture, was shaped by the Lakota-speaking peoples' ancestors. Around 1450, diseases like tuberculosis—brought about mainly by overpopulation—caused the collapse of the Middle Mississippi culture.[20] Their Lakota descendants remained in this region and continued to practice agriculture; they were only driven out in 1850 by the white American colonizers, who forced them to make their lives elsewhere.

14.2 Creation of the Iroquois Confederation

The social history of the Iroquois-speaking peoples developed somewhat differently. Living at the periphery of the Middle Mississippi culture—the Iroquois in the northeast and the Cherokees farther southeast—these peoples not only continued to develop their own cultures with new patterns of agriculture and housing, but the ordinary people also retained their older, matriarchal social patterns.[21] However, these societies had also developed patriarchal hierarchical elites, over their many centuries as bearers of the Mound Builder culture. The Cherokees were the bearers of the Hopewell Mound Builder culture. The Iroquois had already built burial mounds in Ohio that dotted the landscape, and they brought this tradition with them in their new territories in the northeast.

As with the Middle Mississippi culture, the Cherokees were dominated by an ever-more-powerful priest class, the "Ani-Kutani," which had probably developed during the Hopewell period. Society was rigidly separated into three classes: ordinary people, political leaders and the "Ani-Kutani," whose chief ruled as absolute authority in civil and religious matters. The domination of this elite priesthood lasted hundreds of years—possibly even a millennium—and over time became more and more exploitative and corrupt. It continued with the Cherokees long after they had been pushed southwards out of the Ohio Valley. The Iroquois lived with a similar priesthood elite, although its members were not limited to one clan, as among the Cherokees.

The physical and spiritual terror wielded by the priestly elite eventually led the Cherokee lower classes to revolt, bringing the rule of the priesthood to an abrupt end, and along with it the demise of Mound Builder culture and male dominance in the region. This turn of events was not confined to the Cherokees, but also extended to the Lenapés, who similarly ended the priests' dominance. Among the Iroquois the revolution against the priests led to the founding of the Confederation

of Five Nations in the year 1142 C.E. . For all three of these peoples, the deep-seated cultural changes were not confined to ending the priestly-elite; they also led to a new form of government that fundamentally ended hierarchical, male-dominated, hereditary privileges. This was the basis on which the Iroquois created their brilliant Constitution and celebrated Confederation—which is excellent evidence of a great, matriarchally-based society oriented to the common good.[22]

The great significance of this Iroquois achievement merits a more detailed description. During the time of the domination of the priestly class, the economy had been based on hunting by men, but also included farming by women; corn was cultivated sparsely as a ceremonial plant, and forbidden to the common people. In the ninth century, as priestly practices—including sexual violence and ritual cannibalism—became more and more oppressive, the people revolted against the brutal system, and began to leave. Women, especially, had had enough of male dominance. Certain clan mothers rose up and fled, leading their clans into other regions—a practice that matriarchal clan mothers have always, and in different continents, used to escape systems of patriarchal dominance. One of these clan mothers, Gaihonariosk, took her people northwards to the St. Lawrence River, and—finding the region too cold for plant cultivation—migrated southward into the region of New York; her people later became the *St. Lawrence Iroquois* and the *Mohawks.* Another clan elder led her people to Ontario, where they later became the *Attiwendaronk* ("Neutrals"). These clan mothers introduced their people to a new kind of farming—the expansive planting of corn, beans, and squash; this perfectly complementary trio of plants became the subsistence food for these peoples. The success of this practice allowed clan mothers to build up an agrarian, egalitarian society, one in which the will of the people was sacred.[23]

In the tenth century the Attiwendaronk began to send out female "Emissaries of Peace" to spread word of the new farming methods, the "Corn Way," to other Iroquoian peoples. These peoples were the ancestors of the *Petuns* and *Wyandots,* or *Northern Iroquois,* who lived on Lake Huron, the *Wenros* on Lake Ontario, and the *Eries* on Lake Erie. In the region south of Lake Ontario settled the *Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas,* and *Mohawks.* Yet further south were the Iroquois-speaking *Susquehannocks*.[24]

An important leader of the "Corn Way" was the matriarch Jigonsaseh, originally an Attiwendaronk who became Seneca. She brought the message both of corn farming and of an egalitarian-based social organization. Whereas the clan mothers of the southern Iroquois took her message seriously, the dominant priestly class of the Mound Builder culture saw itself as threatened. Each people of the Mound Builders had its own chief priest; Adodaroh was the Chief Priest of the Onondagas

and ceremonial head of their priest fire. Though he was an old and insane shaman, he became very powerful, and is described as a hunched figure with huge feet and an enormous penis; he wore live snakes in his hair and on each fingertip a snake's head. It is said that Adodaroh's great power enabled him to cause storms and high waves, and at the sight of him, birds fell dead from the sky. He rallied his army, and a long civil war followed, lasting the entire eleventh century. Two forms of society were at war with each other: the patriarchal order of the priests stood against the matriarchal order of the clan mothers. During this whole time, Adodaroh tried to capture and kill Jigonsaseh, but she always managed to escape in her boat—she was an expert canoeist.[25]

Around 1050, one of the two male founders of the future Confederacy appeared. The one called the "Peacemaker" was a young Attiwendaronk from Lake Ontario. His first act was to call upon Jigonsaseh—who was the elder and more powerful person of the two—to ask her to link his peace initiative, that is, the development of a Constitution and Confederation, with her Corn Way. She negotiated with him, securing for women the broad powers that are embedded in the Constitution that became the foundation of the Iroquois League. The Peacemaker travelled from people to people, and achieved a degree unity and peace that stood up to the tyranny of Adodaroh and his priests. It was primarily Jigonsaseh's approval of the Peacemaker's mission that made it so impressive, and it later led to her being honored by the Iroquois League with titles such as "Great Woman," "The Peace Queen," and "The Mother of Nations."[26]

Many Iroquois heeded the message of Jigonsaseh and the Peacemaker, who peacefully expanded their influence. Because ever-increasing numbers of people refused to fight, the civil war lost steam. Even Ayonwantha ("Hiawatha"), a Mohawk cannibal war chief who was a general of the priestly class, was persuaded by the Peacemaker to embrace peace and the Corn Way. Finally, after the Peacemaker, Jigonsaseh, and Ayonwantha had spent years pursuing peace and the formation of the Confederation, all the peoples of what would become the Five Nations went over to the Corn Way: Senecas, Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, and Mohawks. Adodaroh found he was alone, and escaped to an island with his last priests.

Then, Jigonsaseh set in motion the grand finale, one worthy of a great matriarchal spirit. At the shores of the lake surrounding the island, she called together those who wanted to form the League—the peoples of the Five Nations. Looking out from his island, Adodaroh saw thousands gathered on the shores, and found himself cut off: the consensus had gone against him. It was a manifestation of the strength of the Corn Way, as well as of his own social isolation. Twice, Jigonsaseh

sent the Peacemaker and Ayonwantha over to the island, but each time Adodaroh caused a storm, forcing them back. It was only after the two ambassadors sang the "peace song," a magic song about the rightful power of the people, which Jigonsaseh created and gave the men, that they were able to reach the island—but they were not there to kill Adodaroh. Jigonsaseh, in her wisdom, had advised offering him the job of First Chairman of the Men's Grand Council of the League, on the condition that he would adopt the Corn Way and peace.

Adodaroh reluctantly accepted their offer. He was still insane, so that Ayonwantha was given the continuing job of combing the snakes from his hair, both literally removing the snakes and figuratively straightening out Adodaroh's twisted thinking, thus managing to turn him into a functional Men's Grand Council Chairman. With Ayonwantha's therapy, Adodaroh conducted the office so well, that the name "Adodaroh" was celebrated, becoming the position title for each succeeding chairman of the Men's Grand Council. Meanwhile, Jigonsaseh became Head Clan Mother of the League, and her name also became that office's position title. All clan mothers elected later as Head Clan Mothers of the League bore the respected title of "Jigonsaseh"(Ill. 14).[27]

This Iroquois example is particularly noteworthy, as it demonstrates the way matriarchal thinking and acting can overcome a form of patriarchy.

After this victory the Constitution, or "Great Law of Peace," was read to all of the peoples involved, and in 1142 the Iroquois Confederation, or League of Five Nations, was founded.[28] The Great Law of Peace served as the foundation and legal framework for the League, which owed its political effectiveness to the fact that it was an extension of local matriarchal clan structure: the Five Nations understood their Confederation in terms of a large longhouse. Each Iroquois longhouse had a door at the east and a door at the west, and in between were various sections for the different lineages of each clan. The Confederation, with its five peoples, was understood to be configured like a longhouse, with the Mohawks acting as guardians of the eastern door, the Senecas as guardians of the western door, and the Onondagas as the central firekeepers (administrators). In between lay the "younger siblings," the Cayugas, a branch of the Senecas, and the Oneidas, a branch of the Mohawks. The longhouse symbolism shows that these five peoples saw themselves as symbolically related to each other. [29]

But the prime cause was that the relationship was echoed in the clan names. Each nation had all of the clan names, these are the same in all five peoples: in that way the matriliny was extended to all five nations. It was this symbolical kinship system what held the confederacy together—creating a matriarchal kinship society writ large.[30]

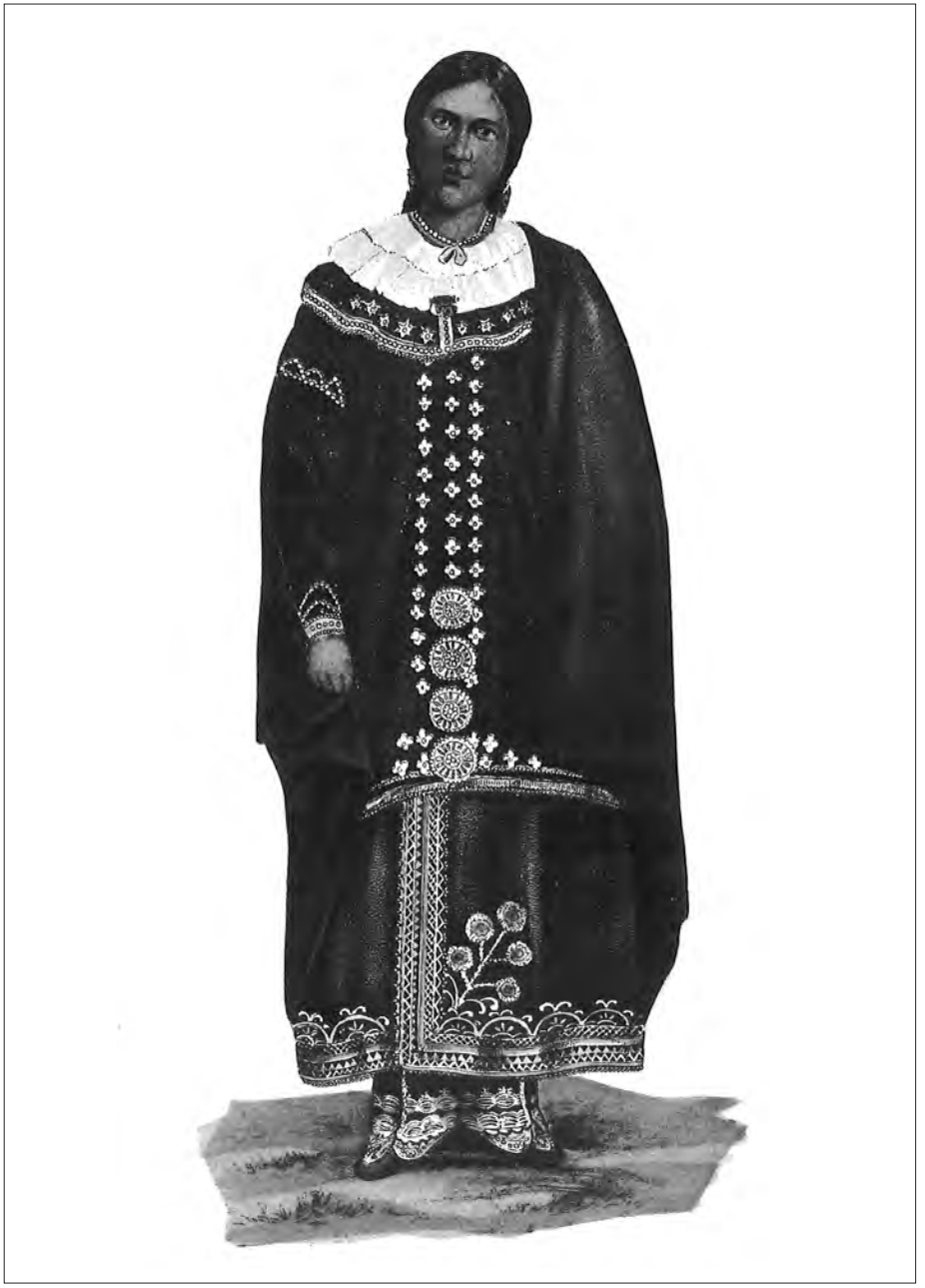


Illustration 14. Gähahno, who was Iroquoian "Jigonsaseh" from 1853–1892, in Seneca costume. (in H.L. Morgan: League of The Hodenosaunee 1851, N.Y. Burt Franklin 1901, vol. 2, frontispiece)

Only many centuries later, between 1712 and 1735, did the sixth people, the Tuscaroras, join the Confederation. The Iroquoian Tuscaroras had been forced off their lands by European soldiers and settlers. In 1712, when the settlers attempted to enslave them, the Tuscaroras ran north to their League relatives, requesting national adoption, which was promptly granted. Through this adoption the League grew, with the Tuscaroras enjoying the same status of direct kinship as every other nation of the Confederation.

The Confederation made it possible for the Iroquois peoples to remain sovereign over their vast territories until the end of the eighteenth century. They maneuvered their League with such acuity, political wisdom, and aggressive courage that they were able to defend themselves and maintain their independence while surrounded by European colonization of the eastern part of the continent. In the process, they exercised a powerful influence unmatched by any other indigenous people in North America.[31]

14.3 The Constitution and political structures

With the establishment of the Constitution and the League came the renewal and reformulation of an ancient Iroquois principle: the matriarchal principle of balanced collaboration between two equivalent powers ("Twinship Principle"). The Iroquois shorthand this as the "Directions of the Sky," referring to the relationship between the East-West Axis, which is primarily male, and the North-South Axis, which symbolizes the female half of the sky. These are not imagined as linear but rather circular, following the circle which is described by the rising and setting sun and the polar star. The Twinship Principle applies to everything in the world, including human society, so the Twinship Principle of male and female was at the core of their Constitution. Thus, the female power is associated with the Earth, and with the characteristic of "local," whereas the male power is associated with the Sky, and the characteristic of "federal." Importantly, there is a female part in the overall male, and a male part in the overall female. Clans are female, but include males; nations are male, but include females. All matters must circulate in an ongoing process between these two polar powers.

Traditionally, the local and federal were interdependent, equivalent entities, rather than having been hierarchically ordered the way they are in patriarchal dominance societies. The local represented the sacred will of the people, the "grassroots level" of Mother Earth herself, and was run by the clan mothers. In the local clan houses, all decisions were made by consensus among all clan members, and all clan hous-

es were represented in the Women's Clan Council, an elected body presided over by the Jigonsaseh. The federal side, presided over by the men, was made up not of clans, but of nations, as represented in the League of the Nations in the Men's Grand Council. Although decisions and messages were communicated and handled here, they did not originate here. The men might only discuss an issue after the women had gone over it, which made the Women's Clan Council the more powerful one—their deliberations effectively set the men's agenda. Similarly, if the Men's Grand Council did not dispose of an issue in the way that the Women's Clan Council preferred, the women could take up the matter anew, reformulate it, and send it back to the men for reconsideration. This means the women's council retained what amounted to a judicial review of men's actions, and could stop them; the men's council could not do the same to the women's actions. However, this does not mean the Women's Clan Council had too much power, because it included the consensus not just of the women in the council, but the consensus of the people—all the clan houses, including the women, men, and children who belonged to them.[32]

The Women's Clan Council, as *sole authority* at the local level of government, is the first right of women explicitly granted in the Constitution. The second explicit right is that women are the *exclusive guardians* of war and peace; that is, they had the right to decide these matters. The concept behind this is that, in order to secure the future of society, women and children must have the absolute right to peace and security. To achieve this, Iroquoian women retained the weapons, relinquishing them only when the Women's Clan Council had resolved to suspend women's right to peace, having made this public through their spokespersons, the clan mothers or their male speakers. However, in their traditional way of life this happened only very rarely, for the clan mothers were not interested in sacrificing their children.[33]

These two political rights of women may seem to imply that the Iroquois gave too much weight to female power, but in their law, an additional provision emphasized male power. This emphasis emerges in the distinction between "hereditary chiefs," or clan peace chiefs, whose job was to protect the "Innocents," resolve conflict, and manage inter-national negotiations, and "merit chiefs," whose selection was based on their various services to the community. Hereditary chiefs were selected exclusively by women for specific council seats held by the clans, whereas merit chiefs were selected exclusively by men; their selection was based on their merit, although hereditarily seats did not exist. For men, in addition to showing mature judgement, one of the ways to earn merit was by acting as a war chief, a position chosen by men after women had given war a go-ahead.

This brings us to the uniqueness of male Iroquois activities. Men did not participate in agriculture, which was the nutritional basis of the Iroquois society.

Their sole interface with this was in clearing forest land, but this was only at the behest of the women and because the forest was men's specific preserve. They contributed to the clan economy through hunting, fishing, and trade. Although these contributions were unpredictable, they constituted a very much sought-after supplement to people's lives. As hunters and traders, men moved freely along the waterways, occasionally ending up in other peoples' hunting territories. This sometimes started small-scale feuds between the men of various peoples. More often, it included the peaceful negotiation of the temporary use of the other's land. Even when the issue did come to blows, the traditional Iroquoian art of war did not require killings to be involved. Rather, these feuds resembled a tournament between men of comparable size and experience, marked by frequent pauses. The goal was not so much killing, as capturing the enemy. If someone was killed, the death was treated as a misfortune, so that actual killings were isolated, regretted incidents, since these dead pulled more dead along with them: every clan was sworn to protect and defend its members, which meant there was a religious duty to avenge murder. But it did not come to the European-style blood vendettas, because these feuds typically ended in Iroquoian-style sports, in which team sports won or lost determined the outcome.[34]

Besides, for the Iroquois, the negative effects could be eliminated by their Constitution, which includes the provision that feuds could always be ended by giving twenty wampum belts as compensation to the dead man's clan. For a murdered woman the gift was thirty wampum belts, as women were considered more valuable than men: they were the "source of life" for their clans.[35] It was only the advent of organized warfare—brought in later by the Europeans and aimed at causing the opponent's complete destruction—that brought about the demise, first of other peoples by Iroquoian soldiers (as allies of the English they were armed with European weapons),[36] and finally of their own nations by the white American conquerors' genocidal practices.

A feud took place after being decided upon in the war council. In this council, lines of relationship played no role since the merit chief, who sat in the war council, was not elected on the basis of clan structures. Thus, feuds were the formal reason for the resolutions of war council, but often this masked the young men's thirst for adventure and ambitions for advancement. Feuds were carried out based on private initiative of volunteers, and whether or not a feud actually went forward depended completely on the war chief's popularity.[37] He would dig up the hatchet (a red-painted tomahawk decorated with red feathers) and plunge it into the village war post. Then, fully adorned and emitting loud war cries, he would begin the war dance. By then, everyone in the village knew that a feud was planned, and those

who voluntarily chose to follow the chief joined in the war dance. However, just as often, no one danced with him, and he went home in disgrace.[38]

Sometimes, a small group had formed spontaneously, observed and cheered on by the entire village; when the dance was finished, the war-party set out. When the feud was over, the men and their captives were welcomed back into the village; at this point the war party, like the role of the chief, dissolved.[39] This contrasts significantly with organized warfare, where permanent troops and war officers are stationed in permanent institutions; in these arrangements, the military machine always develops into an expensive "state within a state."

The Iroquois could not undertake feuds without the explicit consent of women. Additionally, the young men who set off in a war party had to be supplied by the women with long-lasting provisions of cornmeal; otherwise, they could not carry out these forays. The women apportioned the food not only for the feuds, but also for the trade expeditions, so the final decisions about these things were in women's hands. By withholding their political and economic assent, women in the village or town could stop a feud from taking place. And they did stop it, when the elder lineage chiefs thought it was a bad idea. [40]

In addition, it was women's responsibility to decide what would happen to prisoners of war. Women and children were always adopted, and usually, men were, too. These people were adopted into the clans, not as slaves, but as full citizens, replacing the clan's own lost sisters, daughters, brothers, or sons in order to strengthen the clan. Sometimes, whole branches of an enemy people would be adopted, which had the effect of significantly increasing the population of the adopting nation. Here also, the decision was solely in the hands of the women.[41]

14.4 Iroquois society

In terms of the social order, the Iroquois peoples, like other matriarchies, had a society of matrilineal kinship, in which the lines of relationship were the dominant principle behind social forms and functions. The basic principle of relationship followed the "Ohwachira," or mother's line. The Ohwachira included all people who had the same ancestress. The women and mothers were at the center of society, and the clan mothers, or matriarchs, bore the honorific title of "Gantowisas." The matrilineal clan—which as a rule was quite large and might include thousands of people—was the most important social unit. In the clan, a grandmother's sisters were all called "grandmother," the mother's sisters were all "mother," and the children of sisters called each other "sister" and "brother." As in other matriarchal societies, relationship was communally rather than individually understood.[42]

The members of a matriliny lived together in a great longhouse, or, if many people were involved, in several longhouses. As a result of the generally matrilocal living arrangements, marriage partners were less dependent on each other. Although the biological father was known and respected, he had little significance, and usually came to his wife's longhouse as a visitor, or lived there temporarily. The mother's brother, who usually lived in the same clan house as she did, assumed the responsibilities of social father. [43]

Status, title, property, and almost all social, political, and religious functions were inherited through the mother's Ohwachira. In addition, all ceremonial objects and emblems, as well as myths, ritual songs, ceremonies, and traditional knowledge of medicine, belonged in the domain of certain matri-clans; this meant that women owned them and were in control of their use. This is also enshrined in the Constitution in the form of a law guaranteeing women the *exclusive right* to determine lineages and names. The right of naming means that in addition to possessing the right to give their own children individual names, as well as the name of their matriliny, women also have the right to name persons who are adopted into their clans. In addition, they have the right to bestow their clan's hereditary titles. In this way, each of the Gantowisas, or matriarchs, bestowed all chieftaincy titles that belonged to their clan, including the most sought-after honorary title, the "Sachem," or "Peace Chief," in the Men's Grand Council.[44] However, a clan mother could not choose her own brother or son for these political positions; rather, the Sachem was selected from the numerous candidates eligible, in the large clans, for such a position. The Sachem's emblematic objects were a crown of antlers and a "wampum" belt of woven whelk and clamshell beads, which—arranged in a form of character writing—recorded the lineages, nomination to titles, the laws of the Constitution, the contracts of the Confederation, treaties with settlers, and minutes of meetings. [45]

This indicates that not only was the administration of the Ohwachira in the hands of the Gantowisas, or matriarchs, but great social power was theirs as well. A Gantowisa would be a woman of advanced years, recognized as an intelligent and talented leader, with irreproachable character and faultless morals. She would be chosen from among her sisters by a clan council, and would be awarded the clan's finest Young Man (position title of soldiers), who would remain at her side as her male helper. He was the clan mother's speaker to the men's council. She would enjoy great respect, all the more so if her clan had the right to bestow a Peace Chief, or Sachem title. In that case, she would also be custodian of the office of chief, and would bear the title of "Royaneh," or "chiefmaker." [46]

The Gantowisas were the representatives of the clan in its entirety. In the clan house, the elder women were dominant, and the political direction of the

Ohwachira was determined by the decisions of the clan mothers and other adult women. The men were represented by the men's councils. They had their own speakers, including a female speaker to the women's council—the counterpart of the clan mother's male speaker to the men's council.[47]

The house-based council was not only for handling household matters; it was, at the same time, the vehicle for general policy. The chosen representatives of the Ohwachira participated in clan, town, and federal politics. Every Ohwachira had, in addition, the right to launch political initiatives and could convey the Ohwachira's wishes and expectations to bodies at the nation level and federal level. In this way, households reflected the wishes and claims of all Iroquois—and even of children, as the voting rules weighted a woman's vote according to the number of children she had. All political opinion and decision-making was based on household councils. Thus, the social and political order presented itself not as a top-down domination, but as a network based on consensus building from below.

If an Ohwachira possessed a hereditary political office, the opportunities for influencing the greater community expanded considerably. The Sachems were chosen in councils made up of the clan mothers and adult women. The Royaneh had the last word, but, once consensus was achieved, she could not overrule it. Aptitude and experience were deciding factors. In this way, women selected the representatives who made up the political bodies in the town, the nation, and in the League. Therefore, these hereditary chiefs acted primarily in the interests of their own clans, particularly the women. Iroquoian women were present at men's gatherings and heard everything that went on, and so had great political influence and responsibility.

Sachems, or Peace Chiefs, were responsible for quickly resolving conflicts, whether at the town, national, or federal level, and they took the initiative to settle disputes. Nevertheless, by possessing this title, a man became the delegate of his Ohwachira, so that each Sachem was dependent upon the instructions of the Royaneh. In response to poor performance, or headstrong behavior, or infringement of the ideals or laws of the Confederation, she could unseat him. Custom dictated that an offending Sachem would be warned three times: first by the Royaneh acting alone; then by the clan's male speaker, the Young Man; and finally by the Royaneh and the Young Man together. If all these did not produce results, the Royaneh would revoke the Sachem's title and his emblems, giving them to another chosen clan representative. The entire clan would of course be paying attention to the Royaneh's administrative leadership, and she too could be replaced after three warnings.[48]

Also at the national councils, the two clan chiefs—Royaneh and Sachem—were present, but the management of this differed among different nations. The

Attiwendaronk were a very special group, their national council seems to have had the maximum number of female members possible: four fifths of their council chiefs were women. The clan mothers were in just about total control among the Attiwendaronk. The Confederacy, however, modified that to a more parallel system of national councils as sphere of men, and clan councils as sphere of women. There were also female chiefs at the level of the Confederation; in fact, there were just as many women as men. This was verified by a white woman ethnologist, who herself was a Seneca female chief in the Iroquois Confederation (Harriet Converse).[49] During the wars of conquest, the Gantowisas saw themselves as being obliged to assume, in national and federal councils, the roles of imprisoned and murdered Sachems. In these desperate situations the Seneca and Attiwendaronk Gantowisas even took up arms, fighting as soldiers alongside the men: in 1687 the League's Jigonsaseh personally assumed military control, and handed the French a heavy defeat in 1689, near Montreal.[50]

Most importantly, all these kinship groups and political groups were traditionally responsible to the Councils of Elders; these bodies aggregated the experience and wisdom of age and took vigilant care to ensure that Sachems' decisions were compatible with traditional social values. They were the guardians of the culture's unwritten laws. However, the women's councils spoke first and controlled the agenda of both the Grandmothers' and Grandfathers' councils. [51]

The comprehensiveness of the Iroquoian kinship system is indicated by the fact that the bonds, which could hold even the Iroquoian League together, were the bonds of relatives. In every nation—Seneca, Onondaga, Cayuga, Oneida, Mohawk and, subsequently, the Tuscarora—there were numerous clans which were arranged into Turtle (earth) and Wolf (sky) clan halves. Pre-contact, as many as fifteen clans existed, but by the late 19th century, after four hundred years of strife, there were eight clans: Turtle, Wolf, Bear, Beaver, Deer, Hawk, Snipe, and Heron. If a traveler from the Wolf Clan came to any town that belonged to the Confederation, it was certain he would find a longhouse there bearing a Wolf Clan name. The inhabitants of this house would welcome him, and he would enjoy the privileges of a relative, although there would no longer exist any direct blood relationship. Through these interlocking nets of symbolic relationships that are indicated by the same particular clan names, the nations of the Confederation were more closely tied to each other than they would have been through any abstract concept of unity. This had always served them well on their distant trade expeditions, but it also was important later on, during the wars against the white invaders. The nations could quickly raise an army, since clan houses always responded to each other's calls for help, even across national boundaries.[52] This represents a genuine form of matri-

archal inter-national union building, one that includes alliances of equals based on female lines of relationship—whether real or symbolic.[53] This structure is completely different from that of patriarchal state and empire building, which are based on the inequalities of domination and hierarchy.

14.5 Iroquois economy

The profound significance of women in Iroquoian society was based on their role in the economy. The Iroquois, like other matriarchal societies, had no private property. All property belonged to the social group; land and house were the property of the clan. However, within the clan women had the sole right to land. The territory controlled by the community was also in women's hands; men were not entitled to own land. The harvest belonged solely to the women, who shared it out to the rest of the household based on need.

This arrangement is enshrined in yet another important right in the Iroquoian Constitution pertaining to women: they are the *sole keepers* of Mother Earth. That is, women were and are the custodians of Mother Earth because they were identified with her, and possessed all fruits gleaned from her. Indeed, it was they who discovered the Corn Way of life, defended it against all attacks, and gave it to the people. Thus, women controlled and distributed all the goods and services necessary for life.[54]

At the time of European contact, the Iroquoian economy was based on hoe-farming of planting mounds—traditionally the domain of women. This type of subsistence agriculture was no modest undertaking limited to small plots; rather, it was a highly developed practice of shifting cultivation carried out over extended fields that could comprise as much as thousands of acres. With a variety of mound beds, women grew an ideal combination of corn, beans, and squash. These plants—called "the Three Sisters" by Eastern woodlands peoples—mutually support each other: the winding beanstalks lean on the sturdy shafts of the corn plants, while the fast-growing, broad leaves of the squash vines discourage weeds. They provided a nutritional basis and well-organized surplus reserves. With these plants, women secured the independent provisioning of the entire people.

The Three Sisters could be cultivated relatively far north, and even survived the transition from intensive, narrow flood-plain farming on the riverbanks to the spread out, slash-and-burn agriculture of the woodland Iroquois. That flexibility enabled people to settle land some distance away from rivers but, because settlements had to be relocated every twenty years or so, did not encourage the development of large cities. The capital cities of each of the five, later six, nations

tended to contain about 15,000 individuals in clan longhouses. Other towns housed anywhere from a few hundred to about 5,000 inhabitants.[55]

Hunting and fishing, as well as trade, were the men's domain. Just as women were the Keepers of the Fields, men were the Keepers of the Forest. In the context of the Twinship Principle, care of the fields and care of the forests were seen as complementary spheres of responsibility, with equal value. In summer, the men set out on trading expeditions along the canoe routes of the vast inland waterways. They dealt extensively with the peoples of the north, where they traded agrarian products for products of the hunt. At the same time, these journeys served the interests of Iroquois federal councils, federal communications, and treaty-making. Throughout the rest of the year, especially in winter, they hunted—although this was associated with game-keeping, so the game was not wild.[56] Since field and forest were both seen as aspects of Mother Earth, the goods men brought home from hunting and fishing expeditions were delivered, like the harvest, into the hands of the Gantowisas, the matriarchs. The Gantowisas then shared out the food among the clan members, and also took care of provisioning the guests.

The women practised their mixed agriculture in permanent work groups, based on their kinship relations; these groups fostered solidarity and stability. In comparison, the work groups for men's hunting and fishing expeditions were more open and casual; they could be dissolved and reconstituted anew. In politics, women's stability and unity was a great advantage, and contributed to their power.[57]

Women's economic power in Iroquois society—as in other matriarchal societies—had a deeper significance than just a profane economic power. As Iroquois economic principles are inseparable from spiritual ones, their economy is also a spiritual system. So women had the sole right to land not so much, because they worked on it, but because Turtle Island (North America) *is* a woman, Mother Earth, made by women (Sky Woman and her daughter) for the granddaughters who farmed it. Additionally, following nature, the economy was based on abundance, not scarcity. With this concept in mind, abundance was created for all, and—in the typical way of Mother Earth—sharing and gifting were the most respected principles. [58]

Friendly behavior and generous gift giving were the outstanding qualities of Iroquoian women, whose presence dignified the entertaining of guests as well as the catering of great feasts. Their clothes were of precious, richly embroidered dark material, and they wore valuable silver jewelry. At festivals—which were an opportunity for lavish giveaways by the Gantowisas—women were actively present in all their beauty. By redistributing the wealth in this way, no one stayed poor, and the gift-givers' honor was greatly increased.

The gifts were of food and furs, quills and ceremonially significant feathers, clothing, and wampum belts, which were valuable as records of important civil affairs and, sometimes, more decorative and commemorative. The supply of food and gift items was in the hands of the Gantowisas, which meant that they had explicit responsibility for rendering and maintaining the Iroquoian gift economy. This was a clear expression of the resonance between the gift giving Earth and gift giving women: just as the mound beds were regarded as the breasts of Mother Earth, the corn her milk, so the gifting of the Gantowisas was compared with breast-feeding. Gift giving was considered a motherly action from which all people drew their lives.[59]

This gift giving created bonds of peace that not only applied within the clan, but also between clans within the community. Arguments were put to rest with gift giving, and at feasts, relationships would be renewed with all and sundry. Iroquoian women's gift giving also established and strengthened bonds between various communities within a nation, and extended to bonds between the nations of the League. Following the Twinship Principle, men also began their nation-level or federal-level councils with gift giving, which renewed their peaceful relationships. All this meant that the Iroquois economy was based on a network of smaller and larger gift giving circles.[60]

This is also how guests were drawn into the web of relationships—including European guests, who tended to misinterpret these traditions as simple "hospitality," ignoring the mutual implications of the bonds.[61] It was the prerogative and the duty of women to entertain guests and carry out the practice of gift diplomacy at all levels, whether the guests were entertained in the longhouse of the clan mother, at the local level with the Gantowisas, or at the inter-national level with the Jigonsaseh.

This gift economy is known to have been practised by many other peoples on the North American continent, and this was especially true for matriarchally organized peoples. By way of the extensive waterways and the Indian roads, they maintained their bonds over great distances.[62]

14.6 Iroquois medicine societies and mythology

Today medicine societies are the main bearers of Iroquoian tradition, and are closely associated with the annual agrarian cycle and the cycle of life. These cycles were traditionally in the hands of women, and spirituality was primarily a matter for the Gantowisas.[63] Medicine societies were always secret. Members were given information by the spirits, which was meant only for them and was not to be shared. The fact that they became much more cloaked in the institutional secrecy that sur-

rounds them now goes back to the pressure exerted by white Americans colonial rule for the past 300 years, so that people had to hide their medicine from the missionaries.[64]

It is a complete mistake to lump all these medicine groups together as "men's societies," since traditionally women participated in most of them—and nearly half were exclusively for women. Even in the twentieth century, women's societies comprised five out of a total of twelve societies; however, due to the pressure exerted by colonial missionizing and the demonizing of medicine societies, women's societies were obliged to work even more secretly than did those of the men.[65] Aside from that, male ethnologists had no access to women's societies, which led to blatant one-sidedness in the research.

Although it is true that each of these societies was responsible for healing certain illnesses, the term "medicine society" is misleading, because they in fact are spiritual societies. The Iroquois word "Orenda" signifies the two-part energy in all beings and things: coming together like East and West or North and South to create an over-arching, divine cosmic energy. It was the job of the medicine, or spiritual societies to hold the halves of this Orenda energy in a dynamic balance. For individuals, this meant health as a balance of body and spirit, but it could also mean the political balance of the community—that is, between the genders and between the generations as well as the balance between humans and nature. All the visions, dreams, dances, and ceremonies of a medicine society aimed towards this balance. The stated criteria for a medicine society were: permanent organization and officers, initiation into the society, traditions of origin, stories about the sacred objects, songs, and dances, and unchanging rituals that cannot be referred to outsiders, and cannot be shared with any non-initiate.[66]

Nowadays, Iroquois peoples again publicly present some of their ceremonies, and recently even women's societies have done the same. The ceremonies which are made public were always public, before the US government and the missionaries outlawed the indigenous spiritual traditions. Now they are becoming public again, whereas what was traditionally secret, still remains secret.

Women's societies are those in which permanent members must be women, and all officers are women. Their ceremonies are exclusively led by women; men are spectators and, in certain cases, assistants. Three of the five women's societies are rooted in plant cosmogony: the "Towisas Oäno Society," the "Ogiwe Society" and the "Dwarf Society." The other two, the "Otter Society" and the "Women's Society," belong to the hunting-oriented animal societies; this points to a surprising connection to the traditionally male domain of hunting. The five women's societies still exist today. Masks are not worn in women's societies, because they are

made from trees, which are male. Masked performances are somewhat recent developments, they only appear in the men's societies.[67]

Of the five women's societies, the three most important are the Towisas, the Ogiwe, and the Otter Societies; with distinct tasks, they reflect the spiritual spheres and activities of Iroquoian women. The agrarian Towisas Society, or Society of Sisters, concentrates on the powers of fertility, birth, and growth—of plants, animals and people—and also growth in the cosmos. This society honors Mother Earth and, in particular, her divine daughters, the Three Sisters: the elder Sister Corn and the younger Sisters Bean and Squash. The series of public agrarian ceremonies extending from sowing to harvest are celebrated by this society from spring through summer. In the non-public, secret healing ceremonies the Towisas foster contact with the spirits of Mother Earth, who has to be healed regularly after suffering the wounds that human activities caused.[68]

The Ogiwe Society, or Death Singers, is dedicated to the secrets of death and rebirth. The women focus on the powers of withering, dying, and transforming; their society complements the Towisas Society. Their ritual responsibilities concern death, the realm of the dead, reverence to the ancestors, and rebirth, all of which were originally in the domain of women. Only women may lead funeral ceremonies and guide the dead into the Otherworld. The public Dance-of-death Ceremonies, which are very ancient, are performed by this society from late autumn until early spring. All these rituals take place at night. The Dance-of-death is probably danced on the fire, a spiritual art mastered by Ogiwe women, but the most important event is the Feast of the Dead, held every ten years, to which all the dead are invited. As contact with spirits of the dead is quite dangerous, this society possesses powerful healing rituals designed to cure the "spirit sickness" that can result when a dead person's unhappy soul comes into the midst of the living. Both these women's medicine societies reflect the entire cycle of the year, and of human life, as it is understood in matriarchal spirituality.[69]

It is a different story for the two women's societies associated with hunting. The most important is the Otter Society, in which we encounter a relationship between matriarchal spirituality and hunting rituals. In western academic theories, the men's hunt is represented as being associated with patriarchal patterns, as expressed in the concept of Man, the Hunter—the alleged inventor of everything. This picture is wrong. The Otter Society takes active part in every large public festival. It looks after the spiritual connection with aquatic animals, especially the fish otter, believed to have an especially powerful earth energy (female). In earlier times, hunters' and fishers' behavior towards their prey was monitored by the women of the Otter Society. This afforded them a decisive influence—as long as hunting and

fishing were still important for sustenance—as women were the sole mediators between animals and hunters. If the relationship between hunters and animals was not good, the animals' female ancestors stopped sending animal children back into the world from the other side: instead, they would send only misfortune and disease. It is logical that women were the exclusive mediators between hunters and their prey, as death and rebirth were women's domain. If a hunter did not act appropriately, Otter Society women would gather at a sacred spring to perform the Otter Ceremony to propitiate the animals' female ancestors. At the same time, the offending hunter would be cleansed, and his breach of conduct healed. Today, the women of this society specialize in shamanic trances in which the Otter spirit enters them; they also heal psychic and nerve diseases.[70]

The most important spiritual office for a women is that of the "Ho-non-de-ont," or Keeper of the Faith; she is the public priestess. Today, within the medicine societies, women elected to these offices lead the ceremonies. However, since women, as clan mothers, also sponsor all clan gatherings (they are the ones who prepare the banquets), a Ho-non-de-ont is often both priestess and matriarch. Even at midwinter national gatherings, led by male priests, the chief matriarch is present in the role of female Ho-non-de-ont, and utters the prayers.

In Morgan's time (1851), priestesses were commonly responsible for determining festival dates, organizing the festivals, and presiding over them. At political council meetings the female Ho-non-de-ont always led the ceremonial part. During this period, as women were considered to be especially gifted in spiritual work, they accounted for two-thirds of all Ho-non-de-ont.[71] Men could also be Ho-non-de-ont, as they too had their medicine societies and ceremonies. Among themselves, the female priesthood had no hierarchy, and the same was true of the male priesthood. Neither was there competition between female and male priests; they were a group of co-equal public servants. Along with the elders' councils, they supervised the customs of individuals, as well as of the community and nation.[72]

During the era of Christian missionary activities (which, in fact, did not succeed), all medicine societies were labeled as "black magic" and "hotbeds of pagan resistance," and were forbidden. The role of priestesses was denigrated, with the result that all ceremonies, including those that had formerly been public and particularly the women's, went underground into secrecy. Some operated under the guise of Christian women's groups; the Christian Eastern Star was an especially popular front for women's medicine meetings. In spite of all this, the patriarchalizing bias of the missions, as well as of the government, did not prevail. Today, traditional Iroquoian women are once again taking up their roles as matriarchs and priestesses in women's medicine societies, and influencing clan and national decisions on

all matters, including outside affairs. In the resistance mounted by indigenous self-determination movements, women are at the forefront. Medicine societies have emerged as the strongest force for maintaining traditional matriarchal cultures.[73]

Traditional belief in the feminine divine is also being practiced again today, and is particularly associated with ceremonies of women's medicine societies. Most ancient, and most powerful, of the spirits is the all-encompassing mother, in all her aspects, as daughter, mother, and grandmother. Her Iroquoian name is "Sky Woman," "Aetensic," or "Awenhai," she is called "First Woman," "First Mother," and "First Grandmother on Earth." The Iroquois also call her "Soika Gakwa," "Our Grandmother Moon," in reference to her cosmic origin.

Her stories present what the Iroquois call "The First Epoch of Time." She is first seen as a little daughter in Sky World, whose adventures are manifold and whose mother and grandmothers care lovingly for her. She grows into the role of expectant mother, and that is when they say that Sky Woman fell down from heaven through a shining hole directly towards the primal ocean that covered the globe. The birds saw her fall, and called the water animals together to help the falling Sky Woman. Some water animals dove down and brought back earth from the bottom of the sea, which they then smeared over the back of a giant sea turtle. The birds set Sky woman gently down upon the turtle's back, and this is how Turtle Island (North America) came to be.[74] This story reflects the necessity of Sky and Earth co-operating to create anything, let alone something of the magnitude of life on earth.

As the story goes, at the time of her fall Sky Woman was pregnant with her little daughter Lynx, who was born on Turtle Island. Ever since that time, the turtle has carried North America, pictured as a round disk, on her back. At this point in the tradition, Sky Woman built a longhouse for herself and her daughter, and this is where Lynx grew up. Mother and daughter were inseparable. When Lynx had grown up, she became pregnant by the North Wind. In the original tradition, she gave birth to two sets of twins, the little girls of North and South, and the little boys of East and West. After the missionaries were through re-working the story, however, there were only the male twins left: Teharonhiawagon ("Young Sapling") of the East and Tawiskaron ("Flint" or "Arrowhead") of the West. South and East—a proper combination of female and male energies—are associated with morning, life, sweetness, and smoothness. North and West—a mirror combination of female and male energies—are associated with evening, death, sharpness, and difficulty. Upon her death from carrying too many children, the Lynx was buried on Turtle Island, where she transformed into fertile Mother Earth, nourishing the people: corn, or "earth-milk," grows from her breasts, squash from her navel, and beans

from her feet. These are her daughters, the sacred Three Sisters. In one Seneca version, the sacred plant, tobacco, grew out of her head. Other Iroquoian traditions have Sky Woman bringing tobacco form Sky World, or Sapling retrieving it from Sky World.[75]

The death of her daughter so deeply grieved Sky Woman that she stopped paying attention to her grandchildren, or, in the slimmed-down missionary version, to her twin grandsons, who then began to compete with each other for their grandmother's love—a rivalry that intensified as they got older. They were creators in their own right, and enlivened the Earth with forests and animals, but their creations were antagonistic: no sooner had Sapling invented sweet strawberries, but Flint invented thorny roses; when Sapling made gentle animals, then Flint made roaring beasts; when Sapling created beautiful lakes, Flint created huge waterfalls. Finally, Flint brought forth an Ice Age, threatening all life, but Sky Woman advised Sapling to bring it to an end. Thus, Sapling threw a mountain over Flint; this did not kill him, but it did trap him inside the mountain, so that life on Turtle Island could thrive again. (Mirror-image strife also occurred between the female Twins of North and South in the original tale.) [76] This story of the cosmic twins embodies the Twinship Principle, reflecting complements of light and dark, or life and death, that are not, in indigenous spirituality, judged as being "good" or "evil," but that together comprise the mutuality of the two sides that complete the world.

When Sky Woman grew old, she withdrew into the underworld. Before she departed, she created the Milky Way Trail, the "Path of the Spirits," to show all her children the way home to her. In order to give them light and a way to measure time, she put the moon up in the sky. She then lived in the realm of the dead; her grandson Flint and—in the original story, his sister of the North—were with her, living under the mountains of the Western Rim (the Rocky Mountains) and entertaining the Earth spirits of the departed. Meanwhile Sapling and—in the original tale, his sister of the South—who grieved deeply for their grandmother, lifted her up to the moon; this is how she became "Our Grandmother Moon," whose face smiles down on her children. Her abode remains the moon, where she entertains the Sky Spirits of the newly departed, keeping them and sending them back for rebirth. This story completes the full circle of Sky Woman's life, from daughter to mother to grandmother, and the full circle of her way from the sky down to the earth and from there into the underworld, and back to the sky. On this way she accomplished the unification of Earth and Sky, which is the point here.[77]

Sky Woman is particularly associated with women, ruling, as Grandmother Moon, over the menstrual cycle, birth, growth, death and rebirth—the complete

cycle of life. Her daughter, Mother Earth, is the Keeper of all sickness and healing and is thus fundamental to women's medicine societies, her earth balanced by the wisdom of her mother's sky. The interface of mother and daughter is crucial here. The Ogiwe Society is especially dedicated to Sky Woman's powers.[78]

The Christianized versions of the narrative follow the usual pattern of distortion: Sky Woman, Grandmother Moon, is made into an "old witch," and Flint is portrayed as the embodiment of evil, the "Devil" himself, while the twin girls are ignored altogether. Sapling, the brother of the rising sun, becomes a Jesus-type hero. A "Great Spirit" in heaven is added, a father-god who marries and impregnates Sky Woman before pushing her out of heaven, and out of paradise. This narrative reflects a missionary interpretation, introducing the Christian concept of good vs. evil, an idea foreign to indigenous tradition; it is based on the same crude sexism that demonizes every ancient creatrix goddess and punishes every woman who might be her, such as Sky Woman.[79]

Remarkably, in one version of the tradition, Sky Woman complains about the chaotic lack of order in the new, post-contact world. In this version, it seems she has created the sun from the head of her daughter Lynx, and she and Flint guide this sun-head, in a regular rhythm, down into the underworld each winter. However, reflecting his role as bringer of the sun and springtime, Sapling and his companions decide to win back the sun-head from darkness. Down in the underworld, on an island, he finds the sun tied to the treetops. He steals it away, and fastens it high up in the sky, so that the world can always be in the light. Since now the sun can no longer travel according to its orderly, light-and-dark rhythm, Sky Woman complains to Sapling—three times she brings her complaint.[80] Although this happens in the context of an ancient nature-mythical story, Sky Woman's complaint transgresses the story: the ancient worldview has been turned upside-down with the Christian-influenced deification of a hero of light, who is now the only good one, and who must be petitioned to do right by women. In the ancient view, dark powers had never been seen as evil ones; in fact, they were not seen as "dark" but as different, and equal light in the great cycle of life and the cosmos. Thus, Sky Woman grieves the destruction of the cosmic balance, which is accompanied by the destruction of society's equilibrium.

The wise, nuanced quality of Iroquoian matriarchal society, politics, economics, and spirituality was knocked a heavy blow by the invading Europeans. At first, the unexpectedly booming fur trade with the Europeans gave young men independent economic leverage, which disproportionately strengthened their role not only against

women, but against the power of elderhood; in the heat of competition with other peoples, the aggressiveness of their actions increased, too. In the never-ending, ever-escalating wars that followed, the matriarchal social balance suffered damage. As soldiers, young men achieved extraordinary political significance, but this was determined by outside factors. Forced by the conquest to adapt to organized warfare, war-mongering roles were institutionalized, giving war chiefs permanent political influence. The old order based on matrilineal kinship was demolished as warfare hierarchies cut across traditional structures. In that way, little by little, the Iroquoian Gantowisas lost their strong position.[81]

After the conquest by white Americans and the loss of their independence, Iroquois who survived the genocide were forced into small reservations (seven in New York State and five in Ontario and Quebec Provinces). Many modern Iroquois find it not accidental that no reservations were granted at all in Ohio, the stronghold of resistance going into the 19th century. On the New York and Canadian reservations, the Iroquois remained under the thumb of patriarchal legislators in Canadian and U.S. American governments; this seriously weakened the role of women. In 1847, all Iroquois were forced into agriculture, without any consideration of their traditional occupations or gender-based work roles, and the nuclear family with its male head-of-household became the basic economic and social unit. In 1869, Canadian law established the patrilineal descent of the indigenous peoples on its territory. Since no such law was enacted in the U.S., the remains of the old matriliny were retained.[82] Ironically, in those places lacking reservations, holdouts continued traditional culture in secret, away from the prying eyes of the missionaries and heavy hand of the government.[83]

That under these circumstances the Gantowisas were nevertheless able to continue as bearers of their people's indigenous identity demonstrates Iroquoian women's ability to survive. In the U.S., they have revitalized matriarchal clan structures and joined together again in cooperative work groups, on poor reservation lands, in order to help their people pull through. Those where no reservations exist form less obvious, but equally vital, mutual aid societies. The ongoing revival of Iroquois medicine societies—which, in spite of great adversity, remain the major bearers of indigenous tradition—has given the people new self-respect.

Today, the members of the Iroquois Confederacy meet together again at indigenous festivals and international conferences, and write influential critiques of indigenous peoples' situation in the U.S., North and South America, and the rest of the world. They are among the most politically active groups in the indigenous rights movement.

14.7 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the social level:

- In matriarchal societies sisters share a general motherhood role. This minimizes the restrictions of individual motherhood, and serves to protect the children.
- Matriarchal societies do not exhibit a cultic worship of motherhood. In patriarchal societies, this iconic status obscures the fact that each individual woman is reduced to the pure basics of her childbearing function, usually against her will and abilities.

At the economic level:

- The economic principles of matriarchal societies are inseparably interwoven with spiritual principles; matriarchal economics is also a spiritual system.
- The guiding image for the economy is Mother Earth herself, and as with earth, sharing and giving away out of an abundance are its supreme values. The gift is the lynchpin of the economy, patterned after the continuous gift giving of earth and sky.
- As land and clan houses, as well as food, are usually in the hands of women, it is they who facilitate and maintain the matriarchal gift economy.
- Matriarchal gift giving circles create and renew good relationships at every level: internally, at the clan level; locally, at the community level of village or town; nationally, at the national level; and federally at the level inter nations. Such gift giving circles can be interlinked over vast areas.
- Matriarchal gift giving supports the securing and maintenance of peace at all these levels.

At the political level:

- In matriarchal societies women have significant power in economic and social spheres. Their political power is based on this.
- In spite of women's authority, and centrality, a balance is maintained between female and male areas of activity. These areas are not limited to stereotypically fixed roles, but rather are set out differently in various societies, with a certain amount of tolerance. It is the job that is gendered, not the individual who is sexualized.

- This balance is constantly re-established and maintained via the political medium of creating consensus. In this way, all decisions enter into a unanimity process that involves everybody; this is carried out at the level of the women and the men, at the level of the whole clan, at the level of the village or town, and of the whole people, or nation. Matriarchies are egalitarian consensus societies.
- The core politics, which influence all the other political bodies, is developed and carried out in the clan house. As this is women's domain, their vote carries significant weight, because without women's agreement, men can do nothing—including in their foreign policy. Clan-house politics—representing the sacred will of the people—determine the direction of the entire society.
- Men are clan delegates, who represent women's opinions to the national and federal councils and to the outside world. They are obliged first, to speak only the words that the women gave them, and second, to present the women with an accounting of their actions. They are bound to act according to the women's instructions.
- Just as women elect men as chiefs with representative powers, they also have the right to unseat these chiefs.
- By electing the chiefs, women determine the political make-up of all the larger political bodies.
- The clan has two chiefs: the matriarch and a male clan representative.

At the federal political level:

- Matriarchal alliance-building at the federal level conforms to the ideal of a society based on relationships.
- Matriarchal alliance-building consists in organizing confederations of equals, formed through direct or symbolic matrilineal lines of kinship; it is a question of non-hierarchical federal politics.
- The confederations are over-arching alliances of various peoples, or nations.

At the cultural level:

- In matriarchal societies, the priesthood is female, either exclusively or shared equally with men.
- Matriarchal priestesses have no hierarchy among themselves; the same goes for matriarchal priests.
- Medicine societies are the main bearers of matriarchal tradition, and are closely associated with the annual agrarian cycle and the cycle of life, and

with healing. These cycles and healing were traditionally in the hands of women.

- In times of oppression, medicine societies became cloaked in the institutional secrecy. There exist separate medicine societies of women and of men. Women's medicine societies are often the mainstays for retaining cultural traditions.
- The matriarchal worldview is non-dualistic, and does not contain the theological concept of "good" and "evil." Instead, there is parity between different, but complementary energies. They represent the two sides of the world, both cosmos and earth, and determine the cycle of life. This worldview is cyclical rather than linear.

Notes

1. Joseph François Lafitau: *Customs of the American Indians, Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times,* William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore (eds. and transl.), 2 vols., Toronto 1974, The Champlain Society, (first edition 1724). Even earlier than Lafiteau, Gabriel Sagard gave his account in 1632.
2. Lewis Henry Morgan: *League of the Ho-dé-no-saunee or Iroquois*, 2 vols., New York 1901, Burt Franklin, (first edition 1851). [Iroquois]
3. Lewis Henry Morgan: *Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization,* Chicago 1877, Charles H. Kerr & Company.—See the critique by Barbara Alice Mann (indigenous Iroquois, Bear Clan of the Seneca): *Iroquoian Women. The Gantowisas,* New York 2000, Peter Lang, pp. 67, 68. [Gantowisas]
4. Barbara Alice Mann, [Gantowisas], ibidem; and *Native Americans, Archaeologists, and the Mounds,* New York 2003, Peter Lang. [The Mounds]
5. B. A. Mann, [The Mounds], pp. 140, 155, 156.
6. Personal information from Barbara Mann.
7. Coe/ Snow/ Benson: *Atlas of Ancient America,* Oxford, New York, 1986/1988, Facts On File Inc., pp. 48–50.
8. Some North American oral traditions claim that it was endemic there. Traditions say that tobacco was specifically brought to North America by Sky Woman. (information from Barbara Mann)
9. Coe/ Snow/ Benson, ibid., pp. 50, 57, 92.
10. B. A. Mann, [The Mounds], p. 155, 156.
11. Coe/ Snow/ Benson, ibid., pp. 50–55.—There is contention about how old the Serpent Mound is. Some date it as 4000 years old. (information from Barbara Mann)
12. B. A. Mann, [The Mounds], pp. 148, 156.
13. See the map in B. A. Mann, [The Mounds], p. 138.
14. Coe/ Snow/ Benson, ibid., pp. 55–57; B. A. Mann, [The Mounds], pp. 139, 148–160, maps pp. 100 and 138.
15. B. A. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 129.

16. Personal information by Barbara Mann.
17. B. A. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 19–22; and the Choctaw writer Kay Givens McGowan: "Weeping for the Lost Matriarchy," in: Barbara Alice Mann (ed.): *Daughters of Mother Earth. The Wisdom of Native American Women,* Westport CT 2006, Praeger Publishers; see also *Handbook of North American Indians*, Sturtevant/Ortiz (eds.), Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. 1979.
18. Coe/Snow/Benson, ibid., pp. 50–52, 64.
19. B. Mann, [The Mounds], pp. 117–124.
20. There is dispute about this with many Native scholars claiming that the actual collapse can be traced to the first Spaniard vagabonds under *de Soto.* (information by Barbara Mann)
21. Coe/ Snow/ Benson, ibid., pp. 60–61.
22. B. Mann, [The Mounds], pp. 161–167.
23. B. Mann: "They are the Souls of the Councils. The Iroquoian Model of Woman-Power," in: Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* Toronto 2009, Inanna Publications, York University, pp. 57–69. [Souls of the Councils].
24. Coe/ Snow/ Benson, ibid., pp. 60–61.
25. B. Mann, [Souls of the Councils], p. 3.
26. B. Mann, [Souls of the Councils], p. 4; [Gantowisas], p. 124.
27. B. Mann, [Souls of the Councils], p. 4; [Gantowisas], pp. 124–134.
28. B. Mann, [Souls of the Councils], p. 5; Barbara A. Mann/ Jerry L. Fields: "A Sign in the Sky: Dating the League of the Haudenosaunee," in: *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 21.2, Los Angeles 1997, University of California, pp.105–163.
29. Joseph Bruchac: "Otstungo. A Mohawk Village in 1491," in: *National Geographic*, vol. 180, no. 4, Washington 1991, National Geographic Society, pp. 70, 72–74; and information from Barbara Mann.
30. Iroquois people had a national identity through their fathers, and a clan identity through their mothers. Both identities were combined to create the symbolical kinship system of the Five Nations of the League, with the symbolical matriliny being more important. (information from Barbara Mann)
31. Lewis Henry Morgan, [Iroquois], vol. 1, pp. 3–31.
32. B. Mann, [Souls of the Councils], pp. 5–7; [Gantowisas], pp. 115–182.—This is the historical situation. Today, after the U.S. governmental meddling, people are trying to re-institute it. But the Men's Grand Council often usurps power today, because the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs allows it to. (information from Barbara Mann)—This situation is well known from other indigenous nations in North America, too.
33. B. Mann, [Souls of the Councils], pp. 4 and 7.
34. Irene Schumacher: *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Rolle der Frau. Das Beispiel der Irokesen,* Berlin 1972, Duncker & Humblot, pp. 43–47; Barbara Mann, [Souls of the Councils], p. 7; and personal communication.
35. I. Schumacher, ibid., p. 47.
36. The real term for soldier was "Young Man," and it was a position title. (information from Barbara Mann)
37. I. Schumacher, ibid., p. 99.
38. Morgan, [Iroquois], vol. 1, p. 330.

39. I. Schumacher, ibid., p. 80; Morgan, [Ancient Society], ibid., p. 100.
40. I. Schumacher, ibid., pp. 84, 103; Martha C. Randle: *Iroquois Women, Then and Now*, Bureau of American Ethnology (ed.), Bulletin no. 149, Washington D.C. 1951, Smithsonian Institution, pp. 167–180.
41. I. Schumacher, ibid., p. 104.
42. J. N. B. Hewitt: "Status of Woman in Iroquois Polity before 1784," in: *Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report for 1932*, Washington D.C. 1932, Smithsonian Institution, pp. 475–488. [Status]; I. Schumacher, ibid., pp. 41, 42.
43. Hewitt, [Status], ibidem; I. Schumacher, ibid., pp. 43, 44, 125.
44. "Sachem" is actually an Algonquin term that anthropologists have forced as the main word. (information from Barbara Mann)
45. Hewitt, [Status], ibidem; I. Schumacher, ibid., pp. 45, 46; B. Mann, [Souls of the Councils], p. 8.
46. Hewitt, [Status], ibidem; I. Schumacher, ibid., pp. 46.
47. Information from Barbara Mann.
48. J. N. B. Hewitt: "A Constitutional League of Peace in the Stone Age of America," in: *Smithsonian Institution, Annual Report for 1918*, Washington 1918, Smithsonian Institution, pp. 527—545. [League]; I. Schumacher, ibid., pp.85–93.
49. Hewitt, [Status], ibid., p. 481; Schumacher, ibid., pp. 45, 95, 98; J. W. Powell: "Wyandot Government: A Short Study of Tribal Society," in: *Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Smithsonian Institution 1,* Washington D.C.1879–1880, Smithsonian Institution, pp. 57–69; Sara H. Stites: *Economics of the Iroquois,* Diss. Monograph Series, vol.1, no. 3, Bryn Mawr College Monographs, Lancaster 1905, Press of the New Era Company; W. M. Beauchamp: "Iroquois Women," in: *The Journal of American Folklore*, no. 13, Boston 1900, American Folklore Society.
50. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 149–151.
51. Hewitt, [League], ibidem; Schuhmacher, ibid., pp. 86, 101.—Like other scholars before her, Barbara Mann again makes clear that the Constitution of the Iroquois League was the model for the democratic Constitution of the white founding fathers of the United States—although they unfortunately omitted rights for women, creating a democracy limited to white men. The strong, egalitarian position of women in Iroquois society later inspired the first feminist pioneers in the U.S., and gave them—and their European sisters—the impulse for their struggle for equal rights and a real democracy. [Souls of the Councils]
52. Bruchac, ibidem, p. 70; Schumacher, ibid., p.52; Beauchamp, ibid., S. 81—88; Bruce Trigger: *The Children of Aetaentsic. A History of the Huron People to 1660,* vol. 1, p. 54, Montreal-London 1976, McGill-Queen's University Press.
53. For the Native peoples it does not matter, if relationship is real or symbolic. The relatives are always supported, no matter how long ago the lineages outgrew the one longhouse, or how relationship is created in some other ways. (information from Barbara Mann)
54. B. Mann, [Souls of the Councils], pp. 4 and 8, and [Gantowisas], p. 205.
55. Lafiteau, ibidem; Morgan, [Iroquois], vol. 1; B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 184- 237, especially 224.
56. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 192,193; Bruchac, ibid., p. 70, 72–74.
57. Sara H. Stites, ibidem; Judith K. Brown: "Iroquois Women. An Ethnohistoric Note," in: Rayna

R. Reiter (ed.): *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York 1975, Monthly Review Press, pp. 235–251.

58. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], p. 202.
59. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 230, 236, 237.
60. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 230–237.
61. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], p. 299.
62. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 234, 235.
63. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 294, 295.
64. Horatio Hale (ed.): *The Iroquois Book of Rites*, Reprint Toronto 1978, Scholarly Reprint Series, University of Toronto Press, (first edition 1883); W. Lindig: *Geheimbünde und Männerbünde der Prärie- und Waldlandindianer Nordamerikas. Untersucht am Beispiel der Omaha und Irokesen*, Wiesbaden 1970, Steiner, pp. 226, 227; and „Totenfeste und Totenbund der Irokesen", in: *Tribus*, no. 17, Linden-Museum (ed.), Stuttgart, Germany, 1968, pp. 105108; Saskia Baier-Kleinow*: Frauenbünde und die Bedeutung und Rollen der Frauen im Zeremonienwesen der Irokesen*, Magisterarbeit, University of Freiburg, Germany, 1993.
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67. A. C. Parker: "Secret Medicine Societies of the Seneca," in: *American Anthropologist*, no. 11, Washington 1909, American Anthropological Association, pp. 161–185.
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69. See for the definition of Iroquoian spirituality: B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 324–328, and for the Feast of the Dead, pp. 329, 330.
70. Parker, ibidem; Lindig, ibidem.
71. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], p. 295.
72. Gertrude Kurath, [Dances], ibid., pp. 123, 125.
73. Information from Barbara Mann; and Baier-Kleinow, ibidem.
74. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 1–3, 32, 33.—According to Barbara Mann, there exist multiple versions of the Creation myth in the written records, which exhibit varying levels of authenticity. Each of the six nations of the Iroquois kept and keep their own peculiar versions. She gave a summary review of all the major Keepings in: "Creation," in: B. E. Johansen and B. A. Mann (eds.): *The Iroquois Encyclopedia,* Westport CT 1999, Greenwood Press. See also J. N. B. Hewitt. "Iroquoian Cosmology, Part 1," in: *Twenty-first Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1899–1900,* Washington D.C., 1903, Government Printing Office; and "Iroquoian Cosmology, Part 2," in: *Forty-third Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution,1925–1926,* Washington D.C. 1928, Government Printing Office. [Cosmology]
75. Information from Barbara Mann; and Hewitt, [Cosmology], Part 1, p. 469; see the Wyandot

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76. B. Mann, [Gantowisas], pp. 33–34, 59–60.
77. Information from Barbara Mann; and B. Mann, [Gantowisas], p. 34; and Hewitt, [Cosmology], Part 1.
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15

Matriarchy in South India

For India's ancient Divine Mothers, the Ammas, and for Bhagavati, Goddess of the Nayar

15.1 Matriarchy within the caste system

From the perspective of matriarchal forms of society, the histories of Northwest India and South India unfolded very differently from that of Northeast India. The matriarchal cultures of Northeast India (Khasi and others) are similar to the peoples of Tibet and East Asia, while Northwest India's history has been influenced by matriarchal cultures of Western Asia. The matriarchal cultures of Northwest India enjoyed a long continuity, until to the time of the patriarchal invaders, who also came from the northwest. The matriarchal history of South India has been shaped by these historical developments in the Northwest, and this influence has given it a unique profile. Because of this, matriarchal societies on the Indian subcontinent are handled separately in this work; that is, in their own cultural contexts, rather than in their coincidental inclusion in the modern Indian State.

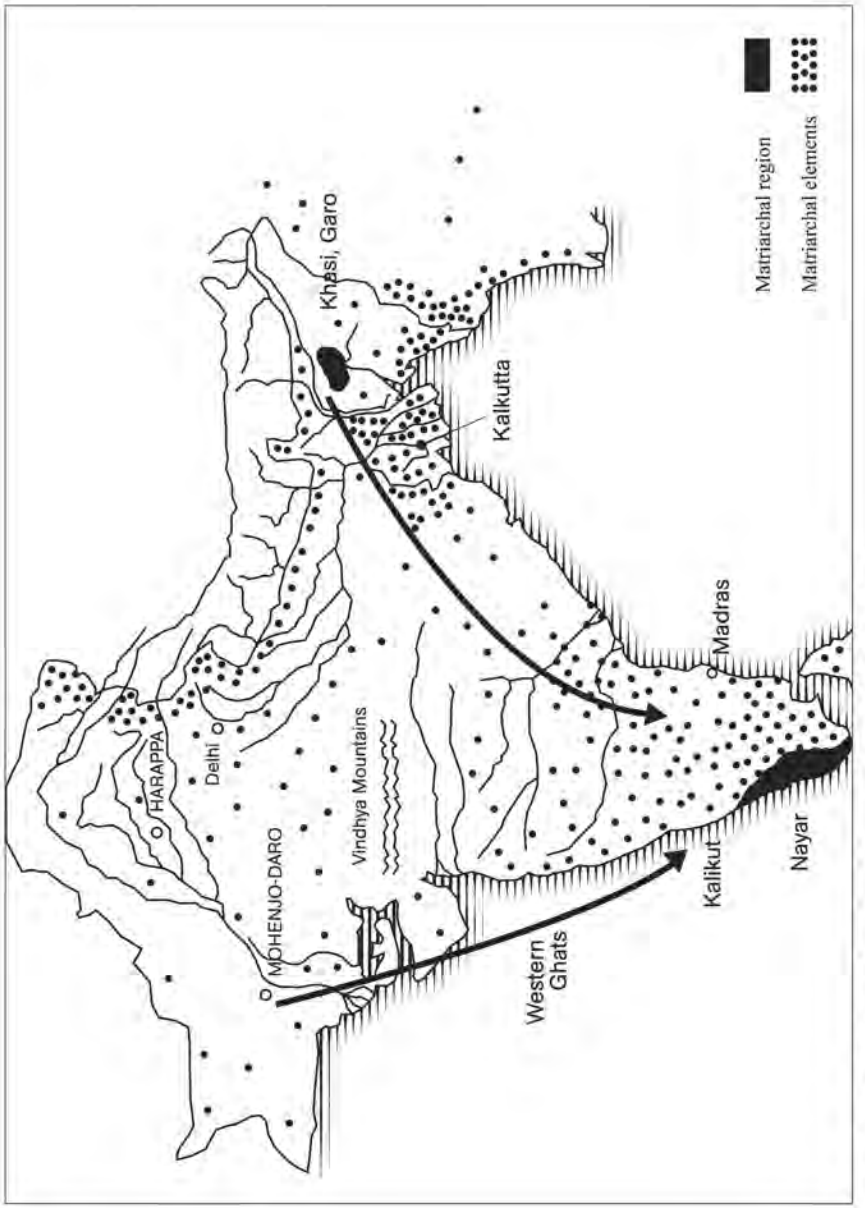
"Matriarchy within the caste system" is a contradiction in terms. Nowhere did patriarchal hierarchy permeate a society more completely than it did in India's Hindu caste system. Matriarchal societies, in contrast, don't have hierarchies of gen-

der, where one is above the other; nor do they have hierarchies of occupation, where a particular activity is more or less important than another one. But in patriarchal societies, both of these hierarchies are typical, and in Hindu India they developed into a way of life.

The paradox of "matriarchy within the caste system" can only be explained in the context of India's unique history. Like all Neolithic and Bronze-Age urban cultures, the ancient culture along the Indus River in Northwest India was based on matriarchy, and remained matriarchal throughout its long history. Many archaeologists consider it to be an offshoot of the closely related early Sumerian culture. Its most famous places are the centers of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa (see map 10). This celebrated Indus Culture was a highly developed agricultural and urban civilization, and its seafaring capabilities extended its reach far beyond the immediate region. This was true not only along the great Indus River, but also on the seacoasts, as far away as Mesopotamia. It flowered for more than a thousand years, until Northwest India was conquered by the patriarchal, Indo-European Aryans. They destroyed the Indus Culture and began to patriarchalize India; the hierarchical caste system sanctioned by religion goes back to the Aryans.

Everything that remains in today's India of pre-Indo-European, pre-patriarchal culture—some scattered indigenous groups, languages, and customs—are called "Dravidian." The term refers not to a people, or a tribal group, but to a form of civilization: that is, the matriarchal form. "Pre-Dravidians" is the designation for Paleolithic gatherers and hunters who preceded, then lived alongside of Neolithic agriculturists, and who remain in India in small groups to this day. "Pre-Dravidians" include, among others, the indigenous Wedda people, who have survived until recently in Indian and Sri Lankan rainforests, practising archaic forms of expression and ways of life. Their social organization was also matrilineal, but today they have nearly died out.[1]

Around 2000 B.C.E., Indo-European Aryans calling themselves "the nobles" came from the north. By 1750 B.C.E., by means of their superior iron weapons, they had destroyed all urban centers along the Indus. They virtually took over the far superior culture of their predecessors, but not their beliefs; instead, they developed their own, patriarchal, religion—Vedic Brahminism. Over thousands of years these teachings spread throughout all of India, as all the other peoples and religions were subordinated in the hierarchical caste system. The resulting conglomerate of many different religions and ways of life—all more or less saturated with patriarchal Vedic teachings—is now known as "Hinduism." In contrast to Brahminism, Hinduism is not a clearly defined religion, but rather a development of the diverse ways of life of various local peoples in India that have been integrated into the caste system



Map 10: Distribution of matriarchal regions and elements in India

along with their many different deities and beliefs.[2] Countless matriarchal elements from these cultures remain, even though often deformed under the pressure of Brahminism. This development is comparable to the missionizing of the Christian religion in Europe: with its cult of the Madonna and female saints, over the centuries it also took over ancient matriarchal deities and symbols, deforming them within a patriarchal framework.

After the destruction of the Indus Culture, many people with matriarchal traditions fled the aggressive Aryans by migrating south in their ships, seeking a new motherland. Along the west coast, refugees reached South India including, in its southwestern corner, the region of Kerala. Kerala forms the southern portion of the Malabar Coast, with its heavenly, luxurious landscapes, sharply cut off by the Western Ghats from the rest of the country. This region, with all its peoples and castes, is characterized by many matriarchal elements, including various degrees of matriliny or matriarchy, even today. The most well-known of these peoples are the *Nayar.*[3]

The refugees of the Indus Culture also fled into the Himalayas, and along the great river Ganges—whose tributaries nearly reach those of the Indus—and made their way to the Ganges Delta in East India. There they encountered other matriarchal cultures: those of the Tibetan-Burmese peoples from the east, whose origins lay in the Sino-Tibetan highlands at the headwaters of the great East Asian waterways. They spoke ancient Austro-Asian languages still used by the matriarchal Khasi and Garo peoples in the Khasi Mountains in East India, as well as by scattered groups in eastern central India (see chapter 2). They are the last outposts of the migration of matriarchal mountain cultures of East Asia, while the refugees of the Indus Culture are the last outposts of the migration of the matriarchal river cultures of West Asia. In India the two migratory cultural movements met.

It is remarkable that even today, the densest concentration of matriarchal cultural elements is in South India, at the Malabar Coast, in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka regions, as well as in East India in the Ganges Delta and the Khasi Hills (see map 10). It is no coincidence that precisely in these same places the largest and most important cities, Calcutta (Kali-kutta) in the Ganges delta and Calicut at the Malabar coast, bear the name of the ancient Goddess Kali, the pre-Indo-European deity who never became completely Hindu.

These historical circumstances are the background against which the important differences between the subcontinent's matriarchies, Khasi and Nayar, can be understood. In their mountainous, isolated retreats far to the east, Khasi people maintained their ethnicity and closed society for a very long time, preserving a rural matriarchy. Their traditions were only interrupted late, by 19th century British colonialism. In

contrast, the Nayar were victims of a catastrophic invasion of Northwest India more than three-thousand years ago. They were uprooted from their culture and deprived of the opportunity to migrate peacefully, and unmolested, to South India. These circumstances led them to develop—in contrast to the agricultural Khasi—a warrior culture, as this was the only way to survive the subsequent millennia.

In India, due to successive waves of invaders, the conflicts continued over the millennia: in the third century B.C.E. the patriarchal Greeks came, led by Alexander the Great, who left in the first century B.C.E. . Then the Scythians came from the north, who stayed until the fourth century C.E. . After that, Kushans invaded the country, establishing the Guptas dynasty, and in the fifth and sixth centuries C.E., Mongolian Huns arrived. Until the sixth century C.E., Northwest India was virtually a showplace for endless bloody conquest and destruction. Meanwhile, the Brahminism that developed with the Aryans and evolved into a rule of priesthood was pushed further south and east by successive waves of conquering peoples. Thus, more and more of formerly "Dravidian" areas came under Vedic Brahmin influence. East India (Bengal) as well as South India (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka) gradually became patriarchalized, and the caste system was imposed.

On the Malabar Coast, the Brahmins were from the beginning so dependent on the support of the warlike Nayar that they had to make an historic compromise with them: the Nayar took over the caste system, recognizing the Brahmin priests as the primary, and highest, caste. In turn, the Nayar became the second caste—that of kings and warriors—and were officially recognized by the Brahmins. This official sanction enabled them to maintain their matriarchal ways. It goes without saying that this unusual compromise was not effected by employing exclusively peaceful means, and it generated quite an array of social contradictions and tensions.

In any case, this unique alliance of priests living patriarchally, and kings and warriors living matriarchally, was able to survive the coming of Islam. From the 11th to the 18th century, Muslim Turkish peoples created a huge empire on Indian soil, ruled by the powerful Mogul emperors. Only South India and Sri Lanka remained completely free of the influence of Islam. After a short rule of Tamil kings, the Nayar formed their own local kingdoms.

All these enemies had entered overland, from the north and northwest, into India, so for them, the journey—through dense rainforests all the way to South India—was a very long one. But the last and most dangerous enemies, the Europeans, came by sea. After the first contact was made by Vasco da Gama in 1498, the fertile Malabar Coast—with its variety of spices, especially pepper—became the most desirable trade destination for the Portuguese, Dutch and French, who competed ruthlessly with one another. Finally the English came, in their

colonising sweep of the world, and violently subdued the entire subcontinent. By around 1800 even Nayar warriors, among the toughest resistors, were sent home disarmed, their armies dissolved. This situation undermined remaining matriarchal patterns, as did colonization, which followed. With the insistence on the British educational system and its use of English, and, after independence in 1949, with the onset industrialization, the old Nayar ways of life came to an end.

15.2 Nayar women and men

The first foreign travelers, who have arrived successively on the Malabar Coast ever since Marco Polo, have long been amazed by its people. For one thing, they were struck by the great beauty and sexual freedom of Nayar women. Their elegance, cleanliness, intelligence, high self-esteem, and progressive outlook were celebrated by every eye-witness account, and in South Indian literature their beauty was legendary. Equally admired was the courage of Nayar men. The most remarkable thing about Nayar culture seems to have been the co-existence of a free, matriarchal way of life with the very straight-laced patriarchal Hinduism practiced by Brahmins. Foreign travelers came from every corner of the world: Europe, Arabia, Persia, China, because the kings of Calicut and other coastal cities pursued an array of foreign overseas trade relationships, while the rest of India, from which they were geographically cut off, did not particularly interest them.

Foreign reports all concluded that there were obviously no tailors on the Malabar Coast, for everyone walked around nearly naked and barefoot, except for a white cloth around their hips. Even the kings dressed this way, although their cloths were of silk, and they wore gold jewellery around their necks, while young slaves held parasols—the mark of highest status—above them. A commentator tells of the Queen of Quilon: she had an entourage of 700 officers and soldiers, all dressed Malabar-style; she too was dressed only in a white cloth around her waist. Heavy ornaments weighted down her ears, and around her neck, arms and legs she wore jewels of gold and precious stones. Noble Nayar women gathered at the palace dressed like the queen: apart from the hip cloth they wore nothing but jewelry, which hung from their ears to their shoulders and circled their arms from the elbows upwards, while their ankles were bejewelled with gold bands, pearls and precious stones; and around their hips they wore jewelled belts of great value. Their breasts were always bare, adorned only with sandalwood perfume and sometimes a garland of flowers. When a man received the garland from a woman it meant, according to an old custom, that he was her chosen one.[4] Women's shining black hair, dressed with coconut oil, fell down

their backs nearly to the floor, but usually they wore it tied up in a knot and decorated with flowers. They went around like this in public, walking with natural dignity, even at men's gatherings, where their beauty was esteemed and admired. No honorable woman would go around with covered breasts.

Minimal clothing was normal for women and men of all castes. A hip cloth, worn without any jewelry and rarely longer than knee length, marked the wearer's caste status by its length. Only Brahmin women veiled themselves, wrapped in a skirt, upper garment and a long scarf around the head and shoulders. To protect them from the masculine gaze, they were also authorized to have a parasol, symbol of the highest caste. Today differences in dress have disappeared, and all women cover themselves "properly."[5]

As for Nayar men, called the "noble warriors of Malabar," witnesses reported that these men were quite proud, and considered work to be beneath them. It was said that they never laid down their arms, and were afraid of nothing. On Nayar estates, the agrarian work was done by lower caste Pulayan and Parayan—the Nayars' slaves and bondspeople. But ordinary Nayar men did pursue various occupations: they were teachers, specialists in funeral rites, temple musicians, barbers, launderers, oil pressers, etc., and over the last several centuries, there a hierarchy has existed among Nayars as well. Regarding the nobles of Nayar society, the reports indicate that men of this class, trained in warfare, patrolled the roads, holding their unsheathed swords as naturally as pilgrims hold walking sticks. Some carried swords on their backs, like any other burden, the handle stuck in a backpack while the glittering naked blade rose above their shoulders.[6]

Favorite mottoes of Nayar warriors were: "Honor and gallantry! My sword and my mistress! Love and battle!" They were independent men, not bound by any family alliances. It was women who looked after the households and estates and communal property, and lived there following matrilinear and matrilocal customs; as mistresses in the clan house they were independent. When they turned seven years old, each girl and boy entered public sports schools, where they received physical training, particularly in wrestling; they also learned to read and write. This explains why Nayar educational levels continue to be very high. At the age of 11, girls left sports schools and began to work in the house, while boys began to learn different professional skills and weaponry. Spear, bow and arrow, sword and shield: these were the traditional weapons, and after contact with the Europeans they mastered the use of guns and cannon.

Every Nayar served for some time in the army, and a large number of Nayar men, who were especially good at soldiering, made a career of it. Kings and local chiefs could call them to arms at any time, and within a short time could raise an

army of thousands of warriors. They went into battle as lightly clothed as in everyday life; with neither armor nor helmets. They relied on their extraordinary manoeuvrability and accuracy, bending and turning as if they had no bones. Their shooting was as accurate as the most disciplined European troops. They fought on foot, for cavalry was unknown to them. They did not march in organised squads, but skirmished in loosely organised groups. With a little pressure from the enemy they engaged in tactical escapes, only to immediately launch an attack from the opposite side; they threw their spears backwards when necessary. When enemy pressure was more intense, and the danger higher, they stayed on the offensive and never gave up. In hand-to-hand combat they were extremely dangerous. According to descriptions by 16th century Europeans, some of whom saw the Nayar as the finest warriors in the world.[7]

Before the British came, forcing them into bloody, exhausting wars of destruction, Nayar warriors led a rather leisurely existence in the manner of medieval knights. They followed a high code of honor, and to violate it meant the greatest ignominy. A fight affected only the fighters; for example, a farmer could peacefully tend his crops, or women could go for water, and no aggression would be directed at them. Moreover, there could be no fighting at night, or during the months of the May-September monsoon rains. But at other times of the year, the honor to be gained from fighting was highly sought after, even in peaceful time; absent a foreign enemy, the minor Nayar kings skirmished with each other. The two feuding parties would meet in the morning, they bathed together, told stories and jokes, shared betel leaves for chewing—until the drums called them into the battle. Then they stood opposite each other in rows: swordsmen, spear throwers and archers plunged into bloody hand-to-hand fighting. At sunset the battle ended abruptly, and all the survivors bathed together once more. Whichever side had more soldiers at the end won, since a king's power depended on how many warriors he had. A victor never annexed land, but could exact tribute.[8]

During the monsoons, Nayar warriors stayed at home. To keep their fighting temperaments from leading to conflict, they not only practised fighting techniques in the sports schools, but also participated in festive skill contests sponsored by local kings. In addition, duels between representatives of enemy clans were held, usually to avenge the offended honor of their own clanswomen. In earlier times this had led to devastating blood feuds, so the Nayar passed a law stipulating that duels could only be fought 10 or 12 years after the original conflict; this allowed everyone plenty of time to consider the matter and to prepare.[9]

Nayar men's war-loving way of life is a very ancient habit rather than a recent development. For evidence we have only to look at their custom of fighting on foot,

without horses. In matriarchal Indus Culture horses were unknown; instead, they had cattle—sacred cows and bulls. Meanwhile all northern invaders, from Indo-European Aryans to Mongols, used horses as weapons. Indus culture was a sophisticated, well-organised society; its peoples were in a position to develop a warrior culture to defend themselves against the long-term Aryan invasions.

Besides their methods of warfare, there are other indications that the Nayar descended from the Indus culture. Highly civilised, the Indus Culture contrasted sharply with patriarchal Aryan culture, although Vedic Brahminism subsequently absorbed—and distorted—every element of the Indus Culture. Similarities between Nayar and Indus Culture, as well as differences between them and Indo-European Aryans, as they were at first contact, follow:[10]

Aryans had a fairly basic level of culture. They were warriors, shepherds and farmers living in simple earth dwellings roofed with straw and bamboo. In contrast, the Indus Culture had cities with excellent water systems, sewer systems and ritual baths that ensured a high standard of hygiene. In the same way, noble Nayar lived in comfortable landowner villas with large inner courtyards and sewer systems. They took daily baths in their household cultic basins, cisterns, and ponds, and had a high standard of cleanliness.

For their part, Aryans had innovative weapons made of iron, and used horses. Iron weapons and horses were unknown in the Indus Culture. Likewise, Nayar never used horses; iron was—and still is—considered offensive to the house deity, the snake. No iron knives, axes or shovels could be used near the snake.[11]

The tiger and the elephant had a large role in the Indus Culture, though they were unknown to the Aryans. In Nayar life, too, processions of festively-decorated elephants were regular events. The tiger is a sacred animal for them, for it carries the goddess Durga on its back. Elephant riding is a high-caste privilege; that is, a privilege of noble Nayar.

In the Vedic religion of the Aryans, woman are scarcely mentioned, although their position was not yet so disappointingly low as it was to become in later Brahminism. The mother goddess is not portrayed with her son or consort. In the Indus Culture, however, the great mother goddess Shakti Kali and her consort, Shiva, are central figures, with the female element being more important than that of the male. In Nayar religion, too, the great mother goddess, called Bhagavati or Bahdrakali, is central.

In the Aryans' Vedic religion there are no effigies. The religion of the Indus Culture, in contrast, is full of images that were later taken over by Hinduism. These artistic renderings often presented the nude body, particularly the female body, where the breasts were uncovered and the body was decorated with jewelry. This

is also the traditional costume of Nayar women, and the particular variations of their jewelry are unequalled anywhere in South India.[12]

The cult of the "yoni-lingam," the female-male sexual symbol, wrongly referred to as a "phallus cult," was widespread in Indus Culture. The Aryans had no knowledge of it, and abhorred it when they encountered it. The Yoni-Lingam cult is common in all of South India, but especially in areas that have a matriarchal character.

In contrast, the Aryans worshipped male gods, particularly fire gods. These were not worshiped by people in the Indus Culture, whose funeral rites were based on earth burial, not burning. Similarly, Nayar do not worship fire gods; instead, they have a snake worshipping cult, the snake being associated with water. They didn't practice cremation until Brahminism forced it on them.

Lavish, overcrowded temples of the type that became common in Hinduism did not exist in the Indus Culture. Instead, this culture had very beautiful residences, where various deities were worshipped in special rooms. Neither did the Nayar build temples in earlier times, but instead practised ancestor worship and veneration of household deities in their own homes. They have little gold and silver statues representing their male and female ancestors—similar figures have turned up in the Indus excavations. The snake cult was practised in a sacred grove inside the boundaries of the property. Today the Nayar have Hindu-style temples for their goddess Bhagavati.

In Nayar culture all these characteristics which point directly to the Indus Culture—including matriarchal social patterns—have largely survived. This provides evidence for the assumption that, at the point when their resistance against the Indo-Europeans proved futile, the people of the Indus culture left their cities on the Indus; and many made their way in small survival-based seafaring groups to South India. They came as refugees, and as the warriors most of them had become.

15.3 Nayar, Pulayan and Parayan

At first, the Nayar settled on the Malabar Coast in the southwest, where all their subsequently-built royal cities are located. Then they pushed on into the interior between the coast and the mountains, where they built their homes and rural villas, each of the latter on its own large piece of land.

But this didn't happen without resistance by the peoples who already lived there, the *Pulayan* and the *Parayan.* As horticultural and agricultural peoples, they were tied to the land and couldn't evade their conquerors the way foraging peoples in the highland forests had done—by just moving on. The various groups of

Pulayan and Parayan peoples, with their older forms of matriarchy, had lived in this region for millennia before the Nayar arrived. Coming as they did from a highly sophisticated urban culture, and being accustomed to the ways of war, the Nayar were able to subjugate these peoples, making them slaves and bondspeople. Thus a contradictory—and historically rare—structure developed: a war-like matriarchy, superimposed over an ancient agrarian matriarchy, where even today each layer has retained its matriarchal character. But this overlay did not yet constitute a strict hierarchical caste system, which was brought in more than 1000 years later by Aryan Brahmins, with their patriarchal religion. This development intensified the Nayar's ambiguous social situation.

Who were these peoples subjugated by the Nayar? Physically the Pulayan people are small in stature, are rather dark-skinned, and are distantly related to the Weddas, the matrilineal first people of India. They had tools suggestive of the very first horticulture in Southeast Asia: not yet made of stone, these were tools of bamboo. Their clans and tribes—even up to the present day—are organized according to purely matrilineal principles associated with matrilocality, girls' puberty rites, sexual freedom of women, visiting marriage, and burial in the earth. After the Nayar invasion, the Pulayan custom of inheritance through the female line was no longer relevant since, now living as a community of slaves, they no longer owned any land to pass on to their descendants. However, they continue to worship the "Ammas," a combination of first mothers, female ancestors, and village goddesses rolled into one. They have also absorbed the Nayar deities Bhagavati and Kali as Great Goddesses, whom Pulayan women enthusiastically honor with their dances.[13]

The Parayan people, also known as *Holeya*, are much more numerous than the Pulayan, and their agriculture is very well developed. They have a matriarchal social order similar to that of the Khasi. Ever since the arrival of Hindu Brahmins, more and more patriarchal elements have been imposed on the Parayan, who were punished for any practices that deviated from the Hindu norm. After introduction of the caste system, these people became *pariahs,* (from *parayan*), the "untouchable" poor, who were the most oppressed caste of all. For more than two thousand years, they endured all the humiliations the caste system could inflict on them. They were scorned by all other castes, even by the Pulayan. They were considered to be so "unclean" that they were forbidden to raise their eyes: even the briefest glance was supposedly polluting. They were not allowed to speak to anyone without covering their mouths, nor could they walk on public paths, as even their footprints might pollute members of a higher caste. They were not permitted to use Hindu fountains and could not worship at Hindu temples. They were the Nayar's bondspeople, servants and workers, and did the most menial jobs.

Indeed, the reason the Parayan were kept so far down was that they were more numerous, and possessed a more developed matriarchal culture than the Pulayan did. This also enabled them to mount a fiercer resistance, and as they became more dangerous, they were even more intensively suppressed than the Pulayan were. But their situation only got this bad after the Hindu caste system was introduced, as can be seen from the fact that they still maintain some of the privileges they enjoyed earlier under their Nayar masters. They live in their own villages, far from the villas of the Nayar, and are relatively independent. When Brahmins come into their villages, it is not uncommon for the inhabitants to beat them fiercely. They have their own village chiefs and priests, the "Velluvan," who are shamans and healers. They also worship numerous "Ammas," in addition to their main goddess, Athal, and hold buffalo races dedicated to Bhagavati. On the occasion of his marriage, a Parayan groom may ride his Nayar master's elephant, once in his life allowed to ride like a king. A Parayan "Velluvan" is chosen annually to be ceremonially betrothed to the statue of the goddess Sriperumbudur. In this ceremonial role, Parayan priests would even be brought by Nayar kings to their courts. But on the other hand, if a Parayan crossed a Nayar warrior's path against the latter's will, the Nayar would unceremoniously cut off his head.[14]

The Parayan have a very interesting practice: like the Khasi, they still build megaliths in the form of low temples made of large stones, miniature dolmen (graves) to memorialise the ancestors, and menhirs (standing stones) for the dead who held a certain status in life. The "Ammas" are also represented by large stones. At celebrations dedicated to the female and male ancestors, these stones are worshipped, a sacrificial rooster or male goat beheaded. In places where Parayan live, examples of megalith culture abound: rows of menhirs, stone circles, and dolmen monuments. This suggests that they are the southwestern-most extension of the Khasi-type mountain-dwelling culture that migrated from East Asia to India. Linguistic studies show that bearers of the matriarchal mountain culture of East Asia once lived in Central India as well (*Munda* people); traces of their Austro-Asian language are still found in this region. Moreover, all of central India is dotted with examples of megalithic culture.[15]

Pulayan, Parayan and Nayar peoples demonstrate certain historical phases of matriarchy, with the Pulayan representing the most basic, and the Nayar the most sophisticated.[16] Pulayan-type matriarchy, the earliest horticulture, may be assumed to have been spread by scattered groups settling over the Indian subcontinent (early matriarchal phase). What followed was the agricultural-megalithic matriarchy from the east related to the Parayan (East-Asian peoples), which was of a different type and discretely co-existed with the Pulayan cultures across India, without

overlapping (later matriarchal phase). In two regions of the subcontinent, the Ganges Delta (Bengal) and the Malabar Coast (Kerala), these co-existent cultures clashed with that of migrants from the west, who brought with them the urban, matriarchal social order from the Indus Culture. This phase was later followed by Aryan conquest and patriarchal Brahminism. In the face of this and other invasions, the agrarian-megalithic matriarchal peoples in the Ganges Delta retreated into the mountains (Khasi Hills, Himalayas). But on the Malabar Coast, where there was no escape, these matriarchal forms of social organization were superimposed hierarchically—which does not otherwise happen in matriarchies.

15.4 Nayar social organization

In traditional Nayar life, women were in charge of the clan houses and of the villas of the estates, and each clan mother was the mistress of her clan house. These clan houses and villas were located in beautiful palm groves, surrounded by canals and ponds, with plumbing in the kitchens, and encircled by low walls. Each clan house was an economic unit and largely independent; the clan land was owned communally, with emphasis on the women, and it was collectively passed down through the female line, directly from mothers to daughters. But no noble Nayar woman or man would lower themselves to work their own land, for this kind of work would be beneath their dignity. Major Nayar landholders owned entire villages, while Nayar tenants lived on parcels of those properties. They in turn had lower caste sub-tenants, who did manual labour in the fields, or Parayan bondspeople as unfree serfs for farm work. Nayar craftspeople also lived in the villages owned by the landholders, providing their services to the big clan houses.[17]

In each Nayar clan house lived a distinct clan, or lineage of a clan—a "taravatu." This group descended from a common female ancestor and practised matriliny and matrilineal succession, or "Marumakkattayam." Their lifestyle was strictly matrilocal: daughters and sons continued to live in the mother's house. However, many adult men who were capable of fighting were absent the better part of the year; during this military service they were looked after by their kings and feudal lords. The male side of the clan would then be represented by the eldest man left at home. Traditionally he was the mother's brother, his title was "karanavan," or "male head of the household." As such he was charged with the management of the clan land or of the estate and, as a member of the neighborhood council, represented the clan in outside matters. In inside clan matters, the eldest woman, the clan mother, was in charge. The ordinary Nayar clan had no chief; the eldest man exercised no authority over the lineage. The clan mother and the mother's brother, or karana-

van, stood together as equals and shared the daily running of clan affairs. For landlord clans, and certainly for royal clans, this was otherwise: the higher the rank and the greater the power the clan held, the more hierarchical they were, which worked to the advantage of the eldest man.[18]

Women and men lived in separate areas of the clan house, which was constructed with spacious buildings around a large rectangular central courtyard. Women and children moved freely throughout the whole house, living in the larger part; this was on the upper floor of the buildings along two sides of the inner courtyard, with windows facing inwards. Men lived on the upper floor of just one side of the courtyard, with windows facing outwards; this prevented them from observing and monitoring women on the courtyard side, and enabled them to pay attention to what was going on outside the house. The fourth side contained the large kitchen and work rooms. The karanavan lived alone in the upper storey of the storehouse, and was usually in contact only with the visiting karanavans of other clans.[19] Up here he oversaw the levies brought in by the Nayar tenant farmers and serfs, whose work he directed; he also monitored the revenues of clan members living in town, which were completely delivered to him. Monthly or annually he handed over a part to the clan mother, who had custody of the work spaces, rationing out the daily needs to the kitchen. She directed women's work in the kitchen and gardens, as well as the occasional harvest help in the fields. The education of girls, and domestic ancestor rituals were also in her hands. The ancestors—deceased clan mothers and karanavans—were represented by gold and silver figurines; housed in a special room, they were given food offerings every day.[20]

A good karanavan ought to be careful and just. One of his most delightful and important duties was to organize the traditional rituals and feasts for females of his lineage. His personal ambition was channelled toward putting on opulent feats for clan members, tenants, village service providers and bondspeople. However, he consulted clan members about any large give-aways of communal goods. Older karanavans would proudly count off celebrations they had produced, for this is how they maintained their honor: initiation celebrations for the girls, first menstruation festivals for girls, and funeral and burial celebrations for the dead, particularly for dead clan mothers. Traditionally, the Nayar did not have any other kind of family celebrations.[21] With these customs, we again can see the clear principles of gift giving intrinsic to the matriarchal economy.

When men and youths were not away in military service, and were back at home, they were kept in line by the karanavan. They held him in awe, treating him formally and with great respect: they didn't dare contradict him. On the other hand the clan mother, though she held authority over women and children, exercised her

prerogatives in a much closer, friendly way. If the male representative of the clan was her younger brother, or her son, then she was virtually the head of the household and the clan, and was addressed as "karanavatti," or "female head of household."[22] She reviewed and monitored the entire household economy, advising him in all transactions that related to the outside world. But if he was the clan mother's older brother or her uncle, the separation of duties would be strictly adhered to—this was to make sure the karanavan could not become too powerful.[23] In earlier times, before the karanavan insisted on a more significant role, the clan mother always governed the clan house alone, with the eldest daughter as her "prime minister." All the brothers and sons, when at home, took orders from these two women.[24]

Unlike the situation in a patriarchal Brahmin household, with its ongoing tension between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law, Nayar women expressed a consistent solidarity. Throughout their lives, the mother was the primary teacher and moral authority for the daughters. She always stood up for her daughters in relation to the karanavan, and even in relation to her own sons, while the daughters defended the mother against outside threats from other women, and sisters always stuck together. The clan mother proudly distributed clan jewels, and helped to adorn and coif her daughters, whose beauty was her personal concern, and she taught them the arts of love. The young women often went out to bathe in the village pond, bent on making new conquests. While bathing they publicly displayed themselves in their full beauty. The men, enraptured by this, came to visit the women's rooms at night, and stayed only until morning—in the typical visiting marriage pattern. In the mother's house, every marriageable daughter had her own room and could entertain whom she liked. When a woman became pregnant, or gave birth, her mother was her most important companion. As long as the young women were occupied with love and pregnancies, the mother took over the education of her grandchildren. She taught them about their clan history and religion, while they obeyed her voluntarily and happily. Women had the most authority after menopause: they advised their younger brothers and sons, went wherever they pleased in the villages, and undertook long pilgrimages. When the clan mother died, the eldest daughter and the eldest son presided over the funeral ceremonies and the ancestor sacrifices.

Relationships among men of the clan were significantly more formal and distant. They maintained a hierarchical code, where age determined rank, and this feudal hierarchy was also reflected in the home. The strongest emotional ties were those of the son to the mother, whom he worshipped all his life. She provided for all his comforts, and in all personal and clan matters gave him her advice, which he fol-

lowed. When he returned to the clan house after a long absence, he greeted his mother first, and put himself at her disposal. For her sake, he took up his sword against all who would harm his sisters, their children and all his matrilineal relatives. The sisters often regarded their brother as their "hero" and adored him. His relationship to a spouse had the lowest priority for him, since she was a clan outsider, and he visited her only at night. It would not do for a male spouse to hang around too long—or even worse, to eat—in a "foreign" clan house.

The karanavan had formal authority over his sisters' sons, or nephews. He funded their education and provided for their undertakings. If they committed some public transgression, he was liable for them to the extent of the clan's entire wealth. In return he expected his nephews' total obedience; if they acted improperly towards him, he would refuse to feed them. This relationship was thus characterised by pressure, counter-pressure and subliminal rivalry.[25]

15.5 Nayar festivals and religion

Traditional Nayar clan festivals revolved almost completely around women. This would begin at birth: parents wished for girls more than for boys, since as adult women they would then carry on the matriliny. But a female birth was also lucky in itself, even without thinking of her future fertility. A dip of longer duration in female births was seen as a crisis, and could lead to the karanavan of the house feeling obliged to undertake a difficult pilgrimage. This reflected his religious and moral duty toward the clan, and he did everything he could so that the blessing of the sanctuary deities would rain down upon the women of his clan.[26]

The puberty festival for girls (there was no comparable ceremony for boys) was the most elaborate, luxurious and expensive of all the Nayar feasts. Every ten to twelve years the "Talikettu-kalyanam," or "Tali ceremony," was held; it was the sacred initiation celebration for all the girls' before the first menstruation. For each girl it was a symbolic engagement with a ritual groom, as preparation for erotic love and becoming an adult woman. Traditionally, this symbolic groom was a male cross cousin, a boy from a distant household of the same clan, one who would therefore have been, in real life, taboo (clan exogamy). The Tali ceremony was celebrated with great pageantry lasting for days. All of the matrilineal relatives attended the event, for celebrating the Tali ceremony in grand style was a matter of prestige for the girls' clan. The festivities included banquets, elephant rides, and processions of warriors with swords and shields; the only other time they all gathered was at funerals. The girls' initiation ceremonies were highly significant for the Nayar, as for all Dravidian peoples of India; it expressed the community's joy in its female offspring. Prayers were

addressed to the goddess Bhagavati, in which the girls were described as her children, and the goddess was asked to protect them and their kin from diseases and troubles.

The high point of the celebration occurred when each boy tied the golden tali ornament on his ritual bride. Then the couples would be left alone in individual rooms where the girls were (symbolically) deflowered, by virtue of the eldest girl substituting for the rest. Because it is fertility, not virginity, which is the treasured quality in matriarchal cultures. Each pair took a ceremonial bath of purification at the close of the celebration, and after this, the ritual grooms were sent off with a gift. They had no further claims on each other. (In some cases the tali was tied on the girl by her mother or elder sister, or a shaman of the goddess). The Tali ceremony symbolized the transition of the girls into adulthood. After the tali tying had happened, the ornament had no further significance whatsoever and was usually taken off or lost after a few days.[27]

The Tali festival was followed later by the "Tirantukuli," or first menstruation celebration, which also was a sacred event. The happy cries of the female relatives announced this event, and the girl was secluded in a flower-bedecked room. She received a ritual mirror, symbol of the moon, because her own cycle would exactly reflect the moon's. The relatives would bring her presents of new clothes, and again there was ceremonial bathing, processions, music and a banquet for the (mostly female) guests. This menarche ritual again was public and celebrated on a grand scale, if the girl's matrilineage could afford it. Her coming of age bestowed fertility, prosperity and abundance upon her clan. The rites ensure that the girl was treated as an auspicious embodiment of Bhagavati, for she was honored as a goddess at this feast. The spirit of Bhagavati—who also is honored as menstruating goddess—flew towards the human female, conferring new power, sacredness and auspiciousness upon her. [28]

The third part of the transition of a girl into adulthood would be union with a suitable male. She now began her life of erotic activity and giving birth. She could choose husbands—as many, and as often, as she liked. Only the first husband had to be approved by her mother and the karanavan, and this union was celebrated with a feast and a mutual gift giving between the two clans. This rite, called "Sambandham," was not performed on a grand scale, because it was not considered to be a sacrament. It was a brief, simple ceremony, usually performed late in the evening, and was regarded as a secular contract, which might be terminated at the will of the parties concerned.

This series of celebrations emphasizes the Nayar matriliny, underlining that the woman belongs to her matriline and remains there. From this follows the relative unimportance of both the wedding ceremony and the husband—who is not a member of the matriline. [29]

After the Sambandham rite, the woman would be free from then on to engage in polyandry.[30] As a rule, a Nayar woman would have from three to twelve husbands—not serially, but simultaneously, in a polyandrous way of life. Her husbands could be a group of brothers, as in Tibet, but could also be unrelated men.[31] The only taboo was that she not choose a man from a lower caste; the punishment for this insult to her clan was death. Men, too, had several wives simultaneously, and when they were away for military service, wherever they happened to be they could be sure of finding a night's shelter and love with Nayar women. In this way, women could have spontaneous lovers in between their regular husbands. When a man slept in a woman's room, he lay his weapon down on the threshold. This was a sign to another husband that he would have to be patient, or else go find another wife to sleep with. Any type of relationship could be unceremoniously ended. The husbands had no responsibility for the children, as the latter were well cared for within their mother's clan.[32] This was the foundation for the happy relationships between the sexes in traditional Nayar society. Since sexual love was not influenced by the idea of possessiveness, no noticeable social practices arose based on ownership, as is customary in patriarchal societies.

However, it was not the relationship to her spouses that was most important to a Nayar women, for these relationships were fleeting, and often changed. Rather, the greatest importance was accorded the relationship between sister and brother. In this way the poles of woman and man are paired not as husband and wife, but as sister and brother. This profound, lifelong relationship had its own ritual, called "Tulaganapati," in which the sister, with both hands full of newly harvested rice—symbol of abundance—filled her brother's outstretched cloth pouch three times, bestowing her blessing on him. In this way, she presents him with her magical fertility and life force, and he worships her like a goddess.[33]

Even under the cloak of Brahmin patriarchalization, Nayar religion still exhibits many matriarchal characteristics. Like the Nambutiri Brahmins in Kerala, Nayar men were occupied with frequent purification baths and daily prayers in the public temple, where women did not go. Instead, the house religion, much more ancient than that of the public temple religion, was in women's hands. This religion included elements of popular religiosity quite different from the abstract religion practised by Brahmins and adopted by Nayar men.

Worship of female and male ancestors played a significant role in the home, and was directly related to belief in rebirth. The corpses of the dead were burned in the large courtyard, so that the ancestral spirit could remain in the home. At the funeral celebrations, led by women, men dressed in women's clothes.[34] A rooster

or male goat was sacrificed and cut up. Represented by a gold or silver figurine placed in a special room, the male or female ancestors were immortalised; women brought them food every day. At each new moon a rooster would be slaughtered for the dead. It is an old form of blood sacrifice that would be utterly unthinkable in Brahminism, with its anti-matriarchal vegetarianism. This form of sacrifice is considered "impure," and by association the whole clan is considered "polluted" for several days after a Nayar funeral.[35]

The home cult of the snake is of particular interest; it is very ancient and is characteristic of the matriarchal agrarian cultures of East Asia as well as for the matriarchal urban cultures of Western Asia, Egypt and Crete. The snake, particularly the cobra, was considered divine; it represents the power of Bhumi Devi, or Mother Earth. Mother Earth was worshiped at the "Uccaral" festival held after the harvest. Snakes are also associated with the ancient goddesses Kali and Bhagavati, who bring—and cure—contagious diseases.[36] Every farmhouse had a "Nagakotta," or circular grove for snakes, at the south-west corner of its clan garden. Trees, thick bushes and medicinal herbs grew there, and in the center there was a shrine with images of the snake deities. These groves were often ancient. Neither domestic animals, nor children, nor strangers were permitted to set foot in them, and no iron tools—which were associated with men's affairs—could be brought near them, for to do so would be to insult the snake deities. In groves like this, there lived hundreds of snakes, especially cobras, in their holes. As the main house deity they brought good luck and prosperity, or sickness and death; their behavior was closely watched in order to make prophecies about the future. If they came out of their holes, or worse, out of the sacred grove, it was a bad omen.

Ceremonial snake feeding was performed daily by the eldest woman, who lived alone and functioned as house priestess. Every day she washed the Snake Queen and Snake King; mornings she fed them milk and fruit, evenings cooked rice, and for special events they had cake. The adoration and feeding made the snakes as tame as pets; they would never harm a human. Certain households, and indeed even villages, were alive with snakes: highly esteemed, they proliferated. But there were no cases of snakebite, as people handled them very gently. To kill a cobra, or any snake was considered a deadly sin. If ever this should happen, the snake would be given all the honors of a funeral, just like a person.

In domestic snake celebrations women also played the most important role. Sometimes these festivals were large, depending on the size of the estate, with up to five thousand people gathering and feasting. Processions took place, people sang and oil lamps burned, as the eldest woman, the clan priestess, held up effigies of snake deities. Women appeased the spirits of the snake deities, summoning them

with "mantras," or magic spells; women fell into a trance as snake spirits manifested themselves through women's bodies. Gyrating and trembling, they spoke as prophetic oracles of the deities. When women were possessed by these spirits, it was seen as a good omen for the clan; if only a few women, or none at all, were possessed on any given occasion, it was seen as a very bad sign. The ceremony lasts until the deity communicates something through a woman.[37] These are shaman practices and indicate a connection to archaic times, when women acted as shamans for the family, clan and village.

There are also ancient matriarchal rituals hidden within the public temple celebrations for the goddess Bhagavati.[38] These celebrations were carried out exclusively by Nayar men, since the temples—notwithstanding the lower-level Brahmins who officiated there—belonged to them. Goddess temples are characteristic of the Nayar, while Nambutiri Brahmins worship only male gods, such as Vishnu and Shiva, in their temples. The great Bhagavati festival lasted seven days and was celebrated with great ceremony and festivities. The Nayar symbol for the goddess, a sword with red flowers wound around it, was paraded around the town or village with a magnificent procession of bejewelled, gold-encrusted elephants, accompanied by Nayar warriors drumming. Every day the splendor increased, so that on the seventh day there were eight bejewelled elephants and at least fifty drummers. The non-Brahmin element of this celebration was animal sacrifice. On each day of the festival during the processions, roosters would have their heads chopped off by masked, so-called "devil dancers," whose leader would fall into a trance in front of the goddess and utter prophecies. Here, too, we see traces of the old shaman practices; these "devil dancers" might once have been the indigenous, independent Nayar priests. At the end of the festival well-to-do Nayar landlords donated male goats, and sometimes a buffalo, which would be taken at night, in strictest secrecy, to a dark passage of the temple and beheaded with a single stroke of a copper sword. The man who performed this act was, again, an indigenous Nayar priest, discriminated against and unacknowledged by the Nambutiri Brahmins, who had left this place a while back. The temple servants could assist only on the condition that they be blindfolded, so they could avoid seeing the "shameful act"; the drummer used his rhythms to drown out what was happening, but avoided looking back over his shoulder, in order not to see what was going on.

This ritual of sacrifice is also very old, and points to the Khasi of East India. The reason for the secrecy is that the Nayar, not wanting to abandon their traditional sacrifice to the goddess, publicly denied that it was going on. Afterwards, the illegitimate priest who had performed the sacrifice left the temple under the cover

of pre-dawn darkness; then lower-level Nambutiri Brahmins would return to cleanse the site of such matriarchal "misdeeds."

15.6 Patriarchal Brahmins and matriarchal Nayar: a problematic relationship

Two thousand years ago, when the Vedic Brahmins reached the Malabar Coast and occupied it (not altogether peacefully), the Nayar way of life and their religious customs were enough to make Brahmins relegate the Nayar to the status of "impure," even though Nayar culture was superior to theirs. But what Brahmins really found outrageous was the status and freedom enjoyed by Nayar women. In order to understand this, we have to look at the Hindu caste system and the life of Brahmin women.

All over India, caste hierarchy, whether openly or covertly enforced, is based on an ideology of purity, anchored in religion that debases women because of their gender, on principle. Certain functions of women's bodies worshipped in matriarchies as life-creating abilities are—as in other patriarchal religions—considered "impure" in Brahminism: menstruation, pregnancy, and birth, as well as death and dying—events that are usually attended to by women. According to this ideology, Brahmin men are the purest, most perfect, most elevated people. They are the most godlike of all beings in that they know, and safeguard, the Vedic scriptures. The Vedas embody patriarchal religion and the lifeways of the Aryans.

The Aryans, in the course of their slow, steady conquest of the entire subcontinent, everywhere encountered matriarchal peoples where women had a central position. The Aryans' patriarchal system could only be maintained by destroying or perverting these peoples' customs and suppressing women, whom they usually had to force into marrying them. In the long run, this delivered many women of India to the usual fate of Brahmin wives, which was just the opposite of Nayar women's situation. Traditionally, a Brahmin wife's life was characterized by child marriage; hypergamy, or "marrying up"; domestic slavery; insoluble marriage; and a proscription against remarriage. This is a system of absolute monogamy, for women, in which widows were not only contemptible, but were burned alive.

Some elucidation on this:

Traditional child marriage means that a female person is promised to her future husband when she is still a child, and often right after her birth. Free choice of any kind in the matter is thus impossible; the female is nothing but a pawn in the business considerations of her patriarchal clan. The groom can be a boy (later, of course, as a man he will have complete sexual freedom), but very often he is a

grown man, even as old as 50 or 60, who wants a child bride. Brahmins have a reputation for preferring to marry very young girls. The girl herself is taught to revere her husband as a god. The wedding is celebrated very early, usually when the girl is 10 years old, but often earlier. In any case it must take place before the onset of puberty and first menstruation; this immaturity guarantees she is a "most pure" bride. In addition, her father's clan, which is not prepared to feed a girl any longer than necessary, is obliged to guarantee that she is a virgin. Though the Indian government abolished child weddings, raising the age to 12 and then to 16, these laws have little effect.[39]

Traditional hypergamy, or "marrying up," characterizes the popular custom in which the middle castes prefer, whenever possible, to marry their daughters up out of their own castes into higher castes. The lower castes marry among each other. Marrying up offers the bride's clan influential relationships. Usually her father's clan has to come up with a large dowry so that the "higher" status groom will be willing to marry the "lower" status bride. This led to today's extortionate dowry practices, as well as dowry murders, where young wives whose own clans can't or won't make good on their payments are killed. These killings are declared as "household accidents."

By marrying up, daughters may only marry into a higher caste; they never will be given to a man from a lower caste. But this does not work to a woman's advantage, as marrying up does not change her caste identity, which depends on her birth. To the contrary, the practice exacerbates the man-woman power gap, where the man is already "above" and the women "below." This degrades women, because a woman will always be the "lower" person in her husband's clan, and will spend her whole life being humiliated daily by her husband's relatives.[40]

Domestic slavery means that a young bride is hopelessly destined to remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy in her husband's clan. Not only is she a stranger; she is usually from a caste lower than her husband's, is significantly younger, and above all is "impure" by nature. She is primarily there to work as a slave for her mother-in-law, who maintains tight control over her and the other daughters-in-law. The mothers-in-law are not, however, the cause of the younger women's slave status, since they, too, are victims of this social system.

Absolute monogamy means that woman holds the right to exist only by virtue of having a husband. There does not exist a puberty or menarche celebration for her, but only the wedding ceremony which is most elaborated. Marriage is a sacrament, totally binding the woman to her husband's lineage and residence and stressing her role of wife and mother to the exclusion of everything else. Marriage is exclusive and insoluble, and re-marriage is not permitted. There is simply no possibility of leaving the marriage. In this sense her husband is her god. When he enters the house after

his daily duties, she kneels before him and washes his feet. She splashes the dirty water into her mouth to show how far above her he is: even his dirty feet water is, for her, "pure." She cooks and serves him his meals; he eats first, alone. Later she eats his leftovers, a practice that leads to chronic malnutrition of many women.

She is expected to bear sons, and bearing daughters makes her situation worse. Labor pains last a long time—three to five days—as Brahmin wives often are in poor health and are cramped with fear. In childbirth, a woman is particularly "impure," and anything she touches takes on this characteristic as well. All her things are therefore taken away, so that they won't have to be thrown out later as unclean. She gives birth in separate rooms and is often left alone, helped only by a "Dhai"—an untrained midwife from the lowest caste. Among other factors, this is one reason why Brahmin and Hindu women's mortality rate in India is higher, from childhood on, than men's, and not many live to a ripe old age.[41]

Traditional "sati" ("suttee"), or widow burning, and contempt for widows means that when the husband dies before the wife does, not only does she lose the justification for her existence, but is also considered to be guilty of his death. Widow burning among the upper castes thus became a common ritual, so grisly that it would serve to deter any woman from wanting to get rid of her hated husband. The woman's "guilt" is framed in terms of the bad "karma" (fate) she has earned in a former life; those earlier sin caused her to lose her husband and suffer the horrible death of a widow. The victim is to be blamed, and it doesn't matter whether the wife is a mature woman or a girl whose aged husband has departed.

"Sati" always resulted in being burned alive with her husband's corpse. Her own sons took an active part in the public spectacle of murdering their mother; to do otherwise they would have threatened their privileged caste membership. Burning a widow increases the whole clan's honor. The victim is promised a heavenly sojourn with her husband in the next world, and a better rebirth—possibly as a man. Although the British and later the Indian government prohibited "sati," it continues to be practised in secret. A widow is drenched with gasoline and ignited; she burns to death in the flames. These incidents, like dowry murders, are categorized as "household accidents."

That women perpetrated these practices against themselves is a function of the misery of being a widow. If a widow did manage to escape the funeral pyre, her life would be worthless. She would be treated like a half-dead person by her husband's clan, even if she had held the influential mother-in-law position before. Every vestige of humanity is stripped away from her, and it is certain she will be reborn as an animal in her next life. Brahmin and Hindu women know what a widow's life is like even today; some still choose to escape that fate by burning to death.[42]

Over the course of Indian history, this awful list of patriarchal horrors—many of which can also be found in other patriarchal civilizations—was not confined to the upper castes. Conquered peoples, forced into certain occupations and made dependent upon the Hindu caste system, were only able to rise up within caste hierarchy by adopting the basic principles of Brahminism: patrilinearity and patrilocality, marrying up, child marriage, and contempt for widows. Since the fate of the lower castes and the "pariah," the "untouchables," was horrible, many of the subjected peoples did adopt these principles, practices that worked to the detriment of women. Depending on how successful their assimilation was, these groups were seen as more or less "pure" castes. Therefore, the lowest castes are characterized by their lack of attention to these principles and to the laws of "purity," and by the unseemly freedom enjoyed by their women.

In the course of history, most of the First Peoples of India have by now been absorbed in this way by the Hindu caste system, and have been made invisible as indigenous peoples. Through constant marrying up, their ethnic identity has been lost and even their physical characteristics changed. Other First Peoples, such as the *Pulayan* and *Parayan,* held onto their own ethnic and matriarchal characteristics and were pushed down to the lowest levels of society because they were "impure"; poverty and misery followed accordingly.[43]

The caste system is anything but a peaceful, rational arrangement of an existing, homogenous society—which is the face that Brahmin ideology presents to the outside world. Rather it is an example of extreme patriarchy, a petrified history of patriarchal violence against women in general and other peoples and cultures in particular.

This brief presentation of the Hindu caste system and the life of Brahmin women ought to make sufficiently clear the enormous difference between Nayar society and the life of Nayar women. It is amazing that two such opposing social systems could work together—though this of course did not occur without some tension.

The migration of the patriarchal Brahmins into Kerala changed the Nayar situation, especially for Nayar women. Even more drastic changes would have occurred, had it not been for their warlike Nayar men. The historic compromise between indigenous Nayar matriarchal clans ("Taravatu") and the invading Nambutiri Brahmins' patriarchal clans ("Illam") came about not least because the Brahmins needed a base. In the long run this would have been impossible without a relationship to Nayar kings and chiefs. Even when they had established themselves as priests with vast landholdings surrounding their temples on the Malabar Coast, the Brahmins still dreaded attacks by ambitious Nayar kings.

Brahmins achieved, and maintained their dominance by playing rival kings and chiefs off each other. Chiefs were only as powerful as their ability to recruit war-

riors. In coastal cities the power of kings depended on collecting tribute from overseas trade. Their power was always local, whereas Brahmins carefully maintained social relationships stretching all over Kerala and beyond. They had their own administration and jurisprudence that functioned independently of the kings. They never interfered in disputes between hostile parties, and were able to move back and forth unharmed between enemy camps. Every Brahmin is considered personally sacred and irreproachable; they claim for themselves the elevated status of deities. Everywhere they settled, they introduced male gods, such as Vishnu and Shiva, who had not existed there before, and they built splendid temples to them as an expression of power. In that way they dethroned the Nayar nature-based matriarchal religion and its domestic celebrations, and demoted its goddess, Bhagavati, to a lower place in the divine ranks. At the same time, they held onto their power by serving as councillors to kings and as priests in public rituals. This allowed them to gain acceptance, little by little, for their patriarchal religious principles and inhuman ideology of purity and pollution. Furthermore, they were able to intensify the simple hierarchy that already existed in Kerala, making the differences more extreme and adding the element of fear of contact that characterizes the caste system. Certain kings who dared violate a Brahmin or set foot on Brahmin temple grounds were threatened, by means of this priestly network of power, with proscription. The power structure of the Brahmin priesthood resembles that of the Christian priests, bishops and popes who, in the European Medieval period, also used their power to bring down certain kings, and who have held onto their elevated status ever since by virtue of their international network of relationships with those in power.[44]

The most elaborate form of power employed by Brahmin priests is hypergamy, i. e. the systematically enforced practice of marrying women from subjected peoples who ended up in the lower castes. When the Nayar became the second caste in Kerala, marrying up was obligatory in royal houses; royal Nayar women married only Nambutiri husbands. The royal Nayar men, on the other hand, married women from noble Nayar lineages that were lower in rank. Meanwhile ordinary Nayar women could marry Nayar men of the same caste, but they could also marry Nambutiri men: if a Nambutiri Brahmin desired her, she was not permitted to refuse him.[45] In the lowest castes, people didn't marry up, but married among each other.

By forcing themselves into Nayar lineages—which soon became a question of prestige for the Nayar—the Nambutiri Brahmins manipulated the bold and enterprising Nayar into inextricable connections and commitments with them. In this way the Nayar lost parts of their ethnicity, because for generations, children of the upper classes had Nayar mothers and Nambutiri fathers.[46]

In contrast, Nambutiri Brahmins remained, in regard to genealogy, tightly-knit among each other. For in their patriarchal clans, or "Illam," it was common practice that only the eldest son married one or more Nambutiri wives. Younger sons were prohibited from marrying Nambutiri women, in order to keep the number of heirs—and competition among them—within appropriate bounds. Only the eldest son inherited—and in turn handed down—the large landholdings, which were never divided up, and remained in pure Nambutiri lineages. This system was bolstered, paradoxically, by matriarchal Nayar patterns in which children remain with their mothers. This meant that younger Nambutiri sons could compensate for their lack of marriage privileges by going with as many Nayar women as they wished, going to Nayar clan houses to be with them overnight in the practice of visiting marriage. But they were never permitted to bring these women, or their children, into the patriarchal Nambutiri clans. Brahmin villages and temple complexes were separated, and no lower-caste person was allowed to enter. On their side, the matriarchal Nayar women had no interest at all in leaving their clans and clan houses to lead the sad, confined life of a Brahmin wife. Because of this absurd Brahmin marriage system in which only the eldest sons were allowed to marry within their caste, most Nambutiri women remained involuntarily single and childless, which did nothing to improve their already oppressed condition.[47]

Younger sons from Brahmin families considered their Nayar spouses as mere concubines, since these unions were not celebrated with the Brahmin marriage ceremony that ensured the absolute monogamy for a Brahmin wife. Furthermore, as women of a lower caste than their husbands they were regarded as "impure"—as were the children of these marriages, who lived with their mothers. After having spent a love-night with his Nayar spouse, a Nambutiri man was obliged to bathe to regain his "purity" before re-entering his own village and clan-house. After his bath, he could not touch the Nayar woman nor her children, otherwise he would be polluted again.[48] Nevertheless, sexual intercourse was permitted within the nit-picking refinements of Brahmin purity and pollution ideology, because the man dirtied himself only outwardly and could wash it off afterwards. But this was not so for women. Nayar considered a woman in visiting marriage with a Nambutiri man to be married, since their traditional practices included neither a wedding ceremony, nor monogamy and patrilocality for women. So Nayar women regarded these Brahmins as their regular husbands, whom they were permitted, in their system of polyandry, to keep in addition to their other husbands.[49]

It becomes obvious that these two utterly contradictory cultural value systems fail to understand each other, and this gap can't be bridged by formal compromise: the Nambutiri man would meet his Nayar beloved with a mixture of desire and

contempt, while she fitted him into her line-up of various husbands—the more the better, since it conferred honor on her to have quite a few. For the Brahmins, matriarchal polyandry represented the quintessence of "impurity." The practice was regarded with contempt, and lowered the entire Nayar population in the eyes of the Brahmins. At the same time, the latter employed it in cynical double-faced morals: Brahmins could satisfy their own lusts, while at the same time enforcing their internal patriarchal structures. This makes it clear that combinations of matriarchal and patriarchal patterns don't succeed, no matter what the combinations entail, or where they occur; all they produce is social tension. They result in insoluble mixtures of contradictions that lead, in time, to destruction.

15.7 The downfall of the Nayar matriarchal structures

The problematic situation just described is equally true for Nayar kings, whose hierarchical policies allowed the Brahmin caste hierarchy to gain a foothold. Here two spheres of domination supported each other: that of the Brahmin priests and that of the Nayar kings, and in this way processes of patriarchalization, combined with the monstrous ideology of purity and pollution, were introduced from the top down to the people. As a result, by means of strict purity laws in relation to menstruation, birth and death, Nayar women's freedom of movement became more and more restricted to the clan house.[50] At the same time, the authority and the power of the karanavan, or elder male clan representative rose. Especially in the Nayar noble lineages, this led to a situation in which he functioned as the arm of the state's male hierarchy within the clan house itself.[51]

The basic social patterns of matriliny, matrilocality and polyandric visiting marriage were nevertheless retained, as they supported the Nayar military profession upon whom the power of the kings depended. Matriarchal customs ensured that warriors were always available for battles, and were also able to find lodgings anywhere. Paradoxically, patriarchal power considerations protected the Nayar matriarchal system throughout a long historical period, but at the same time, they slowly undermined its significance. This represented the seed of its downfall, which bore fruit in 1800 when the victorious English colonial power dissolved the Nayar army and sent the warriors home. The result was that Marumakkattayam, or the Nayar matriarchal structures, broke up in just a few generations.

The drama played out as follows:[52]

In 1792 the British annexed Kerala and annihilated the Nayar armies by constantly waging war.[53] British armies had no code of honor like the Nayar warriors, and were geared exclusively toward subjugation and obliteration. The conquered men

returned to their clan houses, but they no longer had anything meaningful to do. Rivalries intensified, particularly between younger men and the karanavan. Increasingly, they refused to obey him, accusing him of senile irrationality and mismanagement. In 1865 the British introduced the capitalist economic system, announcing that land was for sale; this would have been unthinkable before. The British were acting out of pure self interest, as they wanted to create plantations and achieve a monopoly on the spice trade. The trade caste of Syrian Christians co-operated with them, getting rich as a result, while the Nayar sank ever more deeply into debt. By the end of the 19th century they feared for their very survival, and the karanavan—who had not kept up with the changing times—could not calm those fears.

Young Nayar urban migrants knew better: having left their clans behind and learned western values in British colleges, their education opened the door to new careers. Before long, they occupied the majority of the state's administration posts, and excelled at all middle class occupations such as teachers, lawyers, and doctors. Their income was high, and they bought themselves land and houses instead of sending money back to their clans to support them. In this they were guided by the values of Christian religion, modern individualism and private property. They decided that the Marumakkattayam was actually to blame for Nayar "backwardness," and that only by abolishing it could "progress" and "prosperity" be achieved. They campaigned to have the office of karanavan abolished, and the clan's land holdings parcelled out among all male and female heirs. This too would have been unthinkable earlier, since the clan's land was in women's hands, and they had the sole right to bequeath it, and then only in the direct female line.

But Christian missionaries' propaganda, like that of Hindu Brahmins, opposed the matriarchal social system; the deciding blow was nevertheless delivered by Nayar against Nayar. At the end of the 19th century, landlocked clans were breaking apart. In response to the crisis urban judicial committees were established to enact new legislation: in 1913 the extended matriarchal family, or clan, was abolished by law. In 1925 the unlimited division of clan land holdings was permitted, which led to their being broken up and parcelled out as private property. In 1912 polyandry, having been criticised by Hindu, Muslim, and Christian religious leaders for two centuries, was made a punishable offence and replaced with the Hindu wedding ceremony and its attendant monogamy for women. After 1930 the hypergamy of Nayar women with Nambutiri men came to an end, as Nayar husbands, who now wanted control over their wives, refused to let them be used as concubines by Brahmins. Ultimately, younger Nambutiri men wanted to be able to marry Nambutiri women, which meant that both castes became endogamous. During this time, the Tali initiation ceremony for girls died out, as did the ceremony for first

menstruation. Instead, following Hindu custom the wedding ceremony became more and more central and elaborate. Between 1920 and 1940 the entire process had had a disastrous effect on Nayar matriarchal clans, whose fate was definitively sealed by 1960.

At that time Nayar clan lands were completely sold off by the British, Syrian Christians, and rich Nayar men from the cities. The latter now built single family dwellings there and transferred their wealth from their sisters and their sisters' children to their wives and children. In 1956 further legislation abolished the right of inheritance in the female line, and made inheritance possible only through the male line. Along with this process of economic and social patriarchalization went the establishment of a patriarchal ideology that promoted pre-marital chastity for women, as well as their unconditional fidelity in marriage and the biological father's authority over the children.

Thus Nayar women's autonomy was destroyed and their status much degraded. Nevertheless they fare better than the majority of Hindu wives, as they still have some remains of their ancient inheritance rights, which they guard jealously. Most households are, in fact, based on a combination of male and female inheritances, and depending on who hold more property are sometimes virilocal (residing in the husband's house) and sometimes uxorilocal (residing in the wife's house).

In this context, listen to the words of *Krishna Iyer,* an Indian anthropologist, who is well-versed in this issue:

"Though it is a cry in the wilderness to expect a return to matriarchy, non can ignore the fact that the matrilineal order produces a particular background for individual personality structure which seems favourable to creativeness and originality. True, women have some preferential rights, and secure position, too, but the idea of shared authority is not born out of any prejudice, and, further, women never dominate men in the way men boss over women in patrilineal societies. These aspects, and the potentialities of the matrilineal order (are) a means of education to democracy . . ."[54]

15.8 The outcasts: Adivasi and Sinti-Roma

In the rainforests and mountains of central India, numerous indigenous peoples live, collectively referred to as *Adivasi*, or "original peoples"; they have retained parts of their matriarchal structures up to the present day. They are—all 87 million (in 2008)—of pre-Aryan origin, but are very different from each other. [55] Thus India alone includes somewhat less than one-fourth of all the indigenous cultures on earth, a fact about which the Indian government continues to lie.

Two reasons not to acknowledge these peoples and their cultures are the colonialist, sexist attitudes of the caste system, and the ambition to acquire indigenous lands. On the first point, listen to the voice of *Ram Dayal Munda,* a representative for the Adivasi, the indigenous peoples on the Indian sub-continent:

> India's colonial history did not begin with British conquest; it already started with the Aryan invasion 4,000 years ago. Marginalizing the long-established original peoples began during the course of Aryan colonization; later it was perpetuated by cultural subjugation. An ironclad social hierarchy developed by incorporating the indigenous peoples into the caste system. But there are peoples who did not allow themselves to be subjugated, and they possess an independent identity to this day.[56]

The wilful blindness of the caste system works, however, because all the subjugated peoples were assimilated through marriage restrictions and occupation limitations; this caused them to be seen not as peoples in their own right, but only as special castes. By means of extreme separation and division of work—as each caste is an occupation—a system of dependency was developed that obliterated pre-Aryan identities and cemented them forever into their place in the hierarchical system. Those who ended up as subcultures at the very bottom of the system, such as Pulayan and Parayan, as well as those who were not subjugated, such as Adivasi, were lumped together and segregated as ritually polluted, or "untouchable." This definition made them part of the caste system and thus invisible. Therefore India's dominant classes still insist there are no independent indigenous peoples in India. This has meant that ethnological study has been unwanted, and thus is very difficult and limited.[57]

The second reason for this denial is the wholesale theft of Adivasi land: in the name of industrial progress the livelihoods of 87 million people are being destroyed, people who have until now lived in rainforests, and maintained economic and cultural independence. Huge projects such as dams, industrial complexes and mines destroy the forests; these effects are exacerbated by state-operated clear-cutting. The waterways are contaminated, and certain cash-generating tourist parks in the midst of the destruction do the rest of the damage. Adivasi, particularly women, put up heavy resistance, as can be seen by the Chipko movement and massive resistance against the Narmada Dam. Resistors are met with threats of death or expulsion; in the latter case they end up on tea plantations where women and children do the heavy work, or in the slums of big cities, where they perish in misery.[58]

It is characteristic of all these pre-Aryan indigenous peoples' cultures that they don't have caste hierarchies. They are fundamentally egalitarian, with women enjoying status equal to or slightly higher than men. This depends on how much

matriarchal pattern still exists after a long, often painful history.[59] Several independent matriarchal peoples live in Kerala: the *Malakudias,* slash-and-burn farmers on the western slopes of the Ghats; the *Muthuvan* and *Mannan* in the Cardamom Mountains; the *Badagas* (farmers) and *Kurumbas* (shepherds) in the Nilgiri Mountains; as well as the *Bants* and *Billavas,* who fish along the coast. And many more indigenous peoples in Kerala still have, or have had until recently, matriarchal characteristics. These peoples have certain elements in common: they all practice interment of the dead in earth-mounds, build large and small megaliths (dolmens), and worship the Ammas, or ancient mother goddesses in their villages, as well as in the form of stones, trees and rivers. Also, there are many indications that matriarchal patterns once prevailed over all of South India. Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh: the Dravidian languages of Malayalam, Kannada, Tulu, Telugu and Tamil are still spoken here.[60]

The *Munda, Ho* and *Santal* in West Bengal descended from ancient peoples of East Asia and were, like their Khasi relatives, matriarchal until recently. In Central India women of the numerically large *Gond, Bhil* and *Oraon* peoples practiced slash-and-burn farming with hoe and digging stick until recently. Both historically and in terms of their numbers, the Gond are the most important of these peoples. They once had fighting strength, and built great and fortified kingdoms, which protected them from subjugation and Hinduism. Now they adopted patrilinearity, but have other traditions directly opposed to those of their Hindu neighbors: their society is egalitarian, and the individual members are strictly equal; even chiefs' families are not set apart. Young people enjoy full sexual freedom in special places created for them. Women go around proudly with exposed breasts; they wear only a cloth wrapped around their hips and elaborate jewelry—as the Nayar women formerly did as well. They choose their own marriage partners, easily changing husbands; and widows marry without dishonor. Gond people perform agricultural ceremonies and worship female and male ancestors, whom they hope to joyfully meet up with in the Otherworld.[61]

In Northeast India, as we have already seen, live the matriarchal *Khasi* and *Garo* on the Khasi Hills. Other peoples who exhibit matriarchal characteristics live in the foothills of the Himalaya and Patkai Mountains. These characteristics can be seen throughout the Himalayas, up through Northwest India all the way to Kashmir. And in the mountains of Pakistan's Beluchistan, west of the great Indus River, there are ancient pre-Aryan peoples such as the *Brahui, Rabbas* and *Pani Koch.* They are still matrilineal, and practice the old ways beneath the cloak of Islam; for example, they honor the Prophet Mohammed's mother in place of him.[62] These indigenous peoples are most probably, like all the others in the mountains that surround the Indus

Valley, refugees from the Aryan destruction of Indus Culture. In those remote valleys they were able to guard their culture against diverse invaders and the patriarchalizing pressures that swept away every matriarchal trace from the rest of Northwest India.

Another group of refugees from the invasions into Northwest India are the so-called "Gypsies." They call themselves *Sinti* and *Roma.* Their migration out of India did not begin with the advent of the Aryans, but occurred later with the invasion of the Huns in the 5th-6th century. They had belonged to the lower, much despised castes and were only superficially patriarchalized. Although they were a branch of the noble "Bhat" caste of singers to the court and royal messengers, they were far beneath that group. Their caste was "Banjara," occupied with the business of trade and transport; they transported goods around the regions by oxcart. A variant of the Banjara caste is that of the "Kanjar," who made their living as itinerant performers: as singers, dancers, musicians and acrobats on the streets.

These groups are not just despised because of their occupations, but because of their customs, which from any standpoint contravene the dominant society's rules and stand in sharp contrast to purity-obsessed Hinduism. They still demonstrate pronounced matriarchal characteristics. Women are highly regarded and have sexual freedom; not only do they work at the same occupations as men do, on an equal basis with them, they also, and most importantly, have their own professions, such as prostitute and courtesan. They are considered extraordinarily beautiful, and are famous for their erotic singing and dancing. They very probably practice, or practised, matriliny, since the elder women hold clan and family together. It is difficult to study them because, for reasons of self-preservation, they are evasive in response to all requests—including those from ethnologists, whom they consider to be part of the dominant class. "Honorable" people have always persecuted them, and have granted them no rights at all.[63]

During the Mongolian invasion of Northwest India, and later during the spread of Islam (after 1030 C.E.), their mobile way of life was of great advantage to them. In that time, oppression of these low castes increased and led to their near-extinction as a people. As a response to this situation they left their Indian homeland in migratory waves over time, and became the ancestors of the so-called "Gypsies." On the different continents where they immigrated, they retained their hereditary occupations as transporters, traders, itinerant performers and, for women, as courtesans. But outwardly they assimilated into their different new host-countries, taking on various styles of clothing as well as adopting certain customs such as inheritance through the father's line (in Europe).

Nevertheless, they stubbornly continued to believe in female powers, as shown by their worship of the moon and of goddesses. In India, where some of them sur-

vive, the ancient goddesses Devi and Kali are their tutelary deities; in other places, with different religions, they worship various female divinities, such as the Prophet Mohammed's daughter Fatima (in Muslim countries). In Christian areas they dedicate themselves to the two Marias who stood at the foot of Christ's cross, and to Sara, the Roma tutelary saint. The huge festival in the Camargue (in France's Rhone Delta) is their annual festival to celebrate the two Marias and the dark Sara; it is attended by Sinti and Roma from all over Europe.[64]

But in spite of all their efforts to assimilate, their lifestyle doesn't fit with the industrial growth society's ideal, and even today they are not allowed to stay anywhere for very long, and continue to be persecuted.

15.9 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

In general:

- The shape of matriarchal societies can vary greatly: it can embody planting cultures using digging stick and hoe; it can include agricultural societies combined with building megaliths; and it can embody highly developed, urban civilizations.

At the political level:

- Organized warfare is not typical of matriarchal societies, although they know feuds occasionally employed in the context of "vendettas," or blood revenge.
- When organized warfare develops in matriarchal societies (such as Iroquois, or Nayar peoples), it is associated with a defence situation against truly warlike, patriarchally organized invading armies.
- In extreme situations such as conquest by patriarchal peoples, it can even happen that a matriarchal culture—uprooted and driven away from its homeland—superimposes itself upon older matriarchal societies and subjugates them (for example, the Nayar in South India). This leads to the anomalous situation in which a matriarchal society is made up of different social classes.
- This process slowly undermines and destroys matriarchal society from inside. If the pressure from outside, that is, from patriarchal invaders increases, it usually leads to the downfall of matriarchal society (for example, the Nayar).

Notes

1. See C. von Fürer-Haimendorf: „Die Wedda auf Ceylon", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 7, ibid., pp. 128–129; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* vol. 7, ibidem. See also Romila Thapar/ Percival Spear: *A History of India,* vol. I, II, Harmondsworth, UK England, 1965/1966, Penguin Books Ltd., chapter 1.
2. See: "Mana Sanskriti (Our Culture)," online journal *Vepachedu Educational Foundation,* edited by S. Vepachedu, Issue 69, October 2003, paper on Brahmins, p. 21. (http://www.vepachedu.org/manasanskriti/Brahmins.html)
3. The Nayar of Kerala in South India are no exception, but they fit within a South Indian matrix of matriarchal elements, which also exist in the regions of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Sri Lanka.—See J. Leavitt: "Cultural holism in the anthropology of South Asia: The challenge of regional traditions," in: *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* n. s. 26, Los Angeles 1992, Sage, 3–49; and Savithri Shanker de Tourreil: *Nayars in a South Indian Matrix. A Study Based on Female-centred Ritual,* Dissertation, Concordia University, Montréal/Ca 1995. [Nayars]
4. O. R. von Ehrenfels: *Motherright in India*, Haiderabad-Dekkan-Oxford 1941, Oxford University Press, p. 145.
5. A. Sridhara Menon: *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, Neu Delhi 1979, Sterling, pp. 109–113; F. Fawcett: *Nayars of Malabar*, New Delhi 1915, Asian Educational Services, (first edition 1901), pp. 197–198; O. R. von Ehrenfels, ibid., p. 59.
6. Fawcett, ibid., p. 185.
7. C. J. Fuller: *The Nayars Today*, Cambridge-London-New York 1976, Cambridge University Press, pp. 6–7.
8. Fuller, ibid., p. 8.
9. D. M. Schneider/ Kathleen Gough: *Matrilineal Kinship*, Berkeley-Los Angeles 1961, University of California Press, pp. 332–333.
10. Ehrenfels, ibid., pp. 180–183.
11. Fawcett, ibid., pp. 276, 279.
12. Fawcett, ibid., p. 196.
13. Ehrenfels, ibid., pp. 48–51, 175.
14. Ehrenfels ibid., pp. 52–58, 172, 176–178.—Due to Hindu researchers' fear of any bodily contact with people from these lowest castes, social lives of the Pulayan and Parayan have scarcely been investigated at all. While Muslim researchers are free of this fear of touching, they are however not interested in pre-Islamic cultures. Therefore little is known about the social life of the lowest castes, and so-called "untouchables," of India.
15. Ehrenfels, ibid., pp. 162–168.
16. These historical phases of the matriarchal form of society will be descriptively surveyed here. But in contrast to the usual value judgments perpetrated by 19th and 20th century colonialist and racist stage-theories of history, this description does not consider later forms of development as higher, or better, than others—and does not seek to make them the norm by which other forms are evaluated. Modern Matriarchal Studies has no colonial interests, and respects the distinct, valid value systems of these cultures, each of which represents a unique totality. In this respect Matriarchal Studies are to be distinguished from the evolutionist theories put forth by patriarchal interests, which underpinned patriarchal "development" policies of every sort, and which still do.
17. Schneider/Gough, ibid., p. 314; Fuller, ibid., pp. 63, 71–72; Ehrenfels, ibid., p. 61.
18. Schneider/Gough, ibid., pp. 323–327.
19. Fawcett, ibid., pp. 303–304; Schneider/Gough, ibid., p. 349.

20. Fawcett, ibid., p. 303.
21. Schneider/Gough, ibid., pp. 337–339, 341; see the detailed description of family festival celebrations in Fawcett, ibid., pp. 229–252; also in Ehrenfels, pp. 62–65.
22. Savithri Shanker de Tourreil (indigenous Nayar researcher): "Nayars of Kerala and Matriliny revisited," in: Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* Toronto 2009, Inanna Publications, York University, pp. 205–216. [Nayars revisited]
23. Schneider/Gough, ibid., pp. 341–342.
24. Ehrenfels, ibid., p. 62.
25. Schneider/Gough, ibid., pp. 344–356.
26. S. Shanker de Tourreil, [Nayars revisited], ibidem.
27. Fawcett, ibid., pp. 229–231; Ehrenfels, ibid., pp. 63,64; Schneider/Gough, ibid., p. 357; A. Aiyappan: *The Personality of Kerala,* Trivandrum: University of Kerala, pp. 232–242; and S. Shanker de Tourreil, [Nayars], ibid., pp. 74–84.
28. S. Shanker de Tourreil, [Nayars], ibid., pp. 129–142, 250.
29. S. Shanker de Tourreil, [Nayars], ibid., pp. 74–84, 250–252.
30. Ehrenfels, ibid., p. 65; Fawcett, ibid., pp. 232–236.
31. Fawcett, ibid., p. 241; Schneider/Gough, ibid., p. 371.
32. Schneider/Gough, ibid., p. 358, 359; Fawcett, ibid., p. 237.
33. S. Shanker de Tourreil, [Nayars revisited], ibidem.
34. Ehrenfels, ibid., S. 67.
35. Fawcett, ibid., pp. 274, 275; see at the Hindu vegetarianism: Ehrenfels, ibid., p. 130.
36. Ehrenfels, ibid., p. 66.
37. See at the veneration of snakes: T. K. Gopal Pannikar: *Malabar and its Folk*, Madras 1900, Natesan & Co., chapter 12: "Serpent Worship in Malabar"; Fawcett, ibid., pp. 275–282; more recently: Suresh Kumar Chattothayil: "Serpent God Worship in Kerala," in: *Indian Folklore Research Journal,* Nungambakkam Chennai 2008, National Folklore Support Centre; Deborah L. Neff : "Naga" and "Pampin Tullal," a series of articles in: *South Asian Folklore Encyclopedia,* Peter J. Claus et. al. (eds.), New York 2003, Routledge.
38. See for the detailed description of this festival Fawcett, ibid., pp. 256–265.
39. See for this and the following: Ehrenfels, ibid. ., pp. 113–122, 21–22; Mary Daly: *Gyn/ecology. The metaethics of radical feminism,* Boston 1978, Beacon Press; Katherine Mayo: *Mother India*, New York 1927, Harcourt, Brace & Co.
40. Marilyn French: *The War against Women,* New York 1992, Summit Books; Maria Mies: *Indische Frauen*, Frankfurt 1986, Syndikat.
41. Ehrenfels, ibid., S. 127; Mary Daly, ibid., S. 456; Lynn Bennett: *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters*, New York 1983, Columbia University Press.
42. Ehrenfels, ibid., pp. 125–129; Mary Daly, ibid., pp. 135–155; Katherine Mayo, ibidem.
43. Ehrenfels, ibid., p. 6.
44. Schneider/Gough, ibid., pp. 306, 319.
45. Fawcett, ibid., p. 227.
46. Schneider/Gough, ibid., pp. 320–323.
47. Fuller, ibid., pp. 2–4.
48. Fawcett, ibid., p. 225.
49. Schneider/Gough, ibid., p. 320.
50. Fawcett, ibid., pp. 189–190.
51. Schneider/Gough, ibid., pp. 340–341.
52. See for the following Fuller, ibid., pp. 54–55, 61–63, 71–76, 123–126, 129–135, 149–150; Krishna Iyer/ Bala Ratnam: *Anthropology in India*, Bombay 1961, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan,

pp. 156–165; S. Shanker de Tourreil, [Nayars revisited], ibidem; K. Saradamoni: *Matriliny transformed: Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth Century Travancore,* New Delhi 1999, Sage Publications.

53. Before the British made some changes, Kerala consisted of three distinct geo-political segments known as Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. Only the northernmost political segment, known as Malabar, was ruled directly by the British from the end of the 18th century. In Kochi and Travancore, the indigenous kings' rule lasted till independence from the British in 1947 (for all of India).
54. Iyer/Ratnam, ibid., p. 164.
55. G. N. Devy: "Giving adivasis a voice," in: *InfoChange News & Features*, October 2008 (infochangeindia.org/Agenda/Against-exclusion/Giving-adivasis-a-voice.html)
56. *POGROM. Zeitschrift für bedrohte Völker*, (Newspaper of the Society for Threatened Peoples), no. 171, p. 14, Göttingen, Germany, June/July 1993, (ed.) The Society for Theratened Peoples.
57. *POGROM,* no. 171, ibid., p. 13.
58. *POGROM*, no. 171, ibidem; C. von Fürer-Haimendorf: *Tribes of India. The Struggle for Survival*, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 1982, University of California Press; R. Hörig: *Selbst die Götter haben sie uns geraubt*, pogrom-Taschenbuch 1020, Göttingen, Germany, (ed.) The Society for Threatened Peoples; Vandana Shiva: *Staying alive: women, ecology and development,* London 1988, Zed Books; Maria Mies: ibid., p. 267 f.
59. See the list of matriarchal patterns with original peoples in India: Ehrenfels, ibid., Index pp. 18–33.
60. Krishna Iyer: *Social History of Kerala*, Madras 1968, Book Centre Publications, pp. 111–114, 137- 147; Fawcett, ibid., p. 186.
61. C. von Fürer-Haimendorf: „Die Gond in Zentralindien", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 7, pp. 72–75, ibidem; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* vol. 7, ibidem.
62. Ehrenfels, ibid., pp. 185–187.
63. Ehrenfels, ibid., pp. 151–158.
64. Ehrenfels, ibid., pp. 151–158; Tomasevic/ Djuric: *Roma. Eine Reise in die verborgene Welt der Zigeuner*, Köln 1989, Verlagsgesellschaft; B. W. Fitzgerald: „Die europäischen Zigeuner und ihr Fest in der Camargue (Frankreich)", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 9, pp. S. 44—53, ibidem; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* vol. 9, ibidem.

16

Ancient Matriarchy in Central Africa

For the Old Mother Earth, Old Mother World of the Bantu women

Sub-Saharan Africa serves as a metaphorical screen against which Europeans—past and present—project their own prejudices; this practice is also common among anthropologists. The most ideologically weighted example is the notion that Africans constitute a faceless mass, unchanging since time immemorial, without a history—influenced by Asia and Europe but never actually initiating an influential culture of their own. They are presented as having conserved cultural contributions they received; this has allegedly been their only cultural accomplishment. This kind of thinking is shameful, in light of the fact that Europeans (along with Arabs) depopulated entire regions by means of their extensive slave trade and colonial domination, bringing about destruction of historical African cities and kingdoms. The modern a-historical ethnological approach reifies the prejudices by presenting the more recent situation of African cultures as if it had always been the norm. Consideration of African cultures must take account of their extraordinarily long and multifaceted histories. Archaeological and genetic research has now established that the first human culture of *Homo sapiens* arose about 100,000 years ago on the African continent. From there it spread gradually to other continents, where the African culture left enduring effects.[1]

Some anthropologists are aware of this, and criticize any trace of Eurocentrism in relation to African countries. Frobenius casts doubt on the role of Europeans as alleged "culture bringers," in light of the fact that "European arrogance did not permit them to see a Black African as anything but exploitable labor."[2] Davidson suggests that Europe owes its increased prosperity from the 15th through the 19th centuries to plundering other continents, particularly Africa. If, before this period, the gap between European and African states was relatively small, it has now grown to be an enormous gulf. African kingdoms were driven into ruin by the slave trade, followed by quick and thorough colonial conquest, supported by the driving racist ideology, which is a product of modernity.[3] To the ethnologist Bernatzki it appeared doubtful whether an ethnological comparison between African and European cultures would be to the Europeans' advantage. He always felt respect and admiration for the level-headed, reasonable straightforwardness with which Africans cope with life.[4]

16.1 The Bantu

On the African continent several regions—Central, West and North Africa—are home to peoples who have organized their societies along matrilineal principles, and whose women enjoy economic authority and hold political office: that is, they demonstrate matriarchal characteristics. Matriarchal structures are still maintained in Central Africa by numerous branches of the Bantu people, cultivators of the land; in West Africa by the Akan peoples with their highly developed urban and market economy; and in North Africa by the nomadic, cattle-breeding Tuareg. This reflects the wide variation among economies bearing matriarchal social structures, and at the same time demonstrates that matriarchy is usually, though not always, associated with agriculture.

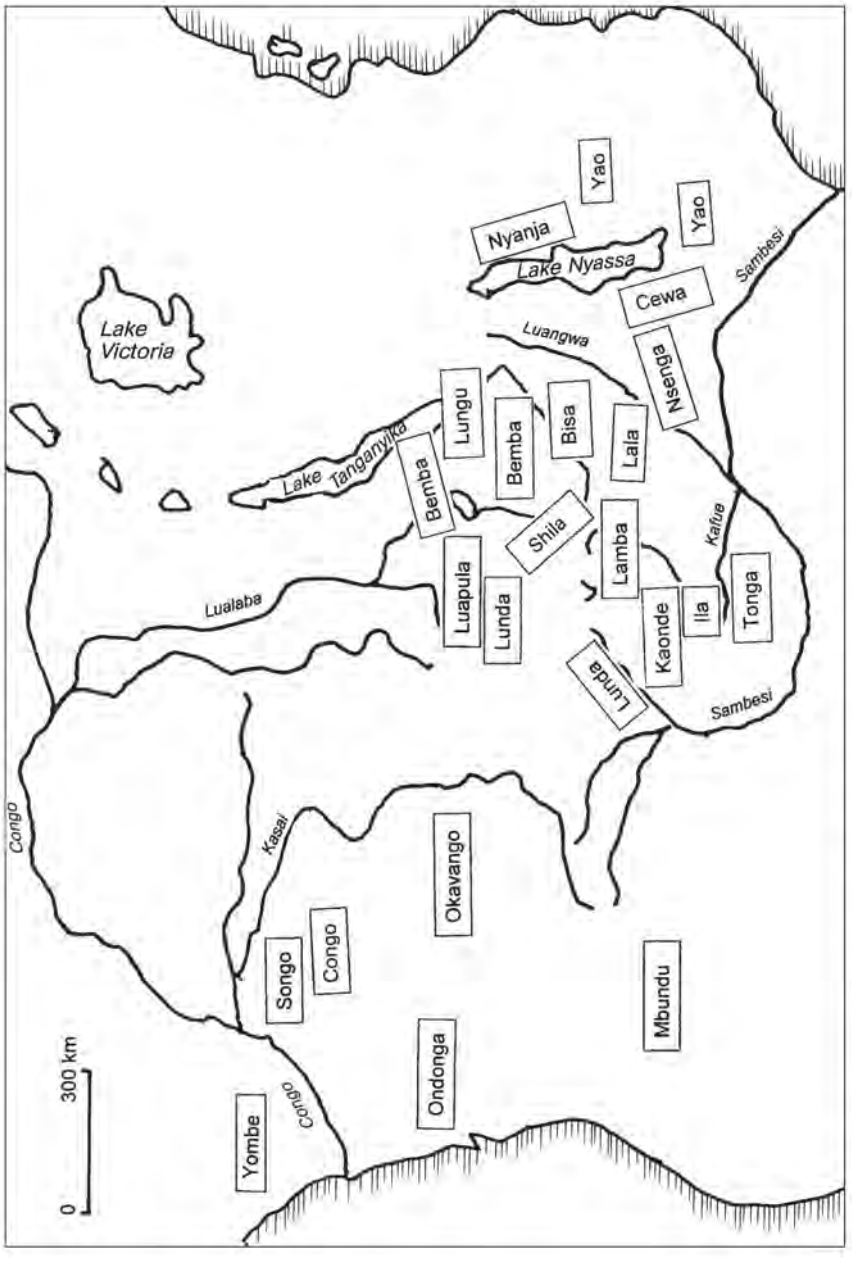
Matriarchal structures of the Central African *Bantu* peoples are very ancient, going back to Neolithic times. Early Neolithic agriculture began around 3200 B.C.E. in northeastern Africa and spread to Kenya; in Sudan and West Africa it began around 2000 B.C.E. Within this cultural period the northern half of the continent was settled by indigenous peoples who practiced crop cultivation and were matriarchally organized. Between about 300 B.C.E. and the beginning of the Common Era, numerous Bantu peoples were forced to migrate from their homes on the Benue River in West Africa. They moved southward and settled on the humid savannas of Central Africa, ideal for plant cultivation. Ultimately, they reached as far as Cameroon and the mouth of the Congo River, whose waterways allowed them to spread out over the entire Congo Basin. Here, they lived on side by side in peaceful co-existence with the hunter-gatherer Pygmy people.

At the same time, that is, from 1000 B.C.E. until the beginning of the Common Era, ancient Malayan peoples reached Madagascar and the East African coast from Indonesia, having made their way across the Indian Ocean in their seaworthy outriggers. From their homes in Sumatra they brought crops that were ideal for the tropics: yams, taro and bananas; they also brought their own matriarchal social order. Their successors are the *Merina,* who still live in the mountain highlands of Madagascar, speaking a Malayan-Polynesian language. Their presence gave new impetus to Bantu plant cultivation; in addition to their traditional crops of millet, maize and sorghum they produced East Asian fruits acquired through trade with the Malayan migrants who inhabited Madagascar. This enrichment led to a second, rapidly spreading population of Bantu peoples whose territory now stretched across the southern half of the continent from coast to coast (7th century C.E.)—extending much further south than today.

During this expansion the more than one hundred different Bantu peoples separated into the Western Central Bantu, the Eastern Central Bantu, the Southwestern Bantu and the Southeastern Bantu. Their traditional matriarchal social patterns have been most intensely maintained in the *Eastern Central Bantu;* in other Bantu regions these patterns occur only in some individual tribes, the majority having been more or less patriarchalized.[5]

To this day the Eastern Central Bantu inhabit a huge region extending across the continent, from the Congo Delta in the west to Lake Nyassa in the east (see map 11). This includes present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo (the Congo River Basin); Angola (the savanna region to the southwest of the Congo Basin); Zambia (to the south of the Congo Basin between Lake Tanganyika and the Zambesi River); and Malawi (the region that extends around Lake Nyassa). These enormous areas are the habitat of peoples whom ethnologists have called "matrilineal": the *Yombe, Songo, Congo* (in the DR Congo); *Ondonga, Okavango, Mubundu* (in Angola); the *Bemba, Luapula, Bisa, Lamba, Lele, Kaonde, Ila, Tonga* and others (in Zambia); and the *Nyanja, Yao,* and *Cewa* (in Malawi) (see map 11). Most of these have not yet been extensively researched, particularly as far as women are concerned. Only occasionally do the women of these peoples appear in ethnological literature; these rare mentions are due to the field work of all too few women ethnologists, among them Audrey I. Richards, Karla O. Poewe and Annie Lebeuf.[6]

All these peoples determine relationship and inheritance through the mother's line. That is significant, because in Africa the concept of relationship is still so central that the social principles are based on it, with economics, politics and spirituality in subordinate roles. Relationship defines the space in which each gender fulfills its responsibilities to society; it defines the status and rank associated with various



Map 11: Matrilineal / matriarchal Bantu peoples in Central Africa

religious duties, and it determines the patterns of distributing goods. The repeated assertion that matrilinearity is simply a matter of inheritance, and nothing else, is clearly false; rather, it is "at once a political economy and a religious system"—that is, "a worldview" (Karla O. Poewe). Wherever it occurs, matrilinearity strengthens the personal and social power women hold.

16.2 The unmanageable Bemba women

As representative examples from this large group of Bantu peoples, the relatively better-researched *Bemba* and *Luapula* will substantiate the above.

The Bemba live on the Zambian Northeast Plateau, an area characterized by light savannah and bush. There are now only150,000 Bemba, but their neighbors, the Luapula, are more numerous, living in the fertile Luapula Valley where the Luapula River and Lake Mweru provide abundant fish. Both peoples share a common pride in a glorious history: they were the bearers of the Lunda Realm, the once-powerful state in this area, whose complex structure was maintained by a sacred queen and king. Today their lifestyle is once again quite simple, as the Lunda Realm was destroyed by the European colonizers. The hunt for slaves, more than anything else, plagued these peoples and finally dispersed them; today the Bemba live scattered over a vast territory, in villages of 30 to 50 dwellings.[7]

Bemba women are considered "unmanageable" by their patriarchal male neighbors, who shrug their shoulders, roll their eyes helplessly skyward and say: "These Bemba women, good grief! They are the personification of wildness itself!" In fact, compared with the customs practiced by these neighboring peoples, the Bemba women enjoy an active, elevated status.

This status is based on their economy: it is the Bemba women—as peasant-women with digging stick, hoe and machete—who traditionally feed their people. They practice horticulture as well as slash-and-burn farming, moving their fields every four or five years because of poor soil. The men help with clearing land, while the women sow, harvest, and store a supply of millet, maize, sorghum, beans, peas and pumpkins to be kept in reserve for lean times. The hoe is used exclusively by women, and features prominently in their dances as a cult object, and is also represented as jewelry. In their ancient arts of raising food, there is a tradition of using wooden mortars and old-fashioned stone grinders. Myths tell that women invented plant cultivation; indeed, it is they who have, ever since the earliest imaginable times, been in charge of the production and processing of food, as well as distributing the finished products among the clan members. This makes them completely independent of men, who are, however, dependent upon them. Men go hunting from time to time, but since there isn't really much game, the hunt has little more

than symbolic significance. Women's complementary food gathering activities are a different story: the extra provisions of wild plants, mushrooms, herbs, honey and caterpillars collected out in the bush enable them to provide for their people throughout the lean months.[8]

Bemba houses are not solid, permanent structures, but lightly-built, round huts covered with straw roofs. The practice of migrating cultivation, which requires the village to be displaced every couple of years, makes large clan houses pointless. The result is that land, gardens and houses cannot be inherited—because they don't last long enough.[9] Cattle, the ultimate wealth in many patriarchal East African peoples, are not raised by the Bemba. This is not only to avoid the tse-tse fly that carries sleeping sickness; it is also because animal husbandry isn't a part of their traditional social order, which is much older than that of the cattle-breeding nomadic peoples who came from Northeast Africa and edged the matriarchal agricultural peoples into the territories they inhabit today.[10]

Unlike patriarchal peoples, the Bemba have no accumulated wealth, and no land or clan house to inherit. Nevertheless they have managed to maintain and continue their clans, including the practice of matriliny and matrilocality.[11] The location for this is not the clan house, but the village: the collection of huts that forms the African "kraal." This type of aggregation is not at all random, but reflects a matriarchal social tradition.

Their sole wealth consists in the right to expect services from relatives and in-laws; this system of mutual assistance keeps the social order alive. For the extended families in the village, everything revolves around one factor central to the social order of the Bemba: the relationship between mother and daughters. By means of the husbands they choose, and the children they birth and educate, women generate these large extended families and, in fact, the village itself. The size of the family, as well as the size of the village, depends on her gardening and her stores. A woman with many daughters can leave the village and start her own village elsewhere; she enjoys great respect, and after her death she will be considered an ancestress herself, since each clan and each lineage goes back to an ancestor woman. No wonder then, that Bemba women are considered "unmanageable," given that it is they—as matriarchs—who manage the concerns of their own extended families and villages. They play a substantial role in society, art and religion.[12]

Other than the relationship between mother and daughters, the next most important bond is between a woman and her brother. He is her adult children's guardian; whereas her husband is the children's companion only during their childhood. The sister's children (that is in our terminology, his nieces and nephews) are the brother's heirs. As they bear the same clan name as he does, he considers them his closest relatives. His permission is requested for his niece's first marriage,

and he protects her during and after the marriage. He can claim the services of his nephews. Sisters and brothers can exchange their property, and interact very casually and openly with each other.

The husband is in a second-class role, which is usual in this type of structure. The young husband lives in his wife's village, where he builds himself a hut and becomes a member of her extended family, as daughters do not move away from their mother's village. They live matrilocally in the mother's extended family, which functions as an economic unit. The young man integrates himself into this family; first of all be performing "bride service" for his so-called father-in-law, and later transfers his collaboration into a "service marriage." There is never a question, for these matriarchal peoples, of a "bride price" reckoned in cattle, as practiced by patriarchal African peoples.

The mother of the young bride must ultimately give her blessing for the marriage to be valid. Once this is done, for the first few years of the marriage the young wife cooks with her mother and sends the food to the husband's hut. It is only later, when she receives her own garden and her own storehouse near the house of her mother, that she moves to her husband's hut, maintaining her own hearth fire. For the young man it is more difficult, as the marriage separates him from his mother's village and lineage; he must work for his wife's family. But in return for his service, he is fed and supported in every way; he also receives many small "honor" gifts.

Occasionally, when children are born, there is a discussion of where to reside: either in the village of the woman's extended family, or in that of the man's. Usually, however, daughters do not move away; all her relatives chime in to convince her to stay. In addition, the relationships between sisters in a maternal village are so deeply intertwined with each other and with their duties, that they refuse to follow their husbands to their villages even if the husbands wish it. Not infrequently, the marriage breaks up over these obstacles, and if that happens, the woman takes a new husband.

If the husband makes it through these first difficult years of marriage, and above all if his wife has many daughters, he can acquire a respected position. Daughters guarantee that he will have many of so-called sons-in-law who will work for him, and he will, by his wife's side, be the male chief of an extended family.[13]

The young husband's situation improves if the two clans in question get along well with each other. For the Bemba, traditional cross-cousin marriage between pairs of clans over generations was the normal practice; that is, the classic matriarchal mutual intermarriage between two specific, unaltered matrilineal clans. Even as late as the 20th century these marriages were considered the ideal unions, and 50% of the Bemba still practice this. For example, the daughters of clan village A always marry, in clan village B, the sons of their mother's brothers, who came from clan

village A. Similarly the daughters of clan village B always marry the sons, in clan village A, of their mother's brothers, who came from clan village B. The result is that in each case the "father-in-law"—for whom the young husband works to fulfill his duty to his wife's family—is in fact none other than his nearest male relative and protector: his own mother's brother, his uncle on his mother's side. The uncle has, in any case, the right to his nephew's services from the time the nephew is seven years old. So there is no question of the young husband being a "stranger" at all. This makes cross cousin marriage generally more stable than other marriages, and this is especially true when both clans live in the same village.[14]

So the Bemba's social arrangements really consist of a linked network of clans. But these arrangements are not carved in stone, as young men and sometimes even young women move from village to village over the course of their lifetimes, following their respective matriarchal lines. Also, marriages are easily dissolved, and after the first marriage, which is arranged by the mother and maternal uncle, there is no obstacle for either party to choose further partners. In this way, the village's population is constantly fluctuating; additionally, the whole village is disbanded from time to time, due to the demands of nomadic farming practices. In this situation, very large clan structures can't hold together and there are no clan-wide chiefs, only local village leaders, the village chiefs.

The village chief is often an elder man delegated by that extended family which consists of numerous daughters and "sons-in-law," whose leadership is confined within the principle of consensus. He can never become a despot. His mandate is to try, by attracting relatives, to increase the size of the little village republic. As he has no power in the usual western sense, and can't develop a hierarchy, the young offspring and in-laws' decision to stay depends very much upon how much of a careful, wise, and generous person he proves to be. Well-managed work and good comradeship—to which the gift of millet beer contributes significantly—keeps them from moving away to some other place. When it comes to a dispute, it is not just individuals who move away, but entire matri-lineages; this has a very detrimental effect on the village. But if the village chief can gather lots of people around him, it brings great prestige.[15]

16.3 Bemba religion

In terms of religion the cult of ancestor worship is paramount, as it is with all the peoples of Africa who practice matriliny. The First Grandmother, the ancestress who began the clan or lineage and founded the original clan village, is venerated, along with her brother, as long as her memory is kept alive. The ancestral spirits are ven-

erated in the home, or at ancestor shrines and graves; they are the guardian spirits of the clan, and bring good luck. Everything that happens is due to their magical agency; for the Bemba, there is no such thing as coincidence. Every child is believed to be a reborn female or male ancestor, indicating the presence of the ancient matriarchal belief in rebirth.[16]

The eldest women, as well as their brothers, have important ritual duties to perform at the ancestor shrines: women perform rituals for female ancestral spirits, men for male spirits. They are highly respected in their extended families and may not be disrespected, since they have the power to bless or curse: ancestral spirits will carry out the pronouncements these elders make! They practice sexual abstinence. Although sexuality is freely enjoyed and valued as part of a healthy, happy life, it makes a couple "hot," and one may not approach the ancestors in that condition. So, after every sexual act, each couple performs a purifying ritual of washing. Neither is it permitted for anyone who has not performed these ritual washing to come into contact with newborn babies: they are recently reborn ancestors. The same prohibition exists with regard to the sacred hearth fire in each hut, which is also a place for praying to the ancestors.[17]

Besides the agrarian seasonal cycle of festivals, the most important festival in every extended family, as well as in the village as a whole, is the "Chisungu," or girls' initiation. This is a days-long progression of magic rites and ceremonies, dances and songs, enactment of symbolic scenes and comic burlesques, abundant and luxurious food and drink—and at the center of it all is the group of female initiates. The Chisungu festival is a big event with the Bemba and other matriarchal peoples of Central Africa, and its importance cannot be overestimated. On the other hand, for boys there is no festival, or festival of comparable importance.

The great significance matriarchal peoples attach to girls' initiation is understandable in the context of the ancestor cult, as marriageable girls are nearly ready to "rebirth" the female and male ancestors of their own clans. It is primarily in this function that they are celebrated; it is not only their fertility, evidenced by the start of menstruation, that is honored. Because of this, Chisungu always takes place before marriage, and is a prerequisite for the wedding. In some Central African peoples it is therefore celebrated very early in girls' lives, even some years before puberty. There is a strict prohibition against getting pregnant before the Chisungu celebration; such babies are exposed to die, and their parents are often outcast, too. In Bemba communities, the young groom is traditionally introduced into the bride's extended family at this festival.

The Chisungu celebration is meant to protect youth from any possible dangers associated with the significant life change to follow: menarche and the first sexual act.

For the young groom defloration is considered dangerous, and so is not performed by him. Rather, traditional ritual deflowering is carried out by a mythical being, a man embodying a jackal. As female and male fertility is very much desired, generative abilities of both women and men are praised at the celebration. In these performances, the groom might act as a roaring lion, or as a hunter and lion-killer: this is not to elevate his power as "conqueror" or even "father," but as progenitor and husband. The performance is meant to stir the bride's desire and increase her fertility.

Just as important is the time initiates spend in the initiation huts. Girls are taught by elder women, and are initiated into the honor and duties associated with being a Bemba woman. During these instructions, rituals are celebrated exclusively by women; these, unlike the public ceremonies in the village square, are held in secret.[18] These secret women's matters are strictly guarded: no Bemba man, and no male or female ethnologist from outside has ever witnessed them. The knowledge they impart has to do with regulation of female fertility and the secret of rebirthing ancestor spirits. The strictly guarded knowledge gives Bemba women control over their clan-generating power, a power that has been taken away from them in patriarchal societies.

Later in the progression of events there is a marriage ceremony, in which the groom must prove his virility; the bride, on the other hand, is not required to prove her virginity, as no particular value is attributed to it. Clitoridectomy, in which the girls' genitalia are mutilated, is not practiced in matriarchal African cultures, although in patriarchal Africa it is widespread—an extreme expression of the cult of virginity. The last note of the transition from girl to woman is sounded by various pregnancy rites, and finally by rituals associated with the birth of the first child, which will occur when she is 15 or 16 years of age. That concludes the series of ceremonies dedicated to a Bemba woman.[19]

It is not only at the Chisungu festival that a Bemba woman's generative power is honored, but also in everyday life, which is infused with appropriate rites and symbols. In matriarchal societies everyday objects and actions all have spiritual significance. This especially honors the generative power of women, and everywhere in the regions where matriarchal Bantu peoples live, female symbolism appears in traditional art. For example, carved wooden figures—simple ones as well as very ornate ones—are usually ancestress figures used for religious purposes.[20] Furthermore, each house is a holy place, the sacred space of the woman who lives there, and she paints both outside and inside walls with ancient magic symbols that signify the generative female power. The door is particularly richly decorated with symbols: two breasts, and the "Impande-shell" that signifies the female vulva. The house is the embodiment of the woman herself, affording protection and security, sharing the woman's lifegiving, nurturing power with its inhabitants. The front door symboli-

cally becomes the entrance or exit of her womb: this is where her husband enters and her children are sent out into the world. The children grow up in the house as an extension of their mother's womb, and when, as young people, they leave their mother's house, it is as if they are being born into the "dangerous" outside world.

The threshold is also a sacred place, for this is where the ancestors are given small offerings of food. The annual harvest ritual for ancestor spirits also takes place on the threshold, where women hang up the fruits of the harvest above the doorway. The hearth is just as holy, with its sacred fire that may not be extinguished or polluted. After each sexual act, both wife and husband wash themselves in the "marriage pot" before they go near the hearth.

Symbols are placed at the hearth and at the marriage bed—usually the basic female symbol that incorporates a woman and a serpent. The serpent symbolizes the sexual power in the union of marriage partners. In general, the snake is considered the one who brings life during pregnancy—according to Bemba belief, little snakes of energy live in all the organs of the body, particularly the sexual organs. In these organs, men have just one snake, women two: a female and a male one, just as they can give birth to both female and male babies. The woman-snake symbol, as well as the two breasts with the Impande-shell, can also be seen on storehouses, reflecting the fact that a storehouse is full of seed and food, just like a pregnant woman.

As "Itoshi-monster" the snake is associated with ancestors and nature spirits; a huge figure, it lives in all bodies of water, which in turn are seen as the organs of Mother Earth. In that context it makes the earth fertile, so that she gives birth to abundant harvests and game. This creates a parallel between Mother Earth and women, as both produce life and nourishment. Every woman is a daughter of Mother Earth, and shares her comprehensive female generative power. Here, the earth is the oldest goddess of all, and is called "Old Mother Earth," "Old Mother World," "Old Bone Woman," or the "Harvest-bringing Ancient One." Besides Mother Earth, there are all sorts of water and rain deities, to whom women also have the best access.[21]

On the other hand, fire symbolizes the energy produced when the complementary powers of woman and man meet. To adequately lead a household, an extended family, or a village, requires this type of energy in abundance, so only a person in a "hot" state is able to guide the community properly. This "hot" state guarantees fertility and well being for the land and the people, and is surrounded with many rites and taboos. These taboos pertain especially to those who hold public authority, such as village chiefs, for whom it is very important not to endanger the land and the people by transgressing a taboo. A chief in his official role can properly look after the common good only if his own marriage is "hot," and this

depends upon his wife. It is through her alone that he maintains his connection with the earth, and through that he bears the name of the land as his official title. This gives the chief's wife great power, as reflected in a folk saying about village chiefs and other authorities: "The queen is king!"[22]

In general, the people of these Central African cultures live in an erotic-ecstatic world in which sexual symbolism permeates everything. It is only in terms of contact with the ancestor spirits, whether this occurs inside or outside the house, that the erotic "hot" state is not permitted. The encounter with them is replete with special rites and taboos, since they come from another world than this one with its fertility-energy. They can only be met in a "cold" state; that is, purified of sexuality or even beyond this, in a state of chastity.[23]

Even so, ancestor religion has ecstatic elements, too. Women see themselves not only as physical vessels for ancestors' spirits, as in pregnancy, but also as spiritual vessels, as in states of so-called "possession." This is simply the typical shaman trance-technique used by elder women in their role as "possession priestesses." They are shamans calling for nature spirits and ancestor spirits to come through, and they dance until the spirits "ride" them, speaking prophesy through them in their ecstatic state. Only women can contact the spirits in this way, according to the tradition of these peoples, as they alone have the capacity to "rebirth" the ancestors.

And women, according to mythology, also created the ancestor religion. The masks of bark or wood and the carved wooden figures of female and male ancestors that are associated with this religion are also, according to many accounts, the creation of women (Ill. 15). In the course of subsequent patriarchalization in Africa, masks and ancestor sculptures have fallen into the hands of the men via secret societies, where women's rites, such as initiation, are mimicked in men's ceremonies. Later, patriarchal African kings used these secret societies to advance their power.[24]

Bemba culture is by no means the only one characterized by these aspects. Albeit with certain variations, other Bantu peoples in Central Africa also share them: peoples related to the Bemba such as the *Bisa, Lele, Lamba* and *Kaonde,* as well as the neighboring *Luapula* and *Shila* on the Luapula River, the *Nsenga* on the Luanga River, the *Ambo, Alungu,* and *Ila* on the Kafue River, the *Lungu*, who live to the north of the Bemba, the *Plateau Tongo* and *Sala* to the south, the *Cewa, Yao* and *Nyanja* on Lake Nyassa, and, not least, the large group of peoples south of the Congo (see map 11). At this point we can say more precisely that all these peoples practice agriculture and do not breed animals (or do so only marginally), and follow the mother's line in terms of naming and inheritance. They usually practice matrilocal

Illustration 15. Wooden mask of the Bundu Women's Society (Liberia).
(in Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Dresden, Kat. No. 44208)

marriage, with the husband living with his wife's relatives; in only a few groups does the wife live with her husband's relatives. Bride and marriage service by the husband are universally practiced, no matter where the couple will reside later; cross cousin marriage is also still quite popular. Religion is centered around worship of the ancestress and her brother, and the "Chisungu festival" occurs everywhere, albeit under different names. Equally universal is women's shamanism and the connection between Mother Earth and women as the creators of life. [25]

No chief acts as a "big boss"; rather, these peoples have an egalitarian society based on respect for ancestors and elders. This can be called a "rural clan democracy." The small village republics with their local chiefs live in regional autonomy. Modern instances where there is a "top chief" are a reflection of practices introduced by Europeans, and represent colonial, not indigenous, tradition. The region has been shaped by an ongoing history of change. Even before the Europeans came, various royal clans established kingdoms and introduced central governments, but this did not change the practice of local clan democracy in the villages (which began about 1000 C.E.). The Luanda kingdom, last and largest of its kind, was established as recently as the 15th century, and achieved its huge expansion by uniting with the Luba kingdom (toward the west on the Congo) in the 17th century to form the Luba-Lunda kingdom. A huge kingdom at that time, it extended from the west coast of Central Africa (Congo Delta) to Lake Tanganyika in the east.[26] The sacred kings of this realm eventually became emperors. The Luba-Lunda kingdom—which became a victim of the Belgian colonial lords—left its cultural traces in the traditions of many Central African Bantu peoples.

Further east on Lake Nyassa, the *Cewa, Yao* and *Nyanja* were left alone by the Lunda kingdom—and have no tradition of central royal power. But they were under threat from the Zulu-Bantu from the south, and later came under the influence of Arabian traders and captors, which brought a superficial Islamization along with it. Matriarchal peoples south of the Congo River (in DR Congo and Angola) also had, in the Congo and Luba kingdoms, sacred queen-king rulers and, later, were a high-priority target for the slave trade and Portuguese colonization.[27]

Today, the two most destructive factors in the region are the Christian missions, which put pressure on the matriarchal extended family, and the copper mines originating with colonization, which draw the young men away from the villages by offering them work for money.[28]

Thus it is even more amazing that all these peoples, who have been rooted here for so long, have maintained their ancient matriarchal patterns up to the present day. In spite of their tumultuous history they have demonstrated a strong determination to keep their social patterns, which go back to Africa's Neolithic. That

was when agriculture and matriarchy began. By retreating later into the Central African rainforest, many Bantu peoples retained the ancient ways.

To shed more light on this, we will outline another example from this cultural region.

16.4 The dual social organization of the Luapula

As with the Bemba, for the *Luapula* in Zambia, the main social institution is lineage rather than marriage. Here again, society is matrilineal, which is the organizational basis for the economy as well as religion. The Luapula have no superior-subordinate structures, and have an ideal gender balance.[29] Matriliny determines not only their present situation, but—as with all Central African matriarchal Bantu peoples—their history as well. History for them is the story of the individual matriarchal clans of their community, whose deeds and experiences are kept alive through the ancestor religion, which determines everything. This history is passed along orally with amazing precision by the eldest women, specialists in the tradition. As history is connected to the ancestors of certain specific clans, it is not worked up into an integrated story of the whole people. Ancient African governments such as the Luba-Lunda kingdom have been dominated by the history of the royal clans, and so, in the nation-building process, that history is what shapes group memory.[30]

The Luapula social order is a variation of the Bemba order, which demonstrates that the patterns of matriarchal social organization are not rigidly adhered to, but can be flexibly employed, building up a wealth of different incarnations of this type of society. Apart from their consistent matriliny, the other important feature of the Luapula is the control women have over the land and the products of their agricultural labor. They closely co-operate, with a marked tendency—compared to Luapula men—to use land and agricultural tools collectively. Upon this matriarchal foundation another variation of social order developed, different from the Bemba order. Luapula men have their own economy, of which they make individual rather than collective use. They do not work on women's land as farmers, but rather as fishers on the Luapula River and Lake Mweru in the Luapula Valley.

Foodstuffs, produced independently by both sexes, are trade goods—particularly between the sexes, but also between the many settlements in the valley. Men trade fish for maize, millet, cassava and pumpkin, which are produced in women's fields and gardens—and vice versa. In this way, each gender has its own economic realm, and maintains a certain independence from the other.[31]

This dual organization, which is also a principle of balance, turns up in the social order as well: each women's secret society, each female honorary society, and each pres-

tigious stage of life has a corresponding men's secret society, male honorary society, and a male prestigious stage of life.[32] It is exclusively men who organize all aspects of men's lives, and women who organize women. This dual organization is typical for many matriarchal societies in Africa, and distinguishes them from comparable matriarchal societies on other continents. In ancient African realms, this principle was applied all the way to the top government officials: the king was responsible only for the men's interests, while the queen mother looked after the interests of the women.

This matriarchal balance principle is at odds with the worldview of patriarchally influenced western anthropology. Wherever they went, male anthropologists researched only the men's sphere and ignored the women's. This omission is most blatant for the so-called matrilineal societies, of which many are actually matriarchal. Here, in spite of evidence to the contrary, researchers would emphasize only the men's realm—in order to demonstrate that these cultures were "only matrilineal" and that women actually had no say in matters. This obviously results in distortion, and means that women's culture in Central African societies is doubly ignored by researchers. A great number of indigenous African societies have not been adequately brought to light, and there is much work to be done.

Since conventional anthropology has seen only the "men's secret societies," usually organized for religious rather than power-wielding purposes, researchers have wrongly concluded that the men dominate. Recalling the example of the Luapula: more recent research by critical women anthropologists exposes the presence of women's parallel religious societies, and shows that these societies to guard secrets are the older ones, meant to protect women's knowledge of their own generative powers. Men's secret societies are later imitations in which boys' initiation and the accompanying secret knowledge is cultivated.

Another favorite anthropological prejudice is to see evidence of men's dominance in the fact that in African matriarchal societies, including the Luapula society, the mother's eldest brother represents the clan in relation to the outside world. This characterization takes into account neither clan structure nor the role of women in the clan. If it did, it would become clear that the mother's brother's authority is only symbolic, since he lacks control of the clan's goods and of the younger clan members' labor power. In contrast, women have the last word on all matters pertaining to clan and lineage, and the clan mother is the actual clan chief. In village matters as well—for which the mother's eldest brother is responsible—women take an active part in decision making.[33]

No less problematic is the mistaken identification of the location where young married couples make their homes. This is given as "virilocal" (residing with the husband) for most matrilineal peoples in Africa. In fact, they are neither virilocal

(with the husband) nor uxorilocal (with the wife), since among these peoples no couple lives alone, but always with the man's or woman's relatives. For the Bemba the designation "virilocal" is patently false, as daughters live matrilocally in their mother's village, and sons live in the next village with their mother's brother. For the Luapula it is just the reverse: the sons, rather than the daughters, live matrilocally in their mother's village, and their brides move in with them there. Contrary to what is often asserted, this in no way constitutes "patrilocality" (living with the father), as there is no male parental line involved. The sons are not considered to be related to their mother's husband.[34]

Another important factor is that Luapula unions are predominantly cross cousin marriages: after the young husband has performed a lengthy period of bride service with his wife's relatives (Clan A village), the young bride moves into her mother-in-law's village (Clan B village). The mother-in-law's husband, however, is none other than the young bride's uncle—her mother's brother who belongs to Clan A, and who is her own primary protector. Thus brides live "avunculocally" (with their mother's brother), just as young Bemba men do. Then, if it should happen that her Clan B mother-in-law's brother, who is now living in his wife's Clan A village, requires (as he has the right to do) the services of his sister's sons (his nephews) who are living with her, these young men, along with their wives, all return back to clan A village. The young women are once again at home with their mother, and it is the young men who now are living "avunculocally." Because of these close ties connecting two marriage clans, neither the young people of the Bemba nor those of the Luapula are ever cast into relationships with strangers; they easily move back and forth between their nearest matrilineal relatives.

Also, there is no compulsion for young women or young men to remain together forever. Marriage is not a legal institution, and is therefore not rigid. The only "rule" is to keep marriage short. Luapula women are sexually very active, which is considered to be a good thing. This activity is not confined to just one marriage, for there is a dread of the type of sexual monopoly that can develop if a woman finds her husband too attractive and consequently stays with him too long. It is highly undesirable for a woman to indulge her husband too much, as a man with a monopoly creates "slavery" for the woman and "chaos" in her clan.[35]

Sexuality has great value. Health, peace and culture are understood to be the result of satisfying sexual intercourse. So not only is married life rather free, but multiple relationships also occur. These have been one-sidedly described by anthropologists as "polygyny," to prove the existence of male dominance within matrilineal societies. It is a gross distortion to imply that these multiple marriages are comparable to patriarchal harems. In the same way that they observe polygyny among the men, these

anthropologists ignore polyandry among the women. In this way, a man can have several wives in various villages at the same time, while a woman can have several visiting husbands who come to her house. As this is a general practice, it can be said that the dominant form of marriage among the Luapula is polygyny-polyandry.

If these open forms of multiple marriage begin to change into permanent and thus constraining ties, women can increase their autonomy by engaging in polygyny. For example, a group of sisters will often decide to share one man among them, to avoid the burden of providing for several husbands. In this system, all the wives concur in making decisions—even against the man, if necessary, and this does not increase his "dominance." Also, when it is desirable to have limited offspring, a group of brothers may elect to share one wife. But this type of polyandry is not tempting for women, as it means that one woman alone will have to provide for the children and all the husbands.[36] Presumably this diversity of marriage forms goes back to earlier, typically matriarchal, sisters-brothers group marriage between young women and young men of two clans, a form whose traces were also to be found in Tibet (see chapter 4).

Such marriage connections between two clans often go back to two famous ancestors who married each other. The sisters-brothers group marriage between these clans is then seen as a continuous re-embodiment of their marriage. Those alive today would be, according to matriarchal belief in rebirth, the ongoing embodiment of these ancestors; in this context a clan is a personified individual embodiment.

These various forms of multiple marriage never present a problem for the children, who always live with their mother anyway, and belong to her clan. If it should happen that a pregnant woman has no regular husband, she simply goes to her various lovers and invites each one to be the "father," in the social sense, of the child. As this includes care-taking responsibilities—and is not always easy—some men decline the role of "fatherhood." When asked "who is the father of your child," a pregnant woman will often answer that "as yet no one has consented."[37]

The religious world of the Luapula resembles that of other matriarchal Bantu peoples, and is based on ancestor worship. In this religion, both women and men officiate equally: women for female ancestors and men for male ancestors. The mythical primordial parents, that is, the original mother and her twin brother, are prototypes for matriarchal kinship systems. This creates the image of a single family tree shared by all people, who thus are all closely related to each other.

The central symbol of this worldview is "ifumu," the mother's womb—through which humankind is continually able to regenerate itself. Ifumu also sig-

nifies the universe, which gives birth to all creation and is filled with limitless abundance. The land is also called ifumu, as is the horticulture practiced by women, along with the fruits of their labor, which are available for all. On the basis of this spiritual principle, women own the land.

The next most important cultural symbol is "mukowa," or matriarchal clan; this term also signifies the womb of the ancestress, embodying both the origin and the history of the clan. The single lineage within the clan is called "cikota", or "great female," and indicates the particular womb from which the lineage sprang. The role of men's fertility is known and honored; it is equated with the liquid element. Semen is cognate with water, the substance that makes the earth fertile, so fishing belongs to the realm of men, as does the water.[38]

A dangerous breach of the well-balanced social order of the Luapula came with European colonial governments and their Protestant missionaries. The industrial market system they introduced has been advantageous only for men, who have in some cases managed to amass individual wealth. Such men decline to share their newly acquired wealth with their matriarchal clans, and withdraw from them. They become members of Protestant sects that preach the gospel of private property instead of clan ownership, and calculate relationship through the father's line, not the mother's. In Protestant ideology, prosperity is regarded as evidence of being selected by God; this validates these men feeling justified in putting their business interests ahead of any claims the clan might make on them. With the support of missionaries, they also try to institute monogamous marriage, with the man as head of the family, in order to assure that their private property is passed down through the male line to their sons. To this end, they seek to "liberate" women from the clan structure by seducing them with their newly-acquired money. Certain women agree to such marriages, hoping to be relieved of hard work in the fields—a short-lived benefit. Although these women convert to Christianity, they quickly drop out of the sects because of the insignificant role they are expected to play. They go back home and return to traditional social and religious practices.

Most Luapula women have mounted massive resistance to this new power play, which they see as "enslavement of women." They claim the right to matrilineal distribution of goods (those who are better-off are especially active in this), and foster the traditional system in which wealth is used exclusively to help the clan. This allows women to maintain control over their land and their descendants, and to be supported by their adult children.[39]

16.5 Patriarchal and matriarchal animal-breeding peoples

The situation of women in patriarchal African cultures is very different from that of the Bemba and Luapula women. In a situation that occurs especially often in animal-breeding peoples, women live without property and without their own economic system. Every male head of a patriarchal animal-breeding people hopes to enlarge his herd and accumulate wealth. Women are there to do the milking and to bear the children, so the patriarchal lineage can continue. Women live patrilocally, as foreigners with their husband's relatives. A husband does not win his wife by performing bride service for her relatives, but rather by paying "bride price," with cattle, which allows him to take her away from her relatives. This in fact makes her into a pawn in the negotiations between her father and prospective father-in-law, who are respectively the giver and the taker of the woman. Subjectively, being valued as worth a large number of animals fills the women with pride; but now that money has infiltrated the system, the bride price is often paid with money.

A common misunderstanding is that the bride price buys the woman. In fact, the bride price pays for the woman's children to be purchased into the father's lineage—which indicates that early patriarchal cultures still believed that children belong to their mothers. A woman can leave the marriage and go back to her parents, but she must do so without her children, who remain with her husband's family. Since the woman's family has to pay back the bride price if she leaves, it is extremely difficult for her to get out of her marriage—and her family is not happy about it. This is especially a problem in cases where her brother has already spent her bride price to acquire his own wife. This is reason enough for the woman's parents to be concerned about her wifely faithfulness.

In the interest of strengthening the patriliny, it is desirable to have many sons, but daughters are also cherished for the bride price they bring, wealth that her father will use to enlarge his herds significantly. Men who are rich in cattle can afford the bride price for several women, thereby expanding their own patriliny through numerous offspring. So polygyny is the ideal—for men. Here we see the foundation of patriarchal polygyny, in which unrelated women must involuntarily become the wives of one man; this is nothing like the multiple-marriage relationships in matriarchal societies. Although a certain degree of respect is accorded the head wife, her husband does not consult her when he decides to enlarge his household with younger women. The humiliation and hurt—especially for older women—must be endured. In Africa this kind of polygyny is widespread.[40] It was later adopted by Islam, and further developed along patriarchal lines with the harem and "pur-

dah," the strict segregation of women. Here, there is no more possibility of returning to the parental home.

Because of the polygyny practiced by the rich, it is difficult for a poor man to find even one wife. He must wait for years, saving up until he has enough money or cattle for the bride price. Men grow old in the process, and usually marry very young women. In the warrior caste of animal breeders, men are also quite old by the time they marry, since they have to serve 14–20 years as a warrior before the elders give them permission to marry. The women they marry are that much younger. Because of the polygyny practiced by the rich, women become a scarce commodity and so are promised as children, often even before they are born, to the right suitor. For this their fathers receive a bride price from the future husband, and with that, the contract is sealed. It is common practice for child brides to be married to older men. While still children (10 years old) they have to move to their husband's home, where they are obliged to cook for him and permit his sexual advances. Of course, the cult of virginity—widespread in patriarchal cultures—plays a significant role in these practices. The younger a bride is, the greater the chance she is a virgin. Establishing patriliny always depends on the precarious identification of a man's legal children, which requires the forced confinement of the women who will bear them.[41]

Since this practice of confinement is always difficult and often impossible to carry out, millions of African women must endure a particularly awful practice called, euphemistically, "circumcision," in order to preserve the patriliny. The term implies that a girl's circumcision parallels boys' circumcision, which is also common practice. But for a boy, circumcision involves nothing more than removing the foreskin of the penis, while girls' circumcision is a dangerous surgical operation in which the clitoris and inner vaginal lips are removed, with the amputated genitalia usually being sewn together. This amputation of the genitals and consequently of a woman's sexual sensitivity—which is the purpose of the operation—is performed on girls when they are between 4 and 8 years old. It results in long-lasting pain and dangerous infections that are exacerbated by intercourse and childbirth. This absolutely guarantees a girl's virginity for her husband, since he receives a "pure" bride who has no interest in sex and therefore will be a faithful wife. Today, this practice has still not been eradicated—in spite of much protest by feminists and warnings from international human rights organizations. It continues as a revered ancient practice; although not introduced by Islam, the practice was taken up by Muslims. Today, it is especially widespread in Muslim regions of Africa, as well as in all Muslim lands from Africa to India.[42]

Though the focus here is on patriarchal animal-breeding peoples, it would not be correct to say that these cultures—contrary to a widespread assumption—were historically the first bearers of patriarchy to Africa, nor does it mean that these peoples have always been patriarchal. The first patriarchal patterns originated in Egypt during ancient New Kingdom (1550–1295 B.C.E.) at the latest. Every pastoral nomad people that was edged westward out of the Nile Valley into the Libyan Desert, or eastward into the Nubian Desert, had once lived in North Africa, and these peoples were organized matriarchally. They are the ancient "Libyans" in the west and the ancient "Nubians" in the east. Their descendants are the *Tuareg* peoples in the west of the Sahara Desert, and the *Beja* peoples east of the Nile in the Nubian Desert on the Red Sea. They are rather light skinned, speak a Hamitic language, and are related to each other. The Tuareg as well as the Beja—the latter include the *Ababda, Bischarin, Amarar, Hadendowa, Halenga*, and *Beni-Amer*—still have a matriarchal social order. The women live both matrilineal and matrilocal, and they control the economy; men are hunters, traders and very fine warriors. Other matriarchally organized pastoral nomads are the darker skinned *Nubian* peoples to the west and east of the White Nile—such as the *Nuba* to the west and the *Kunama* and *Barea* to the east—who still retain many customs that go back to this social order (see map 12).[43]

This shows that even when nomadic animal breeders are shepherd-warriors and act like predators relative to the outside world, they have not necessarily always been patriarchal, and do not of necessity become patriarchal. The Tuareg example raises the question of matriarchal animal breeding cultures (see chapter 18). It appears that in the time before the Iron Age, nomadic animal breeders in general also followed the matriarchal social order.

Not until the Iron Age around 300 B.C.E., with a dramatic migration of peoples in the Near East and the Mediterranean, was northeastern Africa affected. Patriarchalized shepherd-warriors with iron weapons pushed into Northeast Africa from Western Asia and Arabia; they fought and subdued the matriarchal pastoral peoples living there. They spread into the eastern half of Africa from north to south, robbing the dark skinned agricultural peoples who lived there, and forcing them out of their home territories. Some of these animal breeding warrior peoples with patriarchal patterns are the *Nilote* peoples in East Africa, spearheaded by the *Massai,* who pushed forward until south of Lake Victoria. By 200 C.E., the invasion of these Iron Age shepherd-warriors had reached the Zambesi, where they crowded out the southernmost living Bantu peoples. Their migration advanced toward the west, through the Sudan belt, a steppe region south of the Sahara Desert that extends from the Nile to Niger.

Map 12: Area of the Bedja peoples in Northeast Africa

Just a few centuries later, from the 7th century on, these early patriarchal animal-breeding peoples were followed by Arabs who took over East and Central Sudan. They were ruthless in their propagation of Islam, which pushed the social patterns of many early patriarchal cattle-breeding peoples still more forcefully in the direction of a full-fledged, definitive patriarchy. In the process, the once vast regions of matriarchal African agricultural peoples were reduced to small, insular enclaves. In East and Central Africa many Bantu peoples were attacked by the patriarchal cattle-breeders, and over the course of time, were dominated by them—quite a few of these have been patriarchalized in that way. Even the Bantu, who still have matriarchal patterns as described here, have been permeated by certain customs of the Islam-influenced cattle-breeding cultures. This generates a certain tension, and potential for conflict, within Bantu communities and between Bantu peoples.[44]

16.6 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the economic level:

- In most matriarchal cultures, women are the horticulturists and agriculturists; they are the inventors of gardening and field cultivation.
- Their most ancient tools are the digging stick, hoe and grinding stone: all these are in the hands of women, and the hoe is a sacred object.
- Women are the producers, manufacturers and distributors of food. They are the providers. Material wealth is not accumulated.
- Women and men have separate economic spheres, or even separate economies, which are defined differently in different matriarchal societies. Where women are the agriculturists—which is very often the case—then men's work is hunting and fishing.

At the social level:

- In many cases of matriarchal culture, a clan or lineage forms a clan village. Mutual intermarriage between two specific, unaltered matrilineal clans, or lineages links pairs of clan villages.
- In matriarchal societies men's polygyny and women's polyandry—that is, the multiple sexual relationships of the sexes—are common, either as part of the mutual intermarriage between two clans, or as individuals.
- Matriarchal societies in Africa often have a dual organizational structure in economic, social, and spiritual matters. This might be a very ancient

trait; in Paleolithic times the social structure was strictly dual (female gatherers and male hunters), over-arched by an explicit balance between the genders.

At the political level:

- Clan villages are led exclusively by consensus. If there is no consensus, a branch of the matriliny can move away and establish a new village.
- Every village is self-sustaining and autonomous (village republics), and egalitarian.

At the cultural level:

- At the center of religion and spirituality is veneration of the ancestress (mother of the people), and all the other ancestors, along with the associated belief in specific rebirth. Women originated these practices.
- The hearth is a sacred place; the ancestors are venerated at the hearth fire.
- "History" means the history of individual matriarchal clans; this history is remembered in the process of ancestor veneration. It is passed down by word of mouth; in most matriarchal cultures, this oral tradition is carried out by the eldest women, who are the experts.
- The festival of girls' initiation is the most important festival. In this festival women pass on the knowledge of their generative capabilities, and the control thereof.
- In everyday life, as well, the generative capacity of women is honored. Female symbolism appears everywhere in traditional art; for example, the house becomes a sacred place through the use of magic symbols. The central symbol is the mother's womb.
- Sexuality is valued highly; satisfied sexuality is regarded as leading to health, peace, and culture.
- In the agrarian cyclical festivals the generative powers of the earth are worshipped; earth is considered the everlasting, all encompassing mother.
- Each woman is a daughter of Mother Earth, and participates in her generative powers.
- Matriarchal culture creates an erotic-ecstatic world; the religious expression of this is female shamanism.
- In patriarchalized societies, men's secret societies are warrior based, and aim to extend men's power within the culture; this is not the case with men's sacred societies in matriarchal cultures.
- In matriarchal cultures, men's sacred societies have as their counterparts women's sacred societies. Women's sacred societies are usually older than men's; in them, women attend to their knowledge of their generative capacities.

Notes

1. Cheikh Anta Diop: *Civilization or Barbarism. An Authentic Anthropology,* New York 1991, Lawrence Hill Books (first edition, Paris 1981); and *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa. The Domains of Matriarchy and Patriarchy in Classical Antiquity,* London 1989, Karnak House.—Diop argues that Africa's cultures, continent-wide, have matriarchal roots going back to the earliest times, and thus influenced other continents. Based on his understanding of African culture, his definition of "matriarchy" is analogous to my own. According to his theory, Africa's matriarchal roots are the source of the unity of African cultures. Colonization—first by Arabs and then Europeans—obscured this unity and engendered cultural heterogeneity.—See also the positive, if critical, introduction by Ifi Amadiume in: Anta Diop: *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa,* ibidem.—See also Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum: *Dark Mother. African Origins and Godmothers*, 2002, iUniverse, and 2003, Media Mediterranea.
2. Leo Frobenius: *Das unbekannte Afrika*, Munich 1923, C.H. Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, p. 16.
3. B. Davidson: *Black Mother*, London 1961, Gollancz, pp. 235–247.
4. H. A. Bernatzik: *Geheimnisvolle Inseln der Tropen Afrikas. Frauenstaat und Mutterrecht der Bidyogo*, Berlin-Wien 1933, Deutsche Buch-Gemeinschaft, pp.14–15. [Inseln]
5. See for a short history of the Bantu peoples: H. Baumann: *Afrikanische Plastik und sakrales Königtum*, Munich 1969, Verlag der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, p. 47, [Plastik]; Baumann/ Thurnwald/ Westermann: *Völkerkunde von Afrika*, Essen, Germany 1940, Essener Verlagsanstalt, p. 42, [Völkerkunde]; G. P. Murdock: *Atlas of World Cultures*, Pittsburgh, USA, 1981, University of Pittsburgh Press, pp. 9–15; Olderogge/ Potechin: *Die Völker Afrikas*, Berlin 1961, VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, vol. 2, pp. 734–743.
6. The excellent critical work by Audrey I. Richards, Karla O. Poewe, Annie Lebeuf (see below) provides very good insights. In contrast, the work of Lucy Mair (see below) is influenced by the theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss, in which women are seen as nothing more than objects for exchange between men, without any sphere of action of their own. While this may be the case in certain patriarchal societies, the generalization is unsubstantiated. This leads Lucy Mair into numerous confusing and contradictory assertions. Male ethnologists see African women's situation much more negatively, or don't see it at all—a lack that is corrected by the research of Richards, Poewe and Lebeuf.
7. Audrey I. Richards: *Chisungu. A girl's initiation ceremony among the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia*, London 1956, Routledge, pp. 25, 171,177, [Chisungu]; and: "Bemba Marriage and Modern Economic Conditions," in: *Rhodes-Livingstone Papers*, no. 4, Cape Town, South Africa, 1940, Oxford University Press; and: "Some Types of Family Structure among the Central Bantu," in: Radcliff-Brown/ Forde (eds.): *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, London 1950, Oxford University Press.
8. Audrey Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 26, 49; Baumann et al., [Völkerkunde], ibid., pp. 43, 47, 138–139; Evan M. Zuesse: *Ritual Cosmos*, Athen/Ohio, USA, 1979, Ohio University Press, p.79.
9. Audrey Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., p. 27.
10. Audrey Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., p.186.
11. Audrey Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 17, 172, 186.
12. Audrey Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 27, 39–41, 49–50; Baumann et al., [Völkerkunde], ibid., p. 139.
13. Audrey Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp.40–43, 186; Lucy Ph. Mair: *African Marriage and Social Change*, London 1969, Frank Cass and Co., pp. 76,84. [Marriage]

14. Mair, [Marriage], ibid, p. 81.
15. Audrey Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp.39, 42, 48; Zuesse, ibid., p. 87.
16. Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 28, 29.
17. Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 29–32, 48; and Zuesse, ibid. pp. 82–84.
18. Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 33, 158–160, 183, 184.
19. Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 17, 28, 33, 34, 183–186; and Mair, [Marriage] ibid., pp. 78,79; and Baumann et.al, [Völkerkunde], ibid., p. 140.
20. Baumann, [Plastik], ibid., p. 47, and [Völkerkunde], ibid., pp. 43, 141.
21. Baumann et. al, [Völkerkunde], ibid., pp. 43, 140, 141.
22. E. W. Smith/ A. M. Dale: *The Ila-speaking peoples of Northern Rhodesia*, 2 vols., London 1920, Macmillan; and Zuesse, ibid., pp. 79–82, 91, 92.—These authors describe this symbolism in the context of the Ila; their understanding can also be applied to other matriarchal Bantu peoples.
23. Zuesse, ibid., pp. 91, 92; and Richards: [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 30–34.
24. Baumann et al., [Völkerkunde], ibid., pp. 43, 124–126, 134, 142, 158; and [Plastik], ibid., p. 34; and H. Baumann: *Schöpfung und Urzeit des Menschen im Mythos der afrikanischen Völker*, Berlin 1936, Reimer, pp. 382–384.
25. Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 170–180; Mair, [Marriage], ibid., p. 81; other peoples are named in: H. Baumann: „Vaterrecht und Mutterrecht in Afrika“, in: [ZfE], no. 58, Berlin 1926, Springer, especially pp. 110,111. [Mutterrecht]
26. Baumann et al., [Völkerkunde], ibid., pp. 130, 132, 134, 145; and [Plastik], ibid., pp. 26–28.
27. V.G.K. Pons: „Die Völker des Kongobeckens“, in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 2, pp. 96, 97, ibidem; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* vol. 2, ibidem.
28. Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., p. 28.
29. Karla O. Poewe: *Matrilineal Ideology. Male-Female Dynamics in Luapula, Zambia*, London-New York 1981, Academic Press, Preface and p.1, [Dynamics]; and “Matrilineal Ideology: The Economic Activities of Women in Luapula, Zambia,” in: Linda Cordell/ Stephen Beckermann (eds): *The Versatility of Kinship*, London-New York 1980, Academic Press, pp. 333–357.—Karla O. Poewe rightly criticizes the anthropological fiction of universal male dominance and shows that matrilinearity is not only a line of inheritance, but is also an entire social system. Unfortunately, she calls this system “sexual parallelism,” a concept that is confusing and does not go far enough. This social form is not a matter of parallels between the sexes, but is based on the complex interdependence that results in the typical matriarchal balanced society.
30. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., pp. 13, 105.
31. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., pp. 13—16.
32. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., p. 39.
33. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., pp. 47, 105.
34. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., p. 38.—Karla O. Poewe comprehensively and accurately criticizes the biases of patriarchy-influenced anthropology both past and present. She argues that the older (classical) anthropological studies of Africa confirm that women in matrilineal societies are persons with full rights and titles to property, as well as exercising the power to make decisions and manage resources (Rattray, Fortes, Richards). However, at the present time, this research is either ignored or reinterpreted from an androcentric perspective that consults only male informants. This perspective is particularly influenced by the theory of Lévi-Strauss (1969), which regards women as nothing more than objects for exchange between men, and which attempts to squeeze the diversity of social systems into an oversimplified, structuralist mold (Poewe, p. 27).
35. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., pp. 43, 57, 68.

36. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., pp. 40, 41, 67.
37. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., pp. 65, 69.
38. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., pp. 3, 4, 56.
39. Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., pp. 51, 100–104.
40. Mair, [Marriage], ibidem; and „Die Völker im Gebiet der Seen und Hochländer Ostafrikas", in: *Bild der Völker*, vol. 2, pp. 106, 107, ibidem; originally in English: Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard (ed.): *Peoples of the World,* vol. 2, ibidem.
41. Mair, [Marriage], ibidem; and Baumann, [Völkerkunde], ibidem; and [Mutterrecht], ibidem; and Turnbull, ibidem.
42. Mary Daly: *Gyn/ecology,* Boston 1978, Beacon Press, pp. 175–199; and Marilyn French: *The War against Women,* New York 1992, Summit Books, pp. 134–148.—Both authors note that in regard to this situation Europeans and white North Americans have no right to make moral judgements against African and Muslim peoples. The maiming of women through clitoridectomy was practiced in Europe and North America until the 19th century (and is still practiced in North America), promoted and carried out by respected male gynaecologists.
43. Baumann, [Mutterrecht], ibid., pp. 125, 126; and Leo Frobenius, ibid., pp. 42, 43.
44. Here I refer to knowledge that will be presented in context in future work. It is supported, for example, by J. Nicolaisen's argument in: *Ecology and Culture of the Pastoral Tuareg*, Copenhagen 1963, National Museum of Copenhagen, p. 481 f., in contradiction of the theories of Murdock, Schmidt, Koppers, and Baumann.

17

Matriarchal Queen-Kingship in West Africa

For Ameyaa Kese, Founder of the first Akan Realm in Ghana, and for Yaa Asantewa, Defender of the last Akan Realm in Ghana.

For thousands of years in West, Central and Southern Africa, hereditary queens held important positions, acting as regents or co-regents; this continued, to some degree, until recently. This is not a question of scattered instances of individual queens ruling in patriarchal monarchies (such as Hatshepsut of Egypt, Elizabeth I of England, or Maria Theresia of Austria), but refer to situations where uninterrupted regency or co-regency by women is the norm. In royal matriarchal clans power is fundamentally split in two, as it is in African matriarchal peoples: the king rules the world of men, while the queen, whose title means "female king," rules the world of women. However, this is only the beginning of her power; as "queen mother" she is in fact mother of the royal line and of the ruling or future king. She places him on the throne, and is the only person who can admonish him in public; in certain circumstances, she can even unseat him. Symbolically associated with the land the people live on, she is owner of the sacred realm. This is consistent with these peoples' oral historical traditions, which recounts that matriarchal realms were regularly founded by queen mothers. To save her threatened people and culture in times of crisis, the queen often took over the king's duties in addition to her own, and ruled simultaneously as "female king" and "male king," adorned with the var-

ious regalia of each office. Africa's history is full of royal female leaders, whose courage and determination has been kept alive in the memory of their peoples, and who still are highly venerated in ancestor religions.[1]

17.1 The history of the Akan

Thanks to pioneer fieldwork research done by Robert S. Rattray and Eva Meyerowitz on the *Akan* and *Ashanti* peoples of West Africa, we can first of all get a more detailed sense of how matriarchal realms were organised in Africa, and then can pursue the question of how they arose. The answer to both questions can be approached by looking at the traditional oral history of the Akan, and particularly at the history of the royal clans.[2]

Today Akan people live mostly in Ghana and the eastern part of Ivory Coast, and include the *Bono (Brong), Fanti,* and *Ashanti* in Ghana and the *Bete, Baule, Sapo* and *Angni* in Ivory Coast. Europeans called this region "Pepper Coast," "Ivory Coast," "Gold Coast" (Ghana), and "Slave Coast" (Nigeria): the names make colonizers' intentions abundantly clear. Wealth in the later realms of the Akan was founded upon gold. However, not all of the Akan originated here; some of the peoples who later comprised the Akan had originally lived outside this region, and some came from as far away as North Africa.

Following their history back through the centuries, we come across the queen mother Ameyaa Kese, or "Ameyaa the Great." In 1295, she founded the Bono Queen's realm and its capital, Bono Mansu, situated in northern Ghana. Thanks to the discovery of gold, it became the richest and culturally most advanced realm in the region; even today, indigenous singers still praise the splendor of its court. It existed from the 1295–1740 C.E., and had an enduring influence on the later Ashanti realm in the southern forest. The Ashanti conquered the Bono in 1740, and the Ashanti kingdom was finally destroyed in 1901 by English colonial rule.

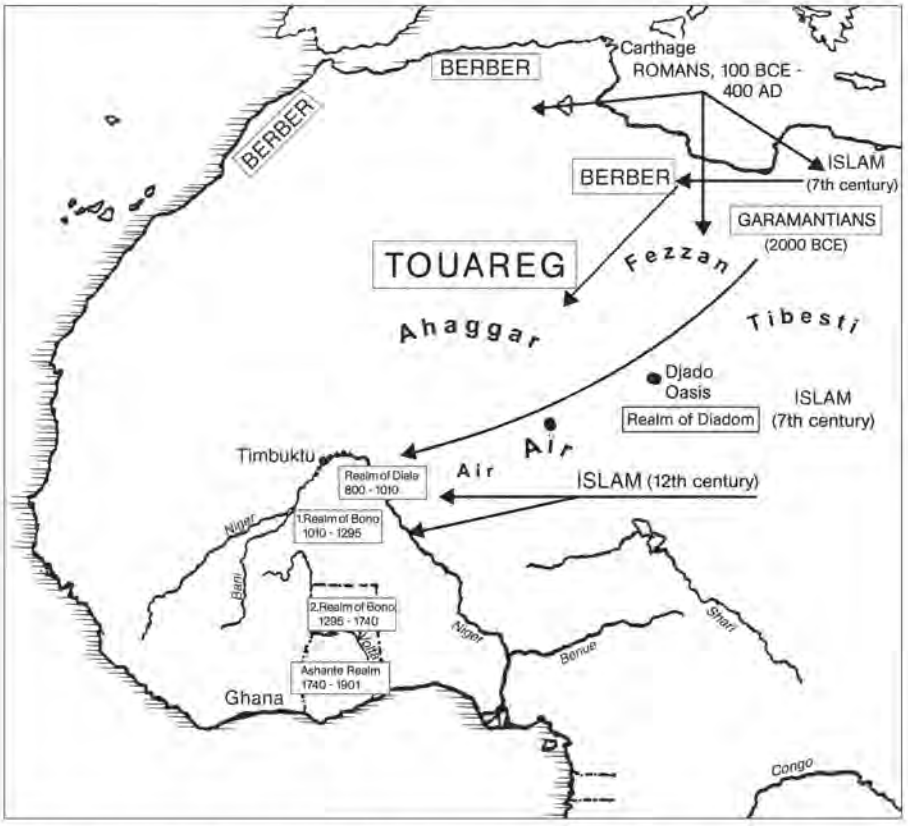
Before she founded the queen's realm of Bono Mansu (which would become the most important in all of Ghana), Ameyaa the Great had come southward from Upper Volta with her people, leaving behind her, south of the bend in the Niger River, the first queen's realm of Bono (1010–1295 C.E.). And three hundred years before that, these people had already migrated south from their queen's-realm of Diala in the Timbuktu region, which had flourished from 800–1010 C.E. (see map 13). Connected by caravan routes, these realms had direct trade connections across the Sahara to Nubia, Egypt, and Ethiopia. What were the reasons of these peoples to continue their migrations?

In the 11th century, Arabic, Islam-influenced Bedouin peoples invaded the Sahara Desert, coming down from the northeast and conquering the old caravan routes. They set off a north-south migration, and various other peoples moved on, in order to get out of the invaders' way. Doubly threatened—both by this aggression and by the encroachment of Islam—Ameyaa and the earlier queen mothers refused to submit. In order to hold onto their traditional matriarchal culture, they departed with their peoples in successive migrations. It wouldn't be the first time a matriarchal people took to its heels in the face of invading patriarchy (see map 13).[3]

Before their queens'-realms had been established on the Niger and further south, these matriarchal peoples had already been displaced from their queen's-realm on the central Saharan Djado Plateau between the Ahaggar (Hoggar) and Tibesti Mountains (the Diadom Confederation). This was caused by the first encroachment of Islam, conducted "with fire and sword" by patriarchal Arabs in the 7th century, when the entire North African coast was being invaded and taken over. Arabs also conquered the once rich, fertile region of Fezzan (in southern Libya) and pushed the inhabitants—matriarchal peoples—out into the Sahara; this affected the whole region, all the way to the central Saharan Djado Plateau. The matriarchal peoples migrated out of this part of North Africa, led by queen mothers, in order to save their traditional culture. It is supposed that their original homeland had been even farther north, in north-east Libya—where Herodotus had already mentioned them in the 5th century B.C.E. .

Indeed, the ancestors of these peoples were one of the many *Libyan,* or *Berber,* peoples of antiquity. They belonged to the lighter-skinned populations in northern Africa, which were all organised as matriarchies. Akan traditional oral history bears witness to this, recounting that some of their ancestors were light-skinned and came southwards across "the land of the white sand." Again and again, over centuries, matriarchal Libyan peoples escaped patriarchal threats along North Africa's coast: Phoenicians arrived first, pushing matriarchal peoples away and establishing a trade empire along the coast (Carthage); then Romans came, using war to establish their power in the region; they were followed by Roman Christianity, which missionized the peoples; and finally the Arabs' ravaging advance came, bringing Islam along with it (see map 13).

While migrating ever southward, the matriarchal peoples created alliances among themselves that incorporated the marriage politics of the queen mothers. Mutual intermarriage joined entire peoples together, leading to alliances and new realms. When these light-skinned peoples got as far as the great Niger River in Sudan, they joined together with dark-skinned African peoples who had lived there since Paleolithic times, and had developed their own matriarchal culture.[4]



Map 13: Realms and migrations of Akan peoples in Northwest Africa

These peoples intermarried and formed political alliances, guided by queen mothers; this resulted in the dark-skinned appearance they have today. Later, in the region of Upper Volta, this intensified when the newcomers once again joined together in intermarriage and engaged in alliance politics with the dark-skinned peoples living there—for example, with the *Mossi*. These distinct cultures—which were both, after all, based on matriarchal foundations—melded together, forming the Akan people.[5]

Marriage politics is a typical means of building up matriarchal realms, and stands in marked contrast to the patriarchal use of war for empire building. Friends, guests, allies, indigenous residents, refugees, and even slaves are brought into the clans—and this is also true for the royal lineage—by marriage, in order to expand the clans and shape a society of relatives. Even in their most complex form as a confederation or a queen's-realm, matriarchies are societies of relationship.

Therefore, matriarchal realms are primarily characterised by the fact that they are societies of relationship. Secondly, they are always sacred cultures. That is, matriliny and the spiritual-religious sphere constitute their two organizing principles. Thirdly, they are alliances built through blood and affinity relationships—but (in contrast to patriarchies) never through conquest. These special characteristics distinguish them fundamentally from patriarchal empires.

17.2 The Queen Mother and the earliest form of the Akan realms

For the Akan, along with all the other matriarchies, the clan's eldest woman is considered the source of clan life and is at its center. She is not only the mother of the matrilinear clan, but also the mediator between the clan deity and living members of the clan. The original ancestress and creatrix of the clan is venerated as the clan deity: she has become the mother goddess of the clan, and the actual clan mother is considered to be her most recent incarnation. So all ritual authority rests with the clan mother.

It is the same for the eldest woman of the royal clan, the queen mother: she is the source of the royal lineage, and mother of the ruling or future king. But even more importantly, she is mother of the whole society, which she herself, or her royal ancestress, has established by joining together various clans and peoples. Since the queen mother has "born" the realm on her own, it belongs to her—"as a child belongs to its mother." She is considered to be the most recent incarnation of the deified founding ancestress, and therefore as mother of all. Anyone may petition her;

even transgressors may seek sanctuary with her, and under her protection they are untouchable. Even now she still has the right to grant pardons.

An Akan realm could not be established without a queen mother, or "Ohemma"; but this could be done in the absence of a king, or "Ohene." In fact, every Akan realm has historically been founded by a queen mother, who only later chooses one of her sons to be placed on the throne as king and co-regent. In times of crisis—for example, if the king were still a minor, or was absent, or if the collapse of a realm forced an immediate exodus—the queen mother ruled alone. She was then both Ohemmaa, female king, and Ohene, male king.[6]

These traits of the Akan realms demonstrate that, in a matriarchal context, queenship stands above kingship: the queen mother has the last word and is in fact the power behind the throne. It is the same order as in ordinary matriarchal clans, where the clan mother is head and her son or brother is delegated to act as representative to the outside world.

In the past, when a queen mother moved away with her clan and retinue to find a new home, she used oracles and divination to lead them on the perilous journey through the desert. She was a shaman queen, using her intuition and ability to read nature's signs; for instance, an animal might help to find the path that would lead to water and food. The animal in question was then considered the "mask" of a deity, and so was established as a totem for that royal clan.

When she found land that was potentially habitable, but was already inhabited by others, the queen mother entered into relationships and shaped alliances with clans of other peoples, who gave them hospitality. If these clans were prepared to intermarry, the newcomers joined together with them in mutual intermarriages. In this way the queen mother brought several clans together and, from that alliance, formed a new people. Once this people's existence was established, the insistence on clan exogamy, which had been lifted during the migration, was enforced again. The sole function of this commandment of exogamy was to weave together, by means of mutual intermarriage, the confederation of distinct clans into a unified realm. It was not related to "fear of incest"—a mere projection of patriarchally influenced western social sciences—but rather was a practical (rather than moral) imperative. On the other hand, during migration there was no confederation, so the exogamy rule was temporarily invalid, and the clan married endogamously. In this notable way, by using intermarriage to shape alliances between different peoples, some Akan queen mothers founded their realms; this is reflected in the ancient title they formerly bore: "Sovereign Mistress of the Realm."

In their new home, the queen mother planted a tree, a "fire tree," as the soul-tree for her new city; near it, she had her palace built in the form of a vulva. During

construction, a female human being might be buried in the palace's foundation or under the soul-tree; this could also occur in building of dwelling houses. Sometimes too, gold or other precious objects were used for the same purpose.[7] This grave under the city's soul-tree became a highly venerated spot. When the realm was under siege by outsiders, the sacred grave beneath the tree was the most precious treasure—to be defended to the last. Each clan built its compound along the main street, running precisely from east to west. Each clan mother (who was after all clan queen in her own home) planted a tree in front of her house; just as the tree of the queen mother was the soul-tree for the city, so the clan mother's tree was the soul-tree for her house. This earliest form of the realm—no bigger than a city-state—consisted of three clans, representing the three regions of the cosmos: the heavens, the earth, and the underworld.[8]

In that way, the queen mother became the Ohemma of the new realm, or city-state, and served as high priestess of the royal ancestress—who was venerated as the city's tutelary goddess. Traditionally, this goddess was worshipped on the outskirts of the city, and lived in a fig tree in a sacred grove. The other clans also venerated their female ancestors in the sacred grove, and often a cave in the grove was cited as the place where all the clans originated. The ordinary clan mothers made up the queen mother's advisory council, which was the council of the eldest women. Everybody could attend this council, but decisions rested with the clan mothers, and the queen mother had the last word.[9]

In those days the lives of the ordinary clans were organised according to typical matriarchal principles. The Akan lived (and still live) not in huts, but in large, subdivided compound houses. Each one of these houses was the residence of a matrilineal lineage, headed by the eldest mother. The daughters, sons, and children of the daughters stayed with her; the men, when they married, did not leave. Married couples did not have a home together, but came together in a visiting marriage.[10] As with all matriarchal peoples, for the Akan the most important of all the life cycle ceremonies is girls' initiation—and this has remained true into modern times. They consider it the most ancient of all ceremonies. Before the festival, girls are taught the rules of the social fabric and of married life. The celebration begins with a bath in the nearest river, after which the girls put on women's clothes for the first time. The Akan abhor the bloodshed and mutilation of all circumcision, which is widely practised in Islamic Africa; whether of boys or girls, they consider it to be a sacrilege against the natural integrity of the body.[11]

The clan mother, or clan queen, sits on her clan stool at every important clan event, just as the queen mother sits on her royal stool, or throne, during her regency. Clan-queens' stools are white, while the queen mother, as a daughter of

the sky goddess or of the moon goddess, sits on a silver stool (Ill. 16 and Ill. 17). The princesses and princes, to whom she herself has given birth, are imagined as stars, who surround her the way stars surround the moon in the sky. With the practice, begun by the queen mothers, of appointing a son as king and co-regent, the latter would also receive—as a "child of the moon"—a silver stool, while the queen mothers sat upon pearl stools, symbolizing female blood and matriliny (for example, see the Wenkyi tradition).[12]

In her role as magician, the queen mother was, above all, a rainmaker. The annual sowing festival was dedicated to her rainmaking power. With a Neolithic stone axe as thunderbolt, she made thunder and lightning, and made the rain to fall. In the event of drought, she and her princesses undertook a great procession; they brought along a water-basin and, during the sacrifice of a female animal, implored the sky goddess for rain. This ritual is still performed today. In addition to mastery over the water, the queen mother also was master of fire: the same procession was undertaken in the event of a wildfire. And, trying to ban epidemics, she sealed off the streets of the city with ashes, so that death could not enter.[13]

When the queen mother dies she goes back to the spirit world, where all her female predecessors live. She herself is now considered to be a divine ancestress with the ability to guide her successor—one of her daughters—in her footsteps. The founder of a realm, she assumes a prominent place in female ancestor worship. At ancestor ceremonies, huge sacrifices of food and animals are brought to all the ancestors, those from royal clans as well as ordinary clans. Veneration of ancestor queens is a central ceremony.[14]

This is the original form of a matriarchal confederation in Africa, which the Akan re-established whenever one of their historical realms was destroyed; the queen mother, or perhaps a royal princess, would always emigrate to start, along with the refugees, a new city-state elsewhere. Even in more peaceful times, a royal princess could move away with her followers, either because of land or water scarcity, or because of irreconcilable differences within the city itself. In any case, from earliest times up until today—in spite of all the patriarchal attacks against it—the institution of queen mother as "owner" and regent of the realm, accompanied by her advisory council of clan mothers, has been maintained.

If that situation is amazing, equally so is the type of politics engaged in by the queen mothers. They enter into political relations and found confederations, and instead of weapons, war and conquest, they succeed because of hospitality, love and marriage. The queen mother's regency rested only on the blood relationships generated by mutual intermarriages, and on traditional beliefs. Taxes and tribute did

Illustration 16. Silver throne stool of the Queen Mother of Mampon, Akan. (in: R. S. Rattray: Ashanti, Oxford 1923, p. 295)

Illustration 17. Queen Mother of Mampon, Akan, showing her daughter how the Silver throne stool is dedicated by magical signs. (in: R. S. Rattray: Ashanti, Oxford 1923, p. 300)

not come into play; even ordinary clans retained their own autonomy and authority vis-à-vis the royal clan. Wealth flowed into the royal clan solely through the vast trade network it organised and controlled. The queen mother was first among equals by virtue of being founder and authority over the priestesses and priests of the realm, that is, through tradition and religion. This is the context in which this form of political organization is being called "sacred" here; it was a sacred society with the queen mother embodying the highest goddess.

17.3 Matriarchal Akan kings

Akan realms did not remain city-states; rather, through propagation, the politics of alliance, and trade relationships they grew into realms of regional size. The realm of Bono Mansu in northern Ghana included seven clans, and the last Akan realm, the Ashanti in southern Ghana, included eight clans, along with the numerous side lineages attached to them.

The confederation of *Bono Mansu,* as the most magnificent Akan realm, can serve as our model for the later form of Akan realms. As individual clans grew larger, they no longer lived in the original city; instead, each clan built its own city, with outlying villages and fields. The queen mother's city was the capital. The marriage system that connected clans to each other became highly complex. As her responsibilities multiplied, the queen mother began to reign with a male administrator, the "Koronti-hene," who translated her instructions into practical policies. This office could be given to a man whom she wished to honor, or even to an outsider, and was not restricted to the royal line.

It was different with sacred offices such as the sacred kingship. The queen mother installed an Ohene, or priest-king, to support her in carrying out religious duties. She chose him from among her sons—this is a privilege she held until quite recently. As a young moon king, bearing the title, "High Born of the Moon," he embodied the male aspect of the sky or moon goddess. Before the tradition of son's kingship was established, the male aspect of the moon was embodied by one of the queen mother's beautiful young lovers. Having been chosen by the queen mother, he entered the sacred grove and joined into sacred marriage with her, in her love-goddess aspect, or with the crown princess. At the Akan New Year's festival at the Spring Equinox, where the royal clan's totem animal used to be sacrificed, this young lover was sacrificed there. According to Akan belief, this sacrifice made the earth fertile for the coming year. The prayers that accompanied this festival were exclusively for the well being of the queen mother, abundant rain, and the fertility of women, animals and seeds.

As the sons of the queen mother became kings, they too suffered this death. Later, a substitute for the king was introduced: his "soul carrier," someone close to him who would embody the king in the sacrificial rites, and would die in place of him. Over time, the ritual of sacred marriage was performed more often, but less frequently by the queen mother herself, and instead was enacted by the king and his favorite wife.[15]

The enthroned king presided over an advisory council composed of male clan heads—the brothers of the clan queens. Clan heads of both genders also carry honorary titles. "Abusua" is the Akan word for clan, and the titles "Abusua-hemmaa" or "Obaapanyin" refer to the female clan head; male clan heads are "Abusua-hene" or "Abusuapanyin." Each clan possesses its own totem animal, represented by small figures adorning the tops of large sceptres carried by female and male clan heads. These clan heads are almost always present as female councillors in the palace of the queen mother, or as male councillors in the palace of the king. Together with the male clan chiefs, the king manages men's work in the realm; that is, duties associated with outside matters such as clearing forest land and drying up swamps, building roads and markets, and organising trade. To manage all the responsibilities of a growing infrastructure, he too has an executive administrator, the Koronti-hene, doing business in the name of the queen mother and the king (later, just in the name of the king).

In spite of his new position, the king's importance is still exclusively based on a network of clan relationships and on his religious role; this has been the case up until recently. He is above all a sacred king, a representative of divine power, and it is this function that is valued. By himself he has no power to give orders; for any official action he needs the agreement of the entire men's council. And behind each man on the council stands a female clan head with her entire clan, without whose agreement no man on the council can decide anything.[16]

The queen mother, while she is still living, can choose to hand over her office to one of her daughters. Now this crown princess—sister of the ruling king and mother of the future king—bears the title, Ohemma, and is head of the realm. In such situations the king rules together with both women: the old queen mother as advisor, the young queen mother as head of the realm. In this arrangement, the young Ohemmaa embodies the love goddess aspect, associated with the planet Venus. This Venus aspect is associated with her female fertility.

The young queen mother—sister of the king—is free to choose her partners and lovers, as often and as many as she likes. But her unlimited erotic freedom is no different from that of other royal princesses, who altogether practice polyandry.[17] Children of the queen and princesses are considered to be "fatherless"; this is a per-

fectly honorable description, since only a fatherless child can become king. The royal women's multiple relationships played an important foreign policy role in the politics of forming confederations.[18]

It was not until the 14th century that the sun cult around the Akan king arose. Due to his vast dealings in the gold trade, Bono Mansu became very rich and developed into a large realm. Gold was discovered, and all the gold in the realm belonged to the king, who introduced gold dust as the currency of the land—and this increased his influence significantly. Gold was considered the metal of the sun. This helped the introduction of the sun cult, which had already been adopted by many other peoples. Originally the Akan believed that the sun was reborn every morning out of the sky or moon goddess, embodying her male aspect, which they called "Nyankopon." Nyankopon gradually became an independent god of nature, or sun god, and from that time on the king was considered to be the image of the sun, and acted as the priest of the sun god.

As high king, elevated above clan kings and city kings, the sun cult now helped him accentuate this higher status. He alone was the "son of the sun," while all the lesser kings remained "sons of the moon." He was not "son" of the sun god in terms of blood relationship; it was only his office that conferred the relationship. As a human man, he remained in his own female lineage, as a son of the moon goddess (queen mother). Because of this, when kings of Bono Mansu went through personal ceremonies, they did so sitting upon a silver stool. But when they went through official ceremonies, they used a golden stool. Constitutionally, the king thus remained a son of the queen mother, and, as usual, had no decision-making power independent of her consent. In this way, in spite of the ascendancy of sun worship, he did not become an autocratic monarch.[19]

Other factors contributed to this. In the sun cult, the king was considered the source of all solar life, and had the sacred duty to breathe life into the realm—a duty that had not only a magical, but also a practical aspect. This means the king practised polygyny, which corresponded the polyandry engaged in by the royal princesses. But this was not indiscriminate polygyny engaged in on a whim; rather, it followed a set system that played a very significant domestic policy role aimed at holding the realm together. The king was officially engaged to the clan queen, or clan crown princess, of each single ordinary clan in the realm. Across the vast reaches of the Bono Mansu realm, where individual clans had many side branches, the number of kings' wives was correspondingly high; ideally, the group of wives should number 3333 (merely a holy, symbolic number). Many of these women, the most important women in the land, were already living in the capital, staying in the queen mother's palace and comprising her female advisory council. In the

same way, her brothers or sons, the elected clan kings, stayed in the king's palace as his male advisory council. To be one of the king's spouses was a great honor for these clan queens (or their daughters, when this was the case); unlike the situation in harems of patriarchal rulers, the position of these spouses was far from being without rights. The power of their entire clans stood behind them, and their brothers and sons lived close by, in the king's palace. This made them a doubly strong force to contend with: they wielded their own influence on the king as his wives, themselves, and also had their interests represented by his male advisory council. It was the king's duty to stay on good terms with these women. These influential king's wives were, however, bound to live in strict monogamy; this ensured that the king would be able to identify their children as his own.

Fostering this male line, which was limited to the king alone, helped to build a network of loyalty relationships between the royal house and all the clans of the realm. The clan queens' daughters and sons by the king were, following matriarchal tradition, not considered to be princesses and princes of the royal clan. Their title is "Ahenemma," which means "children of the king, or stool."[20] From their mothers these offspring inherited the honor of occupying the clan stools as clan queens and clan kings, leaders of their peoples. At the same time, they understood that they were children of the king. This configuration of relationships was extremely conducive to maintaining kinship networks and to peaceful co-existence within the realm. Other daughters and sons of the king, who had not inherited clan stools, occupied high state offices and belonged to the inner circle of the queen mother and of the king. Thus, during the day, the king was surrounded by his sons, who all had official positions. When he died, these positions dissolved; the same was true for his daughters when the queen mother died—since none of them had an inherited title to these positions. The death of the king or the queen mother was a personal disaster for these individuals, and not a few elected, in earlier times, to follow their leaders in death. In later times, they continued to enjoy their positions after their father's death. The Ohene's successor in office automatically inherited his predecessors' wives and children.

This additional structure of relationships in the male line—limited to the line of the king only—is perfect for holding together a large realm based on the principles of love, marriage and relationship. The realm of the Bono Mansu was not created through wars—which the Bono were not at all interested in—but through persuasion, marriage politics, and trade. It expanded not by conquest, but because bordering city-states affiliated voluntarily with them for trade and for protection. The Bono leaders, queen mother and king, reigned solely based on this mutual loyalty; there was no structure of domination using weapons and taxes to subjugate

the ordinary clans and their cities. The only duty of every clan and lineage was, and still is, to marry into the royal family.

Even today in postcolonial times, in the former territory of Bono Mansu (Brong), Akan queen mothers and kings reign using only this complex network of relationships; within the context of the modern states however, they are no longer independent.[21]

17.4 Akan religion and the sacred function of the queen mother and king

In former times, the highest Akan divinity was Nyame, the universe; in contrast to more recent, Christian-influenced tendencies, she was a goddess, not a god. As happened to so many matriarchal creating goddesses, Christian missions made a man of her and conflated her with the ultimate spirit, "self-created, infinite, absolute, immortal, and the creator of all"—in accordance with Christian ideology.[22] The opposite view is seen in an Akan myth presenting an ancient image of Nyame: she descends from the heavens as a breathtakingly beautiful woman named "Ankyaw Nyame," accompanied by a group of retainers, and gives birth to children who become the ancestors of the Akan.[23]

Nyame shares many characteristics with Nut, ancient Egyptian goddess of the cosmos. Like Nut, Nyame is the creatrix of all, and is the Great Mother. She appears as the starry night sky with the moon in it, she is the "Great Turning Wheel" of the firmament. Even though the moon has a different name, "Bosome" (the old Akan year followed the moon calendar in which one Akan moon contained twenty-eight days), Nyame also appears as the moon goddess as *pars pro toto* for the universe.

Nyame carries within herself both the female and the male; she gives birth to the latter each morning in the form of the rising sun, just as the goddess Nut bears the Egyptian sun god, Re. Her double nature is symbolised by the elements of fire and water. Out of fire she created the sun, and out of water, life and humans. At night—for she is gentle, like the moon—she pours a mellow glow, and moisture, down from heaven, allowing vegetation to grow. In the daytime she shoots out arrows of life—the fiery power of the sun—down to earth, and so is also called the "Ever Ready Archer."

It is not only the queen mother, as high priestess, who embodies her; women in general represent her, since they are the source of life. This is demonstrated by many customs: for example, lovers ask their sweetheart "to shoot an arrow at

them" just as the goddess does. The young woman then tosses off her dress and stands naked before him, except for her belt of beads and waistcloth. In this way her "arrows" strike right into the heart of the beholder. In this tradition the female body is seen as the incarnation of all beauty, and is venerated accordingly. Beauty in all its forms is highly valued.[24]

In Akan mythology, Nyame divided the world into three spheres: heaven, earth and the underworld. Heaven is her proper sphere, but she reigns over the other realms as well, in her other two aspects. As "Asaase Afua" she is goddess of earthly creation, symbolised by the eight pointed star and the planet Venus. It is she who permits all things to grow; she embodies the green, fertile earth. Later she takes the sun god, Nyankopon, as her lover. She is the power of the erotic, and the saviour and preserver of all life.

As "Asaase Yaa" Nyame reigns over the underworld, and is embodied in the infertile earth. Her name, "Old Mother Earth," refers to the crone aspect of the goddess. Her symbols are the six pointed star and the planet Jupiter. She is the spirit of earth and the creatrix of the underworld; the dead are buried in her pockets. Her sacred animals are the scorpion and the snake, with the snake especially as a symbol of death and rebirth. No one may make love in the dry steppes, that is, beyond the fertile fields, as this would insult Asaase Yaa. That goes double for those who must kill, such as hunters and warriors; they are under a strict sexual taboo, because Asaase Yaa, as goddess of death, abjures all generative acts.

With these three aspects, Nyame is the triple goddess of an advanced matriarchy of the type that appeared in many forms in the ancient Near East, the Mediterranean area, and in Old Europe. But in none of her aspects did she occupy public temples, as she is the cosmos, and the earth itself. Only lowly, finite deities have temple dwellings; Nyame does not need them. A special tree was dedicated to her in every city and in every house-yard; the hearth fire in every house was sacred to her, and an eternal fire burned for her in the royal palace. As goddess of death she received libations poured onto the earth; she also drank blood shed by hunters and warriors.

"Nyankopon" means "Truly Great Name" and is the personification of the sun as the fiery, life generating, sparkling soul of Nyame. The sun is regarded as "Kra," or soul of the universe, and the king is this soul on earth. The lion is the sun's sacred animal. Nyankopon, because of his life giving power, is also called "The One Who Knows the Antidote to the Serpent." When he is invoked through prayer, he disperses all sadness and darkness; as a visible shining star in the heavens he, like Nyame, needs no temples.[25]

After death, Kra, the immortal spark of life in all humans, does not descend into the underworld the way the personal, earth-bound soul does; instead, in the

shape of a bird, this divine soul flies back to Nyame. It dwells there, in the heavens, as an ancestral soul, until a rebirth brings it back to earth. While every queen's foremothers dwell in the moon, the king's ancestors—who are not his forefathers but rather his predecessors in office—dwell in the sun.

In the traditional Akan culture, the main responsibility of the queen mother as high priestess, and of the king as first priest, was to look after the cult of these royal ancestors, so that their heavenly light would continue to shine down on the realm. Regarded as reincarnations of their predecessors in office, their connection to these ancestral spirits is particularly close. The queen mother practised this cult in the "House of Stools" within her palace, where all the throne-stools of her predecessors are preserved, and the king did the same in the king's palace. At grand public festivals, sacrifices of food and animals were brought to these stools, which had been blackened with soot following the deaths of their owners. These offerings allowed female and male ancestors, believed to be sitting on those stools, to enjoy the festival along with the living.

These official festivals are the great "Apo-ceremonies," that come at the end of the sowing period at the Spring Equinox, and the corresponding one after the harvest at the Autumn Equinox. These two days are celebrated as the most important days of the year and are presided over by the queen mother and the king, who otherwise appear rarely in public. Besides these two great festivals, female and male ancestors are celebrated nine times a year in the "Adae-ceremonies" that the queen mother and king hold for their ancestors, with the ninth one coinciding with the end of the year. After the ceremonies the royal heads hold a public gala.[26]

Not only festival days, but also the queen mother's and the king's ordinary days are marked by cultic observances. As high priestess and priest king of the realm, they are the earthly images of Nyame and Nyankopon. The ideal queen mother is quiet and peaceful, like the moon, and her body, like that of the moon, is tender and beautiful. Her color is silver; in Bono Mansu she wore elaborate silver jewelry, and silver adorned her regalia. At official ceremonies she arrived in her palanquin, and was the last person to arrive; as the most exalted person of the realm, it was her privilege to have the king wait for her. On her lap she held a box of silver dust; she played with the dust, and tossed it up in the air. At the new moon, she danced joyfully in a gown shot through with silver threads. When she died, her bodily orifices were sealed with silver dust, and at the funeral ceremony her body was piled with silver jewelry.

As an expression of her gentle and peace loving nature, her throne stool is placed upon a snow-white sheepskin; the king's stool stands on a lion or leopard skin, to express his fiery spirit. If the king got angry, she calmed him down. If he

made a mistake, she did not hesitate to criticise him openly. When he handed down a death sentence, she often gave a reprieve, especially if she was struck by the beauty of the transgressor. At the highest council she sat just behind the king and continually advised him in a low voice, for she spoke softly in public. Her word could never be discounted, as she spoke for all the women. This means she could change, after the fact, decisions made by the entire male advisory council and the king himself. In case of imminent danger, the king would throw himself in front of her and protect her with his own body.

In her palace she has her own court; the entire royal clan lives there—except for the king, who has his own palace. She is the head of the royal clan. In this regard she was, in earlier times, not just the owner of the realm, but also the clan head of the king. She educated the princesses and princes of the royal clan as well as the hereditary daughters of the ordinary clans, those crown princesses of the matrilineal clans who were the king's daughters. This insured that she had great influence in all clans. Sisters and nieces of kings of allied peoples also dwelled at the queen mother's court, where she educated them to be future queen mothers. Hereditary daughters of ordinary clans of those allied peoples, who would once become clan queens at home, lived with the queen mother as well. In this way, in Bono Mansu the influence of the queen mother stretched beyond her own people into all the clans of allied peoples. The king's wives lived at her court as well; most of them, as clan queens, were already members of her female advisory council. Also, she handpicked the king's first spouse, his chief wife. This placed her in a position to drive the entire system of marriage and relationships politics that is basic to any matriarchal political system.

On top of all this, the queen mother is the protector of all women in the realm. Queen mothers often remain in constant contact with the women in their land; they travel to the various cities and investigate for themselves as to the well-being of the women and their children. It is usual for the queen mother to preside over the most important Akan festival, the girls' initiation. The king, on the other hand, never used to travel; because of his sacredness he had to stay invisible in his palace.[27]

In earlier times, kings lived in the palaces of their queen mothers; later, in the 14th century, they began to build palaces of their own. But even then, the king's court in every aspect was only a copy of the queenly court's brilliance: from the male advisory council down to the royal stool bearer, sandal carrier, and parasol bearer–all of which were indications of his rank.

The king's daily routine followed the sun. His bedroom window opened to the east so the light of the rising sun could wake him. Then his eldest son approached,

bearing news from the capital. He spent the morning in the reception room, awaited by his advisory council and his highly placed sons, who would discuss political events with him and seek appropriate solutions. Afternoons were dedicated to the pursuit of leisure. As soon as the sun went down, the king withdrew. Golden lamps were lit in his rooms, and some of his wives visited him. The queen mother herself chose those who might call on him on a given day; he could not make requests nor refuse her choices. It was considered seemly that the king had no favorite wife; rather, it was expected that each year he would sleep with as many women as possible. Nevertheless, it appears that a classification of the "Aheneyere," or wives of the kings, did develop: there were the particularly respected "Ayite," or stool wives, and the particularly beloved "Yeyere," or favorite wives.[28]

As he represents the sun, gold is the king's preferred metal. In Bono Mansu, he wore elaborate gold jewelry at every opportunity, and adorned his oiled body with gold dust. One of his public status symbols was a golden axe as a sign of peace; it stood for the male occupations of tree cutting and house building. Additionally, the Golden Stool was the throne of the sacred kings of Bono Mansu; it was not to be sat upon except at the investiture ceremony. Later on, the Ashanti took it over and made the Golden Stool their state symbol.

Although he was considered sacred, in Bono Mansu the king did not have unlimited power. He was chosen by the queen mother, and only when her choice was approved by all the clan heads could she place him on the throne. He could not act without consulting her and his male advisory council. If he did, the queen mother and the clan heads would unseat him. As ruling king he was responsible for men's affairs; he organised events, received guests, and dealt with foreigners. He also sent delegations abroad.

The death of a king, like the death of a queen mother, was a national disaster. Because they were sacred persons for the Akan, their demise—according to Akan belief—caused the cosmos to disintegrate, and the human world along with it. Many courtiers voluntarily followed them into death. The idea was that the queen mother and the king would be happy in the Otherworld, if their nearest and dearest were with them. The Akan wanted their queen mothers and kings to be as happy in death as they were in life, so that the realm would also continue happily.

The Akan made no secret of this practice, even though human sacrifice was outlawed by the English colonial power in 1901. The custom continued in secret until at least 1946. No one could be prevented from following the deep conviction that led them to voluntarily follow their dead queen mother and their dead king in death.[29]

17.5 Development of patriarchal tendencies in Akan realms

After this highly developed phase, the matriarchal culture of the Akan realms experienced a decline. Matriarchal principles were weakened by patriarchal influences from Islam, which had, in the meantime, spread over much of Africa. Islamicized peoples occupied powerful states along the Niger, such as the kingdoms of *Mali* and *Songhai* (12th–15th centuries) who continually put pressure on their neighbors—for whom further emigration was no longer an option. The practice of the sun cult itself, associated with the king's own court and male advisory council, represented a weakening of the queen mother's traditional power. Emerging acknowledgement of the king's male lineage—no matter how restrained this practice might be—presented a difficult innovation that went back to Islam, with its cult of the father. It was King Obunumankoma (1363–1431) who brought in the sun cult. In order to learn the art of statecraft, he had spent quite a few years at the courts of various Sudanese kings, all of whom were Muslims. During his rule in Bono Mansu, he established the sun cult with its emphasis on the king's male lineage, which added up to more power for the kingship.

It wasn't until his brother Takyi Akwamo (1431–1463) succeeded him as king that the political implications of this innovation became visible. This king also encouraged Islamic ideas, and rigorously enforced the Sudanese Ntoro cult, which finally pushed the power balance in favor of men and to the detriment of women. The Ntoro cult is a type of patriarchal father cult that makes male lineage a general rule for all men. However, the importance of the female lineage was not done away with, and still exists today among the Akan peoples. Still, within the new concept, each person descends in the female line from the original ancestress, but in the male line, everyone comes from a supernatural ancestor, who is the god of his Ntoro group.

"Ntoro" refers to the male semen, which is compared to the water that makes the female earth fertile. Therefore Ntoro spirits live in bodies of water, such as lakes and rivers. The male semen is thought to have its own soul; after the death of a man this soul is reborn in a child of his family. The father is thus considered a sort of lower god, for the life-giving spirit of Ntoro dwells within him, and it is from him that all his children inherit their Kra, or soul. As such a lower god, he requires veneration.

This new idea would not have had much effect if, at the same time, drastic measures had not been underway to bolster paternal authority. The deciding factor was

the transition from matrilocality to patrilocality, in which a woman and her children now went to live in her husband's clan. As a result, the father was allowed to discipline the children, as well as to monitor his family members to make sure they were sufficiently respectful of his Ntoro god. Further, it was decided that the life cycle festivals—such as those for conception, birth, marriage and death, all of which had always been matters for the mother's clan—were now events belonging to the father and his Ntoro god. On top of all this came discrimination against menstruating women as "impure," and proscriptions about impurity became law. The color red, formerly the color of her blood and of life, was now the color of death.[30]

This systematic assault by a series of patriarchal innovations, all of which were based in the surrounding Islamic culture, served primarily to strengthen the power of the kingship and the male advisory council. Thanks to gold trade, kings inherited a strong financial footing, which served as a basis for them to push through their claims to power. At the same time, such patriarchal innovations split the matriarchal realm. The time of unity was over, because neither the reigning queen mother nor the ordinary Akan women acceded willingly to the new order, and many clans did not accept the Ntoro cult. The Asine clans of Wenkyi city-state resisted it, and they did not follow the king's sun cult; this caused a split within the realm. The traditional Wenkyi people now formed their own city-state, with the queen mother upon her pearl stool as its centerpiece; even today, the Ntoro cult is not practised there. In other clans and cities, there was heavy resistance to the introduction of patrilocal marriage that mandated young brides to leave their own lineages and go to live with their husbands' families. Today people still remember that under the regime of Takyi Akwamo, husbands were often poisoned by their wives—and "witchcraft" was on the rise. The most hated innovation was that the wife was obliged to recognise her husband as head of household, and to respect and serve him as a Ntoro god; on top of all this she was obliged to stay closeted during her menstrual period. Many women found this so contemptible that they left their husbands and preferred to marry foreigners.

Kyereme Mansa, queen mother of Bono Mansu at that time, was unable to stop these misogynist innovations; however, she was able to insure that mother clans and matriliny remained in place as deciding political factors; at the same time, the Ntoro cult was confined to individual fathers and their households. With respect to patrilocality, she was able to guard against the worst outcomes by establishing cross-cousin marriage, which had formerly been confined to the nobility, as the general rule for everybody. This meant that daughters of a wife who had been required to live in the clan of her husband could come back, when they married, to their own clan.[31]

Pursuant to these patriarchal innovations, traditional Akan matriarchal marriage forms changed accordingly, but among the people, the position of women remained strong. It was not just that women could easily dissolve their first, elaborately formal marriages and easily remarry—which meant that matrilocality persisted among the people as the dominant mode of living arrangement well into the 20th century–, but even more importantly, that women retained their economic independence.[32] Here, too, they exclusively ran the agricultural operations, and owned everything that was produced; in addition, they controlled the local markets—an advantage they still enjoy today. The same is true for women in other, more intensely patriarchalized societies in West Africa such as the *Yoruba, Ibo, Dahomey, Nupe, Benin* and *Ewe* in Nigeria.[33]

Takyi Akwamo's successor, King Gyako I (1463–1475) continued to follow patriarchal tendencies: he elaborated the Ntoro cult, and now premarital virginity would be honored with a special wedding feast, and adultery punished. The then very young queen mother Kuromo Kese vehemently opposed this. She even tried to get rid of the despised Ntoro cult; she did not succeed, but she did strengthen the goddess cults. Throughout her entire life Kuromo Kese resisted the new power politics waged by kings against women. To acknowledge her persistent opposition, the women gave Kuromo the title of "the Great," while the men vilified her as "out of control, temperamental, and stammering."[34] It wasn't until King Yeboa (1595–1609) that the traditional order was re-established. He restored the divine kingship with the sun cult and the governing power of the queen mother. A very religious man, he consulted the oracle before every decision, and asked strictly, and in detail, the advice of the queen mother, with whom he shared governance.[35]

But disturbances caused by Islam's influence continued—domestically, through dissemination of patriarchal ideas, and from the outside through repeated attacks by aggressive, Islamicized neighboring peoples. It became necessary for the kings of Bono Mansu to develop their own military organization, and this began in about 1600.[36] Here the Ntoro cult played the pivotal role. Military companies were established according to the pattern of the Ntoro cult; this meant that they were diametrically opposed to the matrilineal clan structures. In the military, inheritance of arms and military title passed from father to son. Military companies, like the Ntoro cult they were based on, now formed a secret power league of men.

Bono Mansu kings replaced the clan alliances between cities of the realm with military alliances. Chiefs—who thereafter surrounded the king in the male advisory council—were no longer male heads of matrilineal clans, but were generals in patrilinear, militaristic army companies of individual cities, even if patriliny remained an exception. Now tribute was raised and collected to finance the king's

military system. This broke the balance of power spheres in the matriarchal realm, and that realm's sacredness was undermined by the new, secular military.

But in general the people of Bono Mansu were not much interested in war. They remained enthusiastic traders in their realm—which was, until the 18th century, relatively stable. The Ashanti, a neighboring Akan people to the south, were much more rigorous in developing the new logic of war, which they had learned from earlier militarist southern Akan peoples such as the *Denkyira* and the *Akwamu.* This enabled them in 1740 to conquer, through betrayal, the rich Bono Mansu realm and plunder its treasures. After it they divided up the realm into little vassal states which they further plundered through taxation. The once rich region fell into poverty, with numerous Bono Mansu clans emigrating. Only the city state Bono Tekyiman made the attempt, together with certain allies, to win back its autonomy in battle—but did not succeed. Although Bono Tekyiman (Brong) remained as a province of the Ashanti realm, its people have retained their traditional cultural consciousness up until the present day.

In addition, in the 16th century European explorers of the West African coast began to engage in a vast slave trade. First Portuguese, then English and Dutch trade companies established headquarters, from which they—in co-operation with Ashanti and Fani kings who sold them their subjects or subordinates—transported millions of African slaves to America. In this way, great swathes of land were depopulated. When the English, after their 1874 military victory over the Ashanti, occupied the region of the ancient Bono Mansu realm across the Ashanti border, they found the region poor and thinly populated, with no trace left of the high culture and opulent lifestyle of former times.[37]

17.6 The Ashanti

Nevertheless, the traditional matriarchal culture of the Akan did not completely die out, but lived on in another form: in the *Ashanti* (*Asante*). They are a branch of the Akan, as the kings of Bono Mansu and those of the Ashanti had the same line of foremothers. Both peoples emigrated to the south in 1010 escaping the aggressive Arab invasion. However, the realm of the Ashanti, established on the southern coast, was destroyed in 1600 by the Islamic *Mande.* A royal Ashanti princess, along with her retinue, fled to Bono Mansu, where she was welcomed; she and her people were given land in the southernmost province, in the forest region, where she founded the city of Kumasi, later the capital of the Ashanti realm (see map 13).

The Ashanti now adapted to the highly developed culture of Bono Mansu, imitating the court-life of the royal household. In other ways, too, the Ashanti proved to be good students: when the Bono Mansu realm introduced military organization in 1600, the Ashanti took on this as well, and developed it further and more efficiently.

The first Ashanti king to establish the Ashanti as a military state was the energetic Osei Tutu; in 1670 he unified seven Akan peoples to resist the Islamicized Denkyira, whose authority over the Akan city-states was spreading. He himself was the high commander, and led his armies into battle, thereby sweeping away the taboo against coming out of seclusion, which had always kept the sacred kings of Bono Mansu apart. He and his allies were able to shake off the yoke of the Denkyira, and in 1701 they were able to subdue them. This tripled his territory, and along with it, the population of the Ashanti realm.

From then on, the Ashanti held that no state could expand its territory except through conquest. Tutu's successor then conquered all the neighboring Akan peoples, finally subduing and plundering the kingdom of Bono Mansu in 1740. After that, the Ashanti realm was the most powerful in the region, and amassed large quantities of gold and other forms of tribute. Having introduced the patriarchal military affairs, Bono Mansu now experienced its boomerang effect, and its kings became the vassals of its former students.[38]

The ancient matriarchal culture traditions did not completely disappear with the advent of the Ashanti. This is demonstrated in several ways: they have maintained matrilinearity and matrilineal rules of inheritance up until the present day, and they have a large number of politically significant women, especially in the role of the queen mother.[39] For the Ashanti, as elsewhere, the queen mother was the highest ranking person in the realm, and was considered the "king behind the king." In the royal advisory council she sat closest to the king, continually advising him: though softly spoken, her words could not be ignored. She had her own court, and levied her own taxes. Although war was part of Ashanti national life, this did not weaken the queen mother's power; rather, when the king left home to lead his army into battle, he turned his power over to the queen mother during his absence. During that time she was simultaneously queen mother and king; she ruled both courts, held tribunals in his place, and carried out public ceremonies that otherwise he alone was allowed to perform. If, unexpectedly, the Ashanti king did not return from the war, then the queen mother acted as high commander in his place as well.[40] This became (very unpleasantly) apparent to the English during their colonial conquest, since they were not used to the Akan institution of queen-kingship and its double royal heads.

The power of the Ashanti realm extended all the way to the coast, giving rise to new wars between the Ashanti and their southern neighbors in 1806–1807, 1810–1811 and 1814–1815. The English were not directly involved in these encounters. But soon the Ashanti came into conflict with the militant, aggressively advancing trade of the English, and in 1824 an English officer was killed and the English defeated. Now the English army allied with the coastal peoples, and these combined forces resulted in the defeat of the Ashanti in 1826. This was followed by a long period of peace epitomized by the Treaty of 1831. In 1863 and 1869 the Ashanti rose up against the English and their allies, and were victorious in these wars. But the major conflict occurred in 1873–1874, when the Ashanti were defeated and subjugated by the English. The victors conquered Kumasi and the whole Ashanti realm, and established the British colony of "Gold Coast," which curiously excluded lots of Ashanti territory.

From the English perspective, there were no people so intractable and difficult as the Ashanti: they simply refused to act as if they had been conquered. They continued to place their own kings—who did not recognize British dominance—on the throne-stool. This continued until 1896 when the English abducted the Ashanti king, along with members of his immediate family and his principal advisors, through an act of deceit. But now the English were unexpectedly confronted with the "king behind the king"—that is, with the queen mother, Yaa Asantewa. In spite of her advanced age she led the Ashanti into a last, desperate war against the hated Europeans, in order to save her people's independence and culture.

After exiling the king, the English erected a military fort in the heart of Kumasi, and there they installed their own governor to rule the Ashanti. Meanwhile Yaa Asantewa secretly organized a rebellion. In April 1900, the "Yaa Asantewa War" against the British dominance began, in which the Ashanti surrounded the English in their fort, and held them captive. A three-month long siege ensued. It was not until the summer that the English back up troops from the coast could liberate the Fort in Kumasi and could release the soldiers who were held under siege.

Even then, Ashanti resistance doggedly fought on, directed by Yaa Asantewa from her hideaway. Three months later the English found her place, which thousands of warriors defended up until the very end. Post-menopausal women fought along with them, and urged the men on—a widespread practice among the Ashanti and other Akan peoples. At the end of September came the decisive slaughter, when the last of queen mother Yaa Asantewa's defenders were annihilated and she was taken prisoner. It took 2,000 English soldiers to get Yaa Asantewa, who spit in the face of the officer who captured her. Now Yaa Asantewa was sent into exile to the

Ashanti king, and to her grandson, an important general in the Ashanti military, who had earlier been exiled along with the king. In exile she died, twenty years later.

She would never know that subsequently her people would be treated more respectfully by the English, because the rebellion had taught the latter to be much more careful with the Ashanti. A few years after her death, in 1924, the exiled king was allowed to return as a private citizen; however, the British realized he was still considered by the Ashanti to be their overlord, and so in 1926, they created for him a new—but much reduced—office. He held this position until his death in 1931, when he was succeeded in office by one of his nephews, a son of one of his sisters.

The Ashanti still sing the praises of their immovable queen mother, and credit her with saving their culture. The Ashanti have maintained, up to the present day, their modified matriarchal clans and the institution of queen mother and king. These are still the most important sacred figures, although they no longer have any political power. Also, the cult of the female and male ancestors is maintained along with a rich variety of other traditions, even though the Christian missionizing efforts that followed colonization have distorted and destroyed much of their culture. The Ashanti military companies, however, were dissolved by the European colonial powers and were replaced in the post colonial, independent state of Ghana by modern military institutions. Today, there are five million Akan, with the Ashanti being the most numerous of the Akan peoples. They are still very much present, and are excellent traders, having made Ghana one of the most important cocoa producers.[41]

17.7 Extension of matriarchal queen-kingship in Sub-Saharan Africa

The structure and development of matriarchal queen-king realms as described above is not at all limited to the Akan in West Africa; it was and still is also widespread in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Women are constitutionally guaranteed a place at the center of government and hold at least half the power. These queens hold hereditary titles, and establish female dynasties through matrilinear inheritance, either alone or with their male co-regents, the kings. And they are not nominal queens, rather, they always rule.

Their power is based on the ancient African tradition in which queens are the founders of cities and realms. The examples are numerous: the famous Songhai Realm on the Niger was founded by women who became celebrated female ancestors; similarly, the Zaria Realm in the same region; also, the powerful Lunda-Luba

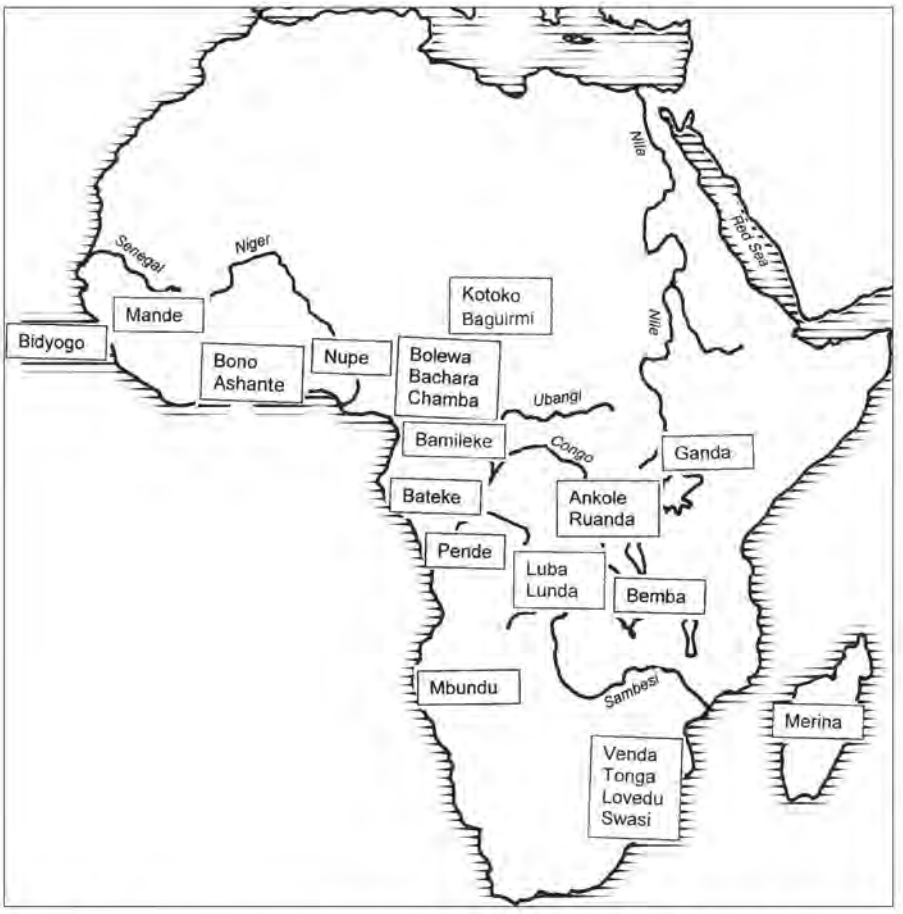
Realm in Central Africa, and the city-states of the So in northern Cameroon. In the 15th century, Queen Amina used conquest to expand her Haussa Realm in West Africa (Western Sudan) and founded many cities. New queens' realms emerged from most of these city-states. Later they became combined queen-king realms, and some of these have remained in existence up until today.

There are three different types of regency: the double regency of queen mother and king is the most widespread, and this is the one we encountered with the Akan. Or, we find a ruling triad of queen mother, queen sister and king; this is not just a transitional circumstance, but a permanent institution. And finally, there is the sole regency of a queen, who is both "female king" and "male king" at the same time, and performs both offices; this too is an established institution.[42]

The double regency of a highest ranking queen mother along with a king is found all over sub-Saharan Africa. This institution is found from West Africa to Lake Victoria in East Africa, is widespread in Central Africa, and reaches all the way to South Africa (see map 14). It is structured so that both heads of the realm exercise power in a complementary way, maintaining equilibrium in all spheres of their actions. They each have a residence in their own city, their own officials and their own legal jurisdiction. They preside at religious ceremonies such as the cult of the female and male ancestors, and at the rainmaking ceremonies; both these offices are carried out in a complementary way. The king does not necessarily have to be the son of the queen mother; he can also be her brother, her nephew, or, if she is very young, her maternal uncle.

Even when patriliny has already permeated the people or the royal clan, it does not destroy the power of the queen mother. The *Bamileke people* (Cameroon) practice patriliny, while matriliny is the rule in the royal clan. The queen mother heads not only all female matters, but also is in charge of all the women's secret societies; in addition, she is a member of the men's secret societies. In the highest council she presides over the king. It is the other way around with the *Rwanda people* (Rwanda), as well as with the *Chamba people* on the Benue River, a tributary of the Niger (Nigeria): the people practice matriliny, while the royal clan is patrilineal. The queen mother is the king's sister (or cousin, or aunt on his father's side) and is as powerful as he is, being titled "Mother of the Realm." This indicates that the historical past of these peoples was matriarchal, and that patriliny, by itself, is not enough to create patriarchy. As for the peoples in the south-western corner of West Africa, double regency by the queen mother and the king is practised by the *Mande* in Sierra Leone.

The ruling triad of queen mother, queen sister and king occurs in Central Africa and the region of the Great Lakes. In matriarchal Central Africa, this pattern was



Map 14: Women as reigning queens in Africa, all three types of Queen-Kingdoms

most widespread in the huge Luba-Lunda Realm, which encompassed many different peoples, such as the Bemba, Loango, Luapula, etc. The sacred king here bore the title of "Citimukulu" and was an emperor. But above him ranked the queen mother, with the title of "Candamukulu," and at the king's side was the queen sister, with the title "Mukukamfumu." Neither this empire, nor the bearers of these titles, still exist.[43] But in the region of the Great Lakes this triad still exists. The *Ganda people* (Uganda) call them collectively "Kabaka," the kings. Here the queen sister is in fact not the blood sister, but the first cousin of the king; she is also his official spouse. She is enthroned along with him, and must remain childless. Both women are of higher rank than the twelve highest chiefs of the realm; each has her own residence. Her ritual functions are especially important; after the death of the king the queen sister cares for his grave and carries the practice of his cult forward.

The queen mother of the *Ankole people* (Kitoro region) is the sacred head of the realm as well as the protectress of the realm and of the king. She receives emissaries before they are presented to the king, and she decides matters of war and peace. In the court of justice she sits beside him; no one can be executed without her approval. Here the queen sister is indeed the blood sister of the king, but not his spouse. She and the king have their own herds, their own officials, and their own armies; each of them collects taxes in the form of cattle. Along with the queen mother, the queen sister looks after the well-being of the realm, and in particular the king's health; the two women together designate the prime minister. The *Bateke people* (Congo region) also have the ruling triad. The queen mother often rules alone for years, during interregnum periods, and she retains the royal regalia. She decides who will be king and queen sister. But even after they have been designated, she does not hand over power right away; first they both have to go through a series of tests. When they have passed, she directs the coronation ceremonies. These three royal personages come from different clans. Thus the queen sister may have already been the king's wife before they were chosen, and may already have children with him; but from the time she sits upon the throne-stool, she must remain childless. She is head of the female half of the population, is the director of agriculture, and leads the women's ceremonies. All peoples who have a form of the ruling triad share the belief that it mirrors the cosmic order: the queen mother represents the double-gendered primordial goddess, while the king and queen sister (spouse) represent the primordial Twins who embody humankind.

In many of these ancient realms, it used to be common practice to kill the king—as the highest possible sacred sacrifice. This custom has been passed down from the Lunda-Luba realm in Central Africa, as well as from Uganda realms, and

from the *Shilluk* on the Upper Nile, as well as from the *Zulu* in South Africa. And in Akan tradition there are historical indications of this custom, which also existed in West Africa.[44]

The peoples of the Sudan who converted to Islam and adopted its patriarchal structures eliminated the regency of women. Even so, in Nigeria and Chad there are many traces that show how it used to be different. The *Fulani,* with their royal court of Nupe (Nigeria), still have the queen mother, who sits on the king's council. Though she no longer has any political authority, she has great moral authority. The same goes for the *Bachara, Bolewa, Kotoko* and *Bagirmi.* For the people of *Nupe,* two royal women lead the noble women, and one other woman leads the ordinary women. The latter is chosen by the married women of the city and treated with great respect, as she organises the collective work of women and is the "Queen of the Market." In every village in the land, a woman is elected to perform similar duties; she rules along with the village chief. The *Yoruba* and other West African peoples also have this pattern, where the women, in spite of patriarchalization, control the market and rule the female sphere. Expressed in various ways, the matriarchal roots of these societies can still be felt. [45]

Queens who stood alone at the summit of their realms and established exclusively female dynasties were common in times past, because it was they who founded cities and realms. Later, they repeatedly appeared to lead the resistance against the colonial masters, and by now have become very rare. Knowledge of a purely female dynastic lineage of 17 queens comes down to us through the tradition of the ancient *Songhai Realm;* this occurred before 1050 C.E.—that is, before Islamization occurred there.[46] Among the later matriarchal queens—who ruled alone, and led their people in resisting the Europeans—were: Queen Yaa Asantewa of the *Ashanti* (Ghana) against the English (1860–1921); Queen Nzinga of the *Mbundu* (Angola) against the Portuguese (1581–1663);[47] Queen Pampa of the *Bidyogo* (Bissagos Islands, West Africa) against the Portuguese;[48] and Queen Ranavolana I of the Malayan *Merina* (Madagascar) against the English and the French (1828–1861). Ranavolana was particularly successful: she drove out the European missionaries, and in 1835 forbade Christianity. She suspended trade agreements with England, and in 1845 prohibited Europeans in general from engaging in trade with Madagascar, which she united. All military expeditions against her and her land ended abysmally for the English and French. Finally, she established a purely female dynasty: the three queens who succeeded her were each the sole ruler of Madagascar; this tradition only ended in 1897.[49]

The last purely female dynasty existed with the *Lobedu,* a numerically small people in the Drakensberg Mountains in Transvaal (South Africa). Their oral tradition says that they came from ancient Ethiopia and built stone monuments in former times. The Lobedu queens, who had the title of "Modjadji," exercised—in their dual role of "female king" and "male king"—their sacred duties alone.[50] Around 1800, Queen Modjadji I inherited the reign of her father and saved her people, who were on the verge of succumbing to chaos. She founded a female dynasty that was not stamped out until 2001; then the last ruler, Queen Modjadji V, died. As "female kings" these queens handed down the throne-stool directly from mother to daughter, which constitutes matriliny, although their people are patrilineal. They conceived their children by secret consorts from close kinsfolk. Their advisory council was also purely female, and consisted of the "Mothers of the Queen's Realm," who represented the various clans and regions. The patrilinearity of their people did not impinge upon female power structures. In every clan the father's sister is the female clan head, along with her brother, so that here, too, the gender power balance is maintained. The queen was supported in carrying out her office by these important women clan heads. Her brother represented her to the outside world as an administrator.

In this pattern, the queen is also "male king," and as such she has several wives. These are the influential sisters (father's sisters) and daughters (inheritors of the role of father's sisters) of the various clan chiefs. Thus related to them as a "son-in-law," she is connected to all her people's clans; this creates a network of mutual responsibilities between all of them. She may choose lovers for her wives, and the children of these short relationships are considered to be her children; she especially favors the daughters. Through her female advisory council and her wives, as well as through her wives' children, she has all the lines of political influence in her hands, as these follow the lines of relationship. In this way the Lobedu queen exerts great influence over social harmony.[51]

However, her authority does not rest solely on her network of relationships, but also on the sacredness of her office. She is primarily the spiritual leader of her people, and her sacredness is based on her magic power of rainmaking. The Lobedu believe that the cyclical regularity of the annual seasons is dependent upon the queen. For generations, this numerically small people was left unmolested by its more powerful neighbors, the *Zulu* and the *Swazi*—warrior peoples who invaded southern Africa before the Europeans and subdued the First People of South Africa, the matrilineal *KhoeSan.* However, the Lobedu were safe from them, for fear of their queens' power over the rains. In times of drought, caravans of gifts were sent up to the Lobedu's small town to win the queens' magic

favor.[52] Modjadji I, Rain Queen, was so famous during her reign that she became the model for the queens of neighboring peoples such as the *Tonga* and the *Venda,* as well as the *Zulu* and *Swazi*.[53] Modjadji V, the last Lobedu Rain Queen, was so well known even in modern times that presidents of South Africa paid obeisance to her. F. W. de Klerk visited her when he was president, and his predecessor, P. W. Botha, visited her mother. President Nelson Mandela also visited Modjadji V, and she is still famous for having kept him waiting.[54]

This shows that political authority and highest rank is widespread for women in Africa. Not until Islamization and European colonization was the development of the matriarchal queen-kingship interrupted or changed for the worse. The colonial powers were particularly blind to the roles of women in other cultures, and this led to women being systematically excluded from exercising the political stewardship as they had always done.

17.8 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

At the political level:

- Matriarchal realms are: first, relationship societies; second, sacred societies; third, they developed out of marriage alliances. They are fundamentally different from patriarchal empires or states, which arise as a result of conquest.
- Matriarchal realms expand through marriage politics, alliances and trade, not by war.
- Matriarchal realms have always been established by queen mothers through alliances between various clans and peoples. Thus the realm belongs to the queen mother, and she and her successors are its highest authority.
- In matriarchal realms each clan retains its autonomy and self-sufficiency with respect to the royal clan; taxes are not levied on them. The queen mother rules not through wealth and weapons, but solely on the basis of relationships, tradition, and religion.
- For the foundation of the original realm a king was not necessary. Later the queen mother invested one of her sons as king.
- Kings never rule as absolute monarchs in matriarchal realms; their various responsibilities bind and integrate them into a relationship society (matriarchal kingship). The king rules the men and organises men's work.

- The king also has the duty to enlarge the realm's relationships network and alliance network through his sexual activity.
- As to the relationship between the queen mother and the king:
  Queen mother and king each have their own court of justice—the queen over the women, the king over the men. But the king is only the co-regent, and his status is below that of the queen mother. She chooses the king, and places him on the throne. She oversees his administration; she publicly admonishes him; she can overrule his decisions, and can also depose him. The king can render no decision without having consulted the queen mother.
- Matriarchal queens are hereditary queens; they establish female dynasties either alone or with a king. There are three forms of matriarchal queen-kingship: first, double regency of queen mother and king; second, a ruling triad of queen mother, queen sister and king; third, the sole regency of the queen, who is both "female king" and "male king."

At the cultural level:

- Matriarchal realms are not societies of dominance, but rather are sacred societies. The queen mother is seen as the embodiment of the supreme goddess; she is her priestess, and often holds the magic office of rainmaker.
- Matriarchal kings are considered to be the embodiment of the supreme goddess's male aspect (moon-son of the moon, or sun-son of the moon). They are always priest kings.
- The veneration of the royal female and male ancestors is the main ritual duty of the queen mother and of the king.
- The death of the sacred king was used in matriarchal societies as the highest form of sacred sacrifice. This sacrifice was literally or symbolically carried out.

Notes

1. Eva L. R. Meyerowitz: *The Sacred State of the Akan*, London 1951, Faber and Faber, [Sacred State]; David Sweetman: *Women Leaders in African History*, London-Ibadan-Nairobi 1984, Heinemann.
2. We owe this opportunity for close examination to the above-mentioned classic authors, Robert S. Rattray and Eva Meyerowitz, as well as to the new critical women ethnographers.—Especially noteworthy in this regard is Eva Meyerowitz, anthropologist, artist, and political advocate for the Akan people of Bono-Tekyiman, where she spent many years. She included

a lot of oral traditions into her books. As a token of their appreciation, the Bono-Tekyiman people awarded her the title and rank of "Queen Mother."

3. See for the history of the Akan peoples: Eva Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 22–26; and *Akan Traditions of Origin*, London 1952, Faber and Faber, pp. 124–129, [Traditions]; and *The Akan of Ghana. Their Ancient Beliefs*, London 1958, Faber and Faber, pp. 13–20, [Akan]; and *The Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt*, London 1960, Faber and Faber, pp. 23–25, 228, [Divine Kingship]; and *At the Court of an African King*, London 1962, Faber nd Faber, pp. 69,70 [At the Court].—The comprehensive work of Eva Meyerowitz, especially her presentation of Akan history, has been criticized by Danquah (1952), Goody (1959), A. Robertson (1976) of being concerned with origins and migrations many of which are dubious, and Meyerowitz not being an expert. However, her work was supported by the Royal Anthropological Institute, the Colonial Development and Welfare Fund, and the University College of the Gold Coast, which suggests that it was undertaken seriously. While bearing in mind these critiques, I include her work because it contains a lot of knowledge on the early realms of the Akan world, much of which was derived from valuable oral sources dating back to the 1940s.
4. The presence of these peoples in the Paleolithic is attested to by archaeological evidence as well as by another strand of Akan oral tradition. See Wilhelmina Donkoh: "Female Leadership among the Asante," in: Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* Toronto 2009, Inanna Publications, York University, pp. 117–128.
5. The Akan scholar W. Donkoh is critical of the assertion that the Akan people as a whole came from North Africa. She remarks (personal communication via email, 2006): "This assertion is highly contentious since there is neither archaeological nor documentary evidence supporting mass migrations of people into the region that is occupied today by the Akan people. On the contrary, the evidence suggests that people have lived in this region for thousands of years and that their institutions and other principal characteristics such as their language, their reckoning of time, naming, political and lineage systems had evolved in situ. The archaeological evidence is further corroborated by the oral traditions of the people. However, in cases where the people/person providing the oral accounts had come under external influence such as Christianity and Islam, there is the tendency to establish a direct link between the Akan and North Africa. This approach to historical presentation tends to deny the abilities and capabilities of dark-skinned peoples and seems to support the Eurocentric position that sub-Saharan Africa had no history of its own. What seems more likely is indirect contact with North Africa through such connections as trade and social intercourse."—I agree with her in not basing my conclusions on the notion of a general Akan migration from North Africa, and certainly not on the Eurocentric idea that black African peoples lack their own history and culture! To the contrary: they belong to the world's oldest cultures. But with all due respect, the historical data from the queens' realms founded by peoples coming from North Africa are also backed up by indigenous informants (see Meyerowitz, [At the Court], pp. 69, 70, personal communication to her from Nana Akumfi Ameyaw III., King of Bono-Tekyiman. The realm of Bono-Tekyiman is the successor of Bono Mansu.) So the "social intercourse" Donkoh refers to involves more than just superficial encounters: it includes the adoption of whole clans coming from the north into black African peoples.
6. Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., p. 27; R. S. Rattray: *Ashanti,* Oxford 1923, Clarendon Press,

pp. 81–85, [Ashanti]; Turnbull: *Man in Africa*, London 1976, pp. 213–215.

7. W. Donkoh, ibid., p. 2.
8. Akan clans are very large, numbering thousands of people.
9. Meyerowitz, [Divine Kingship], ibid. pp. 26, 29; and [Akan], ibid., pp. 23–42; and [Sacred State], ibid., p. 71. Compare with the sacred grove of the Ashanti, in Rattray, [Ashanti], ibid., pp. 121–132. Rattray visited such a grove and was permitted to take part in a ceremony for the primordial clan mothers.—Danquah, a critic of Meyerowitz, maintains (in 1952, p. 364) that there is no evidence that the queen mother ever ruled alone. His critique is a typical one: a female scholar is criticized by male experts in their discipline, and is accused to stress the female element too much in a certain culture. Obviously, she broke the rule that the female element must be neglected and marginalized everywhere, in order to prevent any idea of a matriarchal social order.
10. Mair, [Marriage], ibid., pp. 116, 117.
11. Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 30, 31; and Mair, [Marriage], ibid. pp. 119, 120; and Baumann et al., [Völkerkunde], ibid., p. 309.
12. Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 62, 96; and [Sacred State], ibid., p. 37; R. S. Rattray, [Ashanti], ibidem; and *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, London 1947, Oxford University Press, [Religion]; and *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, Kumasi-London-Oxford 1956, Basel Mission, [Law].
13. Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 28–30, 83.
14. Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 149–156.
15. Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 51–61.
16. Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 27, 28.
17. W. Donkoh: "The Akan do not practice polyandry per se. However, the Ohemmaa is required to keep an open house, she is expected to accommodate all male visitors. She is not expected to lock her door, nor are visitors required to knock before entering her room. This state of affairs is a unique preserve of the Ohemmaa." (personal communication)
18. Meyerowitz, [Divine Kingship], ibid., pp. 29, 30.—The situation is different for an ordinary Akan woman: Although a woman does not need to marry before she is able to produce legitimate children, marriage is considered an honorable state. The qualification for reproduction is the performance of "bragro," or puberty rites, upon the onset of her menarche. "Fatherlessness" is not adulated but rather it is a state that is glossed over with the child's uncle or granduncle giving such a child a name, thus conferring on the child qualities and attributes that the child would have derived from the father. (personal information by W. Donkoh)
19. Meyerowitz, [Divine Kingship], ibid., pp. 29, 33, 95; and [Akan], ibid. pp. 82–85, 106.
20. Personal information by W. Donkoh.
21. Meyerowitz, [At the Court], ibid., p. 82.
22. Eva Meyerowitz reports that the primary Akan deity Nyame was in her earliest conception acknowledged as exclusively female. Her perspective as a woman might have helped her to discern such patterns that her male colleagues missed or ignored; additionally, in the 1940s, she had access to oral traditions which most of the white anthropologists did not have.—I disagree with W. Donkoh, who—based on her Christian background and her position at the University of the Methodist Church of Ghana—takes for granted the male gendering of Nyame (in 2006). Even if this reflects the general belief of Akan peoples today, I think it is a reflection of concepts introduced through Christian missionizing.

23. W. Donkoh, ibid., p. 4.
24. Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 69–71.
25. Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., S. 71, 75—81; for the structure of matriarchal mythology (which is clearly represented in Akan culture) see H. Goettner-Abendroth: *Die Göttin und ihr Heros,* ibidem.
26. Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 85, 89, 90 149–156; and Rattray, [Ashanti], ibid., pp. 92–120.—Rattray describes in detail the ancestor ceremony held in the Ashanti king's House of Stools, as well as the ancestor ceremony of the queen mother (he was not permitted to be present, but she did describe it to him), as well as the ancestor ceremony in Bono-Tekyiman, where even older traditions were maintained. Rattray rightly criticizes the use of the insulting word, "fetish," for African ancestor and deity figures.
27. Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 37–39, 41, 44–52; and [At the Court], ibid., pp. 75–79; and [Akan], ibid., pp. 87–90.
28. W. Donkoh (personal communication)
29. Meyerowitz, [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 54–56, 58, 59, 62–67; and [At the Court], ibid., pp. 75–79, 107–110; and [Akan], ibid., pp. 87–90.
30. Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 98, 99, 105–109; and [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 115–119.
31. Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 109, 110; and [Sacred State], ibid., pp. 115, 116.
32. Mair, [Marriage], ibid., pp. 121, 125, 129, 130, 136.
33. Karla Poewe, [Dynamics], ibid., p. 46.—On the former Yoruba matriarchy see H. Baumann, [Mutterrecht], ibid., p. 116.—On women's market economy in the patrilineal West African Ibo culture, see Karen Sacks: *Sisters and Wives*, Westport-London 1979, Greenwood Press.
34. Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 110–113.
35. Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 115–117; and [At the Court], ibid., p. 80.
36. Turnbull, ibid., pp. 220, 232.
37. Meyerowitz, [At the Court], ibid., pp. 83, 84; R. S. Rattray: *The Tribes of the Ashanti Hinterland*, Oxford 1932, Clarendon Press, vol.1.—Rattray describes these fragmented tribes, with their matrilinearity, priest kings and Akan languages, the remaining elements of the structure of the Bono Mansu realm: *Dagomba*, *Konkomba*, *Chokosi*, *Mamprusi*, *Mossi*, among others. However, he does not mention their illustrious history and describes them as "primitive," since he apparently was not aware that their culture had deteriorated. It was not until Eva Meyerowitz that this was revealed.
38. Meyerowitz, [At the Court], ibid., pp. 70, 83, 84; and [Sacred State], ibid., p. 35; Turnbull, ibid., p. 213.
39. Wilhelmina J. Donkoh: "Female Leadership among the Asante," in: Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *Societies of Peace,* ibidem; Kofi A. Busia: *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti,* London 1968, Frank Cass and Co. Ltd.; M. Assimeng: *Social Structure of Ghana,* Accra 1981, Ghana Publishing Corporation; P. K. Sarpong: *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti,* Tema 1988, Ghana Publishing Corporation.
40. Sweetman, ibid., pp. 83, 84.
41. Sweetman, ibid., pp. 83–90; Meyerowitz, [Akan], ibid., pp. 16, 32; Rattray, [Ashanti], ibid., pp. 287–293; and W. Donkoh (personal communication).
42. See for this and the following: Annie Lebeuf: "The Role of Women in the Political Organization of African Societies," in: Denise Paulme (ed.), *Women of Tropical Africa*, London 1963,

Routledge & Kegan Paul, pp. 93–119.

43. Richards, [Chisungu], ibid., pp. 36–38.
44. Zuesse, ibid., pp. 117–120; Meyerowitz, [At the Court], ibidem.—Her insider knowledge of the court of the Bono-Tekyiman king, Nana Akumfi Ameyaw III, provided Eva Meyerowitz with indications that this custom was formerly practiced by the Akan. Others, such as W. Donkoh, contest this (personal communication).
45. See Ifi Amadiume: *African Matriarchal Foundations: The Case of the Igbo Societies,* London 1987, 1995, Karnak House.
46. Sweetman, ibid., pp. 22.
47. Sweetman, ibid., pp. 39–47.
48. Bernatzik, [Inseln], ibidem.
49. Sweetman, ibid., pp. 64–75; Olderogge/ Potechin, ibid., vol. 2, pp. 748, 749.
50. See for this and the following: Annie Lebeuf, ibid., pp. 97–99.
51. Annie Lebeuf, ibid., pp. 97–99.
52. Donald G. McNeil jr.: *Modjadji V, Rain Queen, Dies in South Africa at 64,* published on website www.nytimes.com, on Saturday, June 30, 2001; and Bernedette Muthien, KhoeSan (personal communication).
53. Annie Lebeuf, ibid., pp. 97–99.
54. Donald G. McNeil jr., ibidem.

18

Matriarchal Pastoral Peoples in North Africa

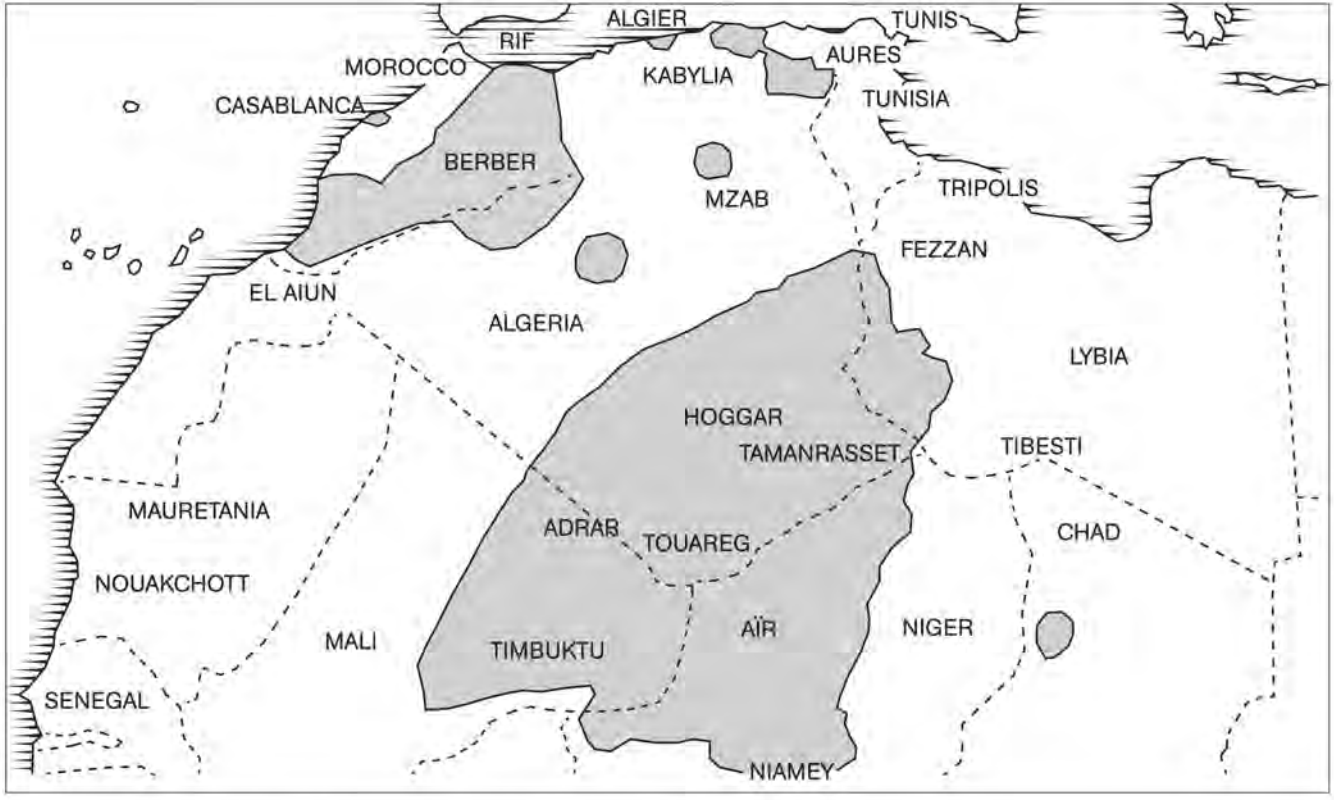
For Tin-Hinan, Takama, and all the queens who went out with their peoples into the desert, to be free

For Queen Kahina, who fought for the liberation of Berber peoples

18.1 The Targia woman: mistress of the tent

The Sahara Desert covers most of North Africa, leaving only a fertile strip of land along the Mediterranean coast. Rising out of the endless sand and stone horizon, attracting the clouds that bring occasional sparse rainfall, are the vast mountains: the High Atlas to the northwest, the Hoggar Mountains, and the Tibesti Volcanic Region in the Central Sahara, with the lower mountains of the Tassili N'Ajjer, the Massiv de l' Aïr, and the Adrar des Ifoghas. This is the home of North Africa's original people: the sedentary, agricultural Berbers in the Atlas Mountains, and the nomadic Tuareg in the Sahara (see map 15).

Berber peoples (about 10 million) and *Tuareg peoples* (about 300,000) are light-skinned and closely related to each other; Tuaregs are desert Berbers, feeding themselves by raising cattle rather than by agriculture. They speak variations of a shared Hamitic language, the "Tamazigh "(Tamashek). Berber and Tuareg peoples both refer to themselves as "Amazigh," which means "free people."[1] Those who



Map 15: Area of the Berber and Touareg peoples in North Africa

conquered or repressed this region's peoples gave them whatever names they deemed suitable: Romans referred to the agrarian Amazighs as "barbarians," which led to the name "Berber." Other Amazighs, in the process of becoming nomadic in the desert, were called "Tuareg" by the Arabs; that is, "godforsaken," because for a long time they resisted attempts to convert them to Islam.[2]

Much earlier, various groups of Tuareg peoples gave their names to the mountains of the Sahara region. The only exception is the Tibesti Volcanic Region, which was occupied not by them, but by the dark-skinned Tibbu, who did adopt certain customs from their Tuareg neighbors. The Tuareg people *Kel Ajjer* live in the Tassili N'Ajjer, and the *Kel Ahaggar* in the Hoggar Mountains; these constitute the northern Tuareg, whose social order is very traditional. The southern Tuareg, the *Kel Adrar*, live in the Adrar of the Ifoghas, the *Kel Aïr* in the Aïr Mountains, the *Kel Geres* and *Kel Dennek* south of the Aïr Mountains in the lowlands, the *Kel Ataran*, or *Ullimeden* near the River Niger, and the *Kel Tademaket* near Timbuktu. These peoples have been more strongly influenced by Islam than have the northern Tuareg; their matriarchal patterns have been weakened and many have adopted patriliny.[3]

The Tuareg of the Hoggar Mountains, living isolated in the heart of the Sahara, are the best representatives of their traditional culture. They have been most successful at maintaining the matriarchal social order that used to be typical for all Tuareg peoples before Islam swept through Africa, bringing all its accompanying lifestyles. Even so, many similarities exist between the Kel Ahaggar and other Tuareg peoples; culturally they are a relatively homogeneous group.[4]

Tall and slender, the Tuareg have fine facial features, with women wearing their wavy hair long. The men are quite thin, possess great endurance, and, due to their long journeys in the desert, are used to hunger. For a woman, a more rounded body is seen as desirable. Abundance is considered beautiful and erotic in women, and is achieved by drinking large quantities of camel's milk. Generously proportioned bodies symbolise wealth, as they demonstrate that the clan possesses large herds. The Tuareg woman, or Targia, goes about unveiled, while the Tuareg man, or Targi, keeps his head and face wrapped up in a yard-long cloth, the "Tagelmust." This does not signify concealing oneself, but rather is a sign of his dignity. At the same time, it offers protection from the heat and dust of the desert. The higher a Targi man ranks in the men's community, the more strictly he adheres to wearing the Tagelmust, in which only his eyes are visible. He would never lift the veil in the presence of women, and particularly not in the presence of foreign women.[5]

Tuareg women and men, especially those of the nobility, live in separate worlds: women in their tent encampments with the goats; the men with the camels

in the distant pastures, or on trading expeditions, or—as in earlier times—on raids and war parties. The adult women and men see each other relatively seldom. But the power of love always brings them back together again.

The art of love is at the center of a significant part of their culture, as expressed in the poetic meetings, the "Ahal." The very ancient Ahal celebration was practised far back in antiquity by the Libyans in North Africa, the ancestors of the Berber peoples (as we know from Herodotus' accounts of Libyan society, in which women were the determining influence). Since ancient times, the Ahal has also been at the core of Tuareg culture; it allows women and men to meet each other in the context of poetic singing, with the aim of beginning new love relationships.[6] From the age of 16, young people go to the Ahal. Everyone is welcome there, so long as they are unmarried. A circle is formed of alternating women and men, dressed in their best clothes. A female chairperson is chosen, whose task is to ensure that good manners are respected at the Ahal celebration. The woman who plays the "Imzad" (a one-stringed violin) lets her voice and her instrument fill the tent with sound, while men accompany her with their rhythmical recitations. Because of the sound, the tent used for the Ahal is outside the camp, and it is held at night. Men often come from far away: they are overheated from the journey, while women are cool and tender. Men wage a verbal exhibition match. With glances and whispers men and women pursue various ways of getting closer together. When the lights go out, those who have made contact trade signals, and when the Ahal is over, the couples go out into the night.

Women are generous with their favors. Always, when men have complied with the rules of the art of courtship, women freely give their love. Jealous quarrelling among men is frowned upon. If a man is edged out by a rival, the former requests a small propitiation present from him. If the lucky one does not comply, it shows he doesn't take his courtship seriously, and the woman turns right around and grants her favors to the other one. To quarrel in the presence of women is considered bad manners.[7]

All the arts associated with the Ahal—the ancient Imzad, the music, the poetry—are exclusively in the hands of women. The noble Targia watches over art and culture, and she is famous for her poetry and music. She considers the practice of these arts as her duty to her culture. The young men are therefore hungry to hear the young women play the Imzad, and husbands desire it intensely from their wives. When women refuse to play the Imzad for their men, it is as if they were inflicting punishment. Formerly, in times of war men acted especially bravely in order not to lose their women's favor—and their music.[8]

In their poetic singing, women foster a system of values that applies to both women and men. The ideal image of woman and man are still alive today, and are

handed down in the "love school" of the Ahal, by women. According to these teachings, the most valued qualities in a man are his beauty, his daring, his bravery—and above all, his chivalrous manners. His behavior is moulded by strict rules of etiquette in which every word, every gesture must be carefully considered and should express a man's pride and elegance. This includes the simple, formal style of dress and jewelry. The noble Targi is praised in the songs: the way he rides his white racing camel across the desert, his robes billowing behind him, sword at his side, face wrapped in the Tagelmust, the protector of his sisters and of the entire female clan—and in his heart, the image of a beautiful woman, the mistress of his love.

The most admired qualities in a Targia are not those of mother, or of working woman, but rather of seductress and magician, that one who creates the Ahal and fills it with inspiration. Her beauty is cherished, her abundant, soft curves make her desirable. She is also treasured for her ability to make clear decisions and follow through on them. She moves quietly and regally, coolly and silently, with the graceful sweep of her luxurious clothes, covered with silver jewelry: her great power doesn't need any noise. To greet her brothers or her lover, she may also appear in a billowing, indigo veil in the middle of the herd of white camels that constitutes her wealth.[9]

Not just the arts of the Ahal, but also language and writing are women's matters. They live in remote desert camps, and speak only Tamazigh—in contrast to men, whose long-distance trade activities require them to learn several foreign languages. Besides this, the ancient script "Tifinagh" is theirs alone, and they pass it on to their children, whose education is completely in the hands of women; this is an extremely important factor in the handing down of the ancient Tuareg culture. For millennia, women have been the bearers and mediators of traditions and culture that give the Tuareg their unique identity.[10]

The symbolic value system extends even further, for the poetry and music are not limited to the nobility. These arts are not confined to specialists, even if it is primarily the noble women who have the time—as they do not work hard—to devote to poetry and composition. But other women of all social levels participate. In addition to the Ahal, the meeting place for courtship between youths of the nobility, there are also get togethers such as the "matinée" in the morning, and the "soirée" in the evening. These events are organized and attended by all sorts of different people; married couples and celibate women and men also take part as performers or as spectators.

The symbolic representation of women and men is broader here; above all it glorifies women as queens of their tents, as mothers, as stewards of the culture. Women are called the "center pole of the tent"; the tent belongs to the woman, and

her matrilineal clan lives together there. The woman is seen as the "stronghold and shelter," tying down the "moving and travelling one"—the man. In poetic language she is described as the "post for the animal" since she holds down the man just as an animal is tied to a post so that it won't go astray. Or, she is "the cave that holds every grain of sand" that the wind blows in. This makes her the stable, permanent center of the society: as the "unmoving center of the world," everything revolves around her. She is provider and protectress; she offers respite from the storms of "outside" that the man is exposed to. In times of war women literally retreat into the tents, and no Targi—not even the worst enemy—would dare to touch a tent. If warriors in battle encountered a tent encampment along their path, they moved the fighting elsewhere. Women were utterly secure inside the confinement of their tents, and they could never be molested in there; this is why the "tent" also means "peace."[11]

The women's tent offers sanctuary not only in the literal sense, but also figuratively. "Tent" is used to refer to the matrilineal kinship ties that support and protect every clan member. Thus women are the founders of "tents," and keep them going. A man looking for a permanent home and long-term shelter takes care of his "tent"—that is, his mother and sisters, who comprise his matrilineal family. A woman who founds a "tent," or a matriliny, enjoys great social respect. Her descendants will establish a clan, and split off into further "tents," while she, as their protectress, will be venerated as the far-seeing, authoritative ancestress of a large clan.[12]

18.2 Tuareg social and economic power

Although today the Tuareg are formally Muslims, their social structures do not fit the Islamic moral code. The high rank of women goes back to several factors, primarily to matriliny, which the Ahaggar Tuareg have consistently maintained. Children inherit their clan names and hereditary rank in society solely through their mother. Under pressure from Islam, other Tuareg peoples have adopted patriliny; nevertheless, much evidence demonstrates that they have been matrilineal until recently. It is matriliny which enables women to create "tents," or clans, and it is the basis for the high regard in which female ancestors are held. It makes women the axis of society.

Furthermore, the Tuareg do not practice polygyny, which is widespread in other African cultures, but live monogamously. This, however, is not lifelong monogamy: the Targia, who choose her own partner, can dissolve the bonds of marriage at any time, taking a different man as husband. Women take liberal advantage of this practice, which is the source of the Tuareg's reputation for permissiveness.[13]

Compared to other African cultures, formal marriage comes late in life, 25–30 for women and 30–35 for men. There is no particular reason to get married earlier, as young women and men enjoy great sexual freedom at the Ahal. Virginity is not particularly valued. A woman is, however, very respected if she has numerous admirers and grants her favors to as many men as possible. It is considered bad form to give oneself to just one person.[14]

The second factor pointing to the strength of women's position is the fact of total matrilocality. The Ahaggar Tuareg, as the most conservative of the Tuareg, have perpetuated this institution. Their children stay in their mother's tent encampment; the adult daughters never move away, while the sons marry endogamously into their own matri-clan. For the Ahaggaren, the best match is not cross-cousin marriage (which we have described above), but parallel cousin marriage: marriage with the daughter of the mother's sister. This custom is very ancient, and means that neither daughters nor sons leave their mother's tent encampment to go live with another clan, because they always marry into their own.[15]

When a boy is seven years old, his mother sends him to her sister's tent, in the same encampment, and he stays there until he is old enough to go out with men to the pastures, or to accompany the trade caravans. His protector is his uncle, his mother's eldest brother, whose political office and honors—if the uncle has any—he will one day inherit. But for now he will live with his parallel cousins, the daughters of his mother's sister, and they will become good friends. They act like "sisters" and "brothers"; they laugh and joke with each other the way close siblings do. If they are separated for long periods of time they get homesick for each other, and the female cousins who have stayed at home cherish the male cousins when they return. This friendly intimacy serves to prevent marital conflicts between pairs who later choose each other as spouses, even though the marriage—as is common—may not last very long.

The Tuareg have religious reasons for this form of marriage. Since every Tuareg clan goes back to a sole ancestress, her daughters and sons should mate among themselves; marriage to non-relatives is not valid. Apart from this, there are also practical economic reasons: it allows goods, herds and political titles to remain in the same clan.

In other Tuareg peoples, both those who have maintained matriliny and those who have already adopted patriliny, marriage relationships have been altered through the influence of Islam; but even there, the position of women is still elevated. The wedding takes place in the mother's tent encampment, and for an entire year the young bride lives here too, until the birth of her first child. The young husband is obliged to serve his parents-in-law; this means that his behaviour,

especially in relation to the young woman, is strictly watched over by them. Later, if the young woman moves into her parents-in-law's encampment, she frequently returns to her mother's camp during her husband's long absences, or when she is pregnant, ill or upset. In case of divorce—which she is free to pronounce at any time—she moves back permanently. In the patrilineal Tuareg peoples, though, the Koran directs that her children must remain in their parents-in-law's encampment.

But this is still marriage between relatives, as those Tuareg peoples practice cross-cousin marriage between certain pairs of clans. The young bride living in the encampment of her parents-in-law is not in foreign territory: the people she is living with are, outside of her own clan, her closest relatives.[16]

The third, and very important, factor in the strength of Tuareg women is their economical independence. This begins with the first marriage—in stark contrast to western society where women's economic dependence usually begins with marriage. The Tuareg bride receives a wedding gift that she alone has control over. It is never returned, not even in case of divorce—unlike a dowry. For a noble bride, it used to consist of seven camels, later it was one to three camels; the ordinary bride gets 25–30 goats instead of a camel. The bride's clan enlarges this herd with more goats and with some pack-donkeys with pack saddles. In addition, the women of her clan give the bride a large tent complete with fittings, which they have put together themselves: carpets, mats and covers, wooden chests, food bowls and milk cups, earthenware cooking pots, dishes and containers, as well as large, ornate leather bags. All this belongs exclusively to the woman, and it enables her to lead a fully independent existence.

Goats are the basis of the economy, the survival of these pastoral nomads depends on goats. Every inch of the goat is used: Tuareg women drink the milk, or make it into butter and cheese; eat the meat; make clothing, blankets, tents and ropes from the hair, and leather saddles and bags from the skin. They also keep sheep, and the menagerie is rounded out by their pack animal, the donkey. Although they drink camels' milk, too, the camel is not essential to everyday life. But as the preferred mount for desert travel the camel is indispensable, and caravan trade utterly depends on it.

Each woman's tent, where she lives with her children, constitutes an independent household. A tent camp is usually made up of about ten or twenty tents, and includes an entire clan, or lineage of a clan. Where there is scant pasture as a result of drought, the camp is broken up into smaller groups of two to seven tents; each of these smaller camps is still an independent community with its own production and consumption. Women combine their individually-owned herds into one large community herd. This is seen as communal, indivisible property, and rests in the

hands of the matrilineal grandmothers. No part of it may be removed, except in case of marriage or emergency. The eldest woman of each lineage looks after the herd, although her brothers help her out when it comes to the camels. Often the camels are taken by the men, at the direction of the women, to a distant pasture to graze. The head of the camp is the eldest woman, the matriarch, around whom all the clan members gather.

Accordingly, in traditional Tuareg society the entire tent encampment along with the herd, and even including the camels, belongs to women. Women own these assets, on which live depends, because they are responsible for the life of the clan. Every woman with her own hearth is presented with the milk, right after milking. She is mistress of the tent who, sitting in the entrance to her tent, is sole decision maker regarding how the milk will be further processed, and how it will be shared among the clan members. Every day she supplies her family members: she is the provider.[17]

This is equally true for the goods that result from the long-distance trade men engage in: without exception, the goods are entrusted to women, who then keep them in their tents and distribute them as necessary. Taken together, all these criteria demonstrate that Tuareg society was entirely matriarchal and, to some extent, still is.

Let us now take a closer look at the role of men: long-distance trade using camel caravans is the domain of men, who raise camels. In earlier times this trade was an important economic factor. Tuareg know the desert well; it was no obstacle to travel, and with the help of caravans they linked the North African Mediterranean coast with the Sudan to the south. They brought gold, ivory and ostrich feathers up from the south, which they traded for salt and desirable European goods. But ever since Europeans colonized North Africa and introduced trucks, caravan trade has been interrupted, and the infrastructure of the oases, with their caravanserais, seriously eroded.

Nevertheless, trade caravans have remained necessary to the Tuaregs for maintaining their own supplies; otherwise men would not make the unimaginable effort associated with the caravans. Nomads cannot live from the animal products alone; they need vegetable based nutrition as well, which means millet, the grain of Africa. Sparse Ahaggar pastures in the middle of the Sahara don't permit much animal husbandry, so those people are especially dependent on millet. In addition, nomads' dependence on agricultural products increases in drought years, when many of their animals die—a situation that presents the further problem of having almost nothing left to trade.

In fact, their sole trade goods are animal products from the herds, such as cheese, blankets, leather goods—all made by women. These are traded for millet,

dates and other field-produce in the rich Sudan, where agricultural peoples such as the Haussa live. This exchange does not happen directly, for the Ahaggar men's route first passes by the nearby salt mines, where they trade their goods for rock-salt of the desert. Then they take salt, the ultimate commodity, along the route to the Sudan far to the south. They return with millet and other agricultural products, which they also use to acquire clothing, tools and household goods.

Such a caravan is underway an entire winter long. Ahaggar Tuareg set out in Fall, and don't come back until Spring, six or seven months later. On their route from Tamanrasset via Agadez, Tanut and Sinder, they cover about 1800 miles across hot, pathless territory; sometimes they live for weeks on nothing but camel's milk. They endure heat, sandstorms and other extreme conditions that are exhausting both for men and animals.[18]

Because of hardships associated with this way of life, and the scarcity of goods—particularly in drought years—men do not confine their activities to peaceful caravan trade. In the past, before European military structures arrived, men added to their trading by robbing farmers to the south, and by raiding herds and caravans of other Tuareg peoples. Raids were part of the desert economy. Here again it was the Ahaggaren, who were not only the best caravan traders, but were also the boldest warriors and most feared raiders. They raided their neighbors, the sedentary oasis farmers, as well as other Tuareg peoples—especially the southern, Islamized Ullimeden Tuareg and the Arabs around Timbuktu, whose herds were large. The latter frequently paid Ahaggar sheikhs protection fees so as not to be attacked, but usually this made no difference. Caravans were so regularly plundered that finally armed protection was required, in order to cross the desert. Raids, feuds and guerrilla wars were undertaken by more or less all Tuareg peoples, both against each other and against their sub-Saharan and Arab neighbors.[19] This served to intensify development of a class society, superimposed over matriarchal patterns, among the Tuareg.

Here we see a matriarchal society under extreme conditions. Instead of retaining the ancient, fertile agricultural economy, they were edged out into the desert as nomads, fighting for their survival. This demonstrates the degree to which animal-raising nomads depend on agricultural societies to provide vegetable food. Nomads are never self-sufficient, for existence would be impossible without connections to agricultural societies. These were sometimes peaceful, trade based connections; often, however they were based on looting, and in these cases the animal-raising society can be seen as having a parasitic relationship to the agricultural ones. In terms of cultural history, this means that animal-raisers were secondary societies. They could only have developed after the agricultural societies did, and probably

emerged out of these peoples, who were the first to domesticate animals. This contradicts the common misunderstanding that animal breeding cultures evolved directly from Paleolithic hunting peoples.[20] This misunderstanding arises from the idea of an independent realm for hunters as well as for nomads. Both notions are false, but for different reasons. The hunters were dependent on plant gathering activities undertaken by women in their own societies, while animal breeding societies were dependent upon agriculture societies.[21]

With the Tuareg, men's apparent independence is actually a function of their dependence on the surrounding agricultural peoples, as well as on the women's encampment. When men come back after their long journeys, they hand over all the goods to women: to their mothers, sisters and wives, no matter how they came by the goods in the first place. The reason for this hand-over is not only that men's mobile lifestyle prevents them from keeping property and makes it necessary to "anchor" or "stabilise" the goods inside the tent so they don't get lost along the way. Rather, it is a part of the nobility's code of honor that they provide for their clan women as richly as possible, and that they hand out bounteous gifts to ordinary people as well. It is not the accumulation of goods that they value, but rather the circulation of goods as gifts and the co-operation of people among themselves. On top of this, the goods men are given for their trading expeditions belong to the women, who not only own the herds but also produce the animal products for trade. So, after these goods have been traded as advantageously as possible by the men, the proceeds come back into the hands of women. In this sense, men are women's trade representatives. As one Targia expressed it: "I send you to fetch and carry, and so you come right back to me. You shouldn't be looking for happiness on your own account."[22]

Here we see that the Tuareg women not only are independent economically, but that in fact they exercise control over all the goods. This means they hold not only social power, but economic power as well. This is no problem for men, who accept as a matter of course that women, as guarantors of the life of the clan and the entire society, must have this power for the protection of everyone.

Tuareg women have, in addition, a strong sense of solidarity among themselves, and this influences the men. It is a solidarity that goes beyond the boundaries of clan and tribe, and is not affected by fights between men. Women foster communal feeling within Tuareg culture as a whole, because it is they who maintain the common language, culture, and way of life. They always stand apart from, and above, tribal feuds. No victor would dare to transgress the precepts that protect women; if he did, no woman would ever take any notice of him again. Inside their tents, women defy extreme heat, cold and desert storms; in their tents they safe-

guard the children, who are the future of their people. It is only when women's existence is secure that society can survive; they are its crucial pole. This is the context in which Tuareg men understand their task: they act in such a way that through their efforts, the goods—which are in the women's hands—can bear fruit. A Tuareg proverb claims: "Without women, no prosperity, and without men, no prosperous women."[23]

18.3 Tuareg political organization

The economically and socially significant position of Tuareg women is also expressed in politics. To retain power, they don't necessarily have to enter men's political sphere, which is hierarchically organized; their power does not need to compete. Politics in general—that is, the politics of the people as a whole and not just of men as warriors—follows the matriarchal pattern: political decisions are made on that basis. In both the literal and symbolic sense, the political center is the "tent," where the popular assembly, called "Aségewur," is convened by the clan head. "Aségewur" means "foundation of everything," or "platform for the seat (of office)." The idea is that the seat of power rests on this foundation, the assembly of the people. Aségewur are the political councils that take place in the "tent," i. e. in the lineages as well as in the clan; it is the most intimate as well as the most universal sphere. Women and men of the same matriliny discuss their own affairs in the individual tents, and this is where decisions are made. They are then co-ordinated between tents, so the entire clan can come to a decision in the clan council, or "Djemma." In this process the voices of women have great weight; without them, nothing can be decided.

The clan heads are men who act as communication bearers, but are not decision makers. They represent, as delegates, the decisions of their clans at the men's large councils (formerly the warriors' large councils); these councils comprise an entire people or an alliance of peoples. Male delegates owe women an accounting of what happens there. Women can intervene in men's large councils, and they do intervene if they think their male delegate does not represent their point of view adequately, or that he does not take seriously his role as representative of the mistresses of the tent. Then they appear in men's territory and defend their decision personally. Afterward, the office of clan head is no longer securely his because the women can unseat him at any time. They also intervene if the men cannot reach consensus: just by turning up, women precipitate a consensus, and unanimous agreement of the people is reached.[24]

But it need not go so far. As a rule, traditional division of men's and women's spheres is retained: women are responsible for the interior of the "tent" (clan) and men for exterior matters. Women reign indirectly. At every general assembly of men, whether at the tribal level or the federal level of tribal alliances, men are no more than delegates sent out by their respective clans; usually they are satisfied just to ratify the decision of the dominant clan. That is why it is women, particularly matriarchs of the large clans, who are the "power behind the throne," or decision-makers, in the background; they direct the business that men carry out in the public sector. Frequently, the designation or deposition of even the highest chiefs is decided by the most important women of the dominant clans. This is done directly, not circuitously, as a Tuareg commentary demonstrates: "She sent her younger brother in as chief, but then ejected him in favor of one of her cousins."

The interior of the "tent" (clan) is considered more important than the exterior matter, for in terms of practical politics, the interior is where the action is. Politics in this case can be defined as the network of relationships between the "tents," translated into action. This interior also possesses the highest ethical status, for it is in women's tents that Tuareg culture and honor is maintained. The concept of honor made women influential, even in feuds and wars between competing Tuareg peoples: because of the honor they prompted men to fight very bravely. A courtly celebration with song and poetry would be held before the warriors set out, whose purpose was to keep them mindful of the righteous path. If the warriors came back victorious, they would be welcomed and celebrated with a similar festival, but if they faltered in their boldness, women would come out on the battlefield to rally the mens' courage, in order to emphasize their own will. Wives would threaten their husbands with losing all rights to be with them. Also, women insisted that the men take their revenge if the honor of the "tent" was threatened; for example, if a clan was deposed. A long lasting feud between clans might result in such a case, as happened in 1909 and 1961.[25]

Women appear even more unambiguously as founders in the original histories of the Tuareg peoples. At the origin of every tribal people there is a woman, the ancestress: she bore sons, to whom she delegated part of her power, and daughters, to whom she bequeathed her position and who were the mothers of future chiefs. Frequently, these histories begin with the migration of the ancestress, along with her followers; these people then settled in the desert, and using marriage politics established alliances with other peoples; these finally resulted in creation of a tribe by the children of the ancestress. The founding mother became a queen when she was recognized as such by the associated peoples; she then bore the title of "Tamenukalt." Later, when the queens' brothers and sons became kings, they were

given the title of "Amenukal." According to the tribal origin legends, the queen mother, or Tamenukalt, reigned alone in the beginning, without a male partner of her lineage at her side, both guiding the decision-making process and making sure the decisions were executed. In times of crisis, a queen would also become a female warlord, and would protect her people with her drawn sword. Such warrior queens mounted implacable resistance against the Arab invasion into Berber territory: the famed Kahina, Berber queen in the Atlas Mountains, fought as an outstanding strategist for the liberation of the Berber alliance she had brought together. Later on, the powerful Queen Satawnata did the same. She led a large army against the Arabs, and expanded her realm all the way to Marrakech. These two queens were conquered only after years of resistance. In 1917, there was still a politically powerful woman, the poet Dassine oult Ihemma, cousin of the Amenukal of the Ahaggaren. Her musical performances were highly regarded, and she sat in the Warriors' Council, where she was attentively listened to. She played a decisive role in establishing peace between the Ahaggaren and the French.[26]

18.4 The history: exodus into the desert

The history of the Tuareg is replete with women founders and reigning queen mothers like those described above, which points to the origin they share with the Berbers in Libya and in the Atlas Mountains. It was their ancestor-women who migrated out into the vast desert. Over and over, they avoided being invaded by the various patriarchal conquerors of the North African Mediterranean coast, emigrating with their peoples across the limitless expanses of sand and stone, never submitting or yielding.

But the pasture lands of the Saharan mountains were indeed limited, and immigrants did not always find them uninhabited. There were fights over land, and as other peoples arrived, the various groups eventually battled for hegemony. This resulted from the scarcity of fertile land in the hard conditions of the desert, and led to establishment of the Tuareg class society.

This story illuminates how matriarchies can change under extreme conditions. The history of the Tuareg starts with the fabled "Libyans," who were written about by the ancient chroniclers Herodotus, Strabon and Pliny. These "Libyans" were not a homogenous people at all; their name is just a place name. The name refers to the light-skinned North African peoples, peoples who inhabited the fertile Mediterranean coastal strip and the oases for a very long time. What the ancient writers were most struck by was these peoples' matriarchal social order and

their ability to defend themselves; in these aspects, along with their way of life, they are shown to be the ancestors of the Berbers. They were obliged to develop their warrior talents when patriarchy, in various forms, insinuated itself into their North African homeland and posed a constant menace.

Libyans are best known from Egyptian historical accounts, where they were for millennia engaged in battle with the patriarchal pharaohs. Egyptians had usurped their territories in the Nile Delta and the Fayum Oasis, and pushed them out into the Libyan desert. For generations they fought to retake their former lands and sacred places, with uneven success. The *Isebeten* are also one of the Libyan peoples; their survivors escaped into the desert when the Isebeten were defeated in 450 B.C.E. by the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses III. Their ancestress and founding queen mother is Esebet, for whom the Isebeten are named. They had agriculture and animal breeding, a mixed economy based on gardening in the oases and nomadic goat breeding, complemented by the hunt for the wild ass and other wild animals. So their economy was well-suited to desert conditions—which at that time included more rainfall than at the present time. They settled in the Hoggar Mountains and lived in cave dwellings, which they decorated with rock paintings; they erected megalith dolmens along the rivers and arroyos, as well as round, conical-roofed underground storehouses for the harvest. They were not at all primitive, but exhibited a developed culture and spoke a variant of Tamazigh. Their queens had become warriors; it was reported that one of them was an excellent chariot driver. She was killed at the battle of Sagunt (218 B.C.E.), while fighting along with her people under Hannibal against the Romans.[27]

The Isebeten were not alone for long; other matriarchal, ancient Berber peoples were also escaping into the desert at that time, in order to avoid the ever-expanding patriarchy. First the patriarchal Phoenicians, then the patriarchal Romans occupied the entire Mediterranean coast of North Africa. The Phoenician Carthaginians established their empire there, and in the 4th century B.C.E. they subdued the backcountry peoples. In 19 B.C.E., Romans commanded by Cornelius Balbus invaded every city on the North African coast, as well as the oases of the Fezzan. The region had more rainfall at that time, and fertile pastures that the inhabitants could use to keep horses; they were excellent riders. The Balbus campaign was the prelude to Roman colonization of the African Mediterranean coast, which pushed yet another wave of migrating matriarchal peoples into the desert. In the face of Rome's dominance, and the subsequent eruption of Christianity, these ancient Mediterranean peoples did not want to give up their matriarchal ways, so they followed their queens out into the unknown. One of these were the *Dag Rali,* who, led by their queen, Takama—perhaps in flight from the Romans—went up

into the Hoggar Mountains, which had already been settled by the Isebeten. These two peoples did not come to blows, but they joined together peacefully by means of marriage politics. The Dag Rali must either have adopted Isebeten culture or brought a similar one with them; in any case, both peoples continued to live as oasis farmers and goat herding nomads in the Central Sahara. They all rejected Phoenician bronze and iron tools, as well as patriarchal religions, and remained true to their Neolithic, Mediterranean, matriarchal culture.

The Dag Rali have retained these characteristics up to the present day: they still have the same economy as the Isebeten, that is, oasis agriculture and goat herding. They produce sorghum and dates, millet and melons; their goat herding is nomadic, and they hunt the wild ass. Their desert agriculture has various forms that range from sedentary gardening in the oases (with or without irrigation) to simple nomadic agrarianism in the wadis, or dry river beds. Wadis conduct the occasional rainfall, which is then managed using small dams. Millet and melons are sowed in wet sand; after the harvest, the farmers move on. In the oases, on the other hand, they keep the harvest in underground storehouses, just as the Isebeten did.

Whether the Dag Rali are herding goats or farming, their goods are always in the hands of women. The eldest woman in the matriliny is responsible for the administration of the herds or of the gardens and date groves, as well as the apportioning of stored supplies. The men have extraordinary respect for the tradition of keeping goods in the hands of women. Even today, the Dag Rali know from their tradition that they descend from the Isebeten, with whom they had at some point joined together; they consider them as ancestors. Furthermore, "Esebet" is a common name for women among the Dag Rali. They still live in the same territory as the Isebeten, now extinct as a people, having been absorbed into the Dag Rali.[28] This ancient society of desert Berbers was fully matriarchal, and completely lacked a class society.

This matriarchal, classless order changed with the arrival of those who later would become the "nobility"—tribes who attained their rank by overriding the earlier culture. But even they didn't voluntarily choose this fate. After forays by Carthaginians and Romans, the ancient Libyans and peoples of the Fezzan region were overrun by a particularly awful invasion: Muslim Arabs arrived in the 7th century, raging against the matriarchal Berber peoples and bringing destruction and terror. The invasion set off the flight of many peoples into the desert, as Cyrenia, Tripoli, Tunisia, and the Fezzan were depopulated. Those agrarian Berber peoples who stayed behind were subjugated and forced to accept the Arabic language, culture and religion; their cultural identities disappeared. Those peoples who already lived as nomadic camel herders in the fertile steppes of the Fezzan did not allow

themselves to be subjugated, but avoided the Arab invasion and moved south (according the Arab chronicler Ibn Khaldun). The Heggar/Hoggar were such a people, led into the desert by their warrior queen Tin-Hinan. She rode on a white camel into the Hoggar Mountains, which were named after her people. Mounted on their camels, her people subjugated the goat-herding inhabitants and made them vassals; among these, the Dag Rali are the largest and most traditional vassal tribe. In the context of so many peoples migrating across the desert from north to south, the time of peaceful alliance building was apparently over. In addition, the increased desertification of the Sahara made pasture lands ever more sparse; the horse was replaced by the camel, which was better suited to the dry climate. Tin-Hinan founded the Ahaggar Federation consisting of the three noble tribes—*Kel Rela, Taytok* and *Tégehé Mellet*; she was the founding queen mother, or Tamenukalt, of the new realm.

The noble tribes of the Ahaggar Tuareg recount this historical event in detail in their foundational legend. According to these accounts, both ancestor women—Tin-Hinan of the noble tribes and Takama of the vassal tribes—arrived together in the desert. Tin-Hinan was the elder sister, and had become a great queen; she gave birth to the nobles, while Takama as the younger sister brought forth the ordinary, tribute paying vassals.

This legend advances its own version of history; it is designed to justify the social division that established the nobles as an upper class over the vassals. The vassals, Dag Rali tribal people, tell another version in which the noble tribes arrived later. Dag Rali oral tradition fits many of the facts: they have different traditions than the noble tribes do, and have a different economy, namely, goat herding rather than camel breeding. The Dag Rali account accords with the archaeological record as well.

As recently as 100 years ago, goat-herding and camel-breeding were two completely separate branches of animal husbandry, with the nobles owning camels only while the vassals owned goats only. The latter were thus called the "Kel Ulli," or goat people; they were also called "Imrad," or goat child. The goat, not the camel, is essential to the economy, and makes survival in the desert possible. For this reason, the nobles were directly dependent on their vassals' goat-based products. They pitched their tents near their vassals' encampments, and exacted tribute in the form of goat's milk products, which they depended on for their lives. In exchange, noble warriors protected their vassals against other noble Tuareg warriors and robbers.

This first two-class society of the Tuareg can be seen as a result of the belligerent overlapping of two groups of tribes who are different from each other, but share

a common heritage. Both peoples possessed the ancient Berber matriarchal social order, presenting a situation where a matriarchal people later superimposes itself over another matriarchal people. Their close relationship in terms of origins and their shared form of social organization meant that the class system resulting from the invasion was not based on brutal oppression—as it is in patriarchal feudalism—but rather on interconnectedness and mutuality. Under the harsh desert conditions these values were necessary for survival.

From their predatory forays into sub-Saharan agricultural peoples, the Tuareg nobility brought with them black male and female slaves. They were integrated within families and assisted women as well as men in their everyday activities. This developed into a multi-level class society with nobles, vassals and slaves. As with the Nayar in South India (see chapter 15), particular historical circumstances were what led to this situation, since the formation of classes and slavery are not genuine matriarchal elements.

In the 7th century, this kind of overlapping occurred not only with the northern Tuareg in the Hoggar and Ajjer Mountains, but also with the southern Tuareg in the Adrar and Aïr Mountains. Large Berber tribes, led by their founding queens, undertook long migrations across the Sahara, settling only when they found good pasture lands near the mountains, or a new home near one of the large bodies of water. Some settled by the River Niger and beside Lake Chad. According to their traditional narratives, they all came from the Fezzan and were fleeing the Arab invasion.

The same thing happened again in the 12th century: huge migrations from north to south, as Arabs invaded Algeria and Morocco and impinged on the central Sahara. Once again, many Tuareg nomad escaped into the desert and sought new pasturelands. Here the history of the Tuareg peoples meets parts of the oral transmission of the matriarchal Akan people of West Africa. Narratives tell how some of their ancestors, led by queens, were light-skinned and came from the north, travelling across the desert. They intermarried with the inhabitants, who were dark-skinned peoples, and so they became dark skinned, too (see Chapter 17). This is like the story of the *Kel Ewey*, who intermarried with the indigenous dark-skinned farmers in the south.

Repeated migrations across the Sahara increasingly intensified the situation. The time of peaceful federations and tribal co-existence was over; warlike superimposition and displacement, and the struggle for hegemony—often a struggle for survival—were unending. This supported the establishment of a male warrior class and its hierarchical structure. This process was exacerbated by the inexorable drying up of the Sahara, which made economic conditions even worse. Hardships such as persistent drought forced them to find other solutions;

these included predatory raids on the one hand, and intentional disintegration of their society on the other. In the latter case, men left the women, children and elders behind and moved away, so as not to further deplete the dwindling stores that remained with the women; they moved out and tried to survive elsewhere.[29] All this is untypical for matriarchal societies, but it is understandable: this is matriarchy under extreme conditions.

In spite of their centuries-long struggle against the Arabs, from the 12th century on the Tuareg began to be influenced by Islam. Though many Tuareg were Muslim in name only, and did not read the Koran, patriliny still crept into southern Tuareg society (it didn't reach the Ullimeden Tuareg until the 17th century), and inheritance laws were influenced by the Koran. In this way, the matriarchal social order of all Tuareg peoples was paved over with patriarchal elements. Nevertheless, the Tuareg of the Central Sahara were able to defend their territory, even assimilating Arab tribes into their own culture, where the effects of Islamization remained relatively superficial.

Paradoxically, it was the era of French colonial rule in 1900 that brought the far-reaching consequence of Islamization: the Sahara was conquered by Arab soldiers under French command. The invaders abolished the warrior system of the Tuareg; by 1950 this had gradually led to the collapse of their political culture. Many Arab soldiers then settled in former Tuareg oasis towns, and Arab cultural elements increased to the point where Arabic became the official language. The Koran teachers, the Marabous, became highly influential, as it was they who carried the flag of resistance against the Europeans; many Tuareg followed them. So it is only relatively recently that Islamization, which they resisted for centuries, has drastically increased among the Tuareg.[30]

Today, the Tuareg are threatened by the incursion of modern patriarchy, and their traditional society has completely changed since 1950: nomadic routes, and caravan routes, are blocked by national borders. Poverty is on the increase in an ever worsening climate that is catastrophic for animal breeding. The cultural collapse resulting from this conclusive phase of Islamization is upon them, and as nomads they are more and more discriminated against—in fact, much of the nomadic Tuareg population is threatened with genocide.[31] Others emigrate into the cities, seeking a new way to survive—but only the well-off among them have access to education and training at Koran schools or French schools. Western education alienates them in any case from their own culture, and leads to its deterioration—a situation that has catastrophic consequences, particularly for Tuareg women.[32]

18.5 The ancient Berber religion

In spite of all this, the Tuareg have held onto certain aspects of their old religion, though this is less true in oasis cities than it is in remote desert encampments, and is less true for men than it is for women. The roots of their traditional beliefs are to be found in the Neolithic religion still practiced by some sedentary Berber farmers in the Atlas Mountains. This archaic religion has suffered much under the last of the migrant Tuareg peoples to arrive in the desert, the nobles. The lifestyle of long migrations over great distances, the constant raids and battles have destabilized the people's connections to their old beliefs though they still have a clear sense of their Mediterranean origins. Their vassal peoples, on the other hand, have done a better job of handing down religious practices from the old Berber religion, because they never completely stopped farming. To get a better idea of the ancient religion that connected the *Mediterranean Berbers* (whose culture once extended across the entire continent from Egypt in the east to the *Guanche* people of the Canary Islands in the west), we will examine the oldest layer of Atlas Berber beliefs, and compare them with vestiges that the Tuareg still possess.

The Atlas Mountains form a typical strategic retreat; they offered agrarian Berbers better protection against various patriarchal invaders than the coastal plains of Cyrene, Tripoli and Tunisia did. Tucked away in their mountain retreat, holed up in their circular walled "cashbahs," or farmhouses, they resisted various attacks by colonial powers for millennia. This is why they were only slightly affected by foreign influences, and why their powers of resistance were so high.

A perfect example of this are the heroic deeds of the Berber Queen Kahina. When 7th century Arabs conquered North Africa, savagely destroying indigenous culture and the ancient agricultural system, Kahina, on the eastern slopes of the Atlas, was able to stem the invasion for quite awhile. As both queen and prophetess, she justly and mercifully ruled her people for 35 years; nevertheless, Arabs called her "the witch." In conjunction with other Berber mountain peoples, and Byzantine peoples from the coast, she decisively defeated the Arab army in two battles in 695. Three years later, the Arabs came back, but it took them another four years to exploit the dissents and divisions among the Berbers and gradually wear Kahina down. With her defeat and death in 701, the Berber resistance was eliminated, and the Islamization of the Atlas Berbers began. They in turn initiated a centuries-long passive resistance, effectively guarding themselves against the outside world, which gave the Atlas Berbers the reputation of being ungovernable.[33]

But eventually they were Islamized and patriarchalized; the rule of inheritance through the father, along with complete lack of inheritance in the female line, was

made official in 1748. Wives live in or near their husband's clan, and serve their mothers-in-law; in case of divorce they are obliged to leave the children there. Nevertheless, there is significant evidence that for all Berber cultures—up until the relatively recent introduction of patriliny—family and clan organization was determined in the maternal line.[34]

Today the Atlas Berbers are strict Shiite Muslims. However, this is only true for the men; it is they who build impenetrable walls around their villages and around their women. Behind those walls, the world of women looks different: within the houses they are very much respected by their men. The women control distribution of food and other supplies brought home from the fields by men. Also, women guard the culture, they strictly conserve and protect the ancient Berber language and archaic religious tradition they call magic. This has continued almost up until today; it was only in 1939 that large migrations to cities began, and since 1950 the traditional society has partially collapsed due to emigration.[35]

Nevertheless, research by both non-indigenous and indigenous researchers sheds light on the ancient religion shared by all traditional Berbers. In these beliefs, all things and all actions have their place in a complex symbolic context. The Berbers have no need of special priests, for every woman is the priestess of family rites, and every man the priest of ancient agrarian rites (in which women also participate). In Africa, it often happens that men formally become Muslims; meanwhile women remain "pagans," continuing with their ancient religions—and this is also true for Atlas Berbers. They live in the sacred time frame of festivals, when Islamic social regulations governing love and death are transgressed in a limited way; profane time is that of social proscriptions. In sacred time traditional women's cults are practiced and handed on; this enables women to maintain a certain degree of religious autonomy. They pray to nature spirits, which often go by borrowed Islamic names. Mountains, caves, cliffs, springs, trees, and especially the numerous tombs of Neolithic megalith culture are considered to be inhabited by spirits. One may not insult the spirits, nor breach their special places; otherwise they might send bad luck. Little by little they have been transformed into Islamic saints, and it is the women who practice the cult of the saints.[36]

Human life is seen to have its origins in the depths of the earth. The original couple came out of the earth, led by the woman—who is magically related to the earth. First, she gave birth to four sisters, then four brothers and numerous other children: this was the beginning of humankind.[37] At the same time, humans are also seen as related to the heavens: women with the moon, and men with the sun. This differs from the usual interpretation in which the heavens are male and the earth female; here both sexes are part of the earthly and heavenly spheres. Children are

seen as moon beings until, as adults, they celebrate their ritual, sacred wedding. Only then does a man appear as the sun, whose light is attracted by the moon (woman) and then reflected back to him. Not until after conception does the woman become the likeness of the earth, who is the mother of the human race. She is then identical with the earth. In this sense the wedding of two people is not only rooted in the community of two clans, but also in the cosmology, which it reflects. It is a sacred act with magical effects—a sacred marriage ("hieros gamos"), on which the equilibrium of the earth and the cosmos, and the balance between them, depends.[38]

Just as the everyday work in the annual cycle of seasons makes its symbolic and magic contribution to this balance, the spring "hieros gamos" ceremony is extremely important to maintaining equilibrium. There exist many other rituals associated with sacred marriage: when eagerly awaited spring rains don't arrive, women hold a procession where they carry a dipper, dressed up as a doll and called the "Bride of Heaven," who is sprinkled with water. Her name is "Gonja," and in earlier times she was embodied by a live young woman, seen as the earth in springtime, or as a young goddess of vegetation: Gonja is the name of an ancient Berber goddess. She attracts the rain god Anzar, who marries her, this is why her procession includes all the customs of a wedding procession.[39] Finally, the doll is set upon a megalithic tomb. Back in the time when the rain god, embodied by a man, appeared bearing the name "Husband of Gonja," the two of them enacted a ritual mating in that sacred place. Another version of this ritual is performed when the women hold a foot race around the doll, while the men hold a horse race. In this case, back when the doll was a real woman, the winner of the horse race would have joined her in the magic wedding ceremony.

These processions are always led by an old woman, who rides backwards on a donkey. She often replaces the doll as "Bride of Heaven"; she is called the "Source of Life," even though she obviously is no longer fertile. This implies that today her function in place of the young woman is to cover up the sexual symbolism. The donkey is a sacred animal for the Berbers, representing endurance, patience and male sexual power. The Libyan peoples of antiquity embodied their main god, Seth, as a donkey.

In northern Morocco there was—though strictly secret from outsiders—another variant of the sacred marriage. Once a year, women and men met in a large cave; the lights went out, and lovemaking began. Outsiders who sneaked into this ritual were killed. Even within Islam, a similar rite of sacred marriage had survived: here, a bride and her groom united within the mosque, and this was followed by all the young women and men who united in the village. These rituals suggest traces of collective sacred marriage enacted in ancient times.[40]

Spring, which marks the transition from the rainy season of winter to the dry season of summer, is followed by the harvest, which must be brought in before summer's heat and drought can ruin it. Summer is the time of death, since the earth itself dies. When the last grain has been harvested, each field dies, and with it, the Grain Spirit. But this death is only the pre-condition for the rebirth of next year's vegetation. Rites associated with the last sheaf are especially elaborate; they are a thank you and goodbye to the ancestors, spirits of the dead, who have accompanied the growth and maturity of the harvest, and will now go back underground. The last sheaf is laid upon the ground and "strangled," like a sacrificial animal would be. The field owner is the "Harvest King," the one who cuts the last ears of grain. Afterwards, they tie him up, and he must pay his way out of his obligation. In earlier times he was the personification of the Grain Spirit and probably was killed as a sacrificial offering to underground powers. Today a stand-in is sacrificed, a black bull he is obliged to provide.

After this comes the summer: the "time of disorder." Once fields have been harvested, its borders are removed, and the land is given over to grazing herds. Not until autumn will the field boundaries be designated again, and with them, the "order of the world" restored. The new parcelling out of land to the male heads of households marks the beginning of the plowing season, and with it, the agricultural work before winter. Again, a black bull, symbol of fertility, is sacrificed; the black of his hide reflects the dark, overcast sky of winter, which brings thunderstorms and rain. The distribution of the sacrificial bull in pieces, which will be consumed in a communal feast, reflects distributing the earth into parcels of land. A chosen "Agriculture King" ploughs the first furrow in the field, and then the seed is sown, in order to impregnate the earth. Erotic games are held in order to encourage the earth's pregnancy.

At the beginning of spring, the sacrificial offering is a white ram, associated with the sun. At this time the return of vegetation is celebrated; women put on their jewelry and wear colorful clothes. The children are given blessings; they embody the rebirth of life in the human world. Boys wear crowns of spring flowers, just like the ancient "spring flower heroes" who in earlier times were believed to be the reborn personification of the sacrificed king. The eroticism of spring reaches its summit with the ceremony of the sacred marriage—and this completes the annual cycle.[41]

The rites of the Atlas Berbers are an integrated system of ancient agrarian ceremonies. Masked by Islam, they still reflect the entire archaic cycle of mystery festivals—characterized by sacred marriage, death and rebirth—of formerly matriarchal cultures of the Mediterranean region, Near East and Europe.[42] Everywhere, this Neolithic religion disappeared long ago, but Berbers kept it alive in their remote Atlas Mountains up to the threshold of the present day.

The secrets of life and death are the particular spiritual sphere of women; these secrets are carefully kept from the men and from foreigners. In various ways they come into contact with the spirits of the dead, the female and male ancestors, who are seen as another part of the clan. Naturally, the living feel connected with the dead in daily life: they greet them, share meals with them, and so the world of the dead is always present. The ancestral spirits are well-disposed toward the living, they bless houses and stables, they protect villages and clan lands.

They live in graves, where one can go to ask their counsel, and they also live in spirit trees and rocks. Women often undertake long pilgrimages to particularly sacred places such as Neolithic megalith tombs, places they know to be inhabited by their own ancestral mothers as well as the primordial mothers of their people. As spirit dwellings, these stones are highly venerated by the women; they paint them with henna, and bring prayers, food and incense to their foremothers. Children who died very young are also brought to be buried in these sacred sites, so that they can be reborn as quickly as possible. The primary reason for the pilgrimage is to get pregnant. The women believe they get children from among the ancestral souls; they pray to them for fertility and pregnancy, and hope that an ancestress will let herself be reborn through them.

The ancestral spirits can also bestow healing, as well as knowledge of the future, upon the pilgrims. Women act in shamanic rites of spirit possession: ancestral souls come into them, sending them into a trance state and prophesying future events through them. The souls who live in the stones are always female. Earth and stone are both female, and every woman is an image of the earth. This means it is exclusively women who are in contact with earth spirits; women are magicians of the earth. Mountain peaks are also seen as possessing female spirits: goddesses are enthroned upon them, and there exist mother mountain peaks and daughter mountain peaks, where simple stone sanctuaries are set up.

The idea of rebirth is constantly present in other ways as well: women often just light a clay death-lamp in these sacred sites. Death-lamps are the exclusive property of women, for to light them is to call upon a dead person, and this rite equals a short rebirth of the soul. Grottoes are also sacred places, they are seen as the earth's lap, and are entrances to the world of the dead. A young woman who wants children makes a pilgrimage to a grotto and, accompanied by singing and ululation, or cries of joy, from other women, walks through the grotto seven times, in order to attract an ancestral soul into her womb.[43]

Also women's ancient arts of pottery and weaving are practiced as symbol-laden ritual cycles by Berber women. These rituals follow the same seasonal cycle as the agrarian ones do. At the same time they reflect the entire traditional Berber

women's life cycle: from the sacred marriage to pregnancy, in which the woman is seen as the "potter of her child," from motherhood, in which the woman is seen as the "nurturing earth of the human race," to the honored role of grandmother, the "weaver of human ties." In this way, pottery and weaving are seen not as commodities, but as beings growing through a slow process; they have a secret life of their own. This is women's way of practicing and handing down spiritual values and ancient knowledge, of creating their own magic.[44]

The rich ritual system of the ancient Berber religion has been partially lost with the Tuareg, Berber peoples who migrated out into the desert to live as nomads. Vassal tribes of the Tuareg, such as the Dag Rali, stayed the most true to the ancient ways, as long as they carried on farming at the oases. But the noble Tuareg tribes, uprooted from their agrarian origins by their nomadic lifestyle, did not preserve these mythologies and religious ceremonies. Nevertheless, in the face of nature's overwhelming power in the desert, they kept their belief in nature spirits, or "Kel Essuf," the spirits of loneliness and emptiness, who drift around in the desert causing trouble. They stir up sand storms, make trails disappear in a fog of dust, and make water sources run dry; sometimes they appear as beautiful mirages. They are dangerous, and one must wear amulets as protection against them. They have nothing in common with the agrarian Berbers' benevolent spirits of the dead.

Nevertheless, their belief in beneficent female ancestors is not completely extinguished, and the numerous archaic tombs and megalith stone circles, which also exist in the desert, are their sacred places. As with the Atlas Berbers, it is customary for Tuareg women to make pilgrimages to these tombs and venerate the ancestral mothers, such as Takama and Tin-Hinan. The Ahaggar women perform a magic ritual at night, beautifully dressed and made up, at one of these pre-Islamic tombs: they invoke the soul of an ancestress, finally falling asleep, or into a trance, on the stones. Shortly before dawn, the ancestress appears in a dream, and tells of events yet to come. These prophesies do not just refer to the return of long-absent husbands (as anthropologists would have it—but of course the women would not give the truth away to anthropologists), but are primarily about future fertility, that is, children—because on these tombs ancestral souls can be brought back through conception. This ritual is very old, as it is known from the Libyans of antiquity.[45]

The fertility ritual enacted on sacred tombs by Tuareg women also has roots in various forms of ancient shamanic practice that are widespread among them. Shamanic healing rituals are exclusively female events; typically they are practiced only by women from vassal tribes. These rituals are done in cases of possession by a Kel Essuf, or evil spirit; the loneliness that results from living in the desert, or social conflicts, can engender feelings of being lost and inconsolable. The ritual takes place

at night when a circle of women forms around the possessed person; she sits in the center of the circle and dances, shaking only her head and upper torso. The healers are the women's chorus; they drum and sing songs and try to make contact with the patient's soul, in order to lead her out of depression. Only women are familiar with, and learn, the texts of the possession songs, which have a sacred character, containing cosmological knowledge associated with medicinal plants. Muslim clergy and Tuareg noblemen share an abhorrence of this ritual; it is always followed by a heated discussion that brings the social conflict to the fore. But the women of vassal tribes see the possession ritual as an aesthetic form of art, just as noble women see the Ahal; both these traditions are very old. [46]

The Tifinagh script, too, is very old; it consists solely of dashes, dots and circles, combinations of which make up the 24 letters of the ancient Libyan alphabet. It is identical with archaic rock inscriptions in North Africa. However, the core content of the culture: myths, legends, tribal and clan histories, genealogies, knowledge of flora, fauna, and desert ecology, are handed down orally; they are considered to be too sacred to be written down.

Equally ancient—that is, going back to the Neolithic, and even to the Paleolithic—is the symbolic motif of the silver jewelry called the "Tuareg Cross," whose many other names refer to special desert regions. In fact, it bears little similarity to a cross, but looks anthropomorphic, like a female human: it has a decorated head, its arms are stretched open, and it exhibits ample, well-padded hips. It actually is the abstract form of a goddess: the fertile, creative woman from whom everything comes. It bears a direct similarity to the Stone Age "idols" or goddess figures found all over the Sahara, of which there are also thousands of examples in the Paleolithic and Neolithic Mediterranean region and Europe. The same is true of the rounded forms in mural paintings on mud houses in the oases; they are called variations of "woman" and are also an abstract reference to the goddess (Ill. 18 a, b, c).

The "Tuareg Cross" and other pieces of silver jewelry constitute the family treasure of the Tuareg, and are handed down from mother to daughter. Sometimes they are also passed down as a protective talisman from a woman to her brother, son or husband when he travels on dangerous paths across the desert: this way, he travels under the protection of the goddess.[47]

These Berber and Tuareg cultural goods guide us back in history into very early epochs, because they indicate a relationship not only to pre-Indo-European Mediterranean societies, such as those of ancient Crete, pre-Hellenic Greece, and Lydian Asia Minor in Near East, but also to the cultures of Paleolithic and Neolithic Europe. These early historical cultures were matriarchal; the Berbers and Tuaregs constitute a last surviving branch, one that extends into the present.

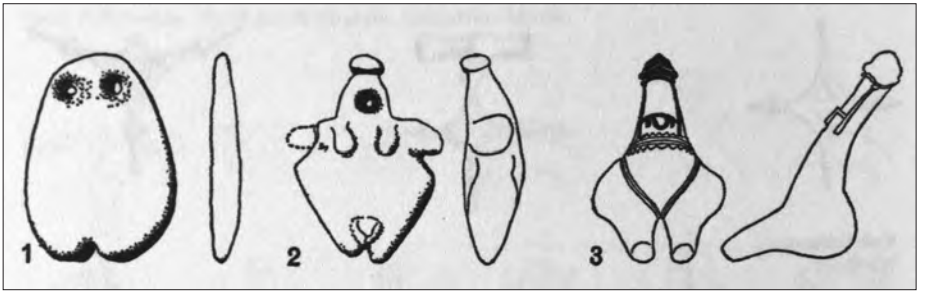


Illustration 18a. Stone figurines of goddesses from Central Sahara

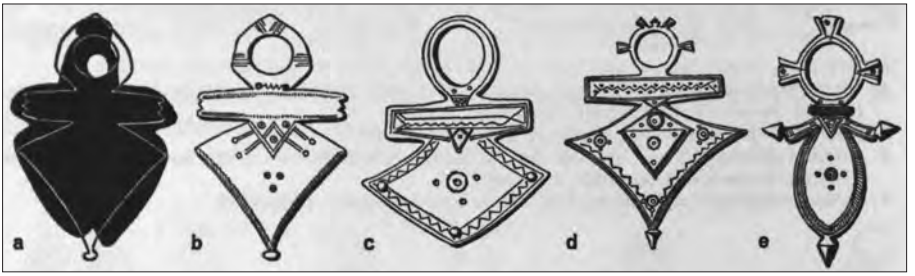


Illustration 18b. Touareg amuletts of goddesses from Central Sahara

Illustration 18c. Mural paintings depicting goddesses from Oualata/Mauritania (in: Jean Gabus: Contributions à l'Étude des Touaregs, Musée d'ethnographie, Neuchâtel 1972, pp. 54, 56)

18.6 Understanding the structure of matriarchal societies (continuation)

In general:

- Matriarchal agrarian societies developed much earlier than animal breeding nomad societies did. The latter constitute a secondary form of society, one that is not self-sufficient. They are dependent on agrarian societies for vegetable food. It does not constitute its own cultural epoch.
- It is very likely that animal breeding societies developed from matriarchal horti/agricultural societies, not from foraging cultures (gatherers and hunters). Animals were first domesticated in agrarian societies.
- Animal breeding societies developed in regions where agriculture was no longer possible, but where it was still possible to graze animals.
- For these reasons, we assume that animal breeding societies originally were matriarchal. Some of them would become patriarchal eventually, as a result of the influence of later established patriarchal societies of domination.
- Some matriarchal animal breeding societies still exist, such as the Tibetans in Central Asia, the Goajiro in South America, the Bedja and Nuba in East Africa, and the Tuareg in North Africa.
- In contrast to patriarchal ones, matriarchal animal breeding societies value mutual support over accumulation of goods, including animal herds. This shows that animal breeding does not, by itself, lead to patriarchy.

Social forms of matriarchal animal breeding cultures

At the social level:

- Matriarchal animal breeding societies are characterized by matrilinearity and matrilocality in tent encampments.
- Both sexes enjoy erotic freedom; the choice of spouse is up to women; divorce and re-marriage are easily accomplished.

At the economic level:

- In matriarchal animal breeding societies, women own the tents and herds; they lead a life independent of men.
- In terms of production and consumption, the tent encampment is an independent community of women. Each camp has its own indivisible herd, composed of animals belonging to individual women. The head of the camp is the eldest woman of that matriliny.

- Every woman who owns a tent is given all foodstuff and other goods acquired in trade by men. This woman alone decides on their distribution. Women have control over all the goods.

At the political level:

- Political decisions are made through consensus; practical politics take place in the tent camp, where decisions are made. Men are sent out as delegates to the clan or tribal council; they represent the encampment of their mothers and sisters and are accountable to the women.
- Women can depose their delegate (the chief) at any time, and can choose another chief.
- Women can intervene in the men's clan or tribal councils to present their side of an issue, or to achieve consensus in the tribe.
- Matriarchal animal breeding societies developed alliances and established realms by marriage politics; the founders were, without exception, queens. Later they would install one of their sons as king; he ruled beside the queen.
- In times of crisis these queens could also be warlords; some of them engaged in acrimonious resistance against foreign invaders.

At the cultural level:

- The religion of matriarchal stock breeders shows vestiges of the religion practiced by the matriarchal agricultural societies they originally came from. They do not have a religion of their own (see the Tuareg in relation to sedentary Berbers).
- The cult of the ancestral mothers that is tied to sacred places still exists, and additionally, the belief in powerful nature spirits.
- Women and men often have separate religious worlds, women having kept more of the ancient matriarchal religion, such as worship of ancestral spirits and founding mothers at the megalithic sites, as well as shamanic prophecy and healing rituals.

General notes on matriarchy under extreme conditions

- Matriarchal societies in extreme situations, that is, resisting invading patriarchal cultures, tend to develop a warrior-caste (see Iroquois, Nayar, Ashanti, Tuareg).
- When they have to flee from patriarchal invader societies—especially when this involves migration of an entire people–, sometimes they imple-

ment a warlike take-over of another matriarchal society. Then a society with different matriarchal classes develops (see Nayar, Tuareg).

- Because of their difficult economic conditions, this situation is even more intense for matriarchal stock breeders in the desert. They may conduct raids to others and fight for hegemony among themselves. In crisis situations, they resort to disintegration of parts of their society, i. e. the men move away (see Tuareg).

Notes

1. Baumann/ Thurnwald/ Westermann: *Völkerkunde von Afrika,* ibid., p. 364; and J. Nicolaisen: *Ecology and Culture of the Pastoral Tuareg*, Copenhagen 1963, National Museum of Copenhagen, p. 8; and R. Stern-Lichten: „Die Berber, das Urvolk Nord-Afrikas", in: *Umschau*, no. 43, y 38, Frankfurt am Main 1934, Umschau Verlag, p. 854.
2. Nicolaisen, ibid., p.12.
3. Nicolaisen, ibid., p. 7.
4. Henri Lhote: *Les Touaregs du Hoggar*, Paris 1984, Armand Colin, p. 35, (first edition, Paris 1944). [Touaregs]
5. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 12–14.
6. Lhote, [Touaregs], ibid., p. 187.
7. Lhote, [Touaregs], ibid., pp. 181–183, 187; Federica de Cesco/ Markus Krebser: *Touaregs. Nomades du Sahara*, Lausanne-Paris 1971, Mondo, pp. 148–150.
8. Cesco/Krebser, ibid., pp. 139–142, 145–147.
9. Hélène Claudot-Hawad: "Femme Idéale et Femme Sociale chez les Touaregs de l'Ahaggar," in: *Production pastorale et société*, no. 14, Paris 1984, Maison des sciences de l'homme, pp. 96–98. [Femme Idéale]
10. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 14, 24; Baumann et al., [Völkerkunde] a.a.O., p. 365.
11. Hélène Claudot-Hawad, [Femme Idéale], ibid., pp. 93, 96; and "Femmes Touaregues et Pouvoir Politique," in: *Peuples Méditerranéens*, no. 48/ 49, p. 70, Paris 1989, Editions Anthropos, [Pouvoir Politique]; and "'Woman the Shelter' and 'Man the Traveller.' The Representation of Gender among the Tuaregs," in : Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace. Matriarchies Past, Present and Future,* Toronto 2009, Inanna Publications, York University, pp. 159–172; Cesco/Krebser, a.a.O., S. 127.
12. Claudot-Hawad, [Pouvoir Politique], ibid., pp. 70–72.
13. Lhote, [Touaregs], ibid., pp. 36, 37.
14. Nicolaisen, ibid., p. 183; H. Claudot-Hawad, [Femme Idéale], ibid, p. 99.
15. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 476, 477.
16. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 22, 142, 145, 456, 459, 476, 477; Lhote, [Touaregs], ibid., pp. 37, 186, 188; Hélène Claudot-Hawad, [Femme Idéale], ibid., p. 98.
17. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 146, 405, 460, 467; H. Claudot-Hawad, [Femme Idéale], ibid., pp. 100–102; Georg Klute: *Die schwerste Arbeit der Welt*, Munich 1992, Trickster Verlag, pp. 196, 198.
18. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 209–213, 218.

19. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 217, 218.
20. This differs only among Arctic peoples, who never farmed as such, or raided other peoples, but continued as hunters and gatherers.
21. See support for this viewpoint in Hahn, Forde, Childe, and Mary Douglas; and in Nicolaisen's arguments on this topic.
22. H. Claudot-Hawad, [Femme Idéale], ibid., p. 102; and the documentary: „Die Töchter der Zelte", Sylvie Banuls/ Peter Heller, P. Heller Production, Munich 1991.
23. H. Claudot-Hawad, [Pouvoir Politique], ibid., p. 70; Henri Lhote, *Zu den Ahnen der Tuareg*, Würzburg, Germany, 1976, p. 106. [Ahnen]
24. H. Claudot-Hawad, [Pouvoir Politique] , ibid., p. 72.
25. H. Claudot-Hawad, [Pouvoir Politique] , ibid., p. 72, 73.
26. H. Claudot-Hawad, [Pouvoir Politique], ibid., pp. 74–76; Cesco/Krebser, ibid., p. 145; Lhote, [Touaregs], ibid., p. 38.
27. Henri Lhote: *Le Hoggar. Espace et Temps*, Paris 1984, Armand Colin, pp. 127–144, 179, 180 [Hoggar] ; and [Ahnen], ibid., pp. 47–51.
28. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 407–411, 485; Mano Dayak: *Touareg, la tragédie*, Paris 1992, Edition Jean-Claude Lattès, p. 56; H. Claudot-Hawad, [Femme Idéale], ibid., p. 98; Lhote, [Touaregs], ibid., p. 73.
29. Dayak, ibid., p. 68; Nicolaisen, ibid., p. 315.
30. Nicolaisen, ibid., pp. 305, 306, 479; Lhote, [Touaregs], ibid., p. 202, 203.
31. Dayak, ibidem; Hélène Claudot-Hawad/ Mahmoudan Hawad: *Touaregs. Voix solitaires sous L'Horizon confisqué*, Paris 1996, Peuples autochtones et développment.
32. Fatimata Oualet Halatine: "The Loss of Privileges. A Tuareg Woman's Journey towards Modernity," in: Goettner-Abendroth, Heide (ed.): *Societies of Peace,* ibid., pp. 173–177; Hélène Claudot-Hawad: "Ecole sans Savoir et savoir sans école," in: *La Revue générale,* no. 10, 1993, Bruxelles.
33. Sweetman, ibid., pp. 17–21.
34. Germaine Laoust-Chantréaux: *Kabylie Coté Femmes. La vie féminine à Aït Hichem, 1937–1939*, Aix-en-Provence 1990, Edisud, pp. 253–255; G. Marcy : "Les Vestiges de la Parenté Maternelle en Droit Coutumier Berbère," in: *Revue Africaine,* no. 85, 1941, pp. 187–211.
35. Laoust-Chantréaux, ibidem, pp. 253–255; see especially the indigenous Berber-Kabyle scholar Makilam: *The magical Life of Berber Women in Kabylia,* New York 2007, Peter Lang Publishing, pp. 218–222 (first edition, Paris 1996), [Life]; and Makilam: *Symbols and Magic in the Arts of Kabyle Women,* New York 2007, Peter Lang Publishing (first edition, Aix-en-Provence 1999), [Symbols].
36. Monique Gadant/ Michèle Kasriel: *Femmes du Maghreb au présent*, Paris 1990, Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, pp. 245–246, 263–264; and Stern-Lichten, ibid., pp. 854 ff; and W. Vycichl: "Les Imazighen. 5000 Ans D'Histoire," in: *Etudes et Documents Berbères*, no. 4, Paris 1988, La Boîte à Documents, pp. 85–93.
37. Makilam, [Symbols], ibid., pp. 29–30.
38. Makilam, [Symbols], ibid., pp. 148–149.
39. Jean Servier: *Tradition et Civilisation Berbères. Les Portes de l'Année,* Monaco 1985, Du Rocher, pp. 271–284, 455 [Les Portes] ; Makilam, [Symbols], ibid., pp. 33, 146.
40. J. Zwernemann: *Die Erde in Vorstellungswelt und Kultpraktiken der sudanesischen Völker*, Berlin

1968, Reimer, pp. 407–411; Jean Servier, [Les Portes], ibid., pp. 271–284, 455.

41. Zwernemann, ibid, pp. 411–419; and J. Servier, [Les Portes], ibid., pp. 121–191, 250, 303–322, 344–247. See also J. Servier: *Les Berbères*, Paris 1990, Presses universitaires de France.—These customs have been practiced in the region of Aurès.
42. Robert Graves: *Greek Mythology*, Middlesex, England, 1960 (revised edition), Penguin Books Ltd.; Heide Goettner-Abendroth: *The Goddess and her Heros,* ibidem.
43. Servier, [Les Portes], ibid., pp. 7–54, 84.—These customs are to be found especially in the Kabyle region.
44. Makilam, [Life], ibidem, and [Symbols], ibidem.—These also are Kabyle customs.
45. Cesco/Krebser, ibid., pp. 154–156; Herbert Kaufmann: *Wirtschafts- und Sozialstruktur der Iforas-Tuareg*, Dissertation at University of Cologne, 1964, Kleikamp, pp. 83, 84; Lhote, [Touaregs], ibid., pp. 195–197, 204, 205.
46. Susan J. Rasmussen: *Spirit Possession and Personhood among the Kel Ewey Tuareg*, Cambridge 1995, University Press.
47. Cesco/Krebser, ibid., p. 158; Hélène Claudot-Hawad: "Tifinagh. De la plume à l'imprimante," in: *LAM-PO, Travaux 1988*, Centre D'Aix 1988, Université de Provence, pp. 225–227; Jean Gabus: *Contribution à l'Etude des Touaregs*, Neuchâtel 1972, Université de Neuchâtel, pp. 37–72; Henri Lhote: "Un bijou anthropomorphe chez les Touaregs de l'Aïr," in: *Notes africaine*, no. 4, Dakar, Oct. 1949, Institut fondamental d'Afrique noir, pp. 114–116; Briffault, *The Mothers*, ibid., vol. 1, pp. 286, 394, 395.

Glossary

Agrarian festivals: Matriarchal societies have a complex, interwoven cycle of agrarian festivals that follow the seasonal agricultural cycle. These ceremonies carry the symbolism of eternal renewal in the cycle of life and death of all beings on earth, as well as of all celestial bodies in the sky. Associated with this is a detailed festival calendar.

Amazons: Amazons are to be distinguished from the matriarchal women who fought at the side of their men: instead, Amazons were professional warriors who built up societies that did not include men. Amazon realms are a special variant of matriarchal social order, occurring in situations where invaders threatened to destroy matriarchal cultures.

Arts: For matriarchal peoples, all artistic expression—dance, song, music, painting, carving, dramatic presentations—serves religion, and should be understood as a form of prayer *(arts of women).*

Arts of women: The ancient women's *arts* of pottery and weaving are practiced as cycles of symbol-laden rituals. These rituals follow the same seasonal cycle as the agrarian ones do *(agrarian festivals)*, and they also reflect the human life cycle. In general, matriarchal women are the guardians of culture, as they strictly conserve and protect the language, *script,* music, poetry, magic, and religious traditions *(education)*.

Balanced societies: In spite of women's authority and centrality in matriarchies, a balance is maintained between female and male spheres of activity. These spheres are not limited to stereotypically fixed roles, but rather are set out differently in various societies. It is not the individual, but rather the sphere of activity itself that is strictly gendered. The balance is constantly re-established and maintained via the political medium of creating *consensus.*

Brothers-polyandry: One woman married to a group of brothers. Brothers-polyandry is a subaltern form of the *sisters-brothers group marriage.* Sisters-brothers group marriage includes economic-ecological principles: it avoids division of property and herds, and produces fewer children. Brothers-polyandry is especially effective for population control, and is therefore often preferred in matriarchal societies.

Caste system: The patriarchal caste system found in Hindu India is not a peaceful, rational arrangement of an existing, homogenous society. It is rather a fossilized history of patriarchal violence against women in general, and other peoples and cultures in particular, who have been subjected over the course of time. These conquered peoples were forced into certain occupations and made dependent upon the caste system. They were only able to rise up within caste hierarchy by adopting the basic principles of Hinduism: *patrilinearity* and *patrilocality, child marriage, hypergamy, absolute monogamy,* and *contempt for widows.* Since the fate of the lower castes was horrible, many of the subjected peoples did adopt these Hindu principles, practices that worked to the detriment of women.

Change of gender roles: Some matriarchal societies practice adopting alternate gender roles: girls can become "sons" and boys "daughters." What is retained in this switching of gender roles is the traditional appearance and spheres of action associated with each sex in that society, and it also includes acceptance of same-sex love.

Chiefs: In matriarchies, chiefs are clan delegates, and represent the clan's—and particularly the women's—opinions to the local, national (tribal) and federal councils, and to the outside world. Chiefs are obliged to present the women and other clan members with an account of their actions *(clan house politics).* Just as women elect men as chiefs with representative powers, the former also have the right to unseat these chiefs. By electing the chiefs, women determine the political make-up of all the larger councils *(consensus, delegates, tribute).*

Child marriage: Child marriage is a patriarchal custom. It means that a female person is promised to her future husband when she is still a child, and often just after her birth. Free choice of any kind in the matter is thus impossible; the female is nothing but a pawn in the business considerations between two patriarchal clans.

Clan house politics: In matriarchies, the core politics, which influences all the other political bodies, is always developed and carried out in the clan house. Thus clan house politics—representing the "sacred will of the people"—determines the direction of the entire society *(consensus, delegates).*

Common motherhood: In matriarchal societies sisters share a general *motherhood* role. This minimizes the restrictions of individual motherhood, and serves to protect the children.

Consensus (consent): Matriarchal societies function as consensual clan societies *(balanced societies)*. This means that the decision-making process belongs to all the clan members, and it enters into a unanimity process that involves everybody. This is carried out at the level of the women and the men in the clan houses, at the level of the whole clan, at the level of the village, at the level of the people, or nation, and at the federal level of several peoples *(clan house politics).* The discussions are facilitated by the clan mother *(matriarch),* or by elected delegates at the larger councils (*delegates).*

Cross cousin marriage: In matriarchal societies, cross cousin marriage is based on *mutual intermarriage between two* specific, unaltered matrilineal *clans.* Down through the generations, the daughters of the one clan (sisters) marry the sons (brothers) of the other clan, often in the form of the *sisters-brothers group marriage*; it is ongoing cross cousin marriage.

Cultic worship of motherhood: Matriarchal societies don't exhibit a cultic worship of motherhood. In patriarchal societies this iconic status obscures the fact that each individual woman is reduced to the pure basics of her childbearing function, usually against her will and abilities.

Deities: In matriarchal cultures, deities are not abstract, transcendent beings outside the realm of humans; they are—in nature and in humans—immanent powers.

Delegates (speakers): In situations where village councils, regional councils, or federal councils are conducted by men, they are there as delegates (or speakers) sent by their clans. On each level—local, regional, and federal—they require the *consensus* of their clans and act according to the clan's instructions. They owe the clan mothers *(matriarchs)* and clan members an account of their actions *(chiefs).*

Dolmen: The horizontal stones of *megalithic cultures* are called "dolmen." Dolmen and *menhir* have to be counted as the oldest forms that represent a differentiation between female and male stones, whether through their position lying or standing, or through naturally-occurring or humanly-fashioned markings that indicate sexual organs. They are sacred, because they are considered to embody the ancestors. In the megalithic stone cult, dolmens serve as table, altar, sitting place and throne, all at the same time.

Domestic slavery: Besides the well-known forms of slavery, there exists the domestic slavery of women in patriarchal societies. It means that a young bride is hopelessly destined to remain at the bottom of the social hierarchy in her husband's clan. She is primarily there to work as a slave for her husband's relatives, especially for her mother-in-law, who maintains tight control over her. The mothers-in-law are not, however, the cause of the younger women's slave status, since they too are victims of this social system.

Education: In matriarchal societies education is in the hands of women; they pass cultural values and abilities on to their children. This is an extremely important factor in the handing down of their ancient culture *(arts of women)*.

Endogamy: Marriage within a certain social unit. In matriarchies individual clan-houses are strictly *exogamous*, while paired clan-houses are strictly endogamous; i. e., they don't seek spouses elsewhere. The result is that matriarchal villages are endogamous.

Exogamy: Marriage outside a certain social unit. In matriarchies individual clan-houses are strictly exogamous; i. e., intermarriage between members of the same clan house is forbidden.

Family priestess: Women in matriarchal societies act as priestesses for their families and clans. This continues even where patriarchal religions have been superimposed over indigenous practices.

Fatherhood: Matriarchal belief in *rebirth* explains why matriarchal societies don't know of biological paternity, or, if they acknowledge it, don't seem interested in it. Children are not seen to be sired by men, but are accepted back into life from the world of ancestors. Even where paternity is recognized, it plays no particularly significant role in society. Where biological paternity is recognized, the matriarchal father takes affectionate care of his wife's children and helps raise them.

Federal politics: Matriarchal alliance-building at the federal level conforms to the ideal of a society based on relationship. It consists in organizing confederations of various peoples as equals, formed through matrilineal lines of kinship; it is a question of non-hierarchical federal politics.

Female-male polarity: As a matter of principle, female-male polarity is maintained in matriarchal cultures, as the foundation, both symbolic and real, of every aspect of society. This female-male polarity can be defined differently in different matriarchal societies.

Female shamanism: The *priesthood of women* in matriarchal cultures is shamanistic. Female shamanism is a respected profession and, in former times, was practiced by the most important women.

Shamanism began in the ancestor cults. The woman shaman attempted, through trance journeys to the Otherworld, to draw the souls of the ancestors back to this world for a new *rebirth*. Therefore, shamanism was most probably developed by women and was, for a very long time, a purely female phenomenon.

Festivals of merit: At personal festivals of merit, the goods of a well-to-do clan or woman are shared out and given as gifts to neighbors, fellow-villagers, and members of their tribal lineage. This brings honor to the givers—"honor" in the sense of the societal acknowledgement that rewards good social behavior.

Gift economy: In matriarchal societies the economic pattern of gift economy prevails. The giving of gifts is always intended as an entry into and a way to maintain good relationships. It supports the securing and maintenance of peace. As land and clan houses, as well as food, are usually in the hands of women, it is they who facilitate and maintain the matriarchal gift economy. Matriarchal gift giving circles are practised not only at the clan and village level, but can also be extended broadly, so that numerous peoples over an immense area share in the process. Matriarchal gift giving supports the securing and maintenance of peace at all these levels *(matriarchal economy).*

Hypergamy: The systematically enforced practice where men marry women from subjected peoples that have ended up in the lower classes. In the patriarchal *caste system* of Hindu India, hypergamy, or "marrying up," characterizes the popular custom in which the middle castes marry their daughters up out of their own castes into higher castes. But this does not work to a woman's advantage, as marrying up does not change her caste identity, which depends on her birth. To the contrary, the practice exacerbates the man-woman power gap, where the man is already "above" and the women "below." This degrades women, because a woman will always be the "lower" person in her husband's clan, and will spend her whole life being humiliated.

Initiation ceremony: The initiation ceremony, or puberty feast for girls is, for all matriarchal peoples, the most important feast. For boys there is no comparable ceremony. At the initiation ceremony the girl's transition to womanhood is blessed, and she becomes a full member of society. She is honored because by having her own children, she will ensure the continuation of the clan and her people. She retains her sacred name; that is, the name of the female ancestor reborn in her.

Life-cycle festivals: These festivals celebrate birth, initiation of girls, wedding, death, ancestor worship. In matriarchal societies, they are exclusively women's ceremonies, and are celebrated within the house. Women act as *family priestesses.*

Male human sacrifice: Men destined for male human sacrifice came from highly regarded clans. Assured by many rituals, these men went voluntarily to their meet-

ing with the goddess of death, in hopes she would grant a better life for their people. It occurred as a form of give-and-take between humans and the earth: she, who had given so much life, was given back one life in return. This is a role that in earlier times probably fell solely to the *sacred king;* it was regarded in matriarchal societies as the highest form of sacred sacrifice. According to the matriarchal belief in *rebirth,* the sacred king was reborn soon. This kind of sacrifice was sometimes carried out symbolically, rather than literally.

Maternal uncle: Mothers' brother; in matriarchal societies he is the nearest male relative to the children of his sister and fulfils the role of "social father" to his nieces and nephews (in our terminology).

Matriarch: In matriarchies, the women and mothers are at the center of society, and the eldest clan mother is the matriarch. She is the head of the matrilineal clan, which can be quite large. The harvest and the clan's treasure is given into her hands, she shares it out to the people of the household. She elects men as *delegates,* or *chiefs,* with representative powers, she also has the right to unseat these chiefs. Though she has the last word, she cannot vote against the other women and clan members, rather she acts in *consent* with them. She facilitates the *clan house politics.*

Matriarchal animal breeding societies: They are characterized by matrilineality and matrilocality in tent encampments. Women own the tents and herds. In terms of production and consumption, the tent encampment is an independent community of women. The head of the camp is the eldest woman of that matriliny.

Matriarchal economy: The economic principles of matriarchal societies are inextricabley interwoven with spiritual principles: matriarchal economics is also a spiritual system. The guiding image for the economy is Mother Earth herself, and as with earth, sharing and giving away out of an abundance are its supreme values. The gift is the lynchpin of the economy, patterned after the continuous gift giving of earth and sky *(gift economy).*

Matriarchal markets: In matriarchal societies women own the markets where agricultural and domestic products are bought and sold. These local, rural markets are embedded within a gift economy. They function very differently from capitalist markets, in which profit maximization is achieved through unfair trade. At markets in matriarchal societies, it is not the selling price that matters most, but rather the good, neighbourly relationships maintained and emphasized by the conversations between women at the market place *(gift economy, matriarchal economy).*

Matriarchal marriage politics: The marriage politics of matriarchal *queens* is a means to create *matriarchal realms*. They and their people intermarry with allied peoples to form a new society.

Matriarchal mystery festivals: These festivals reflect the annual cycle of the seasons and the cycle of life. As ritual drama, they present the relationship humans have with nature and with their own history; the festivals are dedicated to the various manifestations of the Feminine Divine or Great Goddess. Matriarchal mystery festivals are public folk festivals, not secret cults. They demonstrate ancient principles of equality that characterise matriarchal societies *(agrarian festivals)*.

Matriarchal queen-kingship: As to the relationship between the *queen mother* and the *sacred king: in matriarchal realms,* queen mother and king each have their own court of justice—the queen over the women, the king over the men. But the king is only the co-regent, and his status is below that of the queen mother. She chooses the king, and places him on the throne. She oversees his administration; she publicly admonishes him; she can overrule his decisions, and can also depose him. The king can render no decision without having consulted the queen mother.

Matriarchal realms: Matriarchal city-states or realms are: first, relationship societies; second, sacred societies; third, they developed out of relationships and alliances. They are fundamentally different from patriarchal empires or states, which arise as a result of conquest. Matriarchal realms expand through *marriage politics* of *the queen mothers,* and alliances and trade, not by war.

Matriarchal tolerance: In general, matriarchal societies have a highly developed ability to integrate outside influences and new elements; this reflects "matriarchal tolerance." Exercising this ability does not mean, however, that they give up the key aspects of their own identity that pertain to the matriarchal patterns.

Matriarchal worldview: The matriarchal worldview is non-dualistic, and doesn't contain the patriarchal theological concepts of "good" and "evil." Instead, there is parity between different, but complementary energies. They represent the two sides of the world, both cosmos and earth, and determine the cycles of life. This worldview is cyclical rather than linear.

Matrilinearity/matriliny: In a matrilineal clan the children are related, in terms of lineage, only to their mother and carry her clan name.

Matrilineal societies (compared with matriarchal ones): In these societies, women have lost their economic independence and only retain matrilinearity as a social pattern. Economic strength in the hands of women distinguishes matriarchal societies from merely matrilineal ones.

Matrilocality: The direct female and male offspring live in the clan house of the mother, even after they are grown up.

Medicine societies (sacred societies): Medicine societies are the main bearers of matriarchal tradition, and are closely associated with the annual agrarian cycle

and the cycle of life, and with healing. These cycles and healing were originally in the hands of women. Additionally, women attend to their knowledge of their generative capacities in their sacred societies. Later, women's sacred societies have as their counterparts men's sacred societies. Medicine or sacred societies are always secret.

Megalithic culture: Ancient architecture of large stones in the forms of: standing stones *(menhir),* horizontal stones *(dolmen),* stone figures, rows of stones, stone circles or stone rectangles, megalithic grave monuments, pyramids. The basic arrangements serve as both the place of worship and the clan's vast cemetery. Megalithic constructions are encountered all over the world, wherever matriarchal, agriculture based societies have settled.

Menhir: The standing stones of *megalithic cultures* are called "menhir." *Dolmen* and menhir have to be counted as the oldest forms that represent a differentiation between female and male stones, whether through their position (lying or standing), or through markings (naturally-occurring or humanly-fashioned) that indicate sexual organs. They are sacred because they are considered to embody the ancestors.

Men's secret (warrior) societies: In patriarchalized societies, men's secret societies are warrior based, and aim to extend men's power within the culture. They are entities of the patriarchalization process. They are parasitically attached to their culture as a whole, and depend economically upon the societies' resources; and they form secret hierarchies and enforcement bodies with someone in the top position of authority. In regard to culture they promote real or imagined patrilinearity as a cultural innovation. Young men are "reborn" through their association with the other men.—Men's *sacred societies* in matriarchal cultures must be distinguished from men's secret (warrior) societies.

Monogamy: Monogamy is the lifelong marriage of one women with one man. In many patriarchal systems, monogamy becomes absolute, that means, a woman holds the right to exist only by virtue of having a husband. For her (not for her husband), marriage is exclusive and insoluble, and re-marriage is not permitted. There is simply no possibility of leaving the marriage which is necessary for the fathers to recognize their true children *(patrilinearity).*

Motherhood: In matriarchies, motherhood is not only a biological, but also a culture-creating act. Mothers, especially in the role of matriarchs, establish the web of matrilineal relationship, and create the society. They are much respected.

Mutual intermarriage between two clans: In matriarchal cultures, each clan is linked with an other specific, unaltered clan as marriage clan. They are linked pairs of clans within a village, or, where each clan forms a village, as linked pairs

of clan villages. Down through the generations, the women of the one clan marry the men of the other clan, and vice versa, often in the form of the *sisters-brothers group marriage*; it is ongoing *cross cousin marriage.*

Natural authority: Clan mothers have the power to give advice and counsel, but not to command through force. Their counsel is voluntarily accepted on the basis of confidence and respect.

Paired clans: Traditionally, matriarchal clans are paired two-by-two, which means they are paired marriage clans. In their original traditions, matriarchal peoples populated their oldest villages with clans in an even number to create this pairing. Clan houses affected by this arrangement are mutually responsible for each other, and bound to help each other.

Patriarchal polygyny: In this form of marriage a man has several wives who are unrelated to each other, who have not been consulted about the others, and who are forced to get along in the same household with each other somehow. The man is their master, and they are not allowed to have additional lovers. The female mirror image of this patriarchal pattern—a woman with several husbands in her house, men who are unrelated to each other and have no say over their situation—does not exist.

Patrilinearity: In a patrilineal clan the children carry the father's clan name. Patrilinearity is combined with *monogamy* for the wives, which is necessary for the fathers to recognize their true children. The wife is expected to bear sons, who will be the heirs of their father's clan name, titles and property. Bearing daughters makes the situation of the wife worse, because female offspring cannot continue the father's lineage.

Patrilocality: Male and female offspring live in the house of the father. Usually, the eldest son inherits the father's title and property. Daughters don't inherit and are married off.

Polyandry: The marriage of one women with several husbands. In matriarchal societies it occurs as *brothers-polyandry* only.

Polygamy: Meaning marriage-to-many, it occurs in two different forms: *polygyny* (a man with several wives) and *polyandry* (a woman with several husbands). In matriarchal societies men's *polygyny* and women's *polyandry*—that is, the multiple sexual relationships of the sexes—are common, either as part of the *mutual intermarriage between two clans*, or as individuals.

Polygyny: The marriage of one man with several wives.

Pregnancy: In matriarchal societies women believe they get children from among the ancestral souls; they pray to them for fertility and pregnancy, and hope that a female or male ancestor will let herself or himself be reborn through them

(rebirth). They often undertake pilgrimages to sacred places where the ancestral souls reside, in order to get pregnant.

Priesthood of women: In matriarchal societies the priesthood is female, either exclusively or shared equally with men. In the latter case, the spiritual power of women is considered to be greater, and to be a natural gift. Matriarchal priestesses have no hierarchy among themselves; the same goes for matriarchal priests. The priesthood of women is closely connected with *female shamanism.*

Primordial ancestress: In matriarchal cultures the primordial ancestress, as the original mother, is often deified as a mother goddess.

Primordial goddess: In matriarchal religions creation of the world is the work of one or more primordial goddesses. These primordial goddesses are: the Cosmos, associated with the moon and the stars, or with the sun, and the Earth, associated with the underworld.

Property: In matriarchal societies, necessities of life such as land, housing, and food are clan property; as such they are in the hands of women, who manage these goods and pass them on in the female bloodline. Women's economic strength serves the greater well-being of the community.

Providers: In matriarchal societies, provisions are strictly in the hands of the women, whether produced by women on the clan's fields, or by men, and then handed over to women. In any case, women always turn produce into nourishment, and thus are seen as providers.

Purity: In patriarchal societies, there exists an ideology of purity, anchored in the diverse patriarchal religions that debase women because of their gender, on principle. Certain functions of women's bodies, worshipped in matriarchies as life-creating abilities, are considered "impure": menstruation, pregnancy, and birth, as well as death and dying—events that are usually attended to by women. According to this ideology, men are the purest, most perfect, most elevated people. This ideology solidifies the man-woman power gap in patriarchies, where the man is already "superior" and the women "inferior."

Queen (queen mother): In matriarchal societies the queen, or queen mother is, in her role as high priestess, the actual head of the *matriarchal realm* and first person of her sacred office. Matriarchal queens are hereditary queens; they establish female dynasties either alone or with a king. In older phases of matriarchal cultures, matriarchal realms have always been established by queen mothers through alliances between various clans and peoples. Thus the realm belongs to the queen mother, and she and her successors are its highest authority: for the foundation of the early matriarchal realms a king was not necessary. In later times, the queen mother invested a king (*matriarchal queen-kingship*). This *sacred king* is her son (or

nephew, or brother). He is her administrative delegate and not—on his own—empowered to make decisions.

Rebirth: In matriarchal cultures, the ancient belief in rebirth means that the male and female ancestors remain alive in the Otherworld until they are reborn as children back into their own clan. As rebirthers of the clan's ancestors, women are sacred. Belief in rebirth is not an abstraction, but an assumption about reality *(pregnancy).*

Sacred king: Kings never rule as absolute monarchs in *matriarchal realms;* their various responsibilities bind and integrate them into a relationship society. The king manages executive orders in the queen's name (*matriarchal queen-kingship*), and has the sacred duty to enlarge the realms relationships and alliance network through his sexual activity. He is seen as the partner of the Great Goddess, who is personified by the *queen*, and is a sacred king, or priest-king (*sacred societies*). In former times, at the end of his reign, he became the designated sacrifice to the goddess (*male human sacrifice*). In matriarchal culture, sacrifice of the sacred king is based on the principles of free will, assured by many rituals, and of *rebirth.*

Sacred marriage *(hieros gamos)*: Several matriarchal societies—not all—know wedding ceremonies. When a wedding ceremony takes place in a matriarchal society between two people, it concerns not only those individuals, but also their two clans, and is associated with their cosmology, as is reflected in the symbols of the wedding. Thus, marriage is a sacred event with magical effects, i.e., it is a "hieros gamos," and the good relationship between humans and nature is dependent upon it. This is especially true of the sacred marriage of *queen* and *sacred king*.

Sacred societies: Matriarchal societies are sacred societies in the sense that they observe no distinction between sacred and secular. The entire world is sacred to them; every action is a form of ritual (*matriarchal worldview*). Society is built upon religious principles.

Script: Matriarchal societies have developed different types of script, which are very old. However, the core content of the culture—myths, legends, tribal and clan histories, genealogies, knowledge of flora, fauna, and ecology—are handed down orally; they are considered too sacred to be written down *(arts of women).*

Sexuality: In matriarchal cultures, sexuality is valued highly; satisfied sexuality is regarded as leading to health, peace, and culture.

Sister-brother-relationship: In matriarchies, the primary familial relationship is not between husbands and wives. Rather, the closest alliance is the relationship between sisters and brothers. Sisters provide for their brothers, or brothers for their sisters. Brothers protect their sisters and the sisters' children throughout their whole lives. So the original female-male pair is seen as sister and brother.

Sisters-brothers group marriage: A very old form of marriage associated with several matriarchal cultures is the sisters-brothers group marriage, or sisters-brothers *polyandry-polygyny.* In these marriages, a group of sisters from one clan enters into marriage with a group of brothers from another clan. This form of marriage is based on mutual clan intermarriage between two specific, unaltered clans; it is a mutual support system between these two clans.

Tribute (taxes): In matriarchal societies, *chiefs* cannot exact tribute. Their positions are honorary offices, whose duties in relation to the great festivals and clan projects often make paupers of them. The same holds true for matriarchal realms: each clan retains its autonomy and self-sufficiency with respect to the royal clan; taxes are not levied on them. The *queen mothers* and *sacred kings* rule not through wealth and weapons, but solely on the basis of relationships, tradition, and religion.

Trickster-god: The primordial earth goddess often has an ancient underworld god, or god of transformation, as her partner (magician and trickster figure). Within his paradoxical being, he can both heal and destroy. He brings special cultural skills to humans, such as making fire, using new techniques, creating special ceremonies. This androgynous shape-shifter and trickster-god is also found in many variants throughout European, African and Asian mythological systems.

Ultimageniture: The youngest daughter inherits from the clan mother the honors, rights and duties of the clan's head.

Usufruct rights: The right to use land for cultivation, but no right to private ownership of land.

Uxorilocality: It means residence of the husband with the wife, and with the wife's kin.

Village republic: Matriarchal settlements are self-governing village republics that can wield considerable resistance to patriarchal centralization. The resistance is founded on the way the women hold onto their original clan lands, and the way the men defend their matriarchal society against the outside world.

Virilocality: It means residence of the wife with the husband, and with the husband's kin.

Visiting marriage: Men as spouses and lovers are permitted to visit their partners in the maternal clan houses only at night; they have no rights of habitation there.

Wedding ceremony: In many matriarchal cultures, wedding ceremonies are unknown, or accorded secondary importance. The central bond in matriarchal societies is not between woman and man, but rather with the ancestors and the Goddess.

Widow contempt and burning: Contempt for widows is widespread in patri-

archal societies. It means that when the husband dies before the wife does, she not only loses the justification for her existence, but is also considered to be guilty of his death. In the upper castes of traditional Hindu India, contempt for widows developed into widow burning (sati). For the widow, sati always resulted in being burned alive with her husband's corpse. Her own sons took an active part in the public spectacle of murdering their mother; to do otherwise they would have threatened their privileged caste membership.

Women's courtship: Events leading up to love and marriage are strictly subject to women's free choice, which means that the woman courts the man, never vice versa. This practice takes a variety of forms (courtship, hunting, abduction).

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