

# Section 12 – Redefining the Sacred

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## Caral

In the late 1990s, a Peruvian archaeologist and anthropologist, Dr Ruth Shady, began investigating a forgotten city called Caral. Lying in a desert valley some twenty-five kilometres from the Peruvian coast, it had been discovered by Paul Kosok in 1948, but ignored because it appeared to lack the artefacts being sought at the time. Dr. Shady had no idea how old it was so she began to dig. Soon she uncovered monumental architecture, built from stone blocks. Samples of rushes, used to make baskets to carry stones, were discovered trapped between foundation stones, showing that they must be contemporary with the buildings. It was a stroke of great good fortune, because it meant that the city could be accurately carbon-dated.

Caral was built in 2700 BCE, making it, by a thousand years, the oldest city in the Americas and the oldest unspoilt city in the world. The people of Caral left it just the way it was, they never rebuilt it. It was, at last, the long-sought mother city and it became the focus of international research.

Naturally, the experts on early civilisations immediately began to search for the signs of war and fortifications that they believed were essential. But there were none. Caral had massive pyramids that clearly took a huge, organised effort to build, large public spaces and monumental architecture. But there was no wall, no sign of fortification, nor any weapons or images of war. And the city was not hidden. This was a wealthy and prosperous city in plain view, yet it had no need of defence.

No defence equals no war. No war means something else caused Caral to be built. If the only genuine mother-city we have so far discovered was not based on war, then the 'war begets civilisation' theory was in deep trouble, not only here but everywhere. More than that, such a discovery would question the idea that only patriarchal, violent cultures that suppressed women could be called 'civilised'.

As a result, Dr Shady's discovery was doubted. Repeated tests of age were demanded. They all came to the same conclusion: the evidence was sound, and something other than war had caused this city to be built.

Evidence of trade began to emerge very early on. There were discoveries of a diet high in fish, which must have been imported from the coast, and other items that came from the rain forest, 250 kilometres further inland.

The people of Caral used to divert the water running down from the Andes to irrigate the broad, fertile valleys surrounding the city. They grew vegetables and grains for sustenance, but principally cotton for commerce. The cotton was used to make clothing and was exported to the coast to make fishing nets. The nets allowed the fishermen to catch more fish, and the cotton was bartered against the surplus. Caral was founded on agriculture and trade, not on war and defence. If agriculture and trade founded Caral, there is no reason at all to imagine that these did not found the other mother-cities, like Eridu and Uruk, the city of Inanna. The link between patriarchal violence and the beginnings of civilisation could no longer be considered intrinsic. Instead, it appears that early civilisations may have been matriarchal and only later were they corrupted by violence and warfare.

Caral shows that a period of peaceful development, with no warfare, may have persisted in the first mother-cities for centuries or even millennia after their birth. These towns and eventually cities were places of culture, markets, and trade, with comfortable permanent residences and shared public spaces. Their governance was probably under the direction of a council of elders. Viewed through our patriarchal glasses, this has historically been seen to mean 'of elder men', but there is no evidence to support this assumption. Why would women, in this early phase, not be at least equally represented in the decision-making bodies? Why, except for the patriarchal presumption that 'men are always in charge' would we think otherwise?

While Caral was isolated, with no other comparable settlement that could threaten it, the cities of Mesopotamia were not. At some point, their increasing wealth attracted the attention of brigands, perhaps from far away, or perhaps from a nearby town. Maybe this was provoked by outside factors, like climate change, or the migration of peoples, or simple covetousness. Whatever the cause, men gathered together weapons and armour, and all the tools of killing, and attacked the Mesopotamian towns and cities. At first this was probably trivial, amounting to little more than raids by landless nomads. In Sumer, some evidence of warrior culture appears in the fourth millennium BCE, but it is small in scale. There is no evidence of widespread war, professional soldiery or military action; these city 'warriors' were more like men-at-arms whose task was to repel low-level harassment.

The wars that raged in Sumer beginning in the early third millennium BCE were on a different scale altogether. After the drought caused by the Piora Oscillation, we see real war in all its horror, with large armies attacking and razing major cities. The cities had to defend or die. These

wars were not fought according to any chivalrous code. The raiders killed almost everyone, probably raping the women, and those they did not kill they took as slaves.<sup>1</sup> A pattern of sociopathy and its political and philosophical justification was established at the very heart of the patriarchy and its version of 'civilisation'. We can find it in the Roman Empire, the Islamic Caliphate, the European colonisation of the Americas, the villainy of Hitler – and in the genocides they all carried out.

Caral is undeniably the product of an advanced culture, and it was both civilised and without war. The discoveries there are recent, and the academic debate as to their wider significance continues. Nonetheless, they prove that war is not a necessary pre-requisite for the development of a city, and therefore, that civilisation itself need not be based on the violent patriarchal model.

The discovery of Caral not only changes our understanding of what the first cities were like, it also challenges the mainstream understanding of what civilisation is. By depending on an absolutely patriarchal model of a militarily-organised culture being responsible for the development of the first cities, the mainstream view implicitly denied any possibility that there might be an alternative. It was saying that civilisation was a function of living in cities, and these came about because of the patriarchy and its military command structures; therefore, to be civilised requires the supremacy of the patriarchy. It was saying, in other words, that civilisation was a result of war, chaos and destruction. Yet Caral shows that this is not necessarily true; large, organised cities can indeed evolve without any sign of the patriarchy; no defences, no images of war, and no evidence of militarism.

What the patriarchal apologists have been doing is the same sleight of hand as they used in the definition of the matriarchy. By using a definition that could only be achieved within the model they themselves proposed, they deliberately quashed any opposing voice, even when, as we have seen, there are myriad examples of the matriarchy operating successfully all over the world and in all periods of history. They were saying that for there to be civilisation, men must be in charge – and until Caral, they were able to get away with it. Now, however, they must reconsider their position, just as they have had to do regarding the matriarchy.

The gifts of civilisation, Inanna's Mes, are not, it turns out, an indivisible bundle of good and evil where the one must be taken with the other. Caral shows that the good, the peaceable, the refined, the cultured, the artistic, the protective of women and children, the loving of men, and the nurturing of family may exist without the bloody, the savage, the greedy, the cruel, the murderous, the raping, the misogynist and the brutal. These latter, it transpires, are inventions of

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<sup>1</sup> Rape is not a form of sexual pleasure but an expression of sexual dominance. Men rape in order to subdue their adversaries and establish their superiority, not just over women, but their sons and husbands. The well-documented atrocities carried out by the Red Army as it crossed Germany in 1945 are shocking testimony to this. Men who resented the authority of women in these cultures would be, therefore, more inclined to use rape as a weapon.

the patriarchy. They are what happens when men are allowed to rule alone without the equal balance of women. The patriarchal pretence that there is no alternative to its anti-human machine is once again exposed for the flagrant lie that it is.

Civilisation does not need warfare, nor does the patriarchy define it. In that case, does civilisation need the patriarchy?