

# Section 6 – Devolution of the Goddess

---

## Sacred to Profane Marriage

Sex in early Uruk was considered a sacred act of creation. After the emergence of large-scale agriculture, sex, while retaining the pleasures that it affords, became an agricultural practice. Men fertilised women to make babies, and women eagerly complied, exhorted by the mighty and quintessentially seductive Inanna herself.

We have already seen how the phenomenon of reproductive sex became hugely important to our culture, and how the formal institution of marriage bound each woman's fertility to one specific man and placed him in control of it. Divine marriage placed the official stamp of the culture on that relationship. Changes were made to the Great Rite that transformed it into the Sacred Marriage so that even the gods and goddesses reflected the same arrangement.

When the power went from the Goddess to her consort, society had fatefully changed. This evolution occurred during the third millennium BCE. Once a symbolical rite that affirmed women's power of reproduction and fertility and at the same time their central role in society, hierogamy became a formal marriage ceremony binding the Goddess to the God, Priestess to King and woman to man. The mythology provided both a reinforcing model and a standard for behaviour.

Johanna Stuckey notes that during the course of the third millennium BCE, a significant change in the balance of power between women and men occurred. In the beginning, the High Priestess chose her male consort but by 2300 BCE, this right had been taken by the king. This is a clear indication of the general downward trend of women's status during this time.<sup>1</sup>

Although the aspects of the Sacred Marriage relating to fertility and the role of sex in ensuring its continuation were retained, the later versions of the Sacred Marriage ritual placed the Goddess under the control of a god. He was represented by a priest/king, who then exercised the divine power of the Goddess himself.

Sacred marriage was not merely a royal practice. Throughout the Tigris and Euphrates valleys there were many temples to Inanna, of which the greatest was in Uruk, and to the other deities, many of which also appear to have practised it. In Sumerian mythology, the Goddess Ki, the Earth, is 'the broad field' and the 'great cow'. Women were like the cultivated fields or the 'good

---

<sup>1</sup> Stuckey, Johanna. *Inanna and the 'Sacred Marriage'*. <http://www.matrifocus.com/IMB05/spotlight.htm> Retrieved 21/08/2014.

cows' to be fertilised and make babies as often as possible. They were no longer wild, mysterious and dangerous, wielding the limitless power of the Goddess. Like the land and animals now under the control of men, their powers had been tamed.

Sumerologist Douglas Frayne cites a French translation of a 'tablet of the ritual of the *entu*-priestess of the storm-god Emar.'<sup>2,3</sup>

'The ritual took place over seven days. On the first, jars (for divining the identity) of the new priestess, presumably using oil drops, were placed...in the temple of Ninurta. The god chose one of the daughters of the citizens to be the new *entu* priestess. The new priestess was anointed. The next day the priestess was elaborately coiffed. The next day the consecration ceremony *mallulu* took place when the red garment of Ninkur was put in the house of the new priestess' father. The second day of the *mallulu* various sacrifices and ceremonies were made. At evening the *entu* priestess was made to sit on a throne and various presents were made to her. These included earrings, a red turban, a bracelet and a pectoral. The next day the *entu* priestess ate and left her house. They covered her head like that of a fiancée. Before evening more food was consumed and the elders presented to the priestess a new garment, a bed, a chair and a stool. They spread a coverlet on the bed and more food was provided. While the singers chanted *hulelu* the priestess' sister washed her feet.<sup>4</sup> The *entu* priestess went up and lay down on the bed.'<sup>5</sup>

Since marriage was such a cornerstone of the nascent patriarchy, it is not surprising that this would be reinforced on the public stage. Thus, incidentally, was born the tradition of grandiose royal weddings that persists to this day. These are performed by religious authority, evidence that the priestly class still retains considerable power. Not only do they confer legitimacy on the monarch, since no king can be taken seriously without a fertile bride to continue his line, but they also reinforce, in very deliberate terms, the subjection of women to the patriarchy. Queens and kings, amongst their other roles, are meant to show an example to the people they rule.

In Goddess culture, menstrual blood is holy and revered.<sup>6</sup> The time when a woman is bleeding is that of her greatest power, when the mark of the Goddess, the creatrix of all life, is upon her. Whenever we see one group attempting to overrule or wrest power from another, we also see propaganda and vilification. When the patriarchy began to overthrow the matriarchy, they also

---

<sup>2</sup> The term *entu* is an Akkadian derivative of the Sumerian *en*, which means 'highest person'. The use of *entu* indicates that this is a later Akkadian text.

<sup>3</sup> Even today the Catholic Church is a symbolised Goddess, and Catholic priests are married to her, which is why they cannot take human wives.

<sup>4</sup> Note the similarity between *hulelu* and the Judaeo-Christian *hallelu*, which is part of *hallelujah*. This is another indication that the later cults borrowed heavily from Sumerian originals.

<sup>5</sup> Frayne, Douglas. *Notes on the Sacred Marriage Rite*. *BiOr* 42. 1985.

<sup>6</sup> It is the Goddess' drops of menstrual blood on the holly-tree, its red berries, that make it important at our winter festivals.

began to devalue the sacred, life-creating power of women. Women became mere vessels for the creative seed of men. By the end of the first millennium BCE, in many cultures and certainly all those in the Eastern Mediterranean, the Levant and the Middle East, women were deprived of any voice and regarded, particularly when menstruating, as being 'unclean'.

By 2000 BCE the Sacred Marriage had become an uncompromising statement about the balance of spiritual and temporal power between the genders. The Goddess had been tamed by a priest-king-god, just as ordinary women were made subservient to ordinary men. Male authority over women was a central part of later Sumerian society and of many successor cultures, and it became essential to the development of Western culture itself.

With the change from Great Rite to Sacred Marriage, the edifice of matriarchal power was dealt a blow from which it would never recover. As dynasties of kings established control over society, the oppression of women increased, power began to be wrested from the priestesses, and the attempt to destroy the Goddess began.