

Section 12 – Redefining the Sacred

Civilisation Without War

Were our ancestors savage, murderous brutes who lived in a society dominated by violent and sexually aggressive males? Or had they evolved cooperative, non-violent social structures that were overturned when the establishment of growth-based economies led to an explosion of warfare and violence? The debate between these two opposing views has always had one overwhelming problem: the lack of conclusive evidence.

For many years, it was suggested that humans gave up the scattered settlements they had established after abandoning the wandering lifestyle and built cities because of war. Those who argued this said that people had to defend themselves from attack and cities were easier to defend than villages, which is, of course, true. They said that the monumental architecture, which they held to be characteristic of early civilisation, required large numbers of workers and this implied a command structure, and this is also true. They pointed to the evidence of kingship and argued that this man was a warrior whose success in battle was his key to the throne, and this is a historically accurate profile of kings in many civilisations. And then there was the art. Everywhere there seemed to be images of warriors, depictions of battles and of death, and the existence of these works and their meaning is undeniable. The archaeological argument was backed up by Evolutionary Psychologists using flawed methodology, and by a raft of others for whom the idea of a matriarchy is frightening. In the end, lacking a preserved example of an original city, all of these arguments are based upon opinions, and these opinions were and remain, conditioned by the mindset of the observers.

For those on the other side of the argument, this theory was intrinsically repugnant. Many saw trade as the alternative to the 'war begets civilisation' theory. People lived where they could make a living. Settlement occurred in response to natural resource and the trading of the abundance that agriculture would bring. As they became wealthier and more numerous, they invested that wealth and their collective effort to create for themselves a city. Once cities became huge and beautiful and displayed their wealth, they became targets. Why waste years building up wealth when you could just put together a band of soldiers and steal someone else's? Perhaps it was not 'war begets civilisation' but 'civilisation begets war'.

The problem is that humans build their new cities on top of their old ones, often re-using the materials. In Inanna's city of Uruk, there are eighteen layers of building, one atop the other. We

saw the same at Çatal Hoyuk and elsewhere. Getting back to that original city, the very first instance of civilisation, that pristine example that could provide the necessary insight, is difficult.

In many ways, there was already adequate evidence to support the theory of peaceful and cooperative societies. Çatal Hoyuk and Ain Ghazal in Anatolia, where there are no walls or weapons or signs of war, and the peaceable Goddess culture on Malta are examples. But the patriarchal apologists insisted that they would only accept as a city a settlement with characteristics such as monumental architecture, large public spaces and so on. Since these became typical of later, patriarchally-organised cities which did depend on warfare, the search became even harder. The earliest phases of a civilization were invariably buried under many layers of later ones, and had themselves, in many cases, been destroyed by war, even if that were not what caused them to be built. What was required was an original city that had been abandoned at the height of its life, neither destroyed by warfare nor built over; a time-capsule city.

That first city became known as the 'mother city' and the search was on to find one and settle the argument once and for all. If a city could be found that met all the requirements to define it as such, yet had no evidence of warfare or defence, then those who argued that civilisation evolved as a response to war would be faced with a serious challenge.