

# Section 5 – The Advent of Agriculture

---

## Wealth, Status and War

Men acquired wealth and status and appropriated power initially through agriculture, then through the development of growth economies and ultimately by the adoption of warfare.

The invention of writing allowed the codification of strict legal codes and the establishment of legally binding contracts. These documents provided an effective means of social control. Central to these codes, wherever they appear, is a concern with property rights.

In the matriarchy, women not only had the power to choose their mates, but also had authority over their own reproduction. In hunter-gatherer and even horticultural societies, women were self-sufficient; they could gather or grow enough for their needs. Agriculture changed that. Once men controlled the land and the production of food, women became dependent on them, which gave men control over women. A new kind of contract called Marriage was invented. Now men could appropriate exclusive rights over and access to women's fertility through the use of written laws.

Other than water and land, which it had in abundance, the principal requirement for the development of Uruk was labour to build the canals and work the fields. The easiest way to find labour – absent a ready source of slaves – is to increase the birth rate. Women found their bodies, sexuality and fertility shackled to one man through the institution of marriage. In an extension of this, their reproduction was bound to the economic needs of the city. The cultural ideal that Sumerian women were expected to live up to was to be beautiful, sexually seductive, highly desirable – and produce many babies.

As male assertion of social control increased, women's political voice was progressively reduced and ultimately silenced. Although their subjugation took many years, by the end of the third millennium BCE women had become second-class citizens and worse was yet to come.