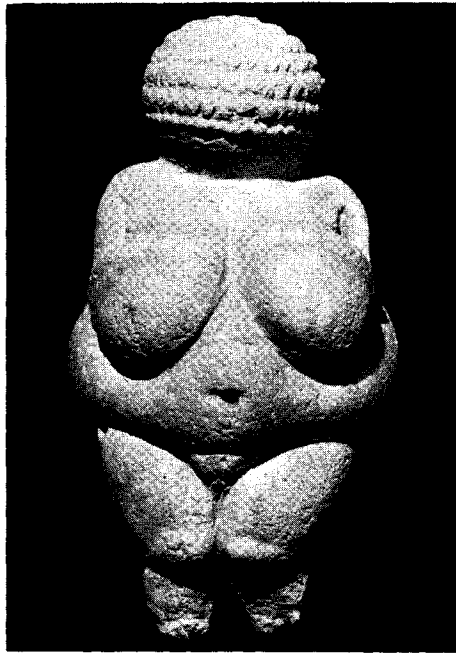


The Great Goddess, the Queen of Heaven

Johanna Stuckey

*Documentation sur le culte de la grande déesse — de la pré-histoire à nos jours.
L'auteur lance un défi à l'interprétation patriarcale du mythe d'Eve
et défend le pouvoir féminin.*



Courtesy of Johanna Stuckey

The 'Venus' of Willendorf

'And God created man in his own image . . .,' so says the King James Version of the Hebrew Bible (*Gen.* Ch. 1, v. 26). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God the Father placed human beings in the Garden of Eden to live totally protected lives, until Eve, prompted by the serpent, ate the forbidden fruit and Adam followed suit. Angrily, God the Father expelled his erring children from Eden and sent them forth to fend for themselves. As part of her punishment, Eve was cursed to desire Adam and be subordinate to him.

In this most influential of stories, God is male and decidedly patriarchal. What the story is trying to affirm is a new order — a male-dominated, patriarchal society watched over by a male god. What this story also tells us, however, is that things had not always been that way. For centuries, indeed, before the Adam and Eve story became a programming text for Jews (and, later, Christians), peoples all over Europe and the Near East, even in the 'Bible Lands' themselves, had worshipped as supreme not a male god but a goddess — the Great

Goddess, the 'Queen of Heaven'.

Her origins go back to the dim beginnings of human time, at least to the earliest artists and probably farther. In late Paleolithic times (30,000 BC to about 10,000 BC), one of the most prevalent and widespread human artifacts was a female image, usually fat, often pregnant, certainly all woman. No one today can say for certain what she represented. Many scholars call her images 'Venus' figures and dismiss them as fertility-cult objects. Perhaps they were. But I think they are the earliest representations of the Great Goddess.

The people who made that beautiful little statue found in Austria were probably ancestral to peoples who, later, continued the making of 'Goddess' statues. Throughout Europe and the Near East, archeologists have found numerous statues which bear similar features to those of the 'Venus' of Willendorf. Such statues, particularly Neolithic ones, abound in the 'Bible Lands, and from many periods. One of the most interesting Neolithic sites is at Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia, Turkey.

Its dates are around 6500 BC to around 5700 BC. Archaeologists have begun to uncover a large town there where they have found many female figurines similar to the 'Venus' of Willendorf. What is more interesting is that, along with the statues, they found evidence of a highly developed religion. Central to that religion seems to have been the worship of the Great Goddess, who, at the later levels at least, appears to have been worshipped in triad — as a young girl, as a mature woman giving birth and as a representative of death. That the Goddess represented life and death is powerfully demonstrated by the most evocative of artifacts found — breasts open at the nipples, out of which protruded the claw, beak, or jaw of a predatory bird or animal — pretty convincing evidence that the people of Çatal Hüyük saw the Goddess as controlling life and death.

Up until now, we have been discussing the period called 'Pre-history', before the invention of writing, which occurred about 3000 BC in Sumer (the Sumerians attributed the invention to a goddess and the first examples

come from one of her temples). Now we have written evidence of the Great Goddess, evidence produced almost certainly mainly by men. In this Mesopotamian material — primarily poetry — we find that the Goddess was still — or had recently been — central to Sumerian worship. Further the myths preserved in these poems help us interpret artifacts such as the Çatal Hüyük finds and the 'Venus' of Willendorf.

These Mesopotamian myths, preserved in male-oriented poems (post-3000 BC), generally record successful attempts to demote the Goddess from her central position. Because of her power, her overthrow was extremely violent, the result of vicious conflict between the Goddess (and her supporters) and her young male descendants. Joseph Campbell, in his book *Masks of the Gods: Occidental Mythology*, says that origin myths go through four stages. At the first stage, the Goddess creates all things from herself alone. The next stage sees creation by an intermingled male-female pair (sometimes the female god has first created the male as her spouse). The third stage presents a male deity who separates the ancestral pair one from the other, and then either he rapes the Goddess or he kills both and out of the body of the Goddess he makes everything. At the final stage, a male deity creates everything by his word alone; at this stage, if the Goddess is present at all, she is there as the inanimate matter of chaos. Hebrew Genesis 1:1 represents this last stage, for the Hebrew God creates everything by speaking it into being.

Indeed, the Hebrew Bible is, perhaps, the most powerful record we have of the conflict between peoples who worshipped God the Father and peoples who were devoted to the Great Goddess. There is little doubt that, when the Hebrews in the Bible entered the Promised Land of Canaan, they found, already there, a Goddess-worshipping culture which immediately presented an enormous threat. So, as the Bible tells us, the Hebrews set out to conquer the Canaanites and eliminate their religion. Town after town fell to the invaders, who then massacred all the inhabitants — men, women and children. But

still, they were unable to suppress Goddess worship. The Bible records, again and again, the 'whoring' of the people of Israel after 'foreign gods' and through the Prophets we read of the Israelites 'whoring' after the gods of Canaan. In the Book of Jeremiah, for instance, we read:

'The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough to make cakes to the queen of heaven . . . ' (KJV. Ch. 7, v. 18)

And later in the same book we read:

'Then all the men which knew that their wives had burned incense unto other gods, and all the women that stood by, a great multitude, . . . answered Jeremiah, saying, "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth, to burn incense unto the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, as we have done, we, and our fathers, our kings, and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem: for then had we plenty of victuals, and were well, and saw no evil. But since we left off to burn incense to the queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men?"' (K.J.V., Ch.44, vv. 15-19)

Certainly, all through the period of prophecy in Israel, many Hebrews worshipped the Goddess more or less consistently. And archaeology supports this statement for, throughout the 'Bible Lands', innumerable female figurines of familiar shape have occurred in sites of varying dates and well into Biblical times.

Who was the Great Goddess, the 'Queen of Heaven'? Her names are legion — Nammu and Inanna in Sumer, Tiamat in Akkad, Astarte in Assyria, Asherah and Anath in the 'Bible Lands', Isis and Hathor in Egypt, Kuan Yin in China, Morgan le Fay and Maeve among the Celts, Coatlicue among the

Aztecs, Eurynome and Aphrodite in Ancient Greece, Jezanna in Zimbabwe, Pele in Hawaii, Hepa among the Hittites, Mayuel among the Maya, Kali in India, Venus and Magna Mater in Rome, Atira among the American Plains Indians, Freyja in Norway, Ishtar in Babylon, the Morrigan in Ireland, Amaterasu in Japan, the Virgin Mary among Christians, the Shekhina in Judaism; her names go on and on.

In her earliest possible form, as Paleolithic 'Venus', she was clearly a Goddess of fertility as well as (perhaps of life and death), one and indivisible, as was the creator Goddess of the earliest stage of myth, 'Mother of all the Gods', 'Mother of all living'. Later on, her worshippers, probably both male and female, began to separate one of her various functions from the other — motherhood and fertility, sexuality and love and death. By the time of Çatal Hüyük, for instance, the division seems to have begun with the three Goddesses, one young and sexy, one mature and fertile and likely a third concerned with death and represented as a vulture. So, by 3000 BC in Sumer, there were three main Goddesses — Ninhursaga, the Mother Goddess; Ereshkigal, the Goddess of the underworld; and her younger twin sister, Inanna, the Goddess of love and sexuality. Here, clearly, is the origin of the Madonna/Whore dichotomy that has so influenced modern Western Culture.

It is to this division of the Great Goddess into her various aspects that we can trace the division of women against each other, just as, in her violent overthrow, we can find the origin of the sex-class system. In male-dominated worlds the Goddess has, in the past, usually had a place — subordinate, to be sure, and powerless — and women have followed suit.

And this thought brings us back to the Hebrew Bible and the Adam and Eve story. Today we are taught to read the tale as a myth of female evil and betrayal — Eve lost Eden for us forever. But is this reading valid? Eve's name means 'Mother of all living', an epithet of the Great Goddess. The serpent, usual companion of the Goddess in her Garden of Delights, should make us pause. Perhaps this most influential of all the mythic stories

in the Hebrew Bible is a male version of a Goddess tale? Should we add the name 'Eve' to our list of Her names?

Whatever the case, one fact is sure — the Goddess was everywhere, in all cultures, even, I think, in altered form in the Adam and Eve story. What is more, despite Judaeo-Christian attempts to eliminate Her, she persisted until, in the Middle Ages, the Church had to bow to popular feeling and reinstate a female

principle in Christianity. Who is the Virgin Mary but the Great Goddess, the 'Queen of Heaven' in fact?

Even today She is with us, still exerting Her power. It is no coincidence that feminism (Goddess worship in political form) and the ecology movement (Goddess worship in scientific form) grew up together. For the Great Goddess, the Queen of Heaven, is at the same time Mother Nature and the Female Principle,

and She is alive, powerful, essential. We ignore Her at our peril. ☉

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I DON'T LIKE ROMANCE

I don't like romance
 it drains my energy,
or flirtation,
 it teases me to sheer stupidity,
or mystery,
like the waiting game,
 it's a mind-fuck
 and leaves me a dependent,
 babbling idiot.
I don't want to be
 thrown for a loop,
 or walk on cloud nine
with prince or princess charming.

I want to stand here
in this work-a-day world
and touch your real face
with my ordinary hands.

Heather

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