

# The Remedial Herstory Project

## INQUIRY-BASED LESSON PLAN

### STAGING THE INQUIRY

For this inquiry, teachers should consider opening with an intriguing and open ended question, then provide some background on this topic generally in the form of a video, brief lecture, or presentation. Close the introduction by asking students what questions they have, guide them in discussion to the question for the inquiry, highlighted at the top of the next page.

### ACTIVITY TASKS

- Pose a broad open ended question. Provide background information.
- Students respond to questions in this packet independently or with a partner.
- Consider doing one of the following to extend the exercise:
  - Facilitate student discussion of the compelling question.
  - Facilitate a 4-corner debate.
  - Facilitate a structured academic controversy.
  - Students assume the characters involved and discuss the compelling question in character.
- Students craft an argument.

### C3 FRAMEWORK

D1.1.9-12. Explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field.

D1.2.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.

**D2.His.4.9-12.** Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

**D2.His.5.9-12.** Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations.

D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

### **Inquiry Activity: Was there a Great Goddess?**

*Before reading, source the following documents. Then, examine and analyze the document by responding to the analysis questions provided.*

#### **Historical Context:**

Religions of the Paleolithic era were distinctly different from modern religions in that there were heavily influenced by nature, usually polytheistic, and, importantly, honored female goddesses relatively equally to male gods. These goddesses and gods had power over certain aspects of human life and the worshipers would pray to the particular god to address their need. Worship was ritual, spiritual, and varied from tribe to tribe, region to region. Sexuality was evidently important as gods and goddesses had extenuated genitalia and many of the early myths included details of procreation.

And, “The prevalence of the Venus figurines and other symbols all across Europe has convinced some, but not all, scholars the Paleolithic religious thought had a strongly feminine dimension, embodied in a great goddess and concerned with the regeneration and renewal of life.”<sup>1</sup> Was it possible there was a time when a goddess reigned supreme? Was there a Great Goddess?



*Figure 1: Venus Figurine with exaggerated breasts, hair, and genitalia.<sup>2</sup>*

#### **Key Terms:**

- Patriarchy: a system of society or government in which the father or eldest male is head of the family and descent is traced through the male line.
- Matriarchy: a form of society or government in which descent and relationship are reckoned through the female line.
- Ethnographic: relating to the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences.
- Paleolithic: relating to or denoting the early phase of the Stone Age, lasting about 2.5 million years, when primitive stone implements were used.

<sup>1</sup> Strayer and Nelson, *Ways of the World*, 23.

<sup>2</sup> “Venus of Willendorf,” Encyclopædia Britannica, last modified August 16, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chopper-chopping-tool-industry#/media/1/439507/36945>.

Source A	Source B
<i>In what context was this source written?</i>	<i>In what context was this source written?</i>
<i>What evidence supports the argument that there was a Great Goddess?</i>	<i>What evidence refutes the idea that there was a Great Goddess?</i>
<i>Which source do you believe more? Why?</i>	

### Source A: A Woman's History of the World

In the beginning, as humankind emerged from the darkness of pre-history, God was a woman. And what a woman! The Samarian inhabitants of what is now Iraq worshiped her in hymns a fearless eroticism, giving things for her tangled blocks, her 'lap of honey', her rich [vagina] 'like a boat of heaven' - as well as for the natural bounty that she 'pours forth from her womb.'... but the supreme being as more than a provider of caramel delights. Equally relished and revered or her war-like rages - to her first priest-poet Enheduanna she was 'a dragon, destroying by fire and flood' and 'filling rivers with blood'. Enheduanna herself enjoyed temporal power... in her role as chief 'moon-minister' to the Most High'... for as poet, priest and prophet of Inanna, Enheduanna was the voice of a deity who's power and worship span to the whole world and was as old as time itself, the first divinity, the Great Mother.

The power and centrality of the first woman- God is one of the best-kept secrets of history. We think today of a number of goddesses, all with different names - Isis, Juno, Demeter - and have forgotten what, 5000 years ago, every school girl knew; no matter what name or guys she took, there was only one God and her name was a woman. The Roman lawyer Lucius a police was skillfully recycling the whole compendium of contemporary clichés and his portrait of 'the Goddess' as she spoke to him in a vision:

*I am nature, the universal mother, mistress of all the elements, primordial child of time, sovereign of all things spiritual, queen of the dead... though I am worshiped in many aspects known by countless names, and propitiated with all manner of different rites, yet the whole round earth venerates me.*

Later ages dismiss accounts of Goddess-worship as 'myths' or 'cults'. But since Sir Arthur Evans, discover of the lost Minoans civilization at the turn of the century, stated that all the innumerable goddess-figures he had discovered represented the 'same Great Mother... Who is worship under various names and titles extended over a large part of Asia minor in the regions beyond', modern scholarship has excepted that the Great Goddess, the "original mother without a spouse", was full of control of all the mythologies' as 'a worldwide fact'.

Nor was this an isolated or temporary phenomenon. Commentators stress the prominence and prevalence of the Great Mother Goddess as an essential element from the dawn of human life. From its emergence in the cradle land of the steppes of southern Russia her worship ranged geographically throughout the Mediterranean, the Indus Valley, and Asia as far as China, to Africa and Australia. Historically the span is even more startling:

-25,000-15,000 B.C. - with a so-called 'Venus-figurines' of stone and ivory in Europe, of Nile mud in Egypt, 'the great mother... first on the world of men in overwhelming wholeness and perfection'.

-12,000-9000 B.C. - in Dolni Vestonice, Czechoslovakia, and Shanidar, Iraq, ceremonial burials of bodies coded in red Oak or, commonly associated with Goddess worship.

-7000 B.C. - in Jericho, the first shrines to the Mother Goddess.

-6000 B.C. - The village settlement of Huyuk in Turkey, a site of only thirty-two acres, contain no less than forty shrines to the Goddess, and three incarnations as maiden, mother and crone.

-5000 B.C. - a statuette from Hacilar in turkey shows the Goddess in the act of making love.

-4000 B.C. - the first written language appears on the temple of the Goddess under her title Queen of Heaven at Erech (modern Uruk) in Sumeria.

-3000 B.C. - she now appears everywhere in the known world, in statues, shrines and Britain records.

-200 B.C. - tribal Celts sent their own priests of the Goddess to the great sacred festival of Cybele in Anatolia.

-A.D. 200 - at Tralles, in western Anatolia, a woman called Aurelia Aemiliana erected a carving at the temple of the Goddess, recording that she had duly performed her sexual service (sacred intercourse in honor of the Goddess) as her mother and all her female ancestors had done before her.

-A.D. 500 - Christian emperors forcibly suppressed the worship of the Goddess and closed down the last of her temples.

As this shows, the secret status of womanhood lasted for at least 25,000 years - some commentators would push it back further still, to 40,000 or even 50,000. In fact there was never a time at this stage of human history when woman was not special and magical...

How did women assume from the first the special status? One source of it was undoubtedly her moon-linked menstruation and the mystery of her non-fatal yet incurable admission of blood. Another was her close and unique relation to nature, for us gathering gateway to plant horticulture, women consolidated their central importance as the principal food producers. But the real key lies were the exaggerated breasts and belly of the earliest images of women direct us to look, in the miracle of birth. Before the process of reproduction was understood, babies were simply born to women. No connection was made with intercourse... men, so it seemed therefore had no part in the chain generation. Only women could produce new life, and they were revered accordingly: all the power of nature, and over nature, was theirs.

So arose the belief that woman was divine, not human, gifted with the most sacred and significant power in the world; and so was born the worship of the Great Mother... The most ancient incarnation of the Goddess was a mother - But the number of local and national variations on this apparently Street - forward I can type in itself testifies to the Maverick vicar of 'the God-Mother of the country' as Tibetans called her, and her refusal to submit to stereotypical sentimentalization. So in India, mother Debbie is the traditional mother, to picked it as squeezing milk for humankind from her ample breasts. But the other creation miss as far apart as Syria and Polynesia have the great mother delivering not a race of men and women, but in one mighty once - and-for-all 'world egg'. And in Greece at the most sacred climax of the most secret mysteries of Eleusis the Goddess (or her earthly representative) yearly 'gave birth' to a sheaf of corn, in an explicit link between woman's fertility and nature's, as the archetypal 'Mother Earth'.

... Gaea, The Roman mother earth, emerges from a primal vagina, the abyss of all-feeling all-knowing, while Ishtar of the Babylonians is the cosmic uterus, the stars of the zodiac her raiment... Ymir, the wind god of Norse legend... comes 'out of the [vagina] of the All-Mother Ginnungagab'. ... The proclamation carved on the temple of 'the Holy One,' Nut of Egypt, makes an even stronger claim: *I am what is, what will be,*

*and what has been. No man has uncovered my nakedness, and the fruit of my birthing was the sun.*

...In her darkest incarnation the bad mother did not simply wait for people to die, but demanded their deaths. The Persian and Poussin, her worshipers believed, cruised about the world in a blood bubble looking for something to kill...In the Ireland of 1000 B.C. A sinister tree out of goddesses, the Morgan, hunted battlefields, collecting severed heads and showing themselves to those about to die. In other cultures the Goddess rounds up the dead rather like a sheep dog, and takes them below...

Wedded as we are to an all-loving, all-forgiving stereotype of motherhood, it is at first sight difficult to reconcile this terrifying image of the bad mother with the good. But both 'life' and 'death' sides of the Goddess came together without strain in her primary aspect, which is in fact not motherhood pure and simple, but her sexuality. As her primary sexual activity she created life; but in sex she demanded a man's essence, his self, even his death. Here again the true nature of the Goddess and her activities have fallen victim to the mealy-mouthed prudery of later ages. Where referred to at all, they were clearly labeled 'fertility' rituals, beliefs or totems, as if the Greek Goddess herself loosely performed her sexual obligations solely in order to ensure that the earth would be fruitful. It is time to set the historical record straight. The fruitfulness of crops and animals was only ever a byproduct of the Goddesses own personal sexual activity. Her sex was hers, the enjoyment of it hers, and all these early accounts of her emphasize, when she had sex, like any other sensible female, she had it for herself.

But not by herself. In every culture, the Goddess has many lovers. This exposes another weakness in our later understanding of her role as the great mother. To the children of the patriarchy, 'mother' always includes 'wife'; mother is the woman who is married to father. That puts further constraint on the idea of the good mother. The good mother does not [sleep] around. She does not even choose the one man she does have, but is chosen by father. Hence the insoluble paradox of the goddess for this custodians of succeeding morality's end she was always unmarried and never chased. Among Eskimos, her title was 'she will not have a husband'. But there was more to her sexual freedom than this. As a source and force of life, she was timeless and endless. In contrast maleness came and went, for their only function the service of the divine 'womb'...

Yet the lover of the Goddess did not simply have the kind of crudely functional experience that this might suggest. Some representations of her sexuality stress its power and terror: on seal engravings from Babylon she puts scorpions to flight with the ritual display of her awe-inspiring pudenda, while the Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh from before 2000 B.C., the Goddess Ishtar, sordid in her unbridled sensuality, threatens to burst gates, tear down houses and then make the dead rise and overwhelm the living'. Far more common, however, are the tender almost girlish poetic tribute to the silk of the liver and the delights of his body, like this song of Inanna, over 4000 years old, yet as fresh as this mornings living:

*My brother brought me to his house, laid me down on a fragment of honey bed, my precious sweet, lying on my heart, my brother did it 50 times, one by one, tongue making.*

... The rampant sensuality of the great Goddess and her taste for blood unite in the archaic the undisputed practice of the killing of the king. King' is in fact an honorary title for a male chosen to [sex] the Queen-Goddess... in these the immortal mother

always take some mortal leather, not to father her child (though children often result) but essentially in exercise in celebration of her womanhood. The clear pattern is of an older woman with a beautiful but expendable use – Ishtar and Tammuz, Venus and Adonis, Cybele and Attis, Isis and Osiris. In the story of Demeter, the functional motif of the story is even clearer: the bold Iasion ‘lies with’ The corn Goddess in the fruit of a cornfield, and dies by thunderbolt immediately afterward. The lover is always inferior to the Goddess, mortal where she is immortal, young where she is ageless and eternal, powerless where she is all – powerful, and even physically smaller – all these elements combined in the frequent representation of the lover as the Goddess is younger brother or son. And always, always, he dies. The fate of the lovers of the Greek Goddess was well-known when Gilgamesh resisted the command of the glorious Ishtar with the reproach, ‘Which of your lovers did you love for ever? What shepherd of yours pleased you for all time? ... And if you and I should be lovers, should not I be served in the same fashion as all the others whom you loved ones?’

... The special magic of women sexuality, from her mysterious menstruation to her gift of producing new life, is expressed in the widespread practice throughout the period of Goddess – worship of treating certain sacred grave-burials with red ochre. Strong or bright red is associated in many religions with female genital blood... The literal as well as symbolic value of women’s menstrual blood, their ‘moon-gift from the Goddess’ is Demonstrated in the ancient Greek custom of mixing it with seed-corn for the annual sowing, to provide the best possible ‘fertilizer’.

This open veneration of women’s natural rhythms and monthly flow contrasts strangely with the secret shame and cursed they later became. But when God was a woman, all women and all things feminine enjoy the higher status than it has ever been since in most countries of the world.

*Source:*

Miles, Rosalind. *The Women’s History of the World*. London, UK: Harper Collins Publishers, 1988, p.36-45.

### **Source B: The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory**

My first encounter with the theory that pre-history was matriarchal came in 1979 a class titled “Minoan and Mycenaean Greece.” While on site at Knossos, our professor – an archaeologist with the American School of Classical Studies in Athens – noted that the artifactual evidence on the island of Crete pointed toward Minoan society being matriarchal. I don’t remember much of what he said in defense of this assertion or what he meant by “matriarchal.” All of this is overshadowed in my memory by the reaction of the other members of the class to the professors statement: they laughed... as my classmates gleefully noted, men did put it into it, for it was a matter of historical record, they said, that civilization of Minoan Crete was displaced by the apparently patriarchal Mycenaeans...<sup>3</sup>

If I was intrigued with the newness and power of the myth, and with its bold gender reversals, I was at least as impressed by the fact that anyone took it seriously as

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<sup>3</sup> 3-4

history. Poking holes in the “evidence” for this myth was, to rely on cliché, like shooting fish in a barrel...<sup>4</sup>

However a myth does not need to be true – or even necessarily be believed to be true – to be powerful, to make a difference in how people think and live, and what people value... I have been a close observer of the myth of matriarchal pre-history for fifteen years now and have watched as it has moved from it’s somewhat patriarchal home in the feminist spirituality movement out into the feminist and cultural mainstream. But I haven’t been able to cheer at the myths increasing acceptance. My irritation with historical claims made by the myths partisans masks a deep discontent with the myths assumptions. There is a theory of sex and gender embedded in the myth of matriarchal prehistory, and it is neither original nor revolutionary. Women are defined quite nearly as those who give birth and nurture, who identify themselves in terms of their relationships, and who are closely allied with the body, nature, and sex – usually for unavoidable reasons of their biological make up...<sup>5</sup>

The myth of matriarchal pre-history is not a feminist creation, in spite of the aggressively feminist spin it has carried over the past 25 years. Since the myth was revived from classical Greek sources in 1861 by Johan Jacob baclofen, it has had end at best – a very mixed record with feminism is concerned. The majority of men who champions the myth of matriarchal pre-history during its first century (and have mostly been men) have regarded patriarchy as an evolutionary advance over prehistoric matriarchy’s, in spite of some lingering nostalgia for women’s equality or beneficent rule. Feminists of the latter half of the 20th century or not the first to find in the myth of matriarchal pre-history a manifesto for feminist social change, but this has not been the dominant meaning attached to the myth of matriarchal pre-history, only the most recent... if the myth now functions in a feminist way, it’s anti-feminist past can become merely a curious historical footnote...<sup>6</sup>

The enemies of feminism have long posed issues of patriarchy and sexism in pseudoscientific and historical terms. It is not in the feminist interest to join them at this game, especially when it is so relatively easy to undermined the ground rules. We know enough about biological sex differences to know that they are neither so striking nor uniform that we either need to or ought to make our policy decisions in reference to them. And we know that cultures worldwide have demonstrated tremendous variability in constructing and regulating gender indicating that we have significant freedom in making our own choices about what gender will mean for us.<sup>7</sup>

As presidents go, the one offered by the myth of matriarchal pre-history is remarkable. It does not say that in the very distant past, there was a small group of people who were able for a short time to construct a society that gave women status in freedom and did not make war on other people or the natural world. Quite the contrary: according to feminist matriarchal math, matriarchy was universal, endured for all the millennia in which we were human, it was only supplanted very recently. Positively

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<sup>4</sup> 5

<sup>5</sup> 6-7

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dwarfs the patriarchy, which is in contrast, a “relatively short, I’ll be at melodramatic, period.”<sup>8</sup>

Mini assume the males were always dominant, for closing in advance the possibility of discovering less obvious forms of women social power... if we are unable to come up with any standard to evaluate women’s status at home, what makes us think we can do so abroad, or in the past?... to ethnographer’s recording on the same group can end and sometimes have patients come back saying opposites things. Often it seems to come down to the attitude of the observer: does she want the glass to be half full, or half empty?<sup>9</sup>

The greatest divide in ethnographies of gender seems to be between those anthropologists who focus on official ideology and those who are more attuned to behavioral variation and face-to-face interactions. Those anthropologists who have come to the conclusion that women are everywhere subordinate to men are usually looking at ideology, while those who see women as at times equal or dominant are generally drawing their conclusions from behavior... presumably women’s power is always there, if you trouble yourself to look for it and aren’t too picky about what form it takes... Whether out of... fear of ethnocentrism, many feminists are loathe to see and name sexism in other cultures in places where they would find it in their own. Or, conversely, they emphasize women’s status and autonomy in other cultures in forms they would not recognize as such on their own turf... we should regard with suspicion women’s statements from ethnographic contexts that appearances of sexism notwithstanding, they find their lives to their liking... individuals can enjoy and appreciate their lives while still being in structurally disadvantaged positions relative to others.

Given the frustrations inherent in trying to pin down the status of women, many feminist anthropologists have abandoned the task as such. Some go so far as to argue that women and men do not exist anywhere except as cultures create these categories.<sup>10</sup>

This has not stopped archaeologists from reading gender into material evidence from the past, however. Particularly over past 15 years, archaeologists seem an eagerly playing catch-up, bringing 30 years of academic and political debate on the topics of sex and gender into their discipline. For a variety of reasons archaeologists came late to this debate... The most everyone seems game to find gender in the archaeological record, no one is quite sure how it should be done, or even if it can be done. Skeletons can be sexed as male or female (within a margin of error), and then examined in order to draw tentative conclusion about women’s and men’s diets, life expectancy, and patterns of work based on bone deck generation, tooth ware, and mineral content in the bones themselves. Grave goods, if they differ between female and male skeletons, may also offer clues to prehistoric gender, and some paintings and sculptures give clear evidence of sex. But beyond this it is impossible at least without historical or ethnohistorical support to know which artifacts go with which sexes. Even the most basic questions-- Who makes those weapons? Who uses those grinding stones?-- cannot be answered definitively through pre-literate material record alone. And so archaeologists typically rely on ethnographic analogies to other cultures to help them interpret the gendered

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<sup>8</sup> 19

<sup>9</sup> 85

<sup>10</sup> 86-87

significance of their material finds. For example, spear points are generally attributed to men, since in most human societies we know of, men are responsible for hunting.

Attributions like this are inevitably controversial. Recently it is even become difficult to make arguments about prehistoric gender based on sex skeletons, for there is concern that a biological female may have been a social man (or vice versa), or that other gendered categories beyond the standard two existed.<sup>11</sup>

According to feminist matriarchalists, the miracle of childbirth – especially miraculous when no male role in conception was recognized – caused all women to be viewed with respect and honor... The idea that prehistoric peoples might not have recognized paternity was first proposed in the 19th century... this speculation received some grounding and ethnographic evidence when reports filtered back from Australia and Melanesia that certain aboriginal peoples denied sexual intercourse had anything to do with pregnancy... these “proof” of the ignorance of paternity were actually errors and ethnography.<sup>12</sup>

Evidence from the material record suggests that prehistoric peoples were aware of the relationship between sexual intercourse and conception. Paleolithic cave paintings to picked animals meeting, pregnant, and giving birth in such a way that these events seem connected. A plaque from Catalhoyuk carved in gray schist shows “two figures in an embrace on the left and a mother and child on the right,” and artifact which some end including some feminist matriarchalists – read as visual texts on the results of copulation.<sup>13</sup>

Another troubling fact about goddesses as we know them ethnographically and historically is that they do not always resemble the image that feminist matriarch list stipulate for prehistoric cultures: the loving mother, the giver and taker of life, the embodiment of the natural world. Some goddesses are incredibly violent – and not in a way that suggests the benevolent function of watching over natural cycles of death and rebirth. For example, a Ugaritic text from 1400 BCE Canaan says of the goddess Anat: “She is filled with joy as she plunge is her knees into the blood of heroes.” The Sumarian Inanna is also a goddess of war, and significantly, neither she nor Anat is portrayed as a mother. Shitala, worshiped today in Bengal, “tempts feeble persons, and especially mischievous children, with irresistible delicacies, which then break out on their bodies as horrifying and fatal foxes.”

More troublesome than these deviations from the feminist meant matriarchal list ideal is the fact that goddesses are often known to support patriarchal social customs. Goddesses may have nothing whatsoever to do with Romans religious needs, representing instead of men’s fantasies of “the eternal mother, the devoted mate, The loving mistress, “or even the fearful nature of women’s power (should it be allowed to wriggle out from under the strict male control). Goddesses may be strongly, if ambivalently, distinguish from human women, and the differences between these two repeatedly emphasized: that is goddesses “accentuate womanhood is not” as often as they reflect a cultures notion of what women are.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 88

<sup>12</sup> 93-94

<sup>13</sup> 96

<sup>14</sup> 103-104

Source:

Eller, Cynthia. *The Myth of Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women a Future*. Beacon Press: Boston, 2000, p.3-104.