

PATRIARCHY
AND OUR ANCIENT IMAGES
OF GOD

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The Earth was patriarchal.

Patriarchy is synonymous with History.

The patriarchic system was based on power.

The patriarchal ideal was ultimate power. It would be embodied by the supreme ruler of the supreme empire. But the patriarchal ideal never materialized because each person and each group, being a potential source of power, impeded an extreme and sole power.

So we have this image: spheres.

A source of power emanated from a central sphere. Concentrically, larger and larger spheres protruded. Power in them was weaker and weaker. That illustrates hierarchy. Sets of spheres overlapped. Hierarchies interspersed with other hierarchies. Thus, the system was structured in degrees of power.

The first key: power.

The second: hierarchism.

Patriarchy can hence be synthesized:

Power and hierarchism.

Exerting power, deferring to power and fighting over power describe patriarchal life.

The structure persisted cohesive by the cosmic symbol of power.

‘God.’

The absolute power.

Atheists denied ‘God’. But they replaced ‘God’ with equivalent symbols: Reason, Nature, the Will, the Universal Spirit — anything would go, as long as it represented supreme power.

‘Reason — God — is substance and infinite power.’

The essence of patriarchy was power.

The male power.

The patriarch was but a representation.

Queen Hatshepsut presided over audiences and attended religious ceremonies wearing a postiche: a metal false beard. From whom power was manifest did not matter, but the male connotation was essential.

There is no evidence of matriarchal societies. There are matrilineal societies, whose families are defined by maternal descent. Yet their structure was intrinsically patriarchic: matrilineal — or matriarchal, if you admit them — societies were based on power and hierarchism.

Power was not called into question. The legitimacy of someone in power could be debated. Not the need for someone in power.

It is conjectured that the condition of human reproduction originated male preponderance. Continuous pregnancies and periods of breastfeeding throughout the fertile age of women excluded them from the production of wealth.

As for men, physical strength — possibly the main exteriorization of power — and the permanent availability for fight guaranteed the conquest and preservation of goods. It also established the right of possession.

Thus, the significance of power may have stemmed from biological and sociological circumstances.

The greater the power, the greater the right.

That is the genesis of patriarchal mores.

Patriarch.

‘Patriá’ plus ‘arkhō’. ‘Lineage’ plus ‘rule’.

From ‘arkhō’ also comes the word ‘hierarchy’.

Ah, the patriarch!

The Lord.

The man who detained power.

The symbol existed on three levels: the personal, the collective, and the transcendent.

Father. King. God.

Patriarchs.

Each one had the attributes of the others.

Fatherhood was sacred and the father ruled the house. The king was the father of the nation and deified. God was king and father.

God, king and father formed a steady triangle, coherent and crowded with consequences.

‘God, Country, Family.’

It is now very well known that fatherhood does not imply patriarchy. Yet no one would understand that in deep patriarchy.

At times, the patriarchal father was invested with despotic power. His law surpassed that of the State.

In the imperial Rome, the pater familias held a primary right — *vitae necisque potestas* — ‘power of life and death’ over wife and offspring. He could condemn them to death and execute them.

In Antiquity, the assassination of wives for infidelity or even suspicion of infidelity was not only lawful in several societies but also expected and dignifying.

Times change.

Governments are executives of public affairs. Heads of State are administrators. They are not guides of anyone’s life, they are not redeemers of any people, they are not the father of any nation. In the past, they were divine. Our modern frame of mind cannot conceive that persons in another age, when witnessing the passage of their king, would throw themselves at the ground, shuddering and in adoration.

Emperors were proclaimed gods.

In the passage to modernity, when the divine right of kings was challenged, many gave their life to the cause and their sacrifice was not a political issue. It was a matter of faith.

There were emperors whose face could not be seen. In audiences, the subjects had their heads covered by a veil because no one can look at a god. In Byzantium, emperors remained immobile during public appearances. The Absolute must be static. To move is to be in an unstable situation until one accomplishes something wanted, and the Absolute does not want.

‘We salute our King, our Lord. August. Pious, Magnanimous. Father of our Land.’

Monarchs of Siam and England, Egypt and Rome, China, France, Peru, Japan, Mexico — they all were endowed with divine right. It is not needed to discuss whether or not they had it: they had it while the majority felt they had it.

We tend to transpose our forms to transcendent reality.

The symbol of the operation of the Earth was the patriarch.

The symbol of the operation of the Cosmos was the cosmic patriarch.

A sovereign. Up on the heights. Ruling.

The Lord.

The transcendental patriarch.

‘Lord!’

The anchor of patriarchy is the vocative ‘Lord’.

It is the form of treatment for patriarchs. ‘Lord’ originally meant ‘old man’; then ‘owner’.

‘The Lord!’

‘The Almighty Lord!’

The allegorical patriarch.

‘Lord, Lord, Lord!’

The patriarch of patriarchs.

‘Oh, Lord!’

The extreme patriarch.

‘Hear me, Lord!’

‘Our Lord!’

‘The Lord of the Armies of Heaven.’

‘Lord is his name.’ ‘The Lord is a man of war.’ ‘The Lord is King for ever and ever.’ ‘The Lord is in his holy temple. The throne of the Lord is in Heaven: his eyes behold the children of men.’ ‘The statutes of the Lord are certain, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure.’ ‘Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.’

Heaven was a kingdom. Heaven was never a democracy. It was an absolutist monarchy.

The perfectness of patriarchy.

Yet times keep changing.

As patriarchy declined, there came a wave of scientism. I am referring specifically to scientism, not to science. Scientism is animated by the assumption that reality is but energy. ‘Energy is all there is.’ ‘The Cosmos is energy.’

At present, the Earth can only function if sources of energy are explored.

Energy became, in the general conception, the mainstay of reality.

Only a god as a patriarch could be the basis of a patriarchal world.

Only a god as energy could be the basis of an energetic world.

Nowadays many will affirm:

‘God is energy.’

Some assertions bear a less scientific look and seem to be more theological:

‘God is pure energy.’

Mystics began to speak of miraculous cosmic energies. Instead of praying, many seek harmonization with allegedly favorable energies.

‘Every notion we have of God will be incomplete and therefore false.’

Our consciousness cannot comprehend that which surpasses it.

Proclaiming that God is a patriarch was a nonconscious propaganda for patriarchy.

Proclaiming that God is energy is a nonconscious propaganda for scientism.

I cannot predict what images we will attribute to ‘God’ in the future. But one could always presume that ‘God’ would be a Mystery that transcends Existence. And surpasses concreteness and abstraction. And exceeds immanence and transcendence. Vaster than totality. Ampler than life. Greater than creation.

An image by Homer in the Iliad illustrates the patriarchic dream.

Achilles refuses to participate in the Trojan War. But Hector kills Patroclus. Assaulted with fury, Achilles decides to avenge Patroclus and enters the war.

The nymph Tethys asks Hephaestus to make a shield for his son.

And Hephaestus makes it. Tin and silver and gold. The prodigy.

And in the shield Hephaestus engraves the Cosmos, for in it he impressed the sky, the Earth and the river Oceanus.

The images are alive.

The fields, the cities, the country fairs with their buzz, the dances, the wedding ceremonies, the banquets. The siege of a fortress in a war involving gods. A litigation judged by an assembly in a sacred circle. The sacrifice of a great ox. And the workings of sowing and harvesting, the workings in vineyards, the hunting of lions, shepherding and the gathering of fruit, courtship. The melodies of flutes and zithers. The art of gymnasts and poets. Nothing further would exist. The Oceanus River encircles the Cosmos.

In the center sits the sceptered king, who watches in contentment over all.

More symbolism.

The scepter.

The penis.

The male attribute.

The phallus was paraded in processions on the streets and inside the temples.

There are still studies in which the archaic phallic processions are interpreted as celebrations of fecundity. Not fecundity, which would be much better celebrated by images of vaginas or uterus. Those processions celebrated male power.

The scepter was not an attribute of the king only: in classical Greece it was held by orators while they spoke in assembly.

Phallic symbols are innumerable. They had to be innumerable in the world of the

patriarchs.

In Ancient Egypt, obelisks represented a petrified solar ray. They were erected for the purpose of protection. Ra, god of the Sun and the main deity, was a patriarch.

The Roman or Fascist salutation, also the Deutscher Gruß, in which the right arm rises straight, are representations of the penis. The erect penis.

That symbol has its proper dynamics.

The angle of the elevation of the arm in the Deutscher Gruß is the same as that of the penis in erection.

Those caricatures emerged in historical contexts of exacerbated patriarchy.

The patriarch was ambiguous. He was caring and even good-natured. He granted mercy. Yet he could be cruel if disobeyed.

Power is anchored in obedience.

Hell was created before History. For upcoming rebels.

Transgression obstructs the hierarchical structure. In all religions, all sins are summed up in one: disobedience. The consequence is punishment. Obedience comes from the fear of suffering.

Free will is not freedom.

It is the 'power of choice' within that which is offered. 'In the case of religions, free will is the freedom to decide between obeying and being rewarded or disobeying and being punished.'

The figures of Homer are dynamic: in the shield persons walk and jump, they become angry, they scream, they initiate movements and they complete them. They run. They fall and rise. They react. It is not a crystallized record. In the Iliad, patriarchy lives. It is in its masterly process of being.

The images compose a shield: patriarchy protects humankind.

And it did.

Patriarchy was essential for the functioning of society, otherwise it would not have been maintained for about twelve thousand years, since the end of the Pleistocene.

'Patrician', 'patriotism' and 'patronage' are terms that still pulse in the patriarchal life.

'Fraternity' and 'brotherhood', as emblems of harmony, are patriarchal terms.

The term 'man' to denote humankind — ruling out women — is patriarchal.

What made patriarchy decline?

Autonomy.

Personal freedom increased up to the point of no return: general freedom.

At that critical point, leaders become obsolete.

When everyone has power, power is relativized and diluted.

Rulers are unnecessary. Society no longer needs of wants to maintain ways that concentrate authority in nuclei, and patriarchy begins to be undone.

Independence widens as fear is reduced.

Patriarchy was consensual. It was never imposed.

There was oppression, for although persons needed an external power, they also had to develop their own power, hence the perennial background of tension.

But women were not particularly oppressed. They raised future patriarchs and were agents of patriarchic ideology. They acted so that patriarchal life would be respected and maintained.

Only when a significant majority did not need the system and patriarchy already hindered the operation of the Earth, is that oppression began to be tangible.

Oppression of persons and groups were not, as before, regarded as episodic or irregular historic events but as systematic strategies for the maintenance of power.

Patriarchy, the stronghold of moral and morality, was now showing how immoral it could be.

It started then to collapse.

Patriarchy fell apart gradually. It took centuries. But as the end drew near, the process accelerated. When patriarchy became a subject of consciousness, and no longer its commander, it was then possible to evaluate how it shaped reality.

All things were hierarchical.

Living had borders.

Despite the tragedies, we can find the burlesque.

The chronicles parade it:

In the Paris of the 17th century, there were no signs for main streets. The right of way was given by the power of the occupants of a vehicle, not to the first to arrive at a corner. An archduke preceded a duke. An earl went ahead of a viscount: the pitiable viscount was forced to wait. A marquis had primacy over a baron — life was measured. The problem arose when the carriages of two barons or two dukes ran into a corner simultaneously. For one of them to pass, it was necessary to prove who held greater nobility. They claimed the seniority of the titles. They pleaded the historical value of the duchy or the barony. ‘If no agreement was attained, they fought. There were cases of carriages leaving only after the fall of a swordsman.’

Hierarchism was stressed by partitioning power into social classes.

Exclusion reached its peak in India. Pariahs could only be touched by pariahs. It was objectionable if someone from another caste even looked at them. The punishment for marriages between castes was death.

The ‘superiority’ of a group was justified as the ages permitted: by divine grace, by the dialectic of the spirit, by manifest destiny, by law, by wickedness, by sham philosophy, and by the end of patriarchy by — not pseudo but legitimated — science.

Wars were glorified by almost everyone; today they are judged as horrid by almost everyone. They are no longer grandeur but rather ignominy. Colonialism ends. Dictatorships fall. Slavery fell. There are formal rights.

Events of patriarchic oppression still occur individually and collectively. There are still wars and warmongers. There is religious intolerance. Bigotry. And that is not all: those events seem aggravated in contrast with the widespread freedom. However, they also seem to be the swan song of patriarchy. When serious episodes of inhumanity happen, a planetary scream rises demanding their end.

During patriarchy, for obedience to be kept, a focus needed to be exalted: sacrifice. The tendency was to regard pleasure as frivolous and suffering worthy. Owing to that propensity, in literature tragedies were usually considered deep and comedies shallow.

Politics did not work to end patriarchy. Politics is an affair of power. The political spectrum, from the extreme left to the extreme right, was essentially the same.

Left and right were not intrinsically opponents. They were rivals in accomplishing power.

Both the political right and the political left perpetrated genocides.

Both were identically apt at disgracing countries and the lives of millions.

So politics was at first not only a hindrance but also a force the innovators had to defy. Only much later, when social change turned out to be inevitable, politicians began to be representatives of the post-patriarchal frame of mind.

The system was confronted by all groups characterized as minorities. Those already felt oppressed by hierarchy and power.

In the fabric of personal and collective freedom, one feeds the other.

All fronts for freedom were of equal importance. All persons who by their attitude, day after day, fostered private freedom were fostering general freedom. Those who fostered general freedom fostered private freedom.

The millenary saying that my freedom ends where the freedom of others begins is meant to give freedom a bad reputation. My freedom does not end: it increases where the freedom of others begins.

The freer I am, the more everyone around me can be free.

What is general freedom if not the congregation of personal freedoms?

Hence, the fall of patriarchy can be most accurately characterized as the defeat of all forms of oppression by all forms of freedom.

Defeating oppression, which is pain, is obviously a revolution of pleasure.

All fights were equally significant, but a particular form of freedom carried the highest degree of symbolism, for it aimed essentially at the patriarch and his power.

I allude to love and sex among men.

Between two men in love, there is no hierarchy. Power is dissolved.

The patriarch vanishes.

Love among men was the greatest threat to patriarchic society.

It could extinguish patriarchy from the core.

It took the structure from inside.

Previously, revolutions scratched surfaces. The revolution of love among men was incisive.

It did not fit at all into patriarchy: it had no leaders.

Love and sex among men today — I am always referring to this event as a symbol — is remarkably different from love and sex among men in Classical Antiquity and any other point in History. It is another occurrence.

During patriarchy there were love and sex among men in several societies — this was not uncommon — as long as it was the relationship between an adult and an adolescent. Here is the difference.

An adult man has power. An adolescent does not. The relationship did not threaten the hierarchical picture. It confirmed it.

When the adolescent matured, when ‘his first beard began to grow’ and he was also to become a patriarch, the relationship was no longer moral and no longer accepted.

These cases turned out to be a ritual of initiation to patriarchy.

In Greek mythology, male deities did not fall in love with other male deities and had no sex with them. That would nullify their power. Gods could be attracted by demigods and male humans. But if in addition to the sexual affair the god fell in love, the outcome would be tragic for the human or the demigod.

Nowadays, all kinds of relationships continue to exist — between men and women, between women, between men — but in another context: autonomy.

Historical transformation is transformation of consciousness.

Power yields to freedom.

Will a ‘God’ of power yield to a ‘God’ of freedom?

Let us take an example.

It is symptomatic that fundamentalist Christianity — which is largely patriarchal — overtly favors the Old Testament over the New and ‘God’ the Father over the Son.

As for most of Christianity, the Trinity is formed by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Father is identified with power, the Son with love and the Holy Spirit with knowledge.

Hermetic representations of the Trinity, particularly during the Renaissance, directly presented it as Knowledge, Love and Power.

It was believed that the three are one. As a Trinity, they are essentially equal and formally distinct.

It was by the mid-20th century that hermetic writings started to represent the Trinity as Knowledge, Love and Freedom. This change is very well explored in the works of surrealist poet António Maria Lisboa.

The transmutation of power into freedom appears to belong in the same apparently spontaneous process of transfiguration of consciousness that arose, at that time, to extinguish patriarchy.

There is an abysmal difference between freedom and power. The difference has a name: oppression. Both freedom and power create. But power can oppress. Freedom never oppresses.

Whenever I interfere destructively with someone’s life, I am not exerting freedom but oppression.

Post-patriarchal Earth, in full post-patriarchal consciousness, will realize that power is completely dispensable for the operation of humankind.

Freedom is indispensable.

We are believers. We might believe even in nothingness.

We can believe in joy.