



The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future (Updated With a New Epilogue)

Riane Eisler

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The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future (Updated With a New Epilogue) Riane Eisler
The legacy of the sacred feminine.

The Chalice and the Blade tells a new story of our cultural origins. It shows that warfare and the war of the sexes are neither divinely nor biologically ordained. It provides verification that a better future is possible—and is in fact firmly rooted in the haunting dramas of what happened in our past.

The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future (Updated With a New Epilogue) Details

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From Reader Review The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future (Updated With a New Epilogue) for online ebook

Alan says

This book was required reading for a workshop I attended on Starr Island for a Religious Education retreat sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Association

It changed my life as I began to understand and believe that there is an alternative to the Dominator model which most of our world has been living under for the last 4,000 years. The Partnership model which prevailed prior to much of our recorded history is what I strive for now. You have to read it to understand it, and whether you accept it or not, you have to admit that it sounds good.

Nebuchadnezzar says

Not in a million years should The Chalice and the Blade be considered a work of feminism or competent scholarship in general. (Indeed, it is, in fact, widely rejected by even feminist archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians.) Many of Eisler's arguments are recycled from the later work of Marija Gimbutas, who claimed that Paleolithic and Neolithic "Venus" statuettes and figurines were representations of a "Mother Goddess." The speculation is plentiful, but the evidence is not. There is no consensus as to what the figures represented, but the claims reiterated by Eisler are just about the least likely explanation. It would require a near-monolithic religion to be present over tens of thousands of years, multiple continents, and through the agricultural revolution. This is more than an extreme stretch, especially if you're talking about Paleolithic hunter-gatherers and early Neolithic peoples. Furthermore, many of the figurines are of indeterminate gender. Even worse, many of the "Snake Goddess" statues and other artifacts from Crete were either forgeries or tampered with during restoration.

Shoddy scholarship such as this works to undermine legitimate revisionism, which may then be more easily written off as New Age crackpottery. It has certainly provided many anti-feminist writers with an easy straw woman to knock down.

For more, see the review in Arizona Anthropologist (Grindell 1993):

<http://arizona.openrepository.com/ari...>

Lynn Meskell's (1995) evisceration of the goddess hypothesis:

<http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi...>

Forgeries of "Minoan" artifacts (Lapatin 2001):

<http://www.archaeology.org/0101/abstr...>

Steve Cran says

During the Neolithic times our world was a much different place. The evidence is present not only in our technology but also of the presence of certain statues all over Europe. They are called Venus statues. They were misjudged at first and archaeologists thought they were used for lustful purposes. Well they were wrong the statues were used to worship the Goddess. The Goddess was seen as the creator of all, the giver of

birth. There was a male consort who co-ruled with her. In those times heritability was passed matrilineally going down mother through daughter. In those days men and women shared power and responsibility. Life was based on agriculture and fighters were not admired. Everyone had what they needed and there was no gap between rich and poor like there is today. This was the time of the chalice. When the Earth was bountiful. But something happened to change all that and people began to fight one another. It was a time of the blade.

Crete which was the seat of Minoan civilization. Was Goddess centered. Greek philosopher called these people divine. They had fertile land their art was pleasing to the eye. Violent kings were not worshiped. There were no weapon or art scenes glorifying violence. There was a queen running the civilization as evidenced by their elaborate tombs. The form of governments was called Gilany. Which meant partnership between man and women. This would change with the coming off the Acheans who stormed their island and took it over. It is believed that most of the men were killed and the women were kept on as slaves and wives.

The Acheans were of Indo European stock who worshiped a warlike male god. Originally they were nomads who had no agricultural skills to speak of. They relied on Pillage and plundering. Crete was one of the last places to fall. The warlike Indo-Europeans took over practically all of Europe and abolished the Gilany life style in favor of Andocracy. Andocracy is male dominated system of ranking people through coercion of violence. The power elite takes all the privilege for themselves. In this system the Goddess is subdued. The Kurgans were the ones who over ran Europe.

Yet despite their best efforts they could not keep the Goddess and her enlightened ways down. In the legends of old which were refashioned putting the male God on top and the Goddess in the lower position even humiliating, were used to control the society they had conquered. All across Europe and the Levant women lost their positions of power. Priestess and oracles were abolished. In Sumerian Legend and later Biblical legend the Goddess underwent a transformation. In the beginning, tree's or sacred groves were sacred places meant for dispensing wisdom and blessing. The snake was a healing sign. All this got turned on its head. Now the women tempted by the evil serpent is tricked into eating of the tree of knowledge. For her stupidity both Adam and Eve are sent out of the Garden of Eden or Sacred groves.

On the Island of Crete they entered the Mycenaean age which saw the blossoming of the old ways. The Acheans adopted the ways of the people they conquered. Oracle were established and listened to. Academies set up that taught women equally with men. In the Levant a figure named Jesus arose preaching compassion, non aggression and that women were equal. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first on his resurrection before coming to anybody else. She was almost the church leader. But of course Andocracy prevailed in the end. Later on the Dorians take over with a vicious onslaught. The ways of the Goddess creep up again.

Right now things are horrible under this andocratic system. We spend more on our military than feeding our children and educating them. One missile could feed hundreds and also fund some much needed areas in our schools. The idea of conquest and power must be replaced by Gilany or partnership.

Antigone says

"...in individuals as in nations, contentment is silent, which tends to unbalance the historical record."

This often overlooked truth, advanced by historian Barbara W. Tuchman, is wielded with a vengeance in

Riane Eisler's *The Chalice and the Blade*. Eisler directs our attention to the least advertised stages of societal evolution, those of relative peace and prosperity, in which nothing strident rises up to catch the eye - and which we fail, rather consistently, to recognize as eras of manifest achievement. Century upon century of solid, sustained and quite routine existence has occurred, and the fact that I couldn't put my finger on one (that finger notorious for skipping to the war, the outrage, the despot, the destruction) served to bring me up short and follow, for a time, where this author meant to lead.

It is Eisler's contention that humanity is possessed of two different approaches to the living of a communal life. One is the dominator model in which all resources, powers and intent are directed toward progress through suppression. Here are the marauders, the invaders, the warriors, the kings; the students of the blade. The second approach is referred to as the partnership model (or chalice). This avenue directs all resources, powers and intent toward progress through supportive connection. Here are the builders, the naturalists, the artisans, the caretakers; those who choose to spend less energy on ranking and more on linking the disparate forces they happen across. It is Eisler's assertion that these models are in constant flux, with the dominator most frequently in the ascendant - and one of the results of that ascendancy has been the suppression in our histories of those peaceful and prosperous times in which the partnership model thrived. (An adversarial response to be sure.)

Simply placing these ideas in context is supremely delicate work. It becomes obvious quite quickly that the fundamental concept can exist only as an indistinct impression. Our language and current modes of thinking clearly aren't set up for this. Yet Eisler perseveres, applying her considerations to nations, religions and cultures throughout the ages. We end in starkly feminist territory which, frankly, I've found can be a minefield for material of this sort. Still, it's worth the risk. If you are fond of that perilous feeling you get when your mind perches on the very verge of expansion? You'll have some fun with this.

Melissa says

Apparently, the author and the publisher thought that this 300 page work of prevaricated, atrociously researched swill was passable. They are gravely mistaken.

I am not a diseased, half-dead pack animal who can't think, so I'm not sure why the author treats me as such. This book is poorly written, Ms. Eisler spoon feeds readers her opinions that are poorly veiled as facts, her writing lacks style, and for a history it lacks what it needs: actual history.

My main criticism is that this book is marketed as a history, but lacks enough source material. Is this book a history or a dream of what the author would like history to be?

The author also warns us against viewing history as black and white, but within her own view of ancient societies she paints Matriarchal societies only as peaceful and Patriarchal societies only as warlike. She also

seems to have not received the memo that says: Lack of proof is not disproof.

Perhaps I would not have quite a vitriolic view of this book if it was marketed as a feminist work, but it's not. And when the cover of your book has a quote that says "The most important book since Darwin's "Origin of Species," I really expect the author to deliver.

Laura says

This was a life-changing book for me. It helped me to connect and make sense of all the stories and myths I had read about from other religions. In doing so, it firmly established the Goddess in my life, and as I look back it is responsible for my decision to become a Witch and devote my life to the feminine energy of the Goddess. I cannot say enough good things about this book. I feel it is a must for all spiritual women...an awesome book and a real eye-opener to say the least!!

Jj says

My personal change agent. I read this book at a juncture in my life when many things were changing. I have read Chalice more than 5 times, have been in book studies on it and led them as well. In nearly every case women who have not encountered information like this before have often profound experiences with waking up. My copy is dog-eared, underlined, commented in and loved dearly for what it has brought me and other women I love.

Kenneth says

Five stars. An exceptionally important, brilliant book. It is a rare book, indeed, that can change a person's entire view of human history.

I've seen copies around for years but never read it. I recently got a copy of a later book by Eisler (The Real Wealth of Nations), then saw a copy of TCATB for a dollar, and thought I would take a quick look at it first. I picked it up and was immediately engrossed. Starting about 10,000 years ago, and continuing for a period of about 30 centuries, widespread European, Mediterranean, and Mesopotamian peaceful communities of settled humans, revering goddesses of fertility, flourished.

These early civilizations invented principles of food growing, containers, pottery, clothing fibers, construction techniques, leather work, and later, metal technologies in silver, gold, brass, and bronze. "The words found in Sumerian texts for farmer, plow, and furrow are not Sumerian. Neither are the words for weaver, leathermaker, smith, mason, and potter." (p66)

There is much, much more--about Crete, about the waves of violent invaders with their horses, iron weapons, and thunderous, angry sky gods. But the part of the book that was an absolute revelation and liberation for me was how these two general patterns--peaceful settled communities invaded by male dominated violent nomads--apply specifically to the nomadic Hebrew tribes invading Caanan.

All of a sudden, the accounts in the Hebrew and Christian scripture about the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge, the Tree of Life begin to make deeper, more complete sense. As do the demonization and subjugation of women taught in our culture and reinforced by our preeminent religious tradition. Even the snake, previously a sacred feminine totem, is shown in a completely new light. Adding information gained by systematic analysis of archaeological evidence for many years completely shifted my understanding of this critical time in Western history.

There are still visible--buried in the Hebrew scriptures--many references to this previous culture:

"We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm.

Jeremiah 44:16-18"

I was raised in a fundamentalist Christian family and know first hand that the violence, strictness, judgement, irrationality, and domination by men (and masculine values) are still very much alive in our culture.

I did not find the final quarter of the book as utterly absorbing, and must admit I find the terms "gylanic" and "gylany" awkward.

I do not know of a more important book to help return our cultural direction to a sustainable path.

Uglyoldwitch says

Like DaVinci Code? Read this. This book is where the information came from, this book is the mother to many, many others...

Megan says

Three stars because it was a pretty interesting read, and she covers, well, all of human history.

I read it because I know a number of people who claim this book fundamentally shaped their worldview (and a number of others who don't make that claim, but are certainly influenced by the popularity of Eisler's ideas).

The first half is in large part a summary and popularizing of the work of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas, who argues that before the spread of Indo-European civilization there existed a matrifocal [NOT matriarchal:], peaceful, egalitarian society, that practiced a predominately female-oriented polytheism that also involved a single Goddess figure.

Gimbutas is a highly controversial figure in archaeology, and I tried to wade a bit into the debate around her by reading a number of articles, to better weigh Eisler's argument.

My conclusion: there are a couple strong points to the idea of a more egalitarian Neolithic society that had

possible elements of a religion involving numerous goddesses. Anything after that, we can't really say for sure. Gimbutas, and by extension Eisler, with all her claims after those, moves onto increasingly shakier ground.*

I feel like my comments on the second half of the book, in which Eisler moves away from prehistory to deal with the political power men have had over women throughout history, can be dealt with by pointing out that it's unfortunate that Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* came out in 1990, three years after Eisler first wrote this.

Eisler sees the main theme throughout history as "the struggle between so-called feminine and masculine values" (138). That "so-called" is oddly placed, because it's clear that Eisler sees women as the bearers of the peaceful virtues; men are "regressive and violent" unless they submit to a feminine value system.

Which made me realize why I also have trouble believing her claims about a women-oriented peaceful society. I think that true egalitarianism is more likely to be achieved by making our concepts of sex and gender less rigid, more fluid, and more varied, rather than dividing humanity into two halves and constantly trying to either make both halves stay on the correct side, or to persuade one half that they're not good enough because they're not like the other.

*[This book also made me realize how skeptical I am about archaeological evidence in general, but especially about the interpretation of ancient art and symbols. And this I attribute, in large part, to a single exercise done for a class I took on Philosophy and Science Fiction: We had to write a story in which Carl Sagan's Pioneer plaque (see it at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pioneer_...) was found by either humans or another species who didn't know its origin but had to try and interpret it anyhow... it's pretty clear how ridiculous it is to believe that someone would come up with the "right" meaning.]

Katja Vartiainen says

So, I give this book 5 stars even though I know well the controversy about Gimbutas's work, Eisler based her prehistoric analysis on.

Eisler, as has for example Joseph Campbell, emphasizes how important the myth is to our evolution as a species and as a person. A mythology is psychological/spiritual model for us as we grow into maturity throughout our lives. I dived into the debate that has, and is going on online, and I haven't yet read Gimbutas's work. But, I have read Joseph Campbell's primitive mythology, and it seems few things are evident:

- there were numerous places with numerous females figurines to be found in the neolithic era.
- at the point around the horse tribes invasions, the figurines seem to have disappeared, and have not since existed in the western/middle eastern world, as compared for example, the hindu gods and goddess pairs and elsewhere.
- the rest of the books's history is unfortunately recorded brutal history of women's secondary and as such abused place in the history of human kind. No news there.

I think this book is a new paradigm. Sure, it's from 1987, but if we take a longer view, it's not that old. Unfortunately, the hope filled vision she has for the future- really like the Star Trek, isn't it?- seems to be yet further. But what is important about this whole book is that we could give Eisler's vision a possibility. Since the criticism claims 'we don't know for sure about the past', then one possibility of the past could be a more

egalitarian society, which the graves seem to indicate. We need another vision for the pessimistic 'humans are just greedy bastards by nature and that's it'.

These days we even have science to back up that altruism benefits the human mental and physical health AND the society. The drop widens effect.

The book is very well written and researched. It's a hard read at times, even though nothing of it was new to me. Reminded me of Lars von Trier's Anti-Christ...Anyway, we don't know for sure about prehistoric beliefs, but do we need to? Or do we create our own myth seen that what we have up to now, has not worked instead endangered the life of the whole planet, as we know it. It's indeed time to get away from the masculine-feminine, black-white, ally-enemy thinking towards something completely different. This book inspired me and I want to read more about all this and more.

Brendan says

The first 66% of this book is fantastic-- a well-researched and developed argument that we must view our notions of anthropology and history with an extremely critical eye.

Unfortunately, the last third of the book leaves all that behind, and becomes a flight of fantasy as it describes what society might be like if based on a more egalitarian method.

So I recommend it based on the holes it punches in many of our most taken for granted beliefs on historic and prehistoric mankind, but don't put too much weight on its own conclusions.

Wendy Babiak says

Loved this book. Helps clarify how we got where we are, and where we can go if we want to. Those who brush this off as feminazi aren't reading well. She reiterates many times that there are gentle men and less-than-gentle women. Nor does she say that the Neolithic matrifocal societies were utopias with no problems, just that they focused on nurturing rather than destruction. Her ideas about a gylanic society based on linking rather than ranking are excellent and should be pursued.

C. Drying says

WHY DID YOU READ THIS BOOK?

This one has been on my TBR shelf for twenty years, so I figured it was time to read it. Of course, having come of age at the tail end of the second wave of feminism, I'm not unfamiliar with the content; nevertheless, I wanted to brush up on the subject for a work of fiction I'm writing.

WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT THIS BOOK?

I think Riane Eisler is a very good writer, and HarperCollins editors are excellent too. The writing in this book is clean and tight and erudite, just like all the feminist books I read back in the 1980s were, and I find such scholarly works to be very appealing.

WHAT DID YOU NOT LIKE ABOUT THIS BOOK?

While Eisler is very good at supporting her claims, my margin notes were a mess because each time I questioned a claim, the next paragraph would explain it. Nevertheless, if she would have used precise language (i.e., words and phrases such as “could be” rather than “is”), then I would not have felt compelled to question so much.

Also, the cover design is unappealing. There are just so many other exciting images of ancient goddess figurines that could have been used. Plus, the saturation of the color red had me thinking of communism (which certainly is adequately represented in the book) and 30 years ago* was probably in the forefront of people’s minds. Nevertheless, by using so much red, I suppose the cover artist was trying to suggest women’s menstruation, which back then was part of the effort of “reclaiming” the dignity of women’s biology. I remember the line: “if men menstruated, it would be a sacrament.” Nevertheless, I think I’m judging the cover too harshly based on present-day graphic-arts advances.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THE BOOK?

Eisler’s presentation of the goddess theory** is excellent. She writes of pre-written history:

[Our prehistoric ancestors] must have noted that life emerges from the body of a woman. It would have been natural for them to image the universe as an all-giving Mother from whose womb all life emerges and to which, like the cycles of vegetation, it returns after death to be again reborn.

This is asserted in light of the revelation that an overwhelming assortment of female-figurine artifacts comprises the inventory of European archeological finds. Eisler then later effectively reminds us of our written history wherein the complete and total denial of women in a multitude of ways prevails until relatively recent times.

From the first time I learned about goddess theory, I believed it, but now that I’m older and have concluded it’s best to be agnostic about most things, I leave room in my mind for other interpretations. Eisler herself states, “we can only infer . . . how the people of the Paleolithic and . . . Neolithic thought, felt, and behaved,” but also she writes, “almost everything we have been taught about antiquity is based on conjecture.” So, I’ll have to be satisfied with the idea that the jury is still out on this. Nevertheless, if goddess theory is still to be questioned then so too should the ubiquitous image of the caveman that comes from the prevailing, traditional interpretation of our early ancestors, and I don’t know what is being taught in schools these days, but I certainly hope goddess theory is included.

As for Eisler’s Cultural Transformation theory***, I think it’s a reasonable but anecdotal way of understanding the world. It entails a twofold look at the cultures of humankind. One model is termed the *partnership* model, and the other one is called the *dominator* model, both of which are represented by the book’s title *The Chalice and The Blade* respectively. The partnership model is characterized by social relations “primarily based on the principle of linking” whereas the dominator model is associated with ranking, and I would say Eisler’s models are similar to the patterns described in *bond-pairing species* vs. *tournament species*, which are current terms used in the field of behavioral sciences. Human beings, by the way, are considered to exhibit both patterns.

Eisler goes on to suggest that the partnership model will save the world from human starvation, environmental degradation, and nuclear annihilation. She’s very fair in her argument and attempts to account

for the benefits of both models. In the end, though, I will remain agnostic, especially since we have learned so much more about genetics in the last 30 years. Nevertheless, ultimately, I have a feeling that the way forward will be a forever oscillating between two extremes, though Eisler claims we've been in the dominator model for 5,000 years. I guess my feeling comes more from recent politics where in my lifetime I've seen the proverbial pendulum swing.

DO YOU RECOMMEND THIS BOOK?

Yes! Yes! Yes! It's an essential read for a clear understanding of goddess theory and a fairly presented history of dominance over women.

FOOTNOTES:

**The Chalice and The Blade* was originally published in 1987, and the edition I own (which contains a lot of red on the cover) appears different than the one shown on Goodreads.

**Eisler, of course, is not the originator of this theory. See Marija Gimbutas and the Great Goddess Hypothesis for more information.

***The Cultural Transformation theory is originated by Eisler.

Bitsy says

I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to read this book. A lot of what I read in its pages changed my entire worldview and caused me to reevaluate the history of the world as I knew it through a feminist lense and to change how I felt and thought about that history. There was a lot in this book that I didn't completely agree with but there were many parts that I was glad to have read and have reached a deeper and richer understanding of the world because of it.

The Chalice and the Blade is a book divided into two basic parts. The lion's share of the book is devoted to a detailed history of human kind comparing and contrasting the two different basic types of worship: god worship and goddess worship, worship of a dominating war-like god and worship of a nurturing loving goddess. The societies that practiced these are taken apart and examined and a lot of history is re-evaluated along these lines of dominator societies and equality societies.

The beginning was fascinating to read about, to hear about these societies that practiced worship of a female goddess that were run by a semi-democratic government with women making up the majority of the leadership. To hear about the research and archaeological work on these sites, the fact that they had paved roads, irrigation systems, drainage systems, and probably lived in better and cleaner cities than some people in third and fourth world countries today can boast of, eight thousand years before the birth of Christ was absolutely stunning to read about. To hear about their destruction at the hands of dominator societies, heartbreaking.

A lot of history starts to make sense once you read the beginning chapters of this book. How do we learn such amazing things and then "forget" them for centuries on end? Why does our society seem to stagnate for thousands of years at a time? What happened to the goddesses of long ago? These and more are answered and the answers make this book worth the read in my opinion.

Some of this book seems very anti-christian and anti-semitic. Those parts were a little uncomfortable to read about. It does explain why the first half of the bible is filled with war and hate and the second half peace and love. If you can hold on until chapter nine the answers will surprise you. This author is not anti-religion, just anti-hate. Jesus Christ was actually one of the first recorded, and definitely the loudest, speaker for the support of love and equality of all people. After reading the chapters that came before, you realize how amazing it is that he spoke the way he did in the time and society that he did. It was pure blasphemy.

A lot of the coverage of the more recent history I didn't really agree with. This happened a few times in the earlier chapters but it happened a lot later. It seemed like the author just went too far and tried to draw the lines of comparison too much and in places where they didn't belong. Was there a hatred that sparked Jesus' disciples to try and oust the women placed in positions of leadership in the church? Yes. Was the same hatred of women and their gaining of equality and rights what helped spark World War I and II? Not so much. Her expertise is clearly with the former and not the latter.

In spite of that and the ending, which seemed to me to have lost its way, this was a powerful and enlightening book. Read it for the first three quarters if nothing else. The new insight and the new worldview you will gain about the history of god and goddess worshiping cultures makes it worth it. Just be prepared to switch gears once she gets beyond her realm of expertise as she does stumble in the last few chapters, and by the end finds that while this new understanding can change how we view our past not even she can come up with a way for it to help guide our future. Many questions are answered in this book, but some we just have to answer for ourselves.

Jenna says

It tends to happen that each new book I read then becomes my favorite - but this book did such a good job answering so many questions for me (giving me a system wide look instead of too focused) that I am now in awe of my new worldview. She answered my questions of "Where did patriarchy come from? How did it begin and why has it lasted as our social system to this day? What better possibilities can we aim for?"

The Chalice and the Blade is a very level headed approach to what is often a heated topic. Feminism is often viewed from the perspective of women and issues that face them, but this book looks beyond that to society as a whole, giving us a better option for the future. This book also helps me feel better prepared to talk about and debate the issue and advocate for that better future.

Christina says

'Attempts' to use evolutionary theory to explain how, through punctuated equilibrium, men rose up and took over the peaceful female-dominated societies all over the world. Apparently all men are evil 'blades' who want destruction and women are all good 'chalices' who believe in religion and want peace and harmony. Eisler argues that there has been a conspiracy within science to hide these early peaceful societies, as evidence she cites an anecdote about an anthropologist she really likes getting his funding removed. Throughout the book she uses anecdotes and her own reasoning, as opposed to actual evidence, to support her theory that for thousands of years these female dominated societies ruled the world and everything was peachy. Early on in the book she tells of 'goddess worship' in the form of 'vagina shaped sea shells' laid out on tombs. It was at this point I wanted to stab my eyes out and quit reading but I had to finish it for a class.

Jen Marin says

Eisler reframes the age old idea of the 'war between the sexes' into something equally polarizing, yet more inclusive. Many people have examined the problems of humanity as an inevitable outcome of our innate aggression and territoriality. Our history clearly shows the forces of war, colonialism, nationalism and greed have shaped the world as we know it.

On closer inspection, however, the picture is less clear than we have long believed. I was surprised to learn that archaeology, as a science, only became serious after World War II. Before this time, Egyptology and the like were mostly a front for imperialistic grave robbers, vying for the shiniest addition to their national museums. Dating of artifacts was done through assumption until the advent of carbon 14 technology and dendrochronography. All of this combined created a vision of the past that was heavily tainted by the expectations and experience of those who unearthed ancient sites.

Proper dating technology has painted a new picture of the ancient past. It seems that in many parts of Old Europe, there were Goddess worshiping cultures that harnessed their intelligence towards creating healthy communities. In these cities, sometimes occupied for millenia, there is no evidence of weapons, ruler-kings, or the glorification of war. In fact, some sites were occupied for thousands of years without any evidence of war. These cultures showed a surprising equality between the sexes, as well as a lack of hierarchy. The concentration of wealth by the powerful that we take for granted is something that came much later.

As the nomadic herding tribes migrated into the regions occupied by these Neolithic culture, they found great wealth and little defensive technology. The cities were rather ripe for the plucking. Once this occurred, people reorganized their focus, working hard to develop weapons technology for offensive and defensive purposes. This arms race continues in the present day.

The unfortunate side effect of this race is that early technological advances in city planning, in art, and other technologies of peace were put aside in the face of this new human created danger. Earlier assumptions about the dates of some primitive looking artifacts turned out to be wrong; after war came to these cultures, their technological development came to a halt, and much technology was lost and forgotten.

These peaceful Neolithic cultures predate Sumer by millennia. Sumer is often recognized as the cradle of civilization; it would be better to describe it as the cradle of modern culture of warfare. Eisler calls these cultures "dominator cultures", whereas the earlier Goddess worshiping groups engaged in a partnership model. By the time that Sumer was in full swing, the partnership model had been overcome by the warrior culture of the nomadic steppes.

As we hurtle into the 21st century, we spend unthinkable amounts of resources coming with better ways to kill each other. The amount of resources spent on military budgets worldwide could transform our world if we put them to better use. We have the technology to feed, clothe, and house people, but as long as we surrender to the dominator model, resources will continue to be concentrated in the hands of the few while the many suffer from need and lack. Eisler urges us to give up the old ways of aggressive ranking and warfare, and create a new world in which we find solutions that work to build communities, create prosperity, and improve the quality of life for our entire human family.

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Pat says

Having just read Half the Sky, Infidel, and several books about the FLDS (Fundamentalist Latter Day Saints), I recalled this book which I had read a number of years ago. The Chalice and the Blade by Riane Eisler is a cultural anthropology and analysis of what she calls dominator societies vs partnership societies. The cultures in Half the Sky, for example, are extreme dominator societies. That women are not valued is how they work. What it takes to change them has been Eisler's life work since she wrote Chalice. She too has hope for the future. It's not an easy book to read at the start - you have to get through the first 60-70 pages before you get into what she's telling you. And too many readers don't get that far. If they do it's a profound book, not to be forgotten. Half the Sky is full of examples of what those cultures look like at their worst. Places where the courage of a few is so remarkable as to give the rest of us hope.
