The History Of Female Empowerment III: From Deities To Luminaries

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Let's conclude this trilogy by tracing the legacy of feminism back to the incidence of ancient female deities–specifically: the use of mother-goddesses. From there, we can discern a common thread–through the centuries–up to the incidence of modern female luminaries.

Over the course of history, cultures around the world have employed a maternal cosmogony. This seems natural, as mothers are the quintessential symbol of fertility, birth, and nourishment. The salient theme here is fecundity. The notion of fertility has dual meaning–pertaining as it does to crops and to procreation. This makes sense, as–other than breathing–the two most important things in life are the ability to eat and to produce offspring. Thus a mother goddess encompasses two fundamental elements of human existence. Note, for example, "Pomona" (Roman goddess of fecundity / prosperity) and "Taweret" (Egyptian goddess of fertility of both wombs and crops).

Fertility is especially salient for agricultural societies–as people's livelihood is based on the growing of crops. This dates back to the Sumerian goddess, "Ashnan" and her various manifestations: Ezina-Kusu, Gesht-Inanna, and Nin-hursag. We also find this with the Old Semitic "Nikkal". In Egypt, there was "Hathor", "Heqet", and "Renenutet".

It has been for the most elementary biological reasons that plenty has been generally conceptualized as feminine–as with the Greek goddesses "Demeter"–around whom the Eleusinian Mystery cults were based. The Romans had several such goddesses associated with the anticipated harvest: "Dea Dia", "Ceres", "Vacuna", "Pomona", "Tutelina", "Semonia", "Segetia", "Feronia", etc. Other examples include the Etruscan goddess "Horta", the Japanese goddess "Toyouke-Omikami", and the Zulu goddess "Mbaba Mwana Waresa".

Above and beyond concerns about plenty, such goddesses have also been emblematic of the most primal form of affection. For a mother is not just a source of nourishment, but of nurturance: providing sustenance and a means of subsistence. To reiterate: The essence of human life is grounded in fecundity: something that–far from requiring an authoritarian approach–is primarily about compassion.

So it can be surmised: Generally speaking, the preeminence of a mother goddess reflects whether a culture prioritizes fertility (matriarchal) or militancy (patriarchal). When compassion is seen as the highest virtue, the quintessence of the divine tends to be feminine. This stands to reason, as maternal figures tend to put nurturance over dominance. In some cases, the goddess is seen as a protector–as with "Athena Polias" (a variant of "Cybele") in Athens and "Ma-tsu" in maritime China. {18}

What characterizes a society's godhead? If we limit ourselves to the dichotomy (martial vs. maternal), it depends on whether the culture is based more on war or more on civility. A more militaristic society will tend to posit a (machismo) martial deity; a more nurturant society will tend to posit a maternal deity. For instance, during the 20th century, if the United States had created a god, it would have been a war-god (effectively, an American Mars, who's shrine was the Pentagon); while if, say, Scandinavia had created a god, it would have been closer to a god of nourishment (effectively, a Nordic Minerva).

Female deities seem to be more conducive to compassion (of which a mother is emblematic) than to wrath (of which the domineering authoritarian is emblematic). Hence the ancient Asian goddess of mercy, Avalokitesvara. History shows that male gods tend to be characterized more by wrath than by mercy–as with the vengeful godhead of the Torah and the vindictive godhead of the Koran (not to mention the Fire and Brimstone approach to Christianity embraced by its Nicene instantiation). The dichotomy of discipline vs. nurturance seems to be timeless.

Note, though, that not all war-gods have been male. In the 2nd millennium B.C., the Canaanites of Ugarit revered the virgin warrior-goddess, "Anat[h]" (daughter of the Canaanite godhead, El), who was later adopted by the Nabataeans. Throughout history, martial goddesses have included:

- Durga (Hindu)
- Jiu-Tian Xuan-nu (Chinese)
- Menhit and Sekhmet (Egyptian)
- Enyo and Nike (Greek)
- Menrva (Etruscan)
- Nerio / Bellona and Victoria (Roman)
- Andred / Andrasta (Icenic)
- Andarta / Andraste (Gaulish / Celtic)
- Itzpapalotl (Aztec)
- Pele (Hawaiian)

Even when martial deities were seen as female, unlike mother-goddesses, they were never seen as the highest deity.

Typically, though, goddesses are associated with CARE, as they are seen more as maternal than as martial. It is not for nothing that the Sumerians characterized COMPASSION as feminine (personified as "Shala"). In Vajra-yana Buddhism, the embodiment of compassion is the female Buddha, Vajra-yogini ("Dorje Neljorma" in Tibetan Buddhism).

Meanwhile, there has been a widespread usage of goddesses to represent the sunrise–as with the Vedic "Ushas", the Shinto "Ame-no-Uzume-no-mikoto", the early Semitic "Shahar", the Greek "Eos", the Etruscan "Thesan", and the Roman "Aurora". Dawn has traditionally symbolized renewal and hope for a better future–a kind of re-birth. So it makes sense that this time of day has often been associated with the feminine.

Another point worth considering: Maternal love is the most unconditional–and thus most reliable–kind of love. Hence "Gaea" [alt. "Gaia"], the basis for the Occidental "Mother Earth" motif, found in Archaic Greek mythology. {1} The earliest instance of a feminized cosmology was the Sumerian "Nammu" (later rendered "Tiamat" by the Babylonians), goddess of the primordial chaos (conceptualized as a kind of cosmic waters) that preceded Creation. The ideation of a primordial mother makes sense, as it is–after all–women who give birth, and mammalian females who nurture.

To this day, the most prevalent example of this motif is the East Asian mother goddess: “Guan-[shi]-yin”, who is associated with mercy / compassion. As an ancient Chinese bodhisattva, Guan-yin was based on the antecedent goddess of compassion / mercy, “Ava-Lokit-esvara” (from the Lotus Sutra). Versions of her can be found in Cantonese and Fujian lore (“Guan-yam”), Taiwanese lore, Siamese lore (“chao-mae” Kuan-im), Vietnamese lore (Quan-[The]-Am), and Japanese lore (Fukukenjaku Kan-[ze]-on). The Tibetans call her “Chenrezik”. The Sinhalese call her “Natha Devi-yo”. Even the Hmong have a version of her (“Kab Yeeb”). She is the godhead in Zaili-ism. In the Taoist tradition, Guan-yin inspired the legend of Miao-shan (as attested in the “Precious Scroll of Fragrant Mountain”).

Behold the widespread appeal of a maternal conception of divinity. Such an ideation pervades virtually all the major cultures of the Far East. This is no surprise, as the conception of a maternal godhead goes back THREE MILLENNIA, to the so-called “Venus of Dolni Vestonice” (and a bit later, the “Venus of Willendorf”). There is clearly something INNATE to the psychology of homo sapiens that leads us to posit a mother goddess. In southern Anatolia, we find Neolithic statuary AND cave-paintings of a mother-goddess (ref. the findings at “Çatal-höyük”) from about 8,000 years ago. She seems to have been a precursor to “Cybele”.

The tendency to equate nature with maternity is universal–hence the idiom “Mother Nature” with which we are still familiar. Even today, the idiom “mother Earth” / “mother nature” is commonplace–especially amongst neo-Druids and Wicca, as well as in feminist New Age lore. {2} The Greeks also posited Gaia: the first conception of “Mother Earth” (thus: the primordial mother of all life). Here daughter (via the primordial father of the heavens, Uranus) was “Rhe[i]a”, mother of all the gods of Olympus.

And so it went that the mother of Rome was held to be “Rhea Silvia”. In the Roman Empire, the honorific, “Caelestis” [Heavenly / Celestial] was used for various goddesses who were seen as embodiments of aspects of a single, supreme heavenly mother-goddess (as with “Juno Caelestis” and “Venus Caelestis”). In Apuleius’ magnum opus, “Metamorphoses”, the hero (Lucius) prays to the Hellenized Egyptian goddess Isis, who he refers to as “Regina Caeli” [Queen of Heaven], a moniker also associated with Ceres (the goddess associated with nurturance and plenty)…who was, in turn, based on the Greek personification of maternity: “Demeter”.

The mother-goddess leitmotif has even occurred in primitive island cultures–as with “Atabey” of the Tainos (on Puerto Rico) and “Moneiba” / “Chaxiraxi” of the Guanches (on the Canary Islands). I initially suspected that matriarchal deification (spec. the conception of nature as maternal) was prevalent throughout history and around the world. Little did I realize that it was virtually UNIVERSAL. As it turns out, matriarchal deification is found in almost every culture to ever exist (outside of the Abrahamic tradition).

Here are over a hundred more prominent mother goddesses:

- Aditi; Prithvi-mata / Mahi-mata **(Vedic)**
- Bhuvana Is-wari [a.k.a. “Bhuvanes-wari”]; Bhu[mi]-devi / Bhu-vati / Bhumi / Urvi-[sha] / Prithvi [Mata]; and Ganga Ma [Mother of the Ganges] **(traditional Hindu)**
- Prakriti **(Samkhya Hindu)**
- “Adi” [Para-]Shakti / Parvati / Tripura Sundari / Gauri / Uma / Kali **(Shakta Hindu)** {3}
- Akhila-Andha-Esh-vari [alt. “Akila-andes[h]-wari”] **(Tamil Hindu)**
- Sundha-rivanida **(Theravada Buddhist)**
- Vasu[n]dha[ra] **(Newar Buddhist)** {4}
- Devi Sri; Men Brajut [a variation on the Hindu goddess, Hariti] **(Javanese)**
- Tao-mu [alt. “Doumu”] / Tati-zhi-mu / Tian-hou / Ma-tzu [alt. “Mazu”] **(Taoist)**

- Tian-shang Sheng-mu / Wu-sheng Lao-mu / Xi-wang-mu / Wuji-mu / Yao-chi Jin-mu / Tian-mu **(ancient Chinese)**
- Nü-wa / Nü-gua **(folk Chinese)**
- Amaterasu; Sei-obo **(Japanese)**
- Wathondare [based on the (Pali) Newar bodhisattva, Vasundhara(ni)] **(Burmese)**
- Nang Thorani [alt. “Mae Thorani”] **(Siamese)**
- Nan Ganhan [alt. “Neang Kongheng” / “Preah Thorani”] **(Khmer)**
- Seo-wang-mo / Sung-mo / Dae-mo / Ja-mo / Sin-mo; Chungkyun Mo-ju **(Korean)**
- Nana [also depicted as a war goddess; basis for the Armenian Nane] **(Kushan / Bactrian)**
- Aruru; Nammu; Urash; and Inanna **(Sumerian)** {5}
- Ki(-shar) [“Earth Mother”]; Kubab; Belet-Ili; Nana[ya]; and Antu[m] **(Akkadian)** {5}
- Ishtar; Irkalla [version of Eresh-ki-gal] **(Assyrian)** {17}
- Ninsun; Tiamat **(Babylonian)**
- Kiririsha **(southern Elamite)**
- Pinikir **(northern Elamite)**
- Arsay **(Canaanite / Syrian)** {6}
- Berouth **(Eblaite)**
- Ashtoreth **(Phoenician)**
- Asherah / As[h]tarte / Athirat (see list below) **(Canaanite / Amorite)**
- [Aredvi Sura] Anahita [alt. “[a]Nahid”; also associated with wisdom; the basis for the Armenian “Anahit”] **(Persian)**
- Hanna-Hannah **(Hittite)** {7}
- [k]Hepa[t] **(Hurrian)**
- Shardi [Arubani / Bagvarti was consort of the godhead, (k)Haldi. A matriarchal figure, she was goddess of fertility and creativity] **(Urartian)**
- Iusaas[et]; Neit[h] / Net / Nit; M[a]ut / Maat; Nekh-bet; Ki **(early Egyptian)**
- Isis **(later Egyptian)**
- Rhe[i]a **(Minoan)** {1}
- Ma; Aphrodite; Hestia **(Greek)** {8}
- Argimpasa; Tabiti **(Scythian)** {9}
- Kybele [alt. “Cybele”] **(Anatolian; esp. Phrygian and Lydian)** {10}
- Cybele / Artemis **(Anatolian)** {11}
- Ana-hit / Nane / Hanea **(Armenian)**
- Op[i]s **(Sabine)**
- Albina; Nutria; Cel; Uni **(Etruscan)**
- Mater Matuta [alt. “Magna Mater”]; Tellus [alt. “Terra Mater”] **(Roman)** {12}
- Tanit [based on the consort of the Phoenician “Baal-Hamon”] **(Punic-Iberian)**
- Tan[g]ou [based on the Punic] **(Carthaginian)**
- Omek Tan[g]ou [based on the Carthaginian] **(Tunisian Berber)**
- al-Lat [alt. “Allat”; based on the early Semitic] **(Arabian)** {13}
- Yer Tan[g]ri / Yer Ana [the feminine form of Tengri] **(Turkic)**
- Umay / Eje [alt. referred to as “Nati-gai”] **(Mongolian)**
- Hajnal Anyacska **(Magyar)**
- Mat Zemlya [“Matka Ziemia” in Latvian; later rendered “Mokosh”] **(Slavic)**
- Luonnotar **(Finnish / Baltic)**
- Mara **(Latvian)**
- Zemyna **(Lithuanian)**
- Frigg [alt. Frijjo / Frija / Freyja]; Jord [alt. Fjörgyn / Hlodyn]; and Sif **(Norse)**
- Nerthus / Nertha **(Suebian / Germanic)**

- Noreia **(Carinthian Celtic)**
- Macha; Ernmas; [d]Anu / Anan[d]; Brigid; Flidais **(Celtic / Irish)**
- Cailleach **(Lusitanian Gaelic)**
- Virgo-Patitura **(Druidic)**
- Don **(Welsh)** {14}
- [Dea] Matrona **(Gaulish)**
- Qucha-mama [alt. “Pacha-mama”] **(Incan)**
- Ix-Chel **(Mayan)**
- Cihua-Coatl / Coatl-icue [Nahuatl: “Ilamatecuhtli”]; Xochi-quetz[a]l [Nahuatl: “Ichpochtli”]; Toci (Yoal-ticitl) / Tlalli Iyollo / Tlazol-teotl **(Aztec)**
- Atabey **(Taino)**
- Papa-tuanuku **(Maori)**
- Papa **(Hawaiian)**
- Hina / Sina / Tina **(Polynesian)**
- Dayang Masalanta [reified as “Maria (of) Makiling”] **(Filipino)**
- Asase Ya / Aberewa / Afua **(Ashanti)** {15}
- Anyanwu **(Igbo)** {15}
- Nana Buluku **(Yaruba; Fon, especially in Dahomey; Akan / Ewe)** {16}
- Moreyba **(Berber)**

These are all feminine conceptions of divinity. They are entities that societies felt they could depend on (that is: female super-beings whom supplicants believed would be looking out for their best interests). Sometimes the deity is both a solar deity and a mother-goddess–as with “Amaterasu” in Japanese myth, “Anyanwu” / “Ala” in African myth, and “Wadjet” [a.k.a. “[b]Uto”] in pre-dynastic Egypt. {19}
In other cases, the national spirit is personified as a woman, such as “Om el-Donia” for modern Egypt and “Ibu Pertiwi” [“Mother Prithvi”] for Indonesia.

In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, there was the conception of the Bodhisattva as the “Yum Chenmo” [Great Mother], an idea inherited from the Indian “Prajnaparamita” (the earliest of the Mahayana Sutras). The Nabataeans of Palmyra worshipped their own version of the Greco-Roman goddess of fortune, Tyche…as well as a trinity of goddesses (Allat[u], Al-Uzza, and Man[aw]at), who were eventually adopted by the Quraysh in the Hijaz.

Matriarchal deification was especially common in Native American cultures–as with:

- Sedna **(Inuit)**
- Nokomis and Mondamin **(Anishinabe)**
- Selu **(Cherokee)**
- Atina **(Arikara)**
- Evaki **(Bakairi)**
- Na-ashje-ii Asdzaa[n] [alt. “Altse Asdzaa[n]”] **(Navajo)**
- Hatush **(Chumash)**
- Wohpe **(Lakota)**
- Kokomthena Paboth’kwe **(Shawnee)**
- Komorkis **(Blackfoot)**
- Menil **(Cahuilla)**
- Ata-en-sic; and Onatah **(Iroquois)**
- Koh-kyang-wu-tee **(Hopi)**
- Asintmah **(Athabaskan)**

The feminine can be found in myriad theological contexts. Most notable is the personification of wisdom / Truth as female. Notable examples of this include:

- Saras-wati / Saras-vati **(Vedic)**
- Nis[h]aba **(Sumerian)**
- Seshat **(Egyptian)**
- Sophia / Athena **(Greek)**
- Minerva **(Etruscan, then Roman)**
- Vör; Frigg / Freyja **(Norse)**
- Devi **(Hindu)**
- Aletheia / Sophia **(Gnostic)**

Tellingly, the NATURAL ORDER has often been seen as feminine; hence the ubiquitous idiom "mother nature". The Minoans equated the natural order, "Physis" with a maternal conception of the universe–an ideation that was adopted by the Ionian school in the 6th century B.C. (ref. Heraclitus of Ephesus). The Greeks associated nature with the Titaness, "Themis". The natural order often was the basis for conceptions of justice–an ideation that dates back to the Vedic notion of "Rta" and the Egyptian "Maat" (whereby justice was equated with the natural order of things). In a sense, what was just was determined by the very structure of the cosmos; and THAT was conceptualized as female.

And so it went that the Greeks embodied justice as female: "Dike". The constellation Virgo [the Virgin] was associated with "Dea Caelestis", impresario of justice. The Romans adapted their own incarnation of Dike as "Justitia"…who became the basis for the modern "Lady Justice" leitmotif. The ancient Norse embodied both justice and love as the goddess, "Frigg" / "Freyja". In some cases, the mother-goddess is also the one who sits in judgement to determine each soul's fate in the afterlife–as with the Babylonian Earth-queen, "Eresh-ki-gal". It is no wonder that both liberty and justice are often embodied by a women in the modern Occidental idiom.

The theme seems to be ubiquitous. In the late 13th century, there emerged a Millenarian cult amongst the Han Chinese known as the "White Lotus"–a hybridization of Manichaeism and Buddhism, wherein "Wu-sheng Lao-mu" ["Unborn Venerable Mother"] was worshipped. That cult would later inspire the Red Turban Rebellion in the 1330's.

Other than "Guan-[shi]-yin", we encounter ramified onomastics with the Sumerian goddess, Eresh-ki-gal, who was also rendered "Irkalla" and "Ashratu[m]". {17} Over time, several variations–theonymic and iconographic–on the mother-goddess theme emerged; all with a consistent semiotic through-line. Here are fifteen of the most notable theonyms for Ashratu[m]:

- As-dar-tu / Ashtart / Ashirat / Ashratu[m] **(Akkadian)**
- Ishtar **(Assyrian)** {20}
- Asherah / Ishtarat / Athirat [alt. dubbed "Qetesh" / "Qudshu"] **(Amorite)** {21}
- Ashtoreth / Ashtart **(Phoenician)** {22}
- At[h]irat / Athtart **(Ugaritic)**
- Ashtar **(Moabitic)**
- Ashtaroth **(Midianite)**
- Ishara **(Eblaite)**
- As[h]ertu[s] **(Hittite)** {7}
- Shaushka **(Hurrian)**
- Attar[t] / Ataratheh / Atar-atah **(Aramaic)**

- Astar [ref. the Ge'ez inscription at Adulis] **(Abyssinian / Aksumite)**
- As[h]tghik **(Armenian)**
- Ataratheh **(north Syrian)**
- Atarate / Allat **(Nabataean)** {24}

And that wasn't the end of it. A North Arabian version was adopted from the Nabataean "Allat", yielding "Alilat" / "Athtar[t]". She was alternately rendered "Attar [Shamayin]" in Syriac–especially at Dumah (where she was a correlate of "Allat"). Attar-Shamayin effectively means "Ishtar from Heaven".
In central Arabia, the Kindites (the Banu Kindah in particular) referred to her as "Athtar[t]"…as did other Kahlani tribes in Yemen (esp. the Qahtanites). The Quraysh, who spoke the Nabataean version of Syriac, referred to her as "Allat".

The re-branding of this goddess seems to have been limitless. Yet another variant was the Etruscan goddess, "Uni" (as in "Uni-Astre"). She was rendered "Ashtarot[h]" in Classical Hebrew–probably based on the Midian version of the name. The Hellenized version, "Astarte[s]", was a derivative of "As[h]tart[e]"…which was yet another version of the name. By the time the Greco-Roman "Astarte[s]" was being worshipped, she was but one of a plethora of deities–each of whom boasted her own meandering genealogy.

Many of these instantiations had hazy origins, involving some vague notion of matriarchal divinity (which had often been espoused by distant forebears). The tendency to appropriate this meme indicates that there was something about it that held appeal across time and place. Clearly, it resonated with people irrespective of cultural differences. In other words: The ideation of a supreme mother transcended culture.

The onomastic ramification went on and on. The Greeks referred to her has "Atargatis". The Romans referred to her as "Dea Syria" [alt. rendered "Deasura" / "Dushara"]. The Persians referred to her as "Derketo". Etc. Memes (be they theonyms or recipes for lasagna) mutate as they migrate across time and space, being adapted to the local culture (and retrofitted into the indigenous memeplex as the need arises). Such mutations can be thought of as a memetic ALLELES. Once instantiated (and thoroughly ingrained in the collective consciousness), the presumption is: "It has always been thus!" Such FALSE consciousness is attested in a billion different ways around the world. For naturally, each culture wants to believe that THEIR version of the meme is SUI GENERIS (i.e. not derivative).

As we have seen, the Sumerian Ashratu[m] is the prime illustration of this. In each case, the memetic prototype is adopted…and then reification goes into full throttle. Eventually, any given manifestation of the prototype is sublimated to comport with its immediate memetic environs–eventually developing a glimmering memetic corona of its own. Indeed, each instantiation of this goddess was assimilated into ambient social conditions (tailored to meet pressing needs, to suit local tastes, to jive with prevailing sensibilities, to synchronize with incumbent "core" beliefs, etc.) Like viruses, memes adapt to survive in their environments.

Even as the version of the deity changes, the underlying semiotic logic holds from case to case.
There is nothing EPISTEMICALLY unique about Ashratu[m] and her myriad incarnations.
The metamorphosis that memes undergo is ubiquitous–from deities to sartorial trends to sacred rituals to leitmotifs in folklore. Hence the existence of mythemes. This explains why archetypes tend to transcend culture. For we are, after all, all human.

The resplendent onomastic ramification seen with "Ashratu[m]" is illustrative of the larger point:
Etymology reflects an underlying memetic genealogy. We can see how the name–and even the portrayal–of a deity can change over time, and over geographies, from culture to culture…without the vestigial genealogy (read: the derivative nature of the deity) being recognized by each subsequent adopter. With "Ashratu[m]" we have more than twenty distinct cultures, each of which worshipped its own version

of a supreme mother-goddess, every one of which was a variation on an antecedent mother-goddess. Each community surely thought ITS OWN version was THE ORIGINAL version. Nobody wants to admit that their most sanctified cultural elements is invariably derivative (etymologically or theologically): a concatenation of cultural appropriation from exogenous sources. Everybody wants to believe that what they consider to be the Supreme Being is an ontological novelty–a Truth to which THEY are privy.

Here, we are concerned with the role of the feminine in different cultures' world-views. I hope to have shown how certain motifs have proliferated around the world across history. Clearly, there was something universal going on here. That reverence for the feminine was made manifest in so many different creeds reveals that feminism did not depend on any particular creed. Theology was simply the means by which something more fundamental was being expressed. We see, then, that this fundamental thing has always existed independently of any given cosmology.

We can now turn to a survey of HUMAN icons (specifically: luminaries in the modern era); and see how female empowerment eventually moved beyond fancy; and has recently translated to civic action.

The history of civil rights has been the history of female empowerment. The first feminist in history seems to have been the Vietnamese icon, Trieu Thi Trinh–who fought for female empowerment in the 3rd century. For present purposes, we might harken back to the 16th century–noting activists in England like Jane Anger, Anne Ayscough (a.k.a. "Askew"), and Isabella Whitney. We begin by posing a simple question: How was it that such female luminaries were able to break new ground for women?

In answering this question, we find an ineluctable trend: Familiarity with sacred doctrine was not a prerequisite for their achievements. Note, for example, the pioneering work of (Spanish queen consort) Catalina of Aragon in promoting Renaissance humanism. In the case of Catalina, the key was "renaissance" and "humanism". That is to say: Headway was made in spite of, not because of, the ambient religiosity (in the case of Spain, Roman Catholicism). Let's see if we can discern a pattern by broadening the survey. In England alone, the 17th century would bring a covey of pioneering women. To name 21 of the most renown:

- Bathsua Reginald Makin
- Anne Bradstreet
- Anne Killigrew
- Anne Conway [Viscountess of Conway]
- Margaret (née Lucas) Cavendish [Duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne]
- Margaret Fell
- Jane Cavendish
- Jane Barker
- Mary Wroth
- Rachel Speght
- Aphra Behn (a.k.a. "Astrea")
- Katherine Philips
- Judith Drake
- Aemilia (née Bassano) Lanier
- Sarah Fyge Egerton
- Elizabeth Cary [Viscountess Falkland]
- Mary (née Sidney) Herbert [Countess of Pembroke]
- Anne (née Kingsmill) Finch [Countess of Winchilsea]
- Susanna Cent-livre
- Sarah Blackborow

- Hester Biddle

Three were Quaker firebrands. (To understand Quakerism is to recognize its non-dogmatic nature. So such Faith is in keeping with the present thesis.) We might now ask: How many of these women were operating according to one or another religious creed? The answer: None. So it is clear that religious dogmas were in no way necessary for such headway.

Once the Enlightenment was underway (during the 18th century), there emerged YET MORE pioneering women in England. A dozen of the most notable:

- Mary Astell
- Mary Scott
- Mary Chudleigh
- Mary Wortley Montagu
- Mary Elizabeth Wollstonecraft
- Elizabeth Elstob
- Catharine Trotter Cockburn
- Catharine Sawbridge-Macaulay
- Helen Maria Williams
- Frances Burney (a.k.a. “Fanny Burney”; “Madame d’Arblay”)
- Anna Laetitia (née Aikin) Barbauld
- Eliza (née Fowler) Haywood

Religion had nothing to do with the achievements of any of these women. It was their tenacity, not their piety, that animated them. This was made crystal clear when Judith Sargent Murray wrote “On The Equality Of The Sexes” (1790). It was also plain to see in Wollstonecraft’s “A Vindication Of The Rights Of Women” (1792), as well as in her other works on human rights.

In England, the above icons were followed–in the 19th century–by trailblazers like:

- Anne Knight
- Janet Taylor
- Augusta Ada “Lovelace” King {25}
- Phoebe Sarah Hertha Ayrton
- Millicent Garrett Fawcett
- Emmeline Pankhurst
- Elizabeth Blackwell
- Caroline Norton
- Josephine Butler
- Sophia Louisa Jex-Blake
- Anna Bownell Jameson
- Annie Besant (née Wood)
- Emily Davison
- Sarah Losh

When each of these remarkable women broke new ground, religiosity was not the clinching factor. This was not because they lived in Great Britain; it was because they were intelligent people who took principled stands–stands which had nothing to do with ANY brand of “received wisdom”. To wit: such women thought for themselves.

Note that it was not because these luminaries were unaware of sacred texts that they did not cite them. After all, they were all well-read women. In fact, it was their erudition that ENTAILED that a sacred

doctrine from bygone eras would have nothing to do with their laudable accomplishments.

The same applied to the other side of the Atlantic–as with icons like Mercy Otis Warren and Abigail Adams (18th century). We might note African Americans like Phillis Wheatley (18th century), as well as Harriet Tubman, Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, and Sojourner Truth (19th century). And we might also note Native Americans during the 19th century like Sakagawea of the Shoshone, Emily Pauline Johnson, Sarah Winnemucca, and the freethinker (suffragist and abolitionist), Matilda Joslyn Gage.

In 1851, abolitionist, Harriet Beecher Stowe published "Uncle Tom's Cabin"; and in 1861, African American abolitionist, Harriet Ann Jacobs penned "Incidents In The Life Of A Slave Girl". Inspired by the great icon of abolitionism, Harriet Tubman (along with Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin) founded a periodical dedicated to African American women, "The Woman's Era", in 1894. Meanwhile, for much of the 19th century, the most widely-circulated periodical in the U.S. was Godey's Lady's Book–a magazine for female writers. Would such a thing have been conceivable in a religious milieu? How about when Ella Josephine Baker forged new ground for black women in the early 20th century?

Even those women who did not advocate for women's suffrage (notably, the American novelist, Sarah Josepha Hale) strongly championed for the role of women in civil society, and promoted the publishing of female writers. When women like Mary Edwards Walker, Belva Ann Lockwood, Clara Barton, Jane Addams, Margaret Fuller, and Ernestine Rose broke new ground for women in America, the Abrahamic doctrine had nothing to do with it. When Quakers like Dorothy Detzer and Emily Greene Balch fought for cosmopolitan ideals, it was their departure from institutionalized dogmatism that impelled them.

When Sarah Moore Grimké and Angelina Emily Grimké, Jane Swisshelm, Lucy Stone, Alice Stokes Paul, Lucy Burns, Carrie Chapman Catt, Lousine Havemeyer, and Harriet Williams Russell Strong pioneered the suffragist movement in the United States, they did not need to quote the Hadith. This abstention did not come as a shock to anyone.

When Native American (Ponca) physician, Suzanne LaFlesche Picotte (of Omaha) became a public health advocate, it was not by following this or that sacred doctrine. When Mary Eliza Mahoney became the first black nurse in America, it was not because people finally decided to start heeding the teachings of Mohammed of Mecca.

Pugnacious authors like Charlotte Turner Smith, Jane Austen, Louisa May Alcott, Emily Dickinson, George Eliot, Willa Cather, Elizabeth Gaskell, Lucas Malet, and the Brontë sisters also set a new precedent…without in any way depending on Iron Age dogmas.

Once all the religious apologia evaporates, we find that what remains in the Progressive repertoire is unapologetic, unadulterated secularity–things that have nothing whatsoever to do with any particular sanctified dogmatic system: critical inquiry, intellectual curiosity, common decency, etc. It was a sense of shared humanity, not supplication (or submissiveness of ANY sort), that enabled such crucial headway to be made by these brave women.

When the day comes that we manage to get past the dazzling array of market-tested talking points that currently pass for serious discourse amongst religious apologists, we will find that there is zero evidence for claims about religion-based feminism. We will eventually discover that the artificial flavoring of most apologia loses its zing; and that a Progressive case can be made WITHOUT basing it on a house of cards.

The truth–it turns out–is not always the spiffiest option. Humanist principles can be promoted without recourse to specious rhetorical flourishes. Once all the grandiloquent perorations cease, once empty catch-phrases and wishy-washy platitudes no longer circulate in the agora, once interlocutors no longer feel the need to resort to bromides to uphold fatuous propositions. Only then can the worn-out trope that

religiosity–of ANY kind–was a crucial ingredient in female empowerment can be unapologetically discarded. Indeed, the impetus for the promulgation of women's rights was obviously something other than "revelation".

From 19th-century Quakers (Elizabeth Fry…followed by Lucretia Mott…followed by Susan B. Anthony) to socialists on into the 20th century (Frances Elizabeth Caroline Willard, Mary Harris "Mother" Jones, Emma Goldman, Dorothy Parker, Dorothy C. Thompson, and Rose Schneiderman), only the most indomitable women (that is: NOT those beholden to ancient scriptures) advanced the cause. Progress was made by those who were tenacious; and at no point did piety have anything to do with it.

Many of these women were not eagerly embraced by their fellow Westerners, as they were flouting long-established mores by standing up for women's rights. The difference is that irascible women in the West elicited scorn and opprobrium, while irascible women in the Muslim world were flogged…or even stoned. Denouncing and scolding impudent women is one thing; lashing and executing them is quite another.

Even when it came to liberal Episcopalians (Eleanor Roosevelt and Frances Perkins), liberal Methodists (Anna Howard Shaw), Puritan apostates (Anne Hutchinson), and the occasional heterodox Catholic (Dorothy Day; who's salient characteristic was that she was a socialist), we find that it was the most audacious women–unhindered by "received wisdom"–who managed to overcome long-entrenched social barriers. The exceptions proves the rule. After all, one can only see the stars when it's dark outside. In broad daylight, the stars are not as stark…even as they continue to shine as much as they do at night.

What was it about "Western" culture that made such audacity possible?

Irreverence, it turns out, is the lifeblood of critical thinking. In the advent of the Enlightenment, critical thinking in "the West"–whether or not one had a penis–was ascendent. In ANY context, to buck a trend means to risk ostracism; but Progress is, of course, all about bucking trends.

Upon evaluating the female luminaries of the modern era, we encounter NOBODY who was guided by sacred doctrine. Progress for women categorically transcended religiosity. That is to say: In no way did progress depend on the hidebound embrace of ancient dogmas or the strict adherence to sacred doctrines. This applies to Dorothy Cotton and Ella Baker (who were members of the SCLC) as well as to SECULAR women: Elizabeth Cady Stanton…and Victoria Woodhull…and Ernstine Rose…and Margaret Fuller…and Ellen La Motte…and labor organizer, Lucy Parsons…and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (along with her daughter, Louisa). All of them: unabashed Freethinkers.

From Ida Tarbell to Ida B. Wells, it was universal principles that bolstered the cause for abolition, and galvanized women in a noble cause. Prior to the emergence of the few trailblazers mentioned here, why were there no women fixated on piety breaking new ground in women's rights?

The casus belli of such female activists was legitimated by–and grounded in–patently secular ideals. The pattern holds whether it was Florence Kelley or Florence Nightingale. Throughout history, those who most assiduously advocated women's rights did not derive their principles from Judeo-Christian / Islamic scripture…or from ANY religious text. This is no coincidence.

During the centuries preceding the present (post-War) era, England and America were not aberrations. There was an undeniable trend across the globe during the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolutions (from the end of the 17th century to the turn of the 20th century):

- **Scotland**: Frances Wright, Joanna Baillie, Mary Somerville, Christian Isobel Johnstone, Elizabeth Fulhame, Marion Kirkland Reid, and Jane Arthur

- **Ireland**: Louisa “Louie” Bennett, Anna Haslam, Frances Power Cobbe, Margaret Lindsay Huggins, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Constance Markievicz
- **Wales**: Ann Griffiths
- **Finland**: Ulrika Vilhelmiina Canth, Lovisa Adelaide Ehrnrooth, Maikki Elisabeth Friberg, Alexandra Gripenberg, Annie Fredrika Furuhjelm, and Vilhelmiina Sillanpää
- **Sweden**: Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, Charlotta Frölich, Wendela Skytte, Sophia Elisabet Brenner, Catharina Ahlgren, Fredrika Bremer, Sophie Adlersparre, Rosalie Roos, Frigga Carlberg, Ellen Key, and Emilia Broomé
- **Norway**: Camilla Collett, Hulda Garbog, Aasta Hansteen, Ditlevine Feddersen, Dorothe Engelbretsdatter, Cille Gad of Bergen, Randi Marie Blehr, Thekla Resvoll, Gina Krog, Anna Rogstat, and Betzy Kjelsberg
- **Denmark**: Birgitte Thott, Anne Margrethe Bredal, Line Luplau, Anna Kirstine “Annestine” Beyer, Caroline Testman, Louise Norlund, Astrid Stampe Feddersen, and Eline Hansen
- **Belgium**: Marguerite Coppin
- **Switzerland**: Suzanne Curchod and Marianne Ehrmann
- **Spain**: Concepcion Arenal Ponte and Concepcion Aleixandre
- **Italy**: Laura Bassi, Maria Gaetana Agnesi, Pauline Léon, Laura Cereta, Dorotea Bocchim, Giovanna d’Aragona, Lucrezia Tornabuoni, Anna Maria Mozzoni, and Teresita Pasini (a.k.a. “Alma Dolens”)
- **France**: Madeleine de Scudéry, Anne “Ninon” de l’Enclos, Émilie du Châtelet, Marie de Gournay, Madame de La Fayette, Marie Gouze (a.k.a. “Olympe de Gouges”), Anne Louise Germaine de Staël, Pauline Léon, Claire Lacombe, Flora Tristan, Marie-Sophie Germain, Catherine Bernard, Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin (a.k.a. “George Sand”), and Maria Deraismes {26}
- **Netherlands**: Anna Maria van Schurman, Katharyne Lescailje, Catharina Questiers, Wilhelmina Drucker, Mariane van Hogendorp, Aletta Jacobs, and Anette Poelman
- **Germany**: Maria Cunitz, Maria Margarethe Kirch, Dorothea Christiane Erxleben, Maria Sibylla Merian, Mathilde Franziska Anneke, Clara Zetkin, Lida Gustava Heymann, Auguste Schmidt, Hedwig Dohm, Louise Otto-Peters, Marie Stritt, Emmy Noether, Amalie Emmy Noether, Alice Salomon, Koncordie Amalie Dietrich, Agnes Luise Wilhelmine Pockels, and Anna Louisa Karsch {27}
- **Austria**: Marianne Hainisch, Bertha Pappenheim, Bertha von Suttner, Lise Meitner, and Ida Freund
- **Hungary**: Zsofia Torma
- **Poland**: Narcyza Zmichowska, Countess Emilia Plater, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Maria Konopnicka, and Marie Curie
- **Bohemia**: Eliska Krasnohorska (Czech)
- **Wallachia:** Urani Rumbo and Dora d’Istria (Romanian)
- **Serbia**: Milica Stojadinovic-Srpkinja and Mileva Maric
- **Croatia**: Ana Katarina Zrinska, Dragojla Jarnevic, and Ana Katarina Zrinska
- **Russia**: Johanna von Evreinov, Anna Volkova, Sofia Kovalevskaya, Mikhailovna Alexandra Kollontai (née Domontovich), and Anna Pavlovna Filosofova
- **Greece**: Soteria Aliberty and Kallirhoe Parren
- **India**: Tarabai Shinde, Anandibai Gopalrao Joshi, Kadambini Ganguly, and Vijaya Lakshmi Nehru Pandit
- **China**: Qiu Jin [a.k.a. “Jianhu Nüxia”] and Wang Zhenyi
- **Vietnam**: Ho Xuan Huong
- **Indonesia:** “Raden Adjeng” Kartini of Java
- **Korea**: Im Yunjidang and Na Hyeseok
- **Japan**: Toshiko Kishida / Nakajima of Kyoto (a.k.a. “Shoen”), Fusae Ichikawa, Raicho Hiratsuka, Shidzue Kato, Keiko Okami, and Shigeri Yamataka

- **New Zealand**: Kate Sheppard, Mary Ann Müller, Eveline Willett Cunnington, Margaret Bullock, Wilhelmina Sherriff Bain, Lily May Atkinson, Elizabeth Yates, and Rhoda Alice Bloodworth; as well as the Maori natives, Meri Te Tai Mangakahia and Heni Te Kiri Karamu (a.k.a. "Heni Pore")
- **Ethiopia:** Askala Maryam of Harar (a.k.a. Empress Zewditu)
- **Sierra Leone:** Adelaide Casely-Hayford
- **Ghana:** Yaa Asantewaa of Ejisu (Ashanti)
- **Jamaica:** Mary Jane Seacole
- **Brasil**: Mariana Coelho, Nisia Floresta ("Brasileira Augusta"), Maria Lacerda de Moura, Francisca Praguer Froes, Malvina Tavares, Jeronima Mesquita, and Berta Lutz
- **Argentina**: Petrona Rosende, Petrona Eyle, Fenia Chertkoff de Repetto, Cecilia Grierson, Herminia Catalina Brumana, Gabriela Laperriere de Coni, Julieta Lanteri, and Alicia Moreau de Justo
- **Chile**: Gabriela Mistral
- **Uruguay**: Paulina Luisi
- **Paraguay**: Maria Felicidad Gonzalez
- **Bolivia**: Adela "Soledad" Zamudio
- **Peru**: the writers "Clarinda" and "Amarilis"
- **Columbia**: Soledad Acosta Kemble
- **Venezuela**: Teresa de la Parra
- **Cuba:** Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda
- **Puerto Rico:** Isabel Andreu de Aguilar
- **Mexico**: Rita Cetina Gutierrez, Juana Ines de la Cruz, Jovita Idar, and Alicia Dickerson Montemayor

These stalwarts of female empowerment account for 46 countries outside of England, Canada, and the United States. While there are certainly many more worthy of accolades, such a sample-set should suffice to illustrate the present point: Women in certain places were far more apt to be engaged in feminism that women in other places.

In the above survey: Germany-Austria boasted at least 22 female luminaries; while–in spite of the suffocating influence of Roman Catholicism–France and Italy boasted at least 23 female luminaries between them. Scandinavia boasted at least 36 lunimaries. In Dar al-Islam, there were zero such luminaries…until, as we'll see, close to the turn of the 20th century, when reformers finally had the wherewithal to rise up.

In New Zealand, Kate Edger-Evans received a university degree in 1877, then Helen Connon received a degree four years later. Marion Todd, a lawyer in California, ran for state Attorney General in 1881. Emily Greene Balch led the International Congress of Women [renamed the Women's International League for Peace & Freedom] in 1919 (an effort for which she won the Nobel Peace Prize).
When Claudette Colvin (and then–more famously–Rosa Parks) refused to move to the back of the bus in Alabama, and when Sarah Louise Keys then filed a lawsuit based on this audacious position, it was not this or that religious dogma they invoked to make their point. They stood on universal moral principles, not on sacred doctrine.

Let's be clear: The present survey offers only a one-dimensional view of female empowerment around the world–focusing, as it does, on iconic figures as a barometer for what happened at the macro-level. Trailblazers–be it Harriet Ann Jacobs or Harriet Tubman or Harriet Beecher Stowe or Harriet Williams Russell Strong–are not always representative of what's going on amongst the common-folk; but they give an indication of what CAN happen.

Stalwarts of a movement provide us with a gauge about what's happening "on the streets", as it were. This is the case whether we're talking about Dorothy Detzer or Dorothy Cotton or Dorothy Day or Dorothy Parker or Dorothy C. Thompson. How much esteem is accorded to female trailblazers is a rough indication of how willing society is to embrace gender equality.

That said, we should not fixate solely on extraordinary women. For it is arguably even more important to focus on what is happening with ordinary women. John Rawls' reminded us that we should judge a society not by how well the best-off are doing, but how well we treat the worst-off. For it isn't about how high we can build our steeples; it's how high we can get the floor. As I stated in the first essay of this series: ***In our ardor to see a few privileged women "lean in" and break the glass ceiling, we mustn't forget about the women who are still languishing in the basement.***

So it is also worth noting INSTITUTIONAL developments. A point of reference from the modern era is the "Declaration of Sentiments" drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. There is a reason she did not cite ANY sacred scripture in the document. To wit: It was not that Stanton refrained from citing a holy book because she wasn't a denizen of Christendom; rather, she so refrained because there is nothing in it worth citing. Surely, if a major work made a resounding case for female empowerment, she would have been inclined to invoke it. And so she did…with SECULAR works. (Thank you, Thomas Paine, Mary Elizabeth Wollstonecraft, and John Stuart Mill.)

It is important to recognize the sporadic advances in women's rights occurred in the Muslim world. But the key is not merely to notice THAT they happened, but WHY and HOW they happened. The first commerce minister as well as the first founder of a university (to mention two notable examples) were Muslim women. However, such headway was made IN SPITE OF (certainly not because of) what was written in sacred scripture. As with all issues, for every laudable achievement in religious communities, the question of attribution must be addressed. In every case that headway was made regarding suffrage, it is not the contents of the holy books that can be thanked for it. Rather, it was the good judgement of the religionists themselves.

When, in the last century or so, sporadic headway was finally made in the Muslim world (in isolated cases), it was in spite of–not because of–any lingering fealty to the Sunnah. When, at the turn of the 20th century, revolutionary Muslimahs managed to break some new ground, they did not have Islamic scripture on their side. Predictably, for their efforts, they were ostracized by religious hard-liners. Throughout Dar al-Islam, women started to take a stand:

- **Azeri** feminist, Hamida Ahmad "bey qizi" Javanshir
- **Iraqi** women's rights activists, H. Bedia Afnan and Naziha al-Dulaimi
- **Turkish** women's rights activists, Fatma Aliye Topuz, Nezihe Muhiddin, and Halide Edip Adivar; as well as the Ottoman writer, Nigar Hanim
- **Kurdish** leaders like "Lady" Adela Jaff and "Lady" Halima Khanim
- **Lebanese** journalist, Labiba Hashim; as well as writers like Zaynab Fawwaz of Tabnin and Maryam Nimr Makariyus
- **Syrian** writer, Maryana bint Fathallah ibn Nasrallah Marrash of Aleppo
- **Palestinian** poet, May Elias Ziadeh (alt. Ziyadah)
- **Iranian** women's rights activists, Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, Bibi Khanoom Astarabadi, Mohtaram Eskandari, and Noor al-Hoda Mangeneh {28}
- **Egyptian** feminists, (princess) Nazli Fadil, Rawya Ateya, Aisha Taymur, Huda Sha'rawi, Nabawiyya Musa, Doria Shafik, Malak Hifni Nasif, and Inji Aflatoun
- **Indonesian** women's rights activists, Dewi Sartika and Raden Ajeng Kartini

- **Bengali** feminist, “Begum” Rokeya and political activist, “Begum” Sufia Kamal

In the Muslim world, these thirty exceptional women were, indeed, the exceptions. Each was the quintessential heterodox actor…which is to say: Each was a subversive. They were “radicals”. It was their iconoclasm that set them apart, not their devoutness. For each of these bold women earned her renown NOT for doctrinal fidelity, but by bucking the status quo; and countermanding precedent.

These indomitable women refused to be cowed by a patriarchal system, or by a climate of rampant misogyny. Felicitously, they were impertinent enough to take a stand AGAINST Islamic precedent; and did so IN SPITE OF the Sunnah. As usual, Progress was effected by audacity rather than sycophancy. Each of these courageous Muslimahs taught us a valuable lesson: A world of empowered women is better for everyone.

It was not a sudden efflorescence of piety that explains the notoriety of such women. They made headway due to their DEFIANCE OF piety.

Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire (pursuant to the first World War), Azerbaijan became the first Muslim-majority nation to be a parliamentary Republic, and to give women suffrage. This watershed moment was brought about by the pan-Turkic “Musavat” party. {23} It should be noted that this breakthrough occurred insofar as the State was SECULARIZED.

The first woman to break new ground in (feminist) Arabic writing was Mary Ajami–who operated under the pseudonym “Layla” for her own protection. However Ajami was not Muslim; she was a freethinker. In 1920, she founded the Women’s Literary Club of Damascus. In October 1929, thirteen centuries after Mohammad’s ministry, the first “Arab Women’s Conference” was held. It was convened in Jerusalem by both Muslim AND Christian Palestinian women. Alas, throughout the Muslim world, the cause has struggled and faltered ever since–hobbled as it has been by an abiding fealty to the Sunnah.

To gauge what is happening in society-at-large, we might also look at formal organizations and grass-roots movements (i.e. the demise and emergence of institutions) and/or at cultural and legislative trends (i.e. socio-political shifts). After all, there are many ways to assess the role that sacred scriptures have played–and continue to play–in the (dis)enfranchisement of women. Such assessments go beyond the scope of the present essay. Even as we cannot reduce entire movements to a few specific people, certain individuals are emblematic.

In the end, we find that the salient principles transcend culture; and do not in any way depend on this or that dogmatic system. The salience of secularity is born out by feminist heroes of the modern era–from Angela Davis and Naomi Klein to Leymah Gbowee and Arundati Roy. Yet we mustn’t forget that for every Edna St. Vincent Millay, there is a Phyllis Schlafly.

Many of the iconoclastic women listed here were the lynchpins of key organizations…or, as the case may be, the loadstars of groundbreaking movements. When evaluating trends, that counts for something. Each was a pioneer in her own way. All of them illustrate what is possible.

The history of female empowerment reminds us that mankind is worse-off when ANY community is marginalized; and society-as-a-whole benefits when enfranchisement extends to all humans qua fellow humans.

I hope to have shown that there was always a nascent proclivity to empower women, simmering beneath the surface, waiting to be realized in every culture that has ever existed. Clearly, there was no particular creed that enabled this to happen, as this salutary predisposition ended up being expressed to different degrees, and in myriad ways (or, as the case may be, squelched by adverse forces). It is plain to see that the realization of this potential requires no dogmatic system at all; it just requires us to get in touch with

our (incipient) humanity. At the end of the day, showing respect for women is simply a matter of showing respect for mankind. And that does not require an instruction manual.

{1 The Minoan "Rhe[i]a"–sometimes depicted as the daughter of Gaia–was seen by the Classical Greeks as mother of the Olympian gods. (See footnote 10.) Later, she was correlated with the Roman mother goddess, "Magna Mater".}

{2 The Jungian thinker, Erich Neumann proffered this mytheme, yet arguably took it too far in his 1955 "The Great Mother". Getting carried away with archetypes seems to be in the Jungian tradition.
We must be cautious not to become too smitten with mythemes–making them out to be more far-reaching than they really are. For example, J. J. Bachofen's 1861 "Das Mutterrecht" conjectured that, during certain epochs, the mother-goddess motif was all-encompassing. That is a bit of a stretch. While there have been undeniable maternal features in societies around the world since time immemorial, their degree has varied widely–from gynaecocracy to regimes brimming with male chauvinism. It should be no secret that patriarchal systems have, sadly, far outnumbered matriarchal ones.}

{3 Shakti is conceived as the primordial cosmic energy. Her avatar is generally known as Parvati ("Meenakshi" in Tamil). She represents Creation itself; and is seen as the agent of all change.
That the energy / forces of the universe is conceptualized as FEMININE speaks volumes. Shakti's most common manifestation is "Lakshmi", goddess of prosperity and good fortune. (The Chalukyas revered her as "Lajjit Gauri".) Another form is "Adi Para-shakti". Durga is her manifestation as a warrior-goddess. The core text presenting a FEMALE as the supreme power and creator of the universe is the "Devi Mahatmya[m]" [Glory of the Goddess], part of the "Markandeya Purana".}

{4 Most popular in Nepal, she was also considered a bodhisattva; based on the Hindu goddess of prosperity and good fortune: Lakshmi.}

{5 The Sumerian "Inanna" inspired various forms of "Ki": Eresh-ki-gal / Nin-ki-gal / Nin-ki-kuga; as well as Nin-hur-sag or "Nin-mah" (Great Lady) or "Nin-tu" (Lady of Birth); alternately dubbed "Dam-kina" (True Wife). The Akkadian "Kubab" was a deified version of the Sumerian queen, Kug-Bau.
Meanwhile, Antu[m] seems to have been interchangeable with both Ishtar and Inanna. (See footnote 30.) She seems to have been the source of the Semitic goddess, "Anat[h]", who had Egyptian, Phoenician, Ugaritic, Hebrew, Syriac / Nabataean, and Arabian versions. She may have even inspired the Aegean (Greek) goddess, "Hera".}

{6 Alternately: "Aretzaya". Her name is based on the Old Semitic (spec. Aramaic) term for "Earth": "ars" (from which the Hebrew "aretz" and Syriac "ardh" were derived). The etymology of the Abrahamic angel, "Arsayalalyur" is likely based on her.}

{7 The Hittites also worshipped the goddess "Shausha" [alt. "Shawushka"], who was adopted from the Hurrian goddess, "Shaushka", who was herself inspired by "Ishtar".}

{8 The Aegean version was "Hera [Teleia]"…a goddess famously (worshipped at Samos) who dated back to the Mycenaean period as [h]Era Argeia. She was seen as a perpetual virgin who represented annual re-birth.}

{9 These were their versions of Aphrodite and Hestia, respectively. The Scythian analogue of Gaia was "Api". Note that there are myriad goddesses that seem to derive from one another. The Semitic goddess "Atah" (of Palmyra) and even the Greek "Athena" may be based on the Phoenician / Ugaritic "Anat[h]", variations of whom were also found in ancient Egypt; and a shrine to whom was located at Antioch. (Herodotus posited her to be the Persian version of Artemis.) And SHE may have been a derivative of the

Akkadian goddess, “An[t]u[m]”…who was, in turn, derived from the (masculine) Sumerian “An[u]”.}

{10 She was later re-conceived as a Trojan goddess. The Roman version of Kybele was “Magna Mater”. (See footnote 1.) The Phrygian version was “Matar Kubeleya”. The Lydians also considered her mother of all gods: “Meter Theon Idaia”.}

{11 Interestingly, the Selene version of Artemis was a lunar deity; as was the Thracian version, Bendis. She was a derivative of the Mycenaean Greek “Potnia Theron”…who was, in turn, a derivative of the Minoan goddess of hunting: Britomartis (later rendered “Artemitos”). The cult of Orthia in Sparta led to the earliest form of “Artemis”–whom Homer referred to as “Artemis Agrotera”. The later Greek derivative was the familiar (mythical) female archer (alternately referred to as “Diktynna”). Also related is the huntress of Arcadia: “Atalanta”. The Roman version was Diana (sans bow and arrow), who was worshipped at Ephesus: the site of the original shrine to Artemis. She was the inspiration for several modern incarnations–as with, say, Edmund Spenser’s “The Faerie Queene” and, more recently, Katniss Everdeen in “The Hunger Games”.}

{12 Later, the Roman Imperial version was referred to as “Magna Dea” (manifestations of which were Juno and Minerva). In Arabian mythology, Aphrodite [Ourania] was correlated with the goddess “al-Lat” / “Alilat”, based alternately on the female counterpart of the Semitic god, “El” / “al-Ilah” and on the Assyrian goddess, Ishtar / Athtar[t]. (See footnote 13 below.) She was also correlated with the Roman Venus; and associated with the Nabataean goddess, “al-Uzza”.}

{13 The Aramaean goddess, “al-Lat” [alt. “Allat”; “Elat”] was rendered “Allat[u]” in Nabataean (Syriac) and north Arabian. The earliest version was “Athirat” in Ugaritic. She was known to the Himyarites as “Ilahatan” [alt. as “ar-Rabbat”; “the Lady”], to the Hadramites as “Athiratan” [mother of Athtar], and to the Carthaginians as “Allatu[m]”. She was essentially the female version of “Allah” (Syriac, then Classical Arabic); and may have been correlated with the Canaanite goddess, “Arsay”. Note that the masculine moniker is sometimes made feminine simply by appending the suffix, “-at”. Thus: the Aramaean “Elat” is the female version (read: consort) of the Canaanite deity, “El”, which served as the basis for the Aramaic / Syriac, Classical Arabic, and Hebrew monikers for god. (See footnote 24 below.) The same was done with the Sumerian godhead “An[u]” to yield the goddess “Anat” (possibly the basis for the Arabian goddess “Manat”); and with the Canaanite godhead “Baal”, thereby rendering the goddess “Baalat”. Also note that Hijazis (esp. the Quraysh) adopted the Nabataean version of the Greco-Roman goddess “Aphrodite Ourania”, dubbed “Al-Uzza”, who was sometimes considered the consort of the Arabian moon-god, Hubal.}

{14 Welsh lore also involves a divine mother (“Modron”) and son (“Mabon”) motif.}

{15 There are many mother-goddesses in African myth–including: Mawu (Dahomey), Abuk (Dinka), Yemoja / Oddudua (Yaruba), Mboze (Congolese), and Ana / Ani (Odinani / Igbo). Interestingly, the Odinani version of this last name was “Ala” / “Ali”.}

{16 Variations of her are found with the Yoruba (Nana Bukuu) and the Igbo (Olisa-buluwa).}

{17 Note that this goddess was herself a variant of the antecedent Sumerian goddess, “Innana”. Other derivatives of Innana were the Georgian “Ainina” / “Danana”, the Akkadian “Nanaya”, and the Hittite / Hurrian “Hanna-hanna”. Curiously, the ancient Celtic goddess, Anan[d] (a.k.a. “[d]Anu” / “Ana”) bears a striking resemblance. But were did Inanna come from? It would seem, we have an infinite regress. This is only a problem if we suppose a fully-formed divinity is conjured from stardust. Like any other meme, deities EMERGE. Every organism has a precursor in biological evolution. It does not follow that it’s animals all the way back. What was the first instantiation of this goddess is like asking what was the first hippopotamus.}

{18 It was common for there to be a patron deity (qua protector) of a city. For example, “Ea” vis a vis Eridu; “Marduk” vis a vis Babylon; “Dagon” vis a vis Ebla; “Baalat Gebal” (Phoenician) / “Atargatis” (Greek) vis a vis Byblos; “Melqart” (Canaanite) / “Melek-qart” (Phoenician) / “Miqart[u]” (Akkadian) vis a vis Tyre; “Kamish” (Amorite) [rendered “Chemosh” in Hebrew] vis a vis Moab; “Baal-Hammon” and his consort, “Tanit” (Punic / Phoenician) vis a vis Carthage; “Nekhbet” vis a vis Upper Egypt; Athena (Greek) vis a vis Athens; and “Yahweh” (Shasu, then Hebrew) vis a vis Jerusalem. This could even be found in meso-America, as with the Aztec sun-god, Huitzilopochtli, patron deity of Tenochtitlan.}

{19 Interestingly, the ancient Chinese attributed lightning to a female goddess (“Tian Mu”; alt. “Lei Zi”); as did the Maori (“Whaitiri”).}

{20 Even the Assyrian identity is not so straight-forward. Ishtar seems to have been correlated with the consort of their godhead, Ashur (himself a correlate of the Sumerian godhead, “Enlil”). In this capacity, she was dubbed “Mullissu” / “Mulliltu”…later rendered “Mylitta” in Greek, who was in turn correlated with the goddess, Aphrodite. Here, the Assyrians seem to have simply renamed Enlil’s consort, “Ninlil”.}

{21 Asherah was sometimes seen as the wife of the Semitic godhead, “El” / “Y-H-W-H”; as myriad idols and Aramaic inscriptions attest. The earliest Hebrews also worshipped her.}

{22 This was rendered “Astarte” in Greek. The Phoenicians also worshipped “Baalat Gebel”, the Lady of Byblos–who was later referred to by the ancient Greeks as “Atar-gatis” (presumably based on the aforesaid Aramaean moniker). She was worshipped at Bambyce in Syria (a city that was Hellenized to “Hierapolis”), where she was sometimes referred to as “Baal-tis”; and was later rendered “Ataratheh” in Aramaic and “Atarate” in Nabataean (Syriac). The Greeks correlated this goddess with “Dione”; who was, in turn, referred to by the Romans as “Dea Syriae”…a correlate of “Deasura”, goddess of the Syrians. Thus “Baalat Gebel” was associated with various Ishtar-derivatives; and–as with Allat–she was considered the sister and/or consort of the Early Semitic (Amorite) godhead, “El”. Roman Emperor Elagabalus was christened after this version of the deity: the masculine “El-Gabal”.}

{23 The State University at Baku also became the first major (bona fide) university in the Middle East–founded by (Tatar) Russian scholar, Vasili Ivanovich Razumovsky of Kazan.}

{24 The etymology for “Allat” is unique, as it was based on the morpheme for the Canaanite godhead, “El”. This feminine form indicates that the goddess was considered a consort of the godhead.}

{25 Lovelace was one of the great intellectual giants of the 19th century. As with most of the other women enumerated here, it was her secularity that undergirded her monumental achievements. The common thread was free-thought.}

{26 Anne “Ninon” de l’Enclos, Émilie du Châtelet was also known as Gabrielle Émilie Le Tonnelier of Breteuil; who was the Marquise of Châtelet, as well as lovers with Voltaire.}

{27 These women make one wonder: During this era, what the heck was going on in Deutschland that wasn't going on in, say, Arabia? Other than noting the fact that Germany had just undergone a Reformation AND an Enlightenment (indeed, it was at the epicenter of both), we might pose the following question: If these seventeen frauen had been born in the Hijaz instead of in northern Europe, would ANY of them have accomplished what they accomplished? The answer is: Almost certainly not. Germans were not INHERENTLY more adept than Arabians. So what was the clinching factor?}

{28 At the onset of the 20th century, a handful of Persian (Iranian) women rose up and helped foment the Iranian constitutional revolution. Needless to say, they did not have the Koran on their side. In any case, the explicitly religious Revolution of 1979 reversed any headway they may have made.}