



# Women inferior? Not in the 'old days'

**WOMAN'S EVOLUTION: From Matriarchal Clan to Patriarchal Family, by Evelyn Reed (Pathfinder Press, 491 pages, cloth \$15, paper \$4.95).**

Reviewed by Joanne Von Blon

This absorbing anthropological dig probes into our earliest social origins, back before homo sapiens to the days of hominids and, more significantly, "feminids." Evelyn Reed uncovers an ancient matriarchal clan system and as she carefully fits together all the shards of information, the shape that emerges as the creative and powerful force behind our ascent from ape to human is decidedly female.

While men were out hunting, says Reed,

women cultivated the earth, domesticated animals, gathered herbs, advanced language, served as architects, engineers and artists in building the settlements that were, in themselves, peaceful and egalitarian.

Early man's aggressive, competitive nature was a disadvantage, she says. Women were equipped by nature to lay the foundations of cooperation and culture and it was women who welded together the clans in which all men and women were "brothers" and "sisters" and a husband was someone from another tribe who came stealthily at night at the woman's invitation.

The father as head of the patriarchal family appeared only after a million

years of social evolution. Reed dates the subjugation of women from the time when the matriarchy eventually was overthrown.

Evelyn Reed has been tagged a "Marxist anthropologist." The red flag goes up, right? Beware a braying feminist who proves her assertions by perverting history. This worry is short-lived. Nearly 25 years of research has gone into "Woman's Evolution," and Reed has drawn her facts from studies of primitive societies by every major anthropologist.

She began by investigating the universal "incest taboo." Why, she asked, would humanity so far back be concerned with incest when they were igno-

rant of the role of sex in procreation, when they had no knowledge of the genetic dangers of inbreeding, and when they could observe animals mating with total freedom? Reed decided that the original taboo had been directed not against incest, but against the perils of cannibalism. During the hunting epoch, man-like creatures could not distinguish clearly between humans outside their clan and the other animals in general, and so they hunted and ate catch as catch can.

The first "marriages" then were economic treaties between large groups—clans who agreed to hunt together and not to eat one another and, incidentally, to allow visits back and forth for sexual purposes. A man's true home where he enjoyed status was with his mother's and sister's household.

The beginnings of the father-family came with the advent of agriculture and stock raising when humans first began to produce a surplus of goods. As men began to accumulate private property, to buy wives and, indirectly, children, the need arose for passing down inheritance through one's children.

According to Reed, the legend of Isis, the Egyptian goddess who appears both as the sister of Osiris and the wife of Osiris, represents a telescoped version of this historical changeover from the sister-brother clan partnership to the husband-wife family partnership.

Also according to Reed, Freud was mistaken in using the myth of Oedipus to name a sexual neurosis that only afflicts modern nuclear families. Oedipus had nothing to do with incest: he was "a man trapped between colliding kinship systems." His story "emphasizes the price in human suffering of establishing an unbroken line of fathers and sons."

Thus Reed refutes the common assertion that woman's biology has made her the inferior sex from the very beginning. It has been so for a mere 6,000 years.

Knowledge of her hidden history should heighten the self-confidence of women today who are aspiring to liberation. When the whole of history is writ, woman's place is definitely in the tome.

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