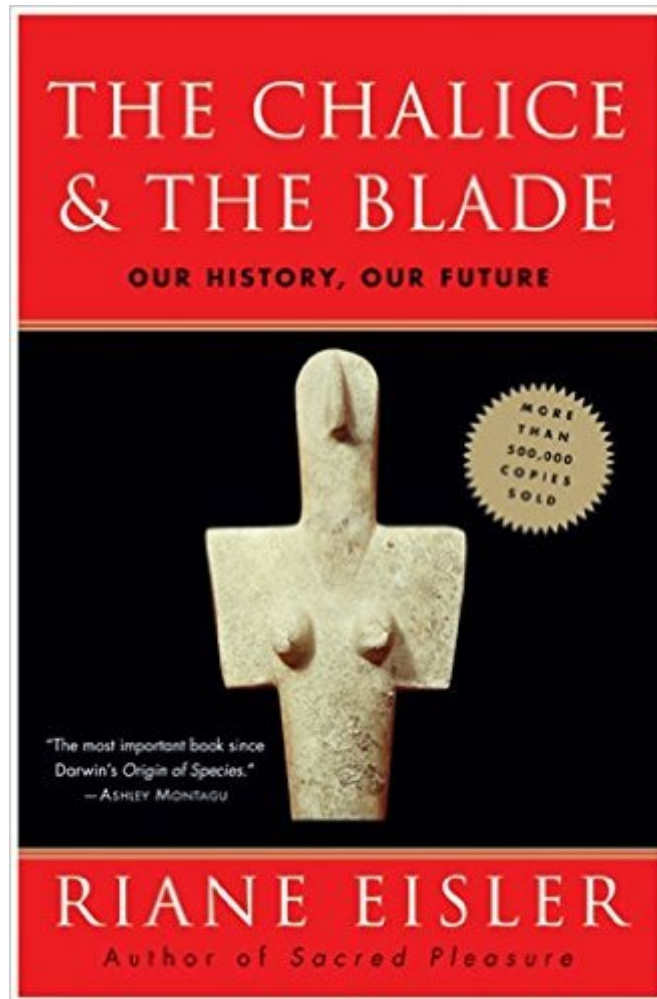


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The Chalice And The Blade: Our History, Our Future



Synopsis

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.

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Customer Reviews

Books like this, if read by a broad enough audience, could alter the course of history. Her insights are broad, her treatments are fair, and her paradigms apparently offer some degree of validity judging from the last section of her book (before the Epilogue) in which she describes 25 years ago much of the transformation we are witnessing today. The general thesis of her book is essentially this. The "Dominator" model of the world in which men rule not only each other, but especially women, with an iron and violent fist, is in fact an innovation that was introduced to a previously more egalitarian, Goddess-oriented civilization. The original civilizations looked at creation and recognized that the creation of life is essentially a female process, symbolized by the Chalice. It was only later when "civilization" decided that the power to take life superceded the power to give life, and replaced the Goddess with the Hero/War God (symbolized by the blade). Over the course of several centuries, the broad social paradigms shifted, and we find our ancestors of recorded history so steeped in the dominator model (as opposed to the more female "partnership" model...) that we take it for granted as simply the way we are, or worse, the way God made us. Eisler offers for the

reader's consideration the possibility that we don't have to accept the violence-laden tendencies of the dominator model anymore. With the rise of feminism in the past century, men and women alike are beginning to question the basic premise of a male-dominated society, and looking for ways to re-weave the social fabric...with some success. Indeed, perhaps enough success that we might be on the cusp of a new social transformation, moving away from the dominator model that has really only been the source of so much suffering, and toward a partnership model which values alliance and relationships more than possession and power. Unfortunately, we will be required to experience a backlash of fundamentalism for a while, as the bastions of the dominator model (monotheistic religion, communism, and capitalism) fight for their very survival. There are disturbing bits of awareness in this book for those readers (such as myself) who have not read much in the way of feminist material. It is shocking to learn of the basic, dogmatic, written tenets of religious and contemporary philosophy (including those of St. Augustine, Marx, and Nietzsche to name a few) who directly state that the subjugation of the female sex is essential for the survival of the human species! As we watch the burka-shrouded forms of Afghani women beg in the streets of Kabul at this time, we are reminded of how real, and how insidious this objective of the dominator model truly is. I only give this book 4 stars because there is a quality about her argument that leaves me slightly undone. Maybe it's because I, too, am a product of the old system that struggles to make the transformation. But I think it has to do with her insistence on an "absolute," i.e. that the way women would run the world is inherently better than the way men would run the world. Her argument is founded on experience, but is therefore also limited by paradigm. The partnership models she discusses at length in the early part of her book in Neolithic times and in Minoan Crete, were systems based on the cooperation of both men and women. She acknowledges this. Yet there is this nagging sense that she insists that the virtues of such a society are the exclusive realm of the female. I am inclined to think that this is possibly a paradigm-driven bias. Such virtues are now attributed to women more than men BECAUSE of the past 6000 years of the application of the dominator model, but successful transformation is wholly dependent on a mutual transformation of both women and men to a full partnership model that benefits from the inherent strengths of BOTH men and women, not just women. For while it is nearly impossible to disagree that virtually all of the tragic events of history can be pinned to boorish, often childish, frequently violent behavior of men, that behavior is not necessarily programmed by biology so much as by socialization (of course both play a role). So to suggest that "female virtues" are inherently superior to "male qualities" is missing a big part of the picture. Men were responsible for the subjugation of women. But what other developments do we presently benefit from that sprung from the strengths of men? The key lies in

her description of a "partnership," rather than on the suggestion that "one is better than the other." Truthfully, I think that this is what she intends (she is not a "man-basher"), but since her emphasis is only on the negative contributions of men, the potential for real partnership is never fully explored in this book. That said, this is a well written, thought provoking book that, as I said at the outset, could indeed facilitate the very transformation she discusses, if people would read it, talk about it, think about it, and reflect on whether or not we as a species really think that the course we've been on is in fact a healthy one.

I'd like respond to some recent reviews that suggest Riane Eisler's work is not based on fact and that it lacks plausibility. It is quite a sweeping dismissal of a scholarly and well researched ten year work, drawing from many disciplines, from a woman whose life has been dedicated to helping us understand the mess we are in: how we got here, how violence is perpetuated, and how we can get out of it. Riane Eisler presents us with a roadmap to peace; whether we have the wisdom to understand it and respond to it is something else. Until violence against children and women has been abated there will be no peace. Violence begets violence. Quoting from Adele Gettys "Goddess, Mother of Living Nature." "Since time immemorial our ancestors have left sacred images of the female form. From the caves of Lascaux in France to the Balkans in Eastern Europe the art and artifacts of the Paleolithic and Neolithic, which represent human's earliest myth-making impulses, indicated a deep reverence for life, and, in particular, for the Great Mother." "30,000 year old Stone Age nude figures are the first Western Goddess Representations. Twenty thousand years later, in the agricultural societies of the Neolithic (8,000---3,000 BCE) female images still predominated, indicating a remarkable, millennia-long cultural continuity. And, none were depicted with weapons. This is very important material, for to understand it means to reclaim our heritage. In the depths of my own profound spiritual journey twenty- five years ago, awakening to the loss of the Sacred Feminine, . . . living in isolation, creating constantly . . . Riane's book came into my hands. I was amazed and heartened to learn that humanity had such a history. Like many folks, I had never heard of the Goddess or our pre-history. Barbara Walker's "The Crone" also found it's way into my hands about that time. There is Merlin Stone's well researched book, "When God Was A Woman," which fleshes out even more this picture of a harmonious, egalitarian, spiritual and immensely creative life that spanned thousands of years, before patriarchy and "father god." The most convincing thing of all is that the religion and the temples of the Goddess, in her many names, are referred to again and again in the Bible. And, somewhere in the Koran it states, clearly with disgust, that some peoples engaged in the abomination of "worshiping women." The research of Riane

Eisler, noted anthropologist Maria Gimbutus, and more recently James DeMeo, PhD (among many, many others) drawing upon global archaeological and anthropological evidence present substantial proof that our ancient ancestors were non-violent. In his book, "Sahasia: The 4,000 BCE Origins of Child Abuse, Sex-Repression, Warfare and Social Violence, In the Deserts of the Old World" professor DeMeo writes, "These early peoples were peaceful, unarmored, and matrist (partnership model) in character. I have concluded that there does not exist any clear, compelling or unambiguous evidence for the existence of patrism (patriarchy--dominator model) anywhere on Earth significantly prior to c.4000 BCE and the earliest evidence appears in specific locations, from which it first arose, diffused outward over time to infect nearly every corner of the globe." It has been now a bit more than 2,500 years since religious myths of the sacred marriage of the Goddess and her divine lover faded from Western Cultural consciousness. Today our sacred images and myths tend to focus more on death, punishment, and pain than on sex, birth, and pleasure. Riane writes, "One of the challenges of our time is to create for ourselves and our children images and stories of the sacred more congruent with a partnership than dominator social organization. Images and stories in which giving and receiving pleasure and caring, rather than causing or submitting to pain, occupy center stage. For in truth we are living in a dysfunctional and antihuman system that threatens to destroy us all. At the same time, there is a new partnership system that is struggling to emerge." In this time of regression to a harsher, more violent dominator system, Riane's wise words are needed more than ever. May we pay attention to them. Janie Rezner, Mendocino, CA

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