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Mobile Societies, Mobile Religions: On the Ecological Roots of Two Religions Deemed
Monotheistic

By Edward N Surman

Claremont Graduate University
2019

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Edward N. Surman as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religion

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Abstract

Mobile Societies, Mobile Religions: On the Ecological Roots of Two Religions Deemed Monotheistic

by
Edward N Surman

Claremont Graduate University: 2019

How do environments affect the generation and development of religions? The investigation taken up in this dissertation is one attempt to address this question. This work focuses on one comparative case study: the potential causal relationship between agriculturally marginal landscapes and the two oldest religions deemed monotheistic. This dissertation argues that the respective origins (and early development) of communities of worship centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH were affected by similar environmental contexts. The dearth of literature concerning the effects of environments on religions extends to established theoretical and methodological approaches on the topic. The framework for approaching this research is based on Frachetti's *Non-Uniform Complexity Theory* and Taves' *Building Block Approach to Religious Studies*. Rather than discussing *monotheistic religions*, this examination considers the category into which fall the respective worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda as *religions deemed monotheistic*. This category appears to be defined by a set of certain building blocks that serve as referents for usage of the term *monotheism*. This dissertation shows that the presence or absence of certain building blocks in this set can be traced to the mobile pastoralist social and agriculturally marginal environmental contexts in which the communities of worship centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda appear to have originated. Among the building blocks present in these religions are: emphatic concepts of *Truth*; perceptions of *incompatibility* with other religions; perspectives that separate social or *ethnic* identities from religious identities; narratives

of *prophet-founders*; texts deemed religious; a focus on supernatural agent/s that exist beyond the material world. This dissertation also examines the absence of *buildings deemed religious* and *art deemed religious* originating with these religions: that these building blocks appear to have been adopted or developed eventually suggests adaptive change in these communities for the sake of survival. Indicative of the biological and cultural evolutionary fitness of these components is the survival of some key building blocks that define each of these religions across time and space. The geographic and social mobility, characteristic of these communities of worship, that have contributed to survival into the modern period ultimately appear to be connected to the parallel environmental contexts in which they developed. This research has implications for the impact of natural and built environments on the generation and development of cultural systems in the modern world. In the face of climate change, the strategic value of innovation and adaptation to the survival of human beings cannot be ignored.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my mom, Theresa Escobedo and my stepmom, Rita Chenoweth, two brilliant, generous, and pragmatic strategists.

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without financial support from the Klavins Family Trust. I am very grateful for the generous foresight and extraordinary kindness of John and Olga Klavins.

This work is the result of careful guidance by each of my dissertation committee members; I am lucky to have had the privilege to learn from three most incredible scholars. I am greatly indebted to Tammi Schneider for her resolute support in this ambitious project, her pragmatic encouragement to push my work to greater heights, and her rigorous supervision in training a next generation “data girl.” Tammi’s pragmatic brilliance, stalwart confidence in the potential of her students, and courage to see beyond “traditional” limits on scholarship have provided the needed freedom, security, and inspiration for this scholar and his research to develop. The “origin” of this dissertation can be traced back to a class taught by Jenny Rose and I owe a great deal of thanks for her careful attention to detail, kind honesty, and powerhouse intellect. I am very grateful for Jenny’s generous investment of time, energy, and support – far beyond the limits of her job at CGU – for the sake of my development and potential scholarship. Throughout the process of planning and producing this dissertation, when I have faced a particularly tangled mess of a problem, Cynthia Eller has appeared with a magnificent solution. I am in her debt for bringing strategic problem-solving abilities, an incredible mind, and generous support to this endeavor.

I am particularly thankful for the generous friendship of Dr. Mariam Youssef, who knows each thread in the complex tapestry of this work and went with me to pick out the skeins. Thanks to David Krausman and Andrew Kravig for their encouragement, discussions, and patience. It takes a village to raise a scholar: this work is the product of much love, kindness, and support from my colleagues, family, and friends.

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Chapter One: Introduction

*“The ecological approach to religion is not new.”*¹

In his article “An Ecological Approach to Religion”, Åke Hultkrantz argues for a causal relationship between natural environments and religions.² Since its publication, Hultkrantz’s “religio-ecological method” has been one of the few attempts to explore this potential relationship; it is both compelling and, due to its lack of substantiation, unsatisfying. Hultkrantz suggests that aspects of religions, like cultures, are shaped by the environmental contexts in which they develop. This assertion is made without support and the question raised by his article is left tantalizingly unaddressed: how do environments affect the generation and development of religions? The investigation taken up in this dissertation is one attempt to address this question. It is impossible to explore the full range of possible effects that natural environments may have had on religions in a single volume. By way of contributing to the investigation of this large question, this work focuses on a specific comparative case study: the potential causal relationship between “agriculturally marginal landscapes” and the two oldest religions regarded today as “monotheistic”. This dissertation argues that the respective origins (and early development) of communities of worship centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH were affected by similar environmental contexts.³

In the papers published from the 1979 Study Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, Hultkrantz writes: “The ecological approach to religion is not

¹ Åke Hultkrantz, “Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology,” in *Science of Religion. Studies in Methodology: Proceedings of the Study Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, Held in Turku, Finland, August 27-31, 1973* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 1979), 225.

² Åke Hultkrantz, “An Ecological Approach to Religion,” *Ethnos* 31, no. 1–4 (1966): 131–50.

³ Throughout this dissertation references to these deities will be made using their “proper names” as given in the texts associated with their respective communities of worship. It appears that the Tetragrammaton is the closest approximation of the “name” of the Israelite deity described in the Hebrew book of Exodus (6:3). The different histories of these deities makes the problem of calling YHWH by any name potentially much more complicated than naming Ahura Mazda.

new.”⁴ In a summary of the discussion that followed the presentation of papers by Hultkrantz and others, published in the same volume, Lauri Honko emphasizes that Hultkrantz saw the advocacy of his ecological approach as a reminder of forgotten scholarly interest in the subject.⁵

Hultkrantz’s statement can be partly supported by an examination of the work of “forerunners” in the development of the study of religion. Thinkers like Feuerbach, Frazer, and Freud appear to have comprehended something of the intricate historical relationship between “Religion” and “Nature.” In light of the development of various scholarly interests in environmental studies in the latter half of the 20th century, the work of these 19th century men would seem to provide a rocky foundation on which to build an investigation of the effects of natural environments on the development of religions. However, in the 21st century, more than five decades after Hultkrantz’s first methodological essay on the subject, the relationship appears to remain unexamined.

Anyone who has attempted a simple library search on scholarship concerning using terms like “ecology” and “religion” might ask: “What about work such as *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, or the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*?”⁶ In order to understand the relationship of these and other sources to the matter at hand, consider the following outline of this large and complex topic. Simplified for purposes of this writing, the relationship between human beings, as a species, and everything else on the planet might be characterized as a “two-way street:” humans (and their minds) are affected by, and affect, the world around them. This seemingly obvious

⁴ Hultkrantz, “Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology,” 225.

⁵ Lauri Honko, “Discussion,” in *Science of Religion. Studies in Methodology: Proceedings of the Study Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, Held in Turku, Finland, August 27-31, 1973*, ed. Lauri Honko and International Association for the History of Religions., Religion and Reason 13 (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 294.

⁶ Bron Taylor et al., eds., *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, 2 vols. (London; New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005); Roger S. Gottlieb, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Bron Taylor, “Exploring Religion, Nature and Culture: Introducing the Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 1, no. 1 (March 2007): 5–24.

statement can help to categorize the work of various scholars over the last fifty years, including Hultkrantz: his approach is aimed at understanding how human beings (and their cultural/religious developments) have been affected by the natural world. In contrast, by concentrating on the effects of religions on environments, scholars like Bron Taylor and Roger S. Gottlieb appear to take the opposite approach.

In “Religion and Ecology: A Review Essay on the Field”, Willis Jenkins describes a growth of interest in “Religion and Environment” as an emerging field in the process of shaping the discussion on this relationship.⁷ He suggests that current disagreements between scholars and (ostensibly) authoritative sources articulate the boundaries within which the nascent sub-field can be understood to be developing.⁸ Jenkins’ article confirms the fact that this new area of research is focused specifically on how humans *affect* the natural environment. With the growing rise of environmental activism in the last thirty years, it is easy to see how this one-sided interest, stemming from a broadly constructed relationship between the environment and religion, could have gained attention among scholars of religion and (predominantly Christian) theologians. As academic acceptance and social awareness, of the role that humans have had (and continue to have) in facilitating environmental degradation and climate shifts, grows, it is logical to see an expression of this increasing realization in the field of Religious Studies.

In the Anthropocene era the need for this important work cannot be underestimated. It is, however, important to differentiate between scholarship that seems to be focused specifically on the effects of “Religion” on human perceptions of (and actions affecting) natural environments and scholarship that seeks to understand how those environments affect the development of things religious. Although this work is important in making strides toward the goals of various

⁷ Willis Jenkins, “Religion and Ecology: A Review Essay on the Field,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 1 (2009): 187–88.

⁸ Jenkins, 188.

environmentalist movements, many of the sources that would seem to fall within the boundaries of the nascent sub-field described by Jenkins appear to construct the entire two-sided relationship of humans and environments in one-sided terms. This is problematic for the interests of researchers working on either side of our simplified conception: it obscures the need for work like that proposed by Hultkrantz and it buries a deep concern for how human minds and societies might be affected by climate change and environmental catastrophe.

Jenkins' approach is important in demonstrating the power of sources that are accepted as authoritative in marking out the boundaries of this burgeoning sub-field. Consider *Ecology and Religion*, a volume described by editors John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker to be an introductory textbook on the subject.⁹ Grim and Tucker locate the impetus for, and significance of, the book in the 21st century awareness of climate change and mass extinction, as well as their personal experiences studying religious perspectives on "Nature."¹⁰ Their introduction makes it clear that this volume is concerned specifically with the impact of religions on the ways in which humans act upon their environments. This approach would not be a problem except that the title presents this as an authoritative text on the topic of *Ecology and Religion*. This perspective is also presented in the way that Grim and Tucker described the relationship between this and other areas of academic interests: "Religion and ecology as an emerging field is closely connected to three key areas: ecology as a research science largely concerned with the study of ecosystems and species, conservation as an applied science concerned with valuing and preserving ecosystems and species, and ethics as ways of shaping human behavior in light of these disciplines."¹¹ It is important to observe that these fields seem to be connected by a shared interest in environmental conservation and the study of the impact of human beings on the non-

⁹ John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, eds., *Ecology and Religion*, Foundations of Contemporary Environmental Studies (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Grim and Tucker, 1–2.

¹¹ Grim and Tucker, 63.

human world. Like Grim and Tucker, Roger S. Gottlieb presents *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology* as an authoritative text on a field concerned with the influence of “Religion” on “Nature.” Consider the first line of his introduction: “For as long as human beings have practiced them, the complex and multifaceted beliefs, rituals, and moral teachings known as religion have told us how to think about and relate to everything on earth that we did not make ourselves.”¹² Despite the far-reaching (and fairly modern) way in which he constructs “Religion,” Gottlieb’s assertion makes obvious the perspective of this volume: “Religion” affects “Environment.”

Although it is beyond the scope of the present discussion to identify this trend in each source purporting to address the interaction between religions and environments, the pattern that emerges from a relevant literature is consistent with the examples offered here. It is to the credit of Gottlieb, Grim, and Tucker that, despite the titles of their respective volumes, they do not overtly promise to address more than the one direction of influence with which they are concerned. These editors are clear with regard to focus and deliver work consistent with the goal. It is important, however, to consider the impact that these authoritative texts must have on constructing scholarly and popular understanding of the research being conducted on this complex and multifaceted topic. How do potentially less (or perhaps less obviously) authoritative texts construct the sub-field described by Jenkins?

A book that could be described as an absurd foray into what the publisher’s website calls “the whole frontier between religion and the environment” is Ralph Tanner’s and Colin Mitchell’s *Religion and the Environment*.¹³ It is a testament to the dearth of scholarship on the subject that this problematic and marginally academic work should garner mention in this

¹² Gottlieb, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, 3.

¹³ “Religion and the Environment | R. Tanner | Palgrave Macmillan,” Palgrave Macmillan, accessed July 10, 2018, www.palgrave.com/us/book/9780333919743.

dissertation. It is significant, however, that the book is one of the few sources that claims to attempt to consider the entire question of how religions affect, and are affected by, environments. Tanner and Mitchell promise, “The book seeks to fill a notable gap in public understanding and in the literature by bringing together two human activities of wide significance: religion and the environment...And such interactions are two-way: religion on the environment and the environment on religion. They are considered separately.”¹⁴ The result is rife with unsupported claims and generalizations that, at best, render the entire volume suspect and, at worst, impede future research efforts on the subject. A seasoned researcher might easily laugh-off a volume that reads like the quintessential 19th century “armchair” scholarship, but what impression might this type of work instill in an undergraduate student who is still developing critical evaluation skills?

In contrast to *Religion and the Environment*, the *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture* (JSRNC) does not purport to address all issues relating to the topic. Importantly, however, it was introduced in 2007 with the specific aim of representing a greater variety of scholarly interests than its predecessor *Ecotheology*. Bron Taylor’s introductory article to the journal makes clear the intended message of inclusion and welcome to scholars working on both sides of the question of how humans affect, and are affected by, environments.¹⁵ The open-ended nature of an active scholarly journal makes this sort of promise much more likely to be delivered. Unfortunately, the potential of JSRNC is limited by the range of interested scholars willing to contribute research on a particular topic. At this point it should not be surprising to find that an overwhelming number of articles in the JSRNC are concerned with the impact of “Religion” on “Nature.” At a glance, this would suggest that the JSRNC fairly represents the recent distribution of scholarly inquiries into aspects of the relationship between religions and

¹⁴ Ralph Tanner and Colin Mitchell, *Religion and the Environment* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), x.

¹⁵ Taylor, “Exploring Religion, Nature and Culture: Introducing the Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture,” 6.

environments and thus emphasizes the need for work concerning the other direction of influence within this relationship.

The shift in approach described by Taylor in his introduction to the JSRNC appears to be connected to a similar attempt, to take a wide perspective, in the development of *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* under his editorship. Like the JSRNC, the encyclopedia appears limited to representing the current state of research in the field. Pertinent to this investigation, however, is an entry on the “religio-ecological method” that Hultkrantz laid out in his 1966 article in *Ethnos*.¹⁶ The appearance of Hultkrantz’s approach is mediated by the fact that the entry itself seems to have little to do with his work. In his gloss on Hultkrantz’s “perspective,” Jordan Paper gives over roughly ten percent of the entry to a confusing summary of the approach that renders it sounding more like the publisher’s description of Tanner’s and Mitchell’s *Religion and Environment*.¹⁷ Although Hultkrantz, as discussed below, was not always clear on the details of his approach, he was quite consistent across basic descriptions of the method in publications spanning nearly thirty years.¹⁸ Thus, it is surprising to find that Paper dedicates only 208 of the 1954 words of this entry to discussion of Hultkrantz and his method. The remaining nearly ninety percent is intended to provide a “demonstration” of the approach that culminates with the following paragraph:

The distancing of humans from animals, plants, and Earth in post-industrial cultures becomes absolute. Theriomorphic and plant spirits, once replaced by anthropomorphic spirits, are for an increasing number of contemporary Westerners now replaced by alien spirits from cosmically distant sacred realms. The North American spiritual journey into romanticized wilderness has been superseded by fantasized alien abduction.¹⁹

¹⁶ Jordan Paper, “Religio-Ecological Perspective on Religion and Nature,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*, ed. Bron Taylor et al. (London; New York: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005), 1363–65.

¹⁷ Paper, 1363.

¹⁸ See Hultkrantz, “An Ecological Approach to Religion”; Ake Hultkrantz, “The Religio-Ecological Method in the Research on Prehistoric Religion,” in *Symposium International Sur Les Religions de La Préhistoire : Valcamonica, 18-23 Septembre 1972*, Actes Du Valcamonica Symposium ’72 (Capo Di Ponte, Italy: Edizioni Del Centro, 1975), 519–28; Hultkrantz, “Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology”; Ake Hultkrantz, “Religion and Environment among the Saami: An Ecological Study,” in *Circumpolar Religion and Ecology: An Anthropology of the North*, ed. Takashi Irimoto and Takako Yamada (Japan: University of Tokyo Press, 1994), 347–74.

¹⁹ Paper, “Religio-Ecological Perspective on Religion and Nature,” 1365.

This quote highlights the distance Paper appears to have travelled from Hultkrantz or his “religio-ecological method.” Taken by itself, this could be dismissed as an example of scholarly wandering that happens to have been included in an encyclopedic volume. Taken together with the trend of scholarly interest that appears to have reductively constructed the relationship between religions and environments as a unidirectional flow of influence, Paper’s entry seems to be less of a resource than a barrier to understanding the kind of scholarship suggested by Hultkrantz in his proposal of the “religio-ecological method.”

In his entry in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* Paper claims that Hultkrantz’s approach was “stimulated” by the anthropological work of William Sanders.²⁰ Paper cites Sanders’ book (co-authored with Barbara J. Price) *Mesoamerica: The Evolution of Civilization* as a source for this claim, despite the fact that Hultkrantz’s methodological essay in *Ethnos* was published two years earlier.²¹ It is not the goal of this chapter to attempt to decipher Paper’s thought process in the course of writing this entry; it is, however, important to correct his mistake as to the inspiration for Hultkrantz’s work. In his 1966 article, Hultkrantz explicitly builds his “religio-ecological method” on the work of Julian Steward: “On the whole, Steward’s culture-ecological theory provides us with a clear-cut tool for measuring the impact of environment on culture.”²² An examination of publication dates concerning Hultkrantz’s reference to Steward’s 1955 book, *Theory of Cultural Change* (published two years before the date that Sander’s doctoral dissertation was submitted to the faculty of Harvard University) appears to prove Paper’s claim invalid. Further, Sander’s interest in the effects of the environment on the development of Mesoamerican cultures appears to stem from the same

²⁰ Paper, 1363.

²¹ William T. Sanders and Barbara J. Price, *Mesoamerica: The Evolution of a Civilization*, Studies in Anthropology (New York: Random House, 1968).

²² Hultkrantz, “An Ecological Approach to Religion,” 141.

general source as the “religio-ecological method:” seemingly widespread interest, on the part of social scientists at the time, in adapting the natural scientific concept of “Ecology” and, specifically, the resulting development of a “research strategy” within Anthropology of “cultural ecology.”²³ It is important to this investigation to establish the source material that led to the development of the “religio-ecological method” because Hultkrantz seems to adopt, with little change, his major conceptual framework directly from Steward.

A key concept developed by Steward and deployed in support of his “multilinear evolution” theory in *Theory of Cultural Change: the Methodology of Multilinear Evolution*, is the idea of the “cultural core.” He writes “[It is] the constellations of features which are most closely related to subsistence activities and economic arrangements. The core includes such social, political, and religious patterns empirically determined to be closely connected with these arrangements. Innumerable other features may have great potential variability because they are less strongly tied to the core.”²⁴ It appears that this concept of a “cultural core” is integral to Hultkrantz’s understanding of the “religio-ecological method.” In his contribution to *Circumpolar Religion and Ecology*, written nearly thirty years after “An Ecological Approach to Religion”, Hultkrantz explains that the features of a “cultural core” pertinent to “Religion” can be considered a “religious core.”²⁵ Steward argues that the “cultural core” is not a universal unit for cross-cultural comparison, but rather it can be used heuristically to interpret data in developing a “cultural type.”²⁶

It is this “type” that functions for cross-cultural comparisons and for examining

²³ Hultkrantz, 131, 134; Svein Bjerke, “Ecology of Religion, Evolutionism and Comparative Religion,” in *Science of Religion. Studies in Methodology: Proceedings of the Study Conference of the International Association for the History of Religions, Held in Turku, Finland, August 27-31, 1973*, ed. Lauri. Honko and International Association for the History of Religions., Religion and Reason 13 (The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 238.

²⁴ Julian Haynes Steward, *Theory of Culture Change; the Methodology of Multilinear Evolution*. (Urbana,: University of Illinois Press, 1955), 37.

²⁵ Hultkrantz, “Religion and Environment among the Saami: An Ecological Study,” 349.

²⁶ Steward, *Theory of Culture Change; the Methodology of Multilinear Evolution.*, 88–89.

connections between features of cultures and environments.²⁷ Hultkrantz appears to assimilate much of Steward's concept with a simple shift in terminology:

The quality and essence of this environmental impact on religion may be assessed in the same way as in cultural ecology, viz., by the formulation of the concept *type of religion* corresponding to Steward's cultural type. The *type of religion* contains those religious patterns and features which belong to or are intimately associated with the cultural core and therefore arise out of environmental adaptations... *Type of religion* may now be defined as a constellation of important religious traits and complexes which in different places have similar ecological adaptation and represent a similar cultural level.²⁸

Hultkrantz's integration of Steward's theoretical approach points to an important methodological consideration for this dissertation: connections between environments and religions are best seen at the level of "categories." Recall that the present investigation is aimed at examining the potential causal relationship between "agriculturally marginal landscapes" (a category of environment) and the two oldest religions regarded today as "monotheistic" (a category of religion). Although methodological details are discussed in greater depth in the next chapter, it is important to tease out particular aspects of Hultkrantz's "religio-ecological method" that can be used in this research from those that are too problematic for effective application.

In "Ecology of Religion, Evolutionism and Comparative Religion" Svein Bjerke articulates a key issue with Hultkrantz's adapted "religious core" concept. He writes, "The 'type' of religion is thus basically the religious aspect of the cultural core. It is, however, conceded by Steward that it is difficult to decide with some precision exactly what elements to include in the cultural core as its definition in any given case..."²⁹ This lack of specificity and the apparent limited potential for standardization across studies seems to weaken the applicability of Hultkrantz's approach. Bjerke observes, "Hultkrantz is well aware of the difficulties inherent in the concept of cultural core and thus of his 'type of religion', but he still seems to conceive of the

²⁷ Steward, 89.

²⁸ Hultkrantz, "An Ecological Approach to Religion," 146.

²⁹ Bjerke, "Ecology of Religion, Evolutionism and Comparative Religion," 239–40.

distinction between the ecologically explainable type of religion and the historically explainable features which are not part of the 'type of religion', as crucial to his religio-ecological approach.”³⁰ Bjerke’s criticism is grounded in claims made by Hultkrantz regarding the applicability of his “religio-ecological method” to only those religions with features obviously impacted by environmental contexts.³¹ Although Bjerke’s comments were presented in 1973, less than a decade after Hultkrantz’s article appeared in *Ethnos*, they apply as late as twenty years later when the latter maintained, “The method presupposes a situation where the impact of nature on culture is discernable. In practice this limits the use of the model primarily to investigations of what were formerly called ‘primitive’ religions.”³²

It is difficult to deny the problematic nature of a supposedly scientific “method” proposed with the caveat that it can only be used in cases where results are obvious in advance. It is important to recognize the type of scholarship that fits within these particular confines: that of anthropologists like Hultkrantz. Considering his voluminous publication history and career, it seems fair to characterize Hultkrantz as a scholar interested primarily in the religions of indigenous societies. His interest in the effects of the environments contextualizing the development of these religions has been established, but it is important to identify the path that led Hultkrantz to this particular interest. The histories of Anthropology and Religious Studies are full of work by scholars like Hultkrantz, who have attempted to apply social scientific methods to their study of specific indigenous religions. The various individual intentions behind taking up such work and the consequences of scholarship resulting from these endeavors can, at best, be described as a “mixed bag.”

A volume such as *Circumpolar Religion and Ecology* would seem to be aimed at

³⁰ Bjerke, 240.

³¹ Hultkrantz, “Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology,” 224.

³² Hultkrantz, “Religion and Environment among the Saami: An Ecological Study,” 349.

addressing the question that motivates the present investigation, but the studies appear to be limited by the same issue noted by Hultkrantz regarding his “method:” the lack of applicability. In fairness to many of the thoughtful scholars whose work is published in this volume, the questions motivating the research presented in the book do not seem specifically concerned with the influence of nature environments on the generation and development of religions. Instead, potential connections of this sort are described or observed in the course of examining a particular feature of this society or that culture. It is beyond the purview of this investigation to unpack the long history of what Alice B. Kehoe calls “the European Primitivism tradition,” but it is cogent to this discussion to point out that within such a history are studies to which the “religio-ecological method” could be applied.³³ Although Hultkrantz is not alone in claiming that indigenous religions are more directly affected by environmental contexts, the lack of data supporting this claim underlies the motivation for this dissertation. It is unfortunate and ironic that, in decades of calling for scholarship to fill this gap, Hultkrantz himself precluded the possibility of research that might validate his claim.³⁴ It seems quite possible that the “religio-ecological method” is limited in applicability because it was generated in a culture that conceived of an insurmountable gap between European Christian and indigenous societies.³⁵ This dissertation is not intended to validate Hultkrantz’s claims or hold up his work as a model of scholarship. Rather, this research shows the influence of natural environments on the origins of specific aspects of the worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda that appear integral to the modern religions of Judaism and Zoroastrianism, respectively. Due to the limitations built into his “religio-ecological method,” Hultkrantz’s work can, at most, be treated as a theory concerning

³³ Alice B. Kehoe, “Eliade and Hultkrantz: The European Primitivism Tradition,” *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 3/4 (1996).

³⁴ Hultkrantz, “Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology,” 224.

³⁵ See Kehoe, “Eliade and Hultkrantz”; For a discussion of the development of this schema in the study of religion in 19th century Europe, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

the potential influence of environments on religions, rather than a methodology for investigating such an idea.

It is to his credit that Hultkrantz spent decades arguing for this approach despite the threat of being accused of “materialistic reductionism” or “environmental determinism.” Steward and Hultkrantz appear to have been aware of these criticisms and attempted to protect their work from accusations of this kind. So too must these criticisms be discussed for purposes of this investigation. Steward argues for an approach to examining patterns of cultural development that “is distinctive in searching for parallels of limited occurrence instead of universals.”³⁶ Although he is ultimately concerned with identifying the variables or conditions that might lead to such parallels, it is significant that Steward explicitly distinguishes his approach from generalizing perspectives that assume either (1) that cultures develop within a universal sequence of evolutionary stages or (2) that cultures develop under relatively unique circumstances and are inevitably different.³⁷ Steward writes, “I wish to stress that my delimitation of the problem and method precludes all efforts to achieve universal explanations or formulations of human behavior.”³⁸ Similarly, Hultkrantz differentiates his approach from the work of scholars who “favour a materialistic explanation of religion,” by limiting the scope of applicability to cases where a connection is obvious without research.³⁹ He writes,

Some ecologists have used this general scheme to introduce a reductionist, materialistic view of cultural development. However, my own conception of the nature of ecological impact differs considerably. I believe that the environment offers materials, associations, and perspectives which may influence a people, but it does not automatically impose itself on a culture, nor does it constitute the conditions of cultural creativity. A society’s use of its environment expresses, rather than causes, its cultural ideas and activities. In a way, the environment may, directly or indirectly, influence the directions of human creativity.⁴⁰

³⁶ Steward, *Theory of Culture Change; the Methodology of Multilinear Evolution.*, 14–15.

³⁷ Steward, 8–14.

³⁸ Steward, 7–8.

³⁹ Hultkrantz, “The Religio-Ecological Method in the Research on Prehistoric Religion,” 522.

⁴⁰ Hultkrantz, “Religion and Environment among the Saami: An Ecological Study,” 348.

Hultkrantz appears to wrestle with articulating the boundaries of these limitations and although he seems able to communicate the fact that religions are the results of complex interactions of various factors, he struggles to parse out the environmental variable.

In order to avoid some of the traps that appear to have stymied Hultkrantz, this dissertation must consider concerns that seem to underlie accusations of “environmental determinism” or “materialistic reductionism.” Hultkrantz explains the history of this concern in his field:

Fundamental to the religio-ecological approach is the insight that nature not only restricts and impedes, but also stimulates cultural processes. The early anthropogeographers and students of human ecology took the positive, change-promoting power of environmental influence for granted. Their exaggerations were repudiated by one well-known scholars from their own ranks, Friedrich Ratzel, and by later researchers in anthropology and ethnology. Indeed, in insisting on the limiting but not creative importance of environment the anthropologists reacted too strongly against the ecologists.⁴¹

This overreaction might explain, in part, the dearth of scholarly interest in the potentially causal influence of environments on religions. The reaction, itself, may be seen in the volume of publications taking up discussion of the influence of “Religion” on “Nature.” To an extent, “Environmental Determinism” appears to be an accusation of exaggerated, one-sided bias: human beings are affected by environments. Ironically, in the absence of nearly any scholarship on the influence of environments on religions, the sub-field of “religion and ecology” seems to have developed an image of exaggerated, one-sided bias in the other direction: human beings affect environments.

In their article “The Role of Symbolic Capacity in the Origins of Religion”, Terrence Deacon and Tyrone Cashman argue, building on Deacon’s work in *The Symbolic Species*, that the development of capacities among human species for language, society, and symbolic thinking led

⁴¹ Hultkrantz, “Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology,” 224–25.

to the development of a kind of cognitive evolutionary niche.⁴² They argue that this niche exerted evolutionary pressures that ultimately resulted in the development of abilities to comprehend and function in two worlds.⁴³ They write, “We possess unprecedented mental features that evolved in an environment radically unlike any other. We live in a double world, one virtual, consisting of symbols and meanings, and one material, consisting of concrete objects and events. No other creature has evolved in such radically divergent niches.”⁴⁴ This concept could be important to understanding part of the concern underlying an accusation of “environmental determinism:” perspectives that privilege the physical environments that contextualize our lives (and histories) may entail a lack of acknowledgement of the cognitive, symbolic rich world in which humans *also* live and interact. With regard to the investigation at hand, it seems that the way to avoid struggling with the potential threat of such a critique is to take into consideration the two worlds in which human beings are affected and cause effects.

In his book *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*, Michael D. Frachetti describes the perspective underlying his work as “environmental pragmatism” instead of “environmental determinism.”⁴⁵ He writes, “Pastoralist mobility, for example, is first and foremost a strategic response to the environmental conditions used to grow pastoralists’ primary subsistence resource: their herds. Mobility orbits are strategically changed in reaction to short-term fluctuations in the natural environment such as extremely wet or cold summers in alpine meadows, for example. These pragmatic choices impact the environment in

⁴² Terrence William Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*, 1st ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); Terrence William Deacon and Tyrone Cashman, “The Role of Symbolic Capacity in the Origins of Religion,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3, no. 4 (December 2009): 502–4.

⁴³ Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*; Deacon and Cashman, “The Role of Symbolic Capacity in the Origins of Religion,” 502–4.

⁴⁴ Deacon and Cashman, “The Role of Symbolic Capacity in the Origins of Religion,” 504.

⁴⁵ Michael D. Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 22.

both intended and unintended ways.”⁴⁶ Frachetti’s example of the interconnected exchange of influence clearly acknowledges the importance of the environment as well as the power of human beings to make decisions in and about their surroundings. His concept of “Environmental Pragmatism” can be used to interpret Hultkrantz’s idea (adapted from Steward’s statement mentioned above) of looking for “fixed types and regularities in the process of cultural development, regularities which should not be considered as laws but as natural recurrences in similar situations.”⁴⁷ “Environmental Determinism” is what Hultkrantz describes as “laws” and seems to imply an inevitability to the trajectories of human development in certain landscapes that precludes human creativity and adaptability. “Environmental Pragmatism,” on the other hand, connects to his phrase “natural recurrences in similar situations” and emphasizes human agency, strategic responsiveness, and innovation in the face of environmental challenges and opportunities.

Using Frachetti’s concept of “Environmental Pragmatism,” this dissertation argues that the religions respectively centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH developed, in part, as pragmatic responses to limits and opportunities presented by similar environmental contexts. Chapter Two (“An Approach: Theories and Methodology”) discusses the applicability and usefulness of another concept developed by Frachetti that is particularly cogent to this investigation. His “Non-Uniform Complexity Theory” takes the fairly well-established assumption of “Environmental Pragmatism” on an economic level (mobility as an economic response to resource limits and opportunities) and extends it to include political and social developments. He argues that models of social complexity based on the settled agricultural societies of the ancient Near East or Asia cannot accurately represent the systems of pragmatic

⁴⁶ Michael D. Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 22.

⁴⁷ Hultkrantz, “An Ecological Approach to Religion,” 132.

responsiveness that underlie economic as well as social development among steppe societies.⁴⁸

The same chapter explores the groundbreaking work of Ann Taves and explains how her “Building Block Approach” serves as a highly productive approach to this research. In arguing for her methodology Taves pushes against a traditional *sui generis* approach of protecting things considered religious from comparison with those considered non-religious.⁴⁹ By suggesting that scholars study “things deemed religious” as opposed to “religious things”, she points to processes of social-construction that underlie the generation and development of things religious. Like Frachetti's notion of environmental pragmatism, the reorientation Taves proposes highlights the innovative thinking and creative adaptability of human actors as they interact with each other and the worlds around them. By drawing attention to the creation and creators of a “thing” Taves' Building Block Approach offers a way to both avoid and problematize the issue of defining “Religion” while allowing a subject “thing” to exist for “deemers” as “religious”.

Although Taves' approach, and method of redefining of subjects, is aimed at understanding the “building blocks” that make up various religions, Chapter Three (“Religions Deemed Monotheistic”) uses this method to describe the category in which the worship of Ahura Mazda and YHWH appear to belong. This chapter is the first of three that explore the categories of religion (Chapter Three), society (Chapter Four), and landscape (Chapter Five) that appear to be connected. Adapting Taves' approach, this work explores the ways in which these religions have been (and continue to be) “deemed monotheistic” and interrogates the functionality of such categorization. This discussion is not merely theoretical but has real consequences for adherents in various parts of the world. The struggle of Jewish and Zoroastrian communities in diaspora

⁴⁸Michael D. Frachetti, “Differentiated Landscapes and Non-Uniform Complexity among Bronze Age Societies of the Eurasian Steppe,” in *Social Complexity in Prehistoric Eurasia: Monuments, Metals, and Mobility*, ed. Bryan K. Hanks and Katheryn M. Linduff (Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21–24.

⁴⁹Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered : A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2009), 122–23.

has historically turned on the manner in which their respective religions have been regarded by predominantly Christian and Muslim powers. By defining the subject “type” of “Religion” according to the language proposed by Taves, this research assumes the most objective scholarly perspective possible with regard to these cases: it neither confirms nor deny the validity of claims that one or both of these religions is “monotheistic.”

Although there are a number of other religions that may fall into the category of “religions deemed monotheistic” this dissertation focuses on the generation and early development of the worship of Ahura Mazda and YHWH. The choice of case studies is partly informed by a statement made by Hultkrantz in *An Ecological Approach to Religion*: “Every historian of religion knows what a rôle the alleged desert pattern of the primitive Israelites has played in the study of Oriental religions.”⁵⁰ In *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, Mary Boyce uses similar language in commenting, “The beliefs and observances of the Old Iranian and Vedic religions were evidently shaped by the physical and social background shared by the Indo-Iranian peoples....The vastness of the steppes encouraged the Indo-Iranians to conceive their gods as cosmic, not local, divinities”⁵¹ Boyce's observation closely echoes Hultkrantz's comment regarding Israelite religion: each statement is offered without substantiation and claims a causal relationship between certain environments and religions.

The work of Carlos A. Botero et al. appears to be much more solid.⁵² In their 2014 article *The Ecology of Religious Beliefs*, Botero et al. suggest that beliefs in “moralizing high gods” are “more prevalent among societies that inhabit poorer environments and are more prone to ecological duress.”⁵³ Although this finding *seems* to be much more scientifically authoritative

⁵⁰Ake Hultkrantz, “An Ecological Approach to Religion,” *Ethnos* 31, no. 1–4 (1966): 147.

⁵¹Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, Textual Sources for the Study of Religion (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 8–9.

⁵² Carlos A. Botero et al., “The Ecology of Religious Beliefs,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, no. 47 (2014): 16784–89.

⁵³ Botero et al., 16784.

when compared to the claims of Hultkrantz and Boyce, issues of definitions and scope belie its promise to the investigation at hand. Botero et al. define “moralizing high gods” as “supernatural beings believed to have created or govern all reality, intervene in human affairs, and enforce or support human morality.”⁵⁴ Such a definition, fitting so closely to modern Jewish, Christian, and Muslim conceptions of “God,” suggests methodological assumptions that have featured prominently in the history of Religious Studies. These assumptions might not be as concerning if the authors limited their interpretation of the findings to the modern societies in which a concept like this might function, but Botero et al. are interested in the evolutionary implications of such data. Taking interest in a long view of “Religion” across the entirety of human history has yielded remarkable (and controversial) biological and cultural evolutionary theories in the nascent sub-field of “Cognitive Science of Religion” (CSR). Natural and social scientific approaches, integrated in this kind of work, lend findings an authority and credibility that bodes well for an increase in future research. Unfortunately, this promise can be undermined by a lack of attention given to what Taves describes as “[grappling] with the instability of the concept of ‘religion’ at the cultural or individual level” a struggle familiar to scholars of religion.⁵⁵ She points out that many researchers in CSR, like Botero et al., focus on supernatural agents or divine beings in defining what is religious and suggests that this, as with other similarly narrow approaches, presents limits and difficulties.⁵⁶ Thus, studies like that conducted by Botero et al. are a step in the right direction away from the unsupported claims of Hultkrantz and Boyce, but, in terms of reliability and substantiation, it is clear that more work is needed. Chapter Two considers further some of the theories proposed by scholars working in CSR and explores in greater depth the applicability of these ideas to this investigation.

⁵⁴ Botero et al., 16784.

⁵⁵ Ann Taves, “Reverse Engineering Complex Cultural Concepts: Identifying Building Blocks of ‘Religion,’” *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 15 (2015): 192–93.

⁵⁶ Taves, 192.

The potentially causal influence of environmental contexts on the development of these religions is investigated across six points of comparison: three categorical “types” and three “building blocks.” Chapters Three, Four, and Five examine the categories to which these cases belong and argue that the origins of these two religions deemed monotheistic in mobile pastoralist societies was influenced by the agriculturally marginal landscapes. Applying Taves' Building Block Approach to the investigation, Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight explore the relationships of three components of religions to these cases: temples (“buildings deemed religious”), icons (“art deemed religious”), and narratives of “prophet-founders” (“people deemed religious”).

The final chapter of this dissertation offers remarks on a few of the implications of the research. It is clear from this introduction that the current body of research, on the relationship between environments and religions, is unbalanced. Although the scholarship available on the impact of societies, culture, and religions on “Nature” continues to serve an important function in and outside of academic circles, the environmentalist efforts of scholars of religion and theologians would be bolstered by research examining the effects of environments on the generation and development of religions. Although an awareness of climate change has only manifested itself as such in recent years, innumerable scholars and activists have fought for decades (and longer) to remind humanity that *Homo sapiens* is a part of the interconnected biosphere of this planet. The work of Rachel Carson and James Lovelock encourage readers to comprehend human psychology as something that has evolved within (and is continuously engaged with) pressures of natural and built environments. It is important to remember that participants in the earliest communities of worship centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH were also members of the same species as the humans reading this dissertation. If they could be affected by their environmental contexts such that they developed particular religious, cultural,

social, or economic systems – why not modern populations? How are modern humans affected by natural and built environments? As climates shift and the biosphere threatens catastrophic changes how will the minds of seven, ten, or twenty billion humans be affected? As landscapes, across the globe, are reorganized into newly unfamiliar and potentially harsh environments, how will this species adapt? Survive? These are very big questions that cannot be answered by this dissertation. Perhaps, however, there are tools for addressing such questions, or for surviving the threat of environmental ruin, to be found among the religious remains of ancient societies that adapted to survive what some might consider to be difficult environments.

Chapter Two: An Approach: Theories and Methodology

“Fields that are defined by their object of study tend to be ‘raider discipline’ when it comes to theory and method. We borrow whatever seems useful relative to our subject matter from wherever we can find it.”⁵⁷

The novelty of the current investigation makes Taves’ observation particularly cogent to this dissertation: the dearth of established theoretical and methodological approaches on the topic means that one must “borrow whatever seems useful” from “wherever [one] can find it.” The last chapter discussed some of the consequences of this perspective and the impact of Steward on the “method” advocated by Hultkrantz for over thirty years. In his paper titled “Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology” Hultkrantz describes his perspective on Steward and the relationship of his work to the development of the “religio-ecological method.” He writes, “In principle, Steward is right of course...I think it is possible to accept Steward's model in its gross features, and to apply it to religion and develop it further.”⁵⁸ Although this dissertation is interested in the core question raised by Hultkrantz, the limitations built into his “religio-ecological method,” make the work generally inapplicable to the task at hand. At best, it seems possible to treat Hultkrantz’s work as a theory suggesting environments may influence the generation and development of religions, rather than a methodology for investigating such an idea. In lieu of the “religio-ecological method”, this chapter proposes an approach using Frachetti’s “Non-Uniform Complexity Theory” and Taves’ “Building Block Approach” to Religious Studies. This discussion will lay out the approach and explore the applicability of these sources to the investigation concerning the influence of agriculturally marginal landscapes on the respective origins (and early development) of worship centered around Ahura Mazda and

⁵⁷ Ann Taves, “2010 Presidential Address: ‘Religion’ in the Humanities and the Humanities in the University,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 289, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfr004>.

⁵⁸ Hultkrantz, “Ecology of Religion: Its Scope and Methodology,” 227.

YHWH.

It is important to emphasize that, just as this research is but *one* attempt to address an overarching inquiry into the influence of environments on religions, this chapter suggests but *one* approach to the study of these cases. In the introduction to her book *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, Tammi Schneider makes a point of clarifying each word in her title. Regarding the first word, she writes, “While this may appear an obvious inclusion to the title, the emphasis here is that the author recognizes this is not the final say on the topic but one of many approaches. It highlights that other approaches to the topic exist and there are certain to be more. This volume happens to be one particular opinion.”⁵⁹ With the exception of the acknowledgment that “other approaches to the topic exist,” Schneider’s comments reflect the approach of this dissertation.

The last chapter discussed the threat perceived by Hultkrantz and Steward regarding accusations of “Environmental Determinism” and the rationale for grounding the present investigation in Frachetti’s concept of “Environmental Pragmatism.”⁶⁰ Although this issue was discussed with regard to the work of two anthropologists (Steward and Hultkrantz) it seems that there may be a connection between this issue and concerns regarding scholarly positionality and perspective in Religious Studies. Questions regarding the religious perspectives (and intentions) of scholars in the field seem to be so unavoidable that this is an important place to begin outlining the approach of this dissertation.

In the published remarks from her “2010 Presidential Address” to the American Academy of Religion (AAR), Taves highlights her experience with this phenomenon in panel discussions

⁵⁹ Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011), 2.

⁶⁰ Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*, 22.

responding to her 2009 book.⁶¹ She writes, “In these conversations, I was repeatedly questioned about my position and point of view; at times, I felt as if I was supposed to adopt a fixed position with respect to a series of binaries: scientific or post-modernist, critic or caretaker, and religious or nonreligious.”⁶² Taves shares this experience in an apparent effort to highlight the fact that such “binaries” oversimplify and artificially flatten a complex field of study. Citing a study conducted by the AAR, Taves notes, “Among other things, according to the report, we agree that the religious studies major is, by its very nature, intercultural, comparative, and multidisciplinary.”⁶³ This observation does not alleviate scholars of the burden of responsibility to account for their claims, but it does offer insight into why researchers engaged in the study of “Religion” might disagree regarding the standards of discourse and scholarship. Taves argues that this is connected to the relationship of scholars of “Religion” to the objects of their research: unlike “disciplines defined by a level of analysis, such as physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and sociology” Religious Studies is “a discipline that is defined by its object of study.”⁶⁴ A key difference (and one that is pertinent to this dissertation) is the way in which “Theory” and “Method” are regarded in each category. Whereas disciplines like Physics and Biology, Taves suggests, “bring common methods and theoretical assumptions to a range of phenomena at a specific level of analysis,” Political Science and Religious Studies “borrow whatever seems useful relative to our subject matter from wherever we can find it.”⁶⁵ This insight is critical to understanding the inevitable (and seemingly indomitable) exercise of defining “Religion.”

⁶¹ Taves, “2010 Presidential Address: ‘Religion’ in the Humanities and the Humanities in the University”; Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered : A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton, N.J. : Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁶² Taves, “2010 Presidential Address: ‘Religion’ in the Humanities and the Humanities in the University,” 288.

⁶³ Taves, 289.

⁶⁴ Taves, 289.

⁶⁵ Taves, 289.

It is important to highlight what appears to be a connection between the common struggle (and disagreement) to define the object of study within Religious Studies and the prevalence of concerns regarding scholarly positionality and religious perspective. The common goal of these efforts seems to be one of agreement or unity – and perhaps one of functioning more like disciplines of the other category. It is not difficult to imagine a line of thinking that might motivate this goal: if “we” can come to some agreement (or standards) regarding perspectives, and thus (one assumes) approaches, then “we” might focus collective attention on the most important possible objects of study. Framed this way, the pressure Taves experienced, to categorize herself among the binary options, may make sense; allowing for alternative options or holding multiple positions might not.

This is cogent to the discussion at hand because this investigation assumes a pragmatically agnostic perspective. Although the approach of this dissertation is best described as “naturalistic,” it cannot offer an opinion regarding “Truth” claims that encompass or specifically allow for the perspective assumed in this examination. In order to investigate the influence of environments on the generation of “religions,” one must make some claims regarding the nature of the development of these institutions. This research assumes: 1) that “religions” originate, develop, and function within human societies; 2) that human beings evolved within natural environmental contexts and continue to be affected by their surroundings (natural and artificial); 3) these environmental contexts, themselves, developed subject to evolutionary processes. At a glance these claims might offer the impression that this work precludes any religious “Truth” claims, but this is not the case. It is not the intention (nor obligation) of this work to validate or disprove such claims; it is, however, the responsibility of this dissertation to consider various perspectives on this inquiry and offer remarks on its position with regard to alternative paths. It seems logical that the present inquiry can be understood and

accommodated by various religious and non-religious perspectives. Consider a few claims that are *not* made by the three assumptions offered above.

First, this work does not make any “ultimate” claims regarding the nature of the universe within which evolutionary processes function and environmental contexts develop. Although there appears to be a lot of productive tension to be harnessed in the passionate debates regarding topics such as “the nature of creation” or “the origin of the universe,” this dissertation is not the place for such discussions. This investigation takes, as a fundamental premise, the existence and functions of physical laws and biological processes, including natural selection; however, it should be clear that the means by which these laws were set in motion is yet left open for debate elsewhere.

Second, this dissertation has not made (and will not make) any comprehensive claims regarding the constituent parts of the environmental contexts on which this research is focused. To some readers this may sound needlessly ambiguous, but it is only reasonable to point out the impossibility of identifying all animate and inanimate elements present in any ancient landscape. The task of cataloguing all matter in any modern region seems overwhelming, if not impossible due to the fact of so much potential data and the extant data concerning ancient landscapes is abysmally small by comparison. Chapter Five (“Agriculturally Marginal Landscapes”) will examine the environmental category, as it is conceived for this investigation, at a geographic scale that virtually precludes the possibility of accounting for all life (let alone inanimate elements) in such zones. This situation “leaves the door open” to any number of “Truth” claims regarding the presence of life within these landscapes. This is not to say “anything is possible” but merely to point out the fact that this investigation cannot account for “all creatures great and small” that may have lived in the environmental contexts under examination. Such assumptions, underlying this investigation, allow a reader to have a perspective, like one proposed by Jürgen

Moltmann in his book *God in Creation* for example, that describes the environmental contexts in which these religions developed as ultimately populated by one or more deities.⁶⁶ Like “Truth” claims regarding the generation and development of the universe, perspectives like Moltmann’s may be subject to debate, but this dissertation is not the venue for such discussions.

Third, these assumptions do not claim understanding of (nor that it is possible to understand) all of the variables that contribute to the origins, development, or functions of religions (or “Religion”) in societies. This investigation is aimed at examining *one* of these variables with the understanding that it cannot be the only one. Furthermore, although much research conducted under the umbrella of the cognitive science of religion (CSR) appears to be aimed at identifying universal human predispositions toward “Religion” as an emergent phenomenon, it cannot be said, as of this writing, that scholars have produced any comprehensive explanations of “how” or “why” *Homo sapiens* came to generate or develop all things considered religious. The cognitive “mechanisms” hypothesized in answer to questions of “why” and “how” are compelling, useful, and still rather newly formed. This dissertation acknowledges that “Truth” claims, offered in answer to these questions, suggesting processes that include (among other features) “revelation,” “divine inspiration,” or human creativity may offer readers different perspectives, research models, or insights with which to approach the current investigation.

In his essay “Differentiated Landscapes and Non-Uniform Complexity among Bronze Age Societies of the Eurasian Steppe,” Frachetti lays out this theory in answer to traditional models of social complexity based on settled agricultural “civilizations.”⁶⁷ He writes, “One may

⁶⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, Gifford Lectures 1984–1985 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

⁶⁷ Michael D. Frachetti, “Differentiated Landscapes and Non-Uniform Complexity among Bronze Age Societies of the Eurasian Steppe,” in *Social Complexity in Prehistoric Eurasia: Monuments, Metals, and Mobility*, ed. Bryan K. Hanks and Katheryn M. Linduff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

observe that the emergence of a seemingly extensive socio-economic landscape throughout the Bronze Age stands at odds with the organizationally small-scale and locally rooted societies that occupied this vast territory. Current archaeological models of social complexity to date do not adequately fit the Bronze Age conditions evident across the Eurasian steppe zone.”⁶⁸ His theory attempts to take into consideration the numerous societies attested to, and suggested by, variously incongruous archaeological evidence from across the Eurasian steppe. Frachetti asks,

But what if one cannot easily circumscribe the geographic boundaries of the participant communities or locate the growth of a shared or consistent institutional framework that applies to different populations intersecting across a shared geography? Socio-political or economic complexity cannot be charted as easily on a “functional scale of differentiation” if the societies that co-generate it subscribe to independent institutional parameters or exhibit non-uniform definitions of general institutions to begin with.⁶⁹

Using Douglass North’s definition of “institutions” as “the humanly defined constraints that shape human interaction”, Frachetti proposes a model that describes how variously complex societies made up of “differentiated populations” develop modes of interaction across a common geographic region.⁷⁰ This work is concerned with describing, and attempting to understand, how social systems developed among ancient Eurasian steppe populations. This fact makes the use of his theory particularly interesting, because this is the context out of which the worship of Ahura Mazda seems to arise.

Central to Frachetti’s model is the importance of responsive strategizing and pragmatism in the development (or adoption) of institutions in any given society. The key to describing “non-uniform complexity” is understanding the significance of flexibility, negotiability, and adaptability in these societies. This is connected directly to the concept of “Environmental Pragmatism” mentioned in the previous chapter. A fairly clear example of this concept, regarding

⁶⁸ Frachetti, 19.

⁶⁹ Frachetti, 20.

⁷⁰ Frachetti, 20–21.

the role of environmental pressures on the development of mobility (and often pastoralism) among various steppe-based societies, seems to have found acceptance among anthropologists before Frachetti. Although such developments are subject to many more variables, it is reasonable to say that this is, ultimately, an example of economic and social systems pragmatically generated (or adopted) in response to particular environmental contexts. Integral to Frachetti's theory is the idea that this responsiveness, that underlies the economic development of mobility in a context of limited resources (those that might facilitate settlement), could reasonably be assumed to underlie other developments.

The Non-Uniform Complexity Theory does not focus on particular developments, but on the idea that processes of social/cultural development function within what seems to be an ever-ready responsiveness. This kind of pragmatism works at different scales across interactions and networks. Frachetti writes "Non-uniformity is the result of some general institutional codes being homogenized between diverse groups or re-shaped among them for strategic purposes, while other institutions remain individually or specifically defined. Thus, for each participant community, its degree of organizational consolidation or fragmentation vis-à-vis its neighbors depends on the scalar cohesion of various institutional structures and the periodic willingness of those communities to adopt or develop similar constraints to their modes of interaction."⁷¹ Frachetti argues that the contingent nature of development makes institutional complexity among steppe populations difficult to assess using tools that have been proposed for use in examining ancient settled agricultural societies.⁷² Frachetti notes "Complexity among steppe communities is better evaluated in terms of institutional integration or fragmentation at the interstices of diverse populations whose economic and political interests co-exist geographically but are not

⁷¹ Frachetti, 21–22.

⁷² Frachetti, 21–22.

necessarily bound by a shared sense of society.”⁷³ It is important to emphasize the connection between this description of a diverse social landscape of “economic and political interests” and the heterogenous environmental landscape within which they “co-exist geographically.”

Consider the fact that Frachetti does not make any claims about fundamental biological differences between steppe populations and groups of humans living in different regions. His theory is not predicated on innate predispositions particular to the genetic pool of steppe dwelling peoples. The reason that Frachetti’s theory applies to the current investigation is *because* this work is based on species-wide human traits of responsiveness and pragmatism. These traits are exercised by complex environmental and socio-cultural conditions that serve as pressures in the region. Frachetti writes, “the Bronze Age landscape of the steppe may be depicted as a ‘jigsaw puzzle’ of fluctuating socio-economic arenas that served to link otherwise discrete and localized pastoral populations. Pastoralist strategies, by definition, contribute to a heightened degree of variation in mobility and subsistence strategies, in settlement ecology, and in commercial activity – both within and across regions.”⁷⁴ This emphasis on “heightened variation” in strategies that are connected to the environmental and socio-economic “jigsaw puzzle” is key to the inquiry taken up in this dissertation. Frachetti’s theory is broad enough to include religious institutions but, in contrast to the present investigation, he does not focus on this category of developments. Nevertheless, the “Non-Uniform Complexity Theory” can be used as a lens through which the points of comparison in this dissertation can be examined.

In discussion of the research conducted by Botero et al. the last chapter noted the promising, yet difficult situation of wide-scale research being conducted in CSR. Although his research does not belong to this category, Frachetti’s chronologically long view of development in the region, and his interest in modeling cultural evolutionary processes, echoes work being

⁷³ Frachetti, 21–22.

⁷⁴ Frachetti, 41.

done in CSR. Although studies like that conducted by Botero et al. don't offer the kind of reliability or substantiation needed to address the specific inquiry of this dissertation, they, like Frachetti's theory, may offer insights into understanding some of the species-level processes underlying the "origins" of "Religion" within particular environmental contexts. Similarly, many theories generated in CSR are too general for the scale of case studies considered in the present investigation, but a few appear to have implications that may be applicable.

In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson emphasize the interaction of physical human bodies in the world on the development and functions of "embodied" human minds.⁷⁵ Lakoff and Johnson argue that the physical reality of minds-in-brains-in-bodies-in-environments creates various opportunities and limits that structure the way human minds engage in conceptual processes.⁷⁶ Their "Embodied Mind Theory" is presented in contrast to notions of mind-body dualism and distinctions between processes of "perception" and "conception."⁷⁷ They write, "findings of cognitive science are profoundly disquieting in two respects. First, they tell us that human reason is a form of animal reason, a reason inextricably tied to our bodies and peculiarities of our brains. Second, these results tell us that our bodies, brains, and interactions with our environment provide the mostly unconscious basis for our everyday metaphysics, that is, our sense of what is real."⁷⁸ Lakoff and Johnson highlight a connection between environments and concepts that underlies the investigation taken up in this dissertation. It is important to point out that they do not merely understand the physical surroundings as a container for bodies and embodied minds, but as a context for the creative processes of those minds. They observe that these surroundings "provide the mostly unconscious

⁷⁵ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh : The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

⁷⁶ Lakoff and Johnson, 37–38.

⁷⁷ Lakoff and Johnson, 37–38.

⁷⁸ Lakoff and Johnson, 17.

basis for our everyday metaphysics, that is, our sense of what is real.”⁷⁹

In “Brain, Body, and Culture” Armin Geertz applies the notion of the “embodied mind” to theorizing on the origins of “Religion.”⁸⁰ He outlines a “Biocultural Theory of Religion” that attempts to describe the interaction between physical and cultural factors that underlie processes of generation and development of “Religion.” Among these factors, Geertz includes concepts of the “embodied mind,” “extended cognition,” and the “distribution of cognition.”⁸¹ He writes,

[In] terms of a biocultural theory of religion, embrainment and embodiment are key factors. This means that cognition functions in the context of embodied brains....[So too] extension and situatedness are key factors. A constitutive instrument in the extension of mind are the tools of all sorts that assist us in a variety of ways to harness fleeting ideas and to function effectively in cognitive networks....[So too] distribution and enculturation are key factors. Cognition is distributed in networks of feelings, memories and knowledge. The mechanism that is inimical to this ability is deep enculturation, driven by the communicative needs of communities of brains.⁸²

Like Frachetti, Geertz attempts to articulate complex processes of cultural development in consideration of physical variables. For Frachetti, the physical variables are ultimately environmental; for Geertz they are associated with human bodies. Although his “Biocultural Theory of Religion” is aimed at explaining this interaction across the entire species, Geertz’s concept offers an important reminder for this investigation: both individual minds and the interactions between those minds, in groups, are influenced by environmental factors. Geertz points to the importance of communication and distribution of cognition/culture, recalling the evolutionary advantage of human social development.⁸³

Like Frachetti and Geertz, Ara Norenzayan offers insights on the significance of social

⁷⁹ Lakoff and Johnson, 17.

⁸⁰ Armin W. Geertz, “Brain, Body and Culture: A Biocultural Theory of Religion,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22, no. 4 (2010): 304–21.

⁸¹ Geertz, 308–13.

⁸² Geertz, 308, 311, 313.

⁸³ Recall Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*; and Deacon and Cashman, “The Role of Symbolic Capacity in the Origins of Religion.”

interactions (and inter-group competition) to the development of religions. In *Big Gods*, Norenzayan argues that processes of cultural evolution have selected for “pro-social” religions that promote intra-group cooperation in order to outcompete other groups.⁸⁴ He focuses this research on the development and spread of “supernatural monitoring” as a means of promoting pro-social cooperation. This is outlined in his eight “rules” of “Big Gods” as “1. *Watched people are nice people.*/ 2. *Religion is more in the situation than in the person.*/ 3. *Hell is stronger than heaven.*/ 4. *Trust people who trust in God.*/ 5. *Religious actions speak louder than words.*/ 6. *Unworshipped Gods are impotent Gods.*/ 7. *Big Gods for Big Groups.*/ 8. *Religious groups cooperate in order to compete.*”⁸⁵ Like Lakoff, Johnson, and Geertz, Norenzayan understands cultural (or religious) concepts to be products of biological evolutionary processes – thus subject to selective pressures exerted by both physical and social environments. Although Norenzayan’s argument is instructive with regard to the significance of cultural evolution in the development of religions, the seventh of his eight “rules” does not appear tenable in light of this dissertation: “*Big Gods for Big Groups*”.⁸⁶ Chapter Four (“Mobile Pastoralism”) argues that the populations of societies out of which the worship of YHWH or Ahura Mazda seem to have arisen must have been, by ecological necessity, rather small compared to the “great civilizations” of neighboring regions. By examining the worship of these deities in the modern world as “religions deemed monotheism,” this dissertation points to the fact that these deities (and the religions that claim them) exemplify what Botero et al. appear to mean when referring to societies with beliefs in “moralizing high gods”.⁸⁷ In contrast, it seems clear that Norenzayan, like Botero et al., uses modern Christian and Muslim conceptions of “God” to help construct his (very similar) notion of

⁸⁴ Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods : How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013).

⁸⁵ Norenzayan, xiii.

⁸⁶ Norenzayan, xiii.

⁸⁷ Botero et al., “The Ecology of Religious Beliefs.”

“Big Gods”.

The difference in aims, approaches, and disciplinary grounding are likely the cause for divergent conclusions. The research taken up in this dissertation: is aimed at understanding the “origins” of two particular ancient religions; is based on historical and archaeological data; and is conducted from the perspective of Religious Studies (a discipline defined, according to Taves, by an object of study).⁸⁸ In contrast, Norenzayan’s research: is aimed at explaining the cause and function of a specific religious phenomenon; is based on modern cognitive science data; and is conducted from the perspective of Psychology (a discipline defined, according to Taves, by a level of analysis).⁸⁹ These differences also underlie the critique of Botero et al. in the last chapter: “universal” theories that are intended as historical explanation, but are based on experimental data from modern religions and participants, can be intriguing but problematic.

Norenzayan writes,

To get some answers, I will occasionally turn to religious texts, and to shamans, priests, and preachers. But more importantly, religion’s imprints on human nature are not so much found in dogmas in texts and teachings, but in *natural religion*—the thoughts and behaviors of believers. When teachings matter (they exist only in some religious groups and only in recent history), they matter only as lived interpretations and understandings by believers. Therefore the bulk of my attention will be on recent empirical studies from psychology, economics, sociology, and anthropology, where the actual behavior of people can be carefully observed in everyday life or under controlled conditions.⁹⁰

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to unpack and evaluate each of the various claims (and assumptions) made in these few lines, but it is important to highlight the modern sources informing his conclusions. Despite the issues identified with this aspect of his work, Norenzayan offers an interesting perspective on some of the processes that might underlie the generation and development of “religions deemed monotheistic.”

⁸⁸ Taves, “2010 Presidential Address: ‘Religion’ in the Humanities and the Humanities in the University,” 289.

⁸⁹ Taves, 289.

⁹⁰ Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 14–15.

In “Conclusion: On Keeping Cognitive Science of Religion Cognitive and Cultural” Justin Barrett lauds the progress that researchers in the nascent sub-field of CSR have made in recent decades, but warns against focusing too much attention on individual cognition.⁹¹ He writes, “CSR should reserve a special place for considering how human minds work such that humans entertain and communicate certain types of thoughts that become so widespread and stable as to become cultural. That is, at once CSR should remember that individual minds matter but that the primary target of explanation of religion is not that of individual cognition but of group-level cultural expression.”⁹² Barrett’s reminder is an important methodological note for this dissertation – one that is quite easy to observe with regard to such ancient religions. Due to the limited information and evidence available, what can be understood of the ancient worship of YHWH or Ahura Mazda can just be described at the level of community. Chapter Eight (“People (and Texts) Deemed Religious”), examines literary narratives of individual “prophet-founders” that appear to serve as expressions of, and tools for building, communities of worship.

Barrett’s suggestion takes on more significance for this investigation in light of Taves’ comments on the importance of group-level analysis for the study of “Religion.” In an article (published two years before Barrett’s essay), “Reverse Engineering Complex Cultural Concepts” Taves clarifies the “Building Block Approach” she introduced in *Religious Experience Reconsidered* as one solution to the struggle to define “Religion.”⁹³ She writes, “We need to recognize, in other words, that ‘religion’ as a complex cultural concept doesn’t exist at the psychological or neurological levels. At those levels, we simply find various processes that have been and are combined to create complex cultural phenomena that sometimes get labeled or

⁹¹ Justin L Barrett, “Conclusion: On Keeping Cognitive Science of Religion Cognitive and Cultural,” in *Religion Explained?: The Cognitive Science of Religion after Twenty-Five Years*, ed. Luther H. Martin and Donald Wiebe, Scientific Studies of Religion: Inquiry and Explanation (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 193–202.

⁹² Barrett, 194.

⁹³ Taves, “Reverse Engineering Complex Cultural Concepts: Identifying Building Blocks of ‘Religion.’”

categorized in cultural terms, some of which are ‘religion-like.’”⁹⁴ Taves attempts to accommodate differences between disciplinary goals, sources, and training by suggesting that scholars in Religious Studies intentionally “reverse engineer” the complex cultural concepts that are religions.⁹⁵ She argues that scholars in Religious Studies should construct inquiries in such a manner that allows for the work to be “maximally useful” to researchers from other disciplines.⁹⁶ In the process of identifying the lack of this kind of work in the field, she lays out just what it might look like: “reverse engineering the concepts of religion and spirituality in a way that will be fruitful either for scientists, who need to operationalize component parts, or for historians and ethnographers, who want to consider how the parts have been synthesized into larger socio-cultural wholes.”⁹⁷ This idea seems to allow for the difference in perspectives, discussed above, between various scholars working in CSR and scholars of “Religion.” Rather than arguing, as Geertz does, that disciplinary boundaries need modifying in order to accommodate interdisciplinary work across well-established historical divides between the Humanities and Natural Sciences, Taves suggests modification of the way scholars of “Religion” consider their object of study.⁹⁸ This reorientation is key to Taves’ argument in *Religious Experience Reconsidered*: before one can begin to deconstruct separate “religions” into constituent “building blocks” one must allow that the former are not indivisible wholes. This seems to be a matter of researcher positionality as well as one of defining “Religion.”

Recall Taves’ experience of feeling pressure to categorize herself among the binary options including: “critic or caretaker, and religious or nonreligious.”⁹⁹ In her 2009 book, Taves argues against a *sui generis* approach to the study of “Religion” that has some association with

⁹⁴ Taves, 194.

⁹⁵ Taves, 192–93.

⁹⁶ Taves, 194.

⁹⁷ Taves, 192–93.

⁹⁸ Geertz, “Brain, Body and Culture,” 311.

⁹⁹ Taves, “Reverse Engineering Complex Cultural Concepts: Identifying Building Blocks of ‘Religion,’” 288.

positions of “caretaker” or “religious” and views “Religion” as a category of phenomena incommensurable with others. She writes, “Under the influence of the *sui generis* approach to religion, scholars assumed that the boundary between religious and non-religious things was fixed and stable, even if sometimes hard to discern. With a *sui generis* understanding of “Religion” and religious experience there is no need to focus on this boundary to analyze how things become religious because religious things 'just are'.”¹⁰⁰ Taves emphasizes that, by demarcating the boundary between “religious” and “non-religious” categories, scholars of “Religion” appear to regard the object of study somewhat religiously.¹⁰¹

By setting the category of “Religion” apart from other categories of human phenomena and treating it as incomparably special, scholars, regardless of personal religious perspective, contribute to the “protection” of “Religion,” and things religious, from reductive “destruction.” Although Taves does not seem to lay responsibility for the perpetuation of the *sui generis* approach at the feet of religious scholars, some within the field of Religious Studies do. In *The Invention of World Religions*, Masuzawa observes that a number of “secularist scholars” criticize Religious Studies departments for having a particularly high concentration of “unreconstituted religious essentialists” working in them.¹⁰² She writes, “This should not come as a surprise, it is often said, given that the field is populated, and by sheer number dominated, by the representatives, participants, and sympathizers of various religions or, more recently, by those who may be best described as advocates and sympathizers of 'religion' in general.”¹⁰³ Russell McCutcheon is a well-established critic of this sort, known for advancing this perspective in

¹⁰⁰ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, 122–23.

¹⁰¹ Taves, 34.

¹⁰² Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, 7.

¹⁰³ Masuzawa, 7.

Critics Not Caretakers.¹⁰⁴ He writes,

I do not see the participant as setting the ground rules for how his or her behavior ought to be studied by scholars. No other area of the human sciences is compelled to grant the people studied a monopoly on determining how their behaviors ought to be viewed, and I see no reason why such ownership of meanings should be granted in the study of religion.... participants' viewpoint, their behavior, and the institutions they build and reproduce are data for the scholar intent on theorizing as to *why* human beings expend such tremendous creativity and intellectual/social energy in discourses on the gods, origins, and endtimes.¹⁰⁵

Although McCutcheon's argument is interesting and worth more consideration than the scope of this investigation will allow, it is important to note that, like McCutcheon, Taves is interested in the way that "Religion," as a category, is constructed and used, particularly by scholars in Religious Studies. She writes, "'Religion,' as scholars regularly point out, does not designate a specific, cross-culturally stable thing that we can reliably look for on the ground. Any specification of 'religious' (or 'spiritual' or 'mystical' or 'sacred' or 'magical'), whether by scholars or practitioners of religions or believers who are the subject of scholarly investigation, excludes phenomena that some people sometimes deem religious and includes other things that most would not consider religious."¹⁰⁶ Cogent to this investigation, Taves' comments suggest that her approach is more nuanced and sensitive to the illusion of distinction between labels of "religious" and "non-religious."¹⁰⁷

At issue, in the *sui generis* promulgation of this "distinction" identified by Taves, is an assumption that a stable category called "Religion" can be defined. Taves' approach is not concerned with what she calls "casual" usage of the term or category, but specifically with its construction and function (or lack thereof) in research.¹⁰⁸ She writes, "When researchers stipulate

¹⁰⁴ Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion*, Issues in the Study of Religion (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

¹⁰⁵ McCutcheon, x–xi.

¹⁰⁶ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, 23.

¹⁰⁷ Taves, 122–23.

¹⁰⁸ Taves, "Reverse Engineering Complex Cultural Concepts: Identifying Building Blocks of 'Religion,'" 193–94.

definitions of religion rather than relying on more generic and at the same time more precise descriptors, they artificially stabilize the phenomena of interest. Doing so has several drawbacks. In stabilizing something that is inherently contested, stipulative definitions tell us more about what researchers think should count as religious than about what subjects think.”¹⁰⁹ This insight is significant and instructive to the approach underlying this dissertation: artificially stabilizing the phenomena of interest has several drawbacks. She clarifies, “Reproducing these distinctions in our research not only makes meta-analysis more difficult, but also makes it more difficult to work across times and cultures where these distinctions do not hold. In stabilizing something unstable, we limit our ability to study how people determine what counts as religious where that category is operative and how they characterize similar phenomena when it is not.”¹¹⁰ Although the connection is not obvious, there is something in Taves’ comments that criticizes methodological limits similar to those imposed by Hultkrantz on his “religio-ecological method.” Like Hultkrantz’s notion that his method can only be applied where its applicability is clear, it sounds like the category of “Religion” is only stable and applicable where it is already clearly operative. This is particularly relevant to the historical case studies under investigation in my research wherein identifying the line between ancient things “religious” from “non-religious” is a notoriously difficult task.

In apparent solution to this problem, Taves uses the term “special” to account for the overarching category to which things “religious” (and things that seem similar) fit.¹¹¹ She writes, “The idea of ‘specialness’ is one broader, more generic net that captures most of what people have in mind when they refer to ‘sacred,’ ‘magical,’ ‘spiritual,’ ‘mystical,’ or ‘religious’ and then some. We can consider specialness both behaviorally and substantively, asking if there are

¹⁰⁹ Taves, 193.

¹¹⁰ Taves, 193–94.

¹¹¹ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, 26.

behaviors that tend to mark things off as special and if there are particular types of things that are more likely to be considered special than others.”¹¹² Taves’ solution is clever because it does not merely obviate the issue of defining “Religion” by widening the scope of categorization, it attempts to account for the systems in which such definitions, and the ascription of such labels, function. She writes, “I do not think scholars of religion have a monopoly on special things, since there are lots of special things that do not have religion-like connotations, but I think it is quite possible that the more special people consider something to be the more likely they and others are to place it under some religion-like heading (for example, 'religious', 'sacred', 'magical', 'superstitious', et cetera).”¹¹³ It is easy to begin to see how Taves’ approach, just by broadening the category of interest to include things “special,” lumps things that some might consider “religious” with things that all may agree are not.

Taves’ “Building Block Approach” is based on an “ascriptive formulation” in which “religious things,” as objects of study, are reoriented to “things deemed religious.”¹¹⁴ In contrast to a *sui generis* approach, Taves’ model of ascription takes into consideration both “things deemed religious” and the processes and variables involved in socially/culturally constructing, or “deeming,” things so.¹¹⁵ The process of forming “religions” is not as simple as regarding things as “special,” so Taves takes this as the most basic level (and necessary beginning) of processes that lead to what might be deemed “religious.” She writes:

The distinctions between ascription and attribution and simple and composite formations have implications not only for the study of experiences that people consider special but also for the study of religion more generally. The distinction between ascription and attribution allows us to distinguish between the creation of special things through a process of singularization, in which people consciously or unconsciously ascribe special characteristics to things, and the attribution of causality to the thing or to behaviors associated with it. The distinction between simple ascriptions, in which an individual thing is set apart as special, and

¹¹² Taves, 26.

¹¹³ Taves, 165.

¹¹⁴ Taves, 13–14.

¹¹⁵ Taves, 14.

composite ascriptions, in which simple ascriptions are incorporated into the more complex formations characteristic of religions or spiritualities, in turn allows us to envision a building-block approach to the study of religion.¹¹⁶

Taves' description of processes that might contribute to the construction of religions is fascinating and important to understanding large questions of "how" religions or other cultural complexes develop. Although her argument regarding processes of ascription and formation underlie the research of this dissertation, it is beyond the scope of this writing to consider, too deeply, the theoretical nuances of Taves' ascription model. It is, however, important to understand just how this model structures the current investigation.

The emphasis on the ascription of "specialness" or of a label of "religious" allows scholars to study the "thing deemed" in comparison to either *different things similarly regarded* or in comparison to *similar things differently regarded*. Taves writes, "identifying the basic elements and processes...will allow us to set up more precise comparisons across times and places, which will allow researchers to better understand how these basic elements and processes can be used to generate disparate cultural phenomena, some of which people view as sacred, and in some cases to elaborate into more complex systems that scholars and practitioners may characterize as religions and spiritualities."¹¹⁷ Taves' approach suggests that, by focusing studies on these basic elements ("building blocks"), scholars can articulate more precise comparisons between the formations of these elements ("religions"). This kind of comparative work makes up the basis of this dissertation and the "Building Block Approach" offers a clear structure for setting up this study.

Taves' approach is easy to identify in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight that focus on three specific "building blocks": "buildings deemed religious", "art deemed religious," and "people

¹¹⁶ Taves, 13–14.

¹¹⁷ Ann Taves, "Building Blocks of Sacralities: A New Basis for Comparison across Cultures and Religions," in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, Second edition. (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2013), 140.

(and texts) deemed religious.” Across the various publications in which she argues for this approach, Taves avoids defining specific rules for considering something a “building block.” Although she offers a few suggestions for possible study, it is important that Taves leaves the question open to scholarly interpretation, as needed for specific inquiries.¹¹⁸ The “building blocks” mentioned above are particularly relevant to the literature concerning the ancient worship of YHWH or Ahura Mazda. The clever simplicity of Taves’ “ascription formulation” shows these elements to be much more available to cross-cultural examination than the familiar terminology of *temples*, *icons*, or *prophets*. Attempting to define the latter three terms appears nearly as difficult (and the results as unstable) as the unending task of defining “Religion.” The formulation of these points of analogy according to Taves’ approach offers opportunities that would not otherwise be available using familiar terms. Considering the dearth of research on the inquiry taken up in this dissertation (as discussed in the previous chapter), it would be difficult to expect to find specific work or insights on the impact of environmental factors on the development of *temples* or *iconography*. In contrast, however, research conducted on the influence of environmental contexts on the generation of buildings, building culture, or lack thereof – presented broadly enough to allow for religious and non-religious buildings alike – is rather difficult to *miss* in the course of research on the subject. This is just one example, but it illustrates a powerful advantage for this dissertation that might have been lost if Taves had chosen to stipulate restrictive parameters for defining “building blocks”.

Taves’ work informs the general structure of this investigation, but the specific approaches used in the course of research for each point of comparison vary by chapter and include the use of tools that belong to the recently developing category of “Digital Humanities” (DH). Due to the relative novelty of incorporating these tools into dissertation work, it is

¹¹⁸ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, 128.

important to point out that the use of DH tools and methods stems from the motivation of scholars in “raider disciplines”, identified by Taves, to “borrow whatever seems useful relative to our subject matter from wherever we can find it.”¹¹⁹ Given the absence of scholarship on the topic of this dissertation, the lack of guidance from Hultkrantz, and the newness of innovative work by Frachetti and Taves, employing the most advantageous and effective tools for conducting this investigation is reasonably pragmatic. Although the tools used for some of this research are digital, these projects could, at great cost of time and energy, be conducted to the same ends using non-digital methods. Mapping, spatial analysis, and qualitative text analysis are just a few research activities, for example, that have served the purposes scholars of religion (and the humanities) since long before the advent of computing and will continue in both digital and analog forms into the future.

By way of concluding discussion of this approach, it is worth noting that there are a number of advantages provided by the use of DH tools that appear directly aimed at *enhancing*, rather than *replacing*, familiar approaches in the humanities. The least “flashy” advantage offered by the use of tools like QGIS, Atlas.ti, and Scalar is the one that would perhaps appeal the most to any graduate student or time-pressed scholar: they allow one to do more work in less time.¹²⁰ This increases capacity on the individual scale of research projects, but these tools can also contribute to an increase in productive capacity of groups of scholars across time. By using digital tools and platforms to produce and disseminate data, researchers can build upon one another’s research in more direct ways. Sharing a digital dataset may allow future researchers to supplement it with their own data for their own purposes, contribute to increasing a common data

¹¹⁹ Taves, “2010 Presidential Address: ‘Religion’ in the Humanities and the Humanities in the University,” 289.

¹²⁰ “Discover QGIS,” accessed November 17, 2018, <https://www.qgis.org/en/site/about/index.html>; “What Is ATLAS.Ti | Qualitative Data Analysis with ATLAS.Ti,” *Atlas.Ti* (blog), accessed April 18, 2017, <http://atlasti.com/product/what-is-atlas-ti/>; “Alliance for Networking Visual Culture » Overview,” accessed August 30, 2018, <https://scalar.me/anvc/scalar/>.

source, or validate experiments conducted using the dataset.

This last opportunity points to the increase in transparency that can accompany the work of scholars conducted or disseminated using digital tools. The principles of transparency and accountability that remain vital to scholarly work have a chance to find new, powerful expression in digital publications. From reference management software to digital publication platforms, the digitization of academic writing processes can transform the analog “breadcrumb” trail of citations to a one-click hyperlink trail of trackable discourse. Although this may sound rather optimistic and utopian, it acknowledges that DH is not a solution to all scholarly problems. It is important to add, however, that issues like academic dishonesty and intellectual piracy that might seem more strongly associated with things digital, are old problems that can’t be said to have originated with the so-called “Digital Age.” On the contrary, it seems that tools that track authorship, version history, and citations in publications, for instance, offer much promise at potentially being able to slow, if not prevent, such problems in digital contexts.

Chapter Three: Religions Deemed Monotheistic

“We can understand monotheism of the revolutionary, exclusive kind only by understanding the polytheistic religion against which it is pitted. For this monotheism did not evolve organically from polytheism, but broke with it by denouncing it as pagan.”¹²¹

Following the last chapter, which outlined Taves’ “Building Block Approach” and its applicability to this investigation, the title of the current chapter is adapted from the same “ascriptive formulation:” rather than discussing “monotheistic religions,” this discussion will consider the category into which fall the respective worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda as “religions deemed monotheistic.”¹²² Although the usage of this formulation is a bit of a departure from Taves’ original suggestion, it refers more precisely to the category of religions implied in scholarly discourse on “monotheism.” This category appears to be defined by a set of certain building blocks that serve as referents for usage of the term “monotheism.” This dissertation will show that the presence or absence of certain building blocks in this set can be traced to the agriculturally marginal landscapes that contextualized the communities of worship centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda.

In *Of God and Gods*, Jan Assmann highlights the significance of “monotheism” to the discussion of religion in the modern world: “The atrocities of the twentieth century—including the horrors of September 11, 2001—have lent a tremendous resonance to the sacred texts of our monotheistic tradition. It is impossible to speak of religion, especially with a focus on violence, without thinking of and referring to the Holocaust and/or to the events of 9/11. It is therefore of prime importance to make clear at the outset, before broaching the subject of monotheism, that the atrocities of the twentieth century did not stem from but rather were directed against

¹²¹ Jan. Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 27.

¹²² Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, 13–14.

monotheism.”¹²³ Assmann’s observations point to the importance of acknowledging that for many people, in and outside of academic circles, discussions of monotheism are loaded with historical and political baggage. A survey of the literature on these concepts suggests that discussion on the topic of “monotheism” is growing stale (possibly because of this baggage). This dissertation is not another stone lobbed into that discussion: the current investigation is concerned with the origins of two specific “religions deemed monotheistic,” not necessarily with the conceptual development of terms like “mono-,” “poly-,” or “henotheism.” In an echo of the endless project of defining “Religion,” contributions to this discourse appear to rely on re-defining “monotheism” or nuancing previous definitions with new terminology (i.e. “kathenotheism” or “monotheiotheism”) as means of intervention.¹²⁴ This chapter will show that these terms, like “monotheism,” appear to be used as a shorthand in the larger discussion of the differences between categories of “religions deemed monotheistic” and “religions deemed polytheistic.” Further, it seems that this discussion is part of the ongoing narratives of differentiation and competition that appear to be key components of religions deemed monotheistic.

In order to understand the category of “religions deemed monotheistic,” this chapter is divided into three connected discussions on: “religions,” “deemed,” and “monotheistic.” This approach is borrowed from Schneider’s *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, in which she writes, “[The] title of this book, while simple, is relevant to what will and will not be covered in the following volume. I will begin by going over each element of the title because the definition of the different parts lays the groundwork for what to expect in the following text.”¹²⁵

¹²³ Jan. Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, George L. Mosse Series in Modern European Cultural and Intellectual History (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 5.

¹²⁴ Christian Frevel, “Beyond Monotheism? Some Remarks and Questions on Conceptualising ‘monotheism’ in Biblical Studies,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 2 (2013): 3, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i2.810>.

¹²⁵ Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 2.

Without using an explicit method, Taves appears to divide *Religious Experience Reconsidered* in a similar fashion: “The argument unfolds in chapters devoted to religion, experience, explanation, and comparison.”¹²⁶ It must be emphasized that Schneider’s approach highlights the significance of Taves’ ascriptive formulation. Focusing each section of this investigation on a word in the name of this category (and chapter), draws out insights specific to that topic that have implications for our understanding of the category. It is important to note that any one of these topics would be a massive undertaking for anyone seeking a comprehensive treatment of “religion,” “deeming,” or “monotheism.” Recognizing that the goal of this chapter is to serve the larger inquiry of this dissertation, not an exhaustive examination of any of these three areas, each section raises points that seem cogent to the matter at hand, offering insight on both topic and the category of “religions deemed monotheistic.”

Religions

This investigation concerns the question of “origins” with regard to two specific “religions.” This is not to be confused with the well-trodden historical pursuit of the “origin of Religion,” which has only recently found new life in CSR.¹²⁷ In “The Beginnings of YHWH and ‘Longing for Origin’” Friedhelm Hartenstein differentiates between scholarly endeavors seeking to understand “origin” versus “beginning.”¹²⁸ He writes,

Whereas 'beginning' from a temporal point of view describes a first initial point, 'origin' is associated with the idea of an enduring foundation for the future: As for 'beginning,' the direction of view is prospective, as for 'origin,' it is mainly retrospective...From a qualitative/ontological point of view, 'beginning' is therefore often associated with an emphasis on something new and a break with

¹²⁶ Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered : A Building Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, 12.

¹²⁷ Writing as the “founding” works in CSR were being published, Masuzawa offers a historically valuable perspective on the state of the field at the time: Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion, Religion and Postmodernism* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 1.

¹²⁸ Friedhelm Hartenstein, “The Beginnings of YHWH and ‘Longing for the Origin,’” in *The Origins of Yahwism*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Markus Witte, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 484 (Berlin ; De Gruyter, 2017), 289.

the past, which can be more or less categorical (pathos of the beginning right up to a sudden revelation). On the other hand, 'origin' is a point of reference for a thinking which wants to confirm traditions and thus underline continuity (enduring foundation and effective deep layer).¹²⁹

Hartenstein's comments highlight the perspective implied in the title of this chapter: modern Judaism and Zoroastrianism are "religions deemed monotheistic." This investigation is an inquiry into the influence of the environmental variables on the respective "origins" of these modern religions. The particular "religions" on which this work is focused have been articulated using the language of "community of worship centered around YHWH or Ahura Mazda" in order to reference the point of continuity that appears to underlie the long histories of these modern religions. Using Hartenstein's observations as a guide, this discussion points to the connection between the modern religions and their respective development lineages (and antecedent iterations/religions) while focusing the work on the circumstances under which the worship of YHWH and of Ahura Mazda originated.

Although the focus of this comparative case study is aimed at the ecological *origins* of these religions, a comparison of their respective developmental histories and modern circumstances reveals an interesting series of parallels. With the rise of the Achaemenid empire, the developmental histories of Judaism and Zoroastrian overlap, making comparison more complicated and, likely, more significant to adherents living in the modern world. It is not insignificant, however, that these historical parallels suggest interesting similarities between the religious communities that met in Mesopotamia in the 6th century BCE. Consider a few similarities between the modern religions: textual traditions, diasporic community, and unique centers of worship. Each of these points of comparison has implications for understanding the contexts in which these religions originated and each shows innovation and adaptation of the

¹²⁹ Hartenstein, 289.

community of worship over time. It is also illuminating to point out that with the replacement of the word “distributed” or “multi-national” for “diasporic,” this list applies to many other “religions deemed monotheistic,” not as products of religious change, but as what might be considered “retained traits” in the course of cultural development. It is reasonable to expect to find “newer” religions developing with building blocks that have historically “proven” themselves fit for success.

Chapter Eight (“People (and Texts) Deemed Religious”) explores narratives of religion-founding prophets and the literary figures of Moses and Zarathustra. The research examines the Hebrew and Old Avestan texts that can be said to belong to the earliest “canons” of Judaism and Zoroastrianism. This brief note, on the parallel development of textual traditions, refers to the respective bodies of texts associated with each of these religions. These include canonical and non-canonical texts (variously deemed across time and space) that have accumulated over the centuries through oral and written processes of development. Cogent to this discussion is the fact that these texts, to no small degree, serve as definitive markers for these modern religions. What is Judaism without the Hebrew Bible, Mishnah, or Talmud? Zoroastrianism without the Middle Persian texts or the Avestan texts they preserved and supplemented? This does not merely point to Hebrew or Old Avestan texts that can be said, in either oral or written form, to constitute the “original” narratives of YHWH- and Mazda-worship. But rather, it points to parallel histories by which a variety of texts in different languages, originating in different time periods and places, have come to not just “belong” to these religions but help to define them in the modern period.

An obvious explanation for the inclusion of texts in different languages, from various locales, is the reality of diaspora in the histories of these religions. To be sure, the historical trajectories differ, but the point of commonality most significant to this investigation is the fact that, in the face of dissolution or destruction, the religions that would become Judaism and

Zoroastrianism *survived* and *spread*. This has implications for the category of “religions deemed monotheistic” because the same cannot be said for the “religions deemed polytheistic” of ancient Egypt, Syro-Palestine, or Mesopotamia. It is no exaggeration to say that the modern forms of the religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH were born in global diaspora. Although the focus of this dissertation is understanding the influence of environments on the origins of these religions, an aspect of this research is the examination of the role played by those ecological roots in the survival of these deities and religions across millennia.

Chapter Six (“Buildings Deemed Religious”) explores the apparent consensus among archaeologists regarding the relative absence, before the Achaemenid period, of temples dedicated to the worship of Ahura Mazda or YHWH. In light of Taves’ work, the conclusion drawn is simple: the religions centered around these deities did not have this building block. The fact that religions don’t all have the same building blocks is integral to Taves’ approach. Although this idea will be explored in greater depth in Chapter Six, it is cogent to the present discussion insofar as fire temples and synagogues, which are respectively associated with Zoroastrianism and Judaism in the modern period, were innovative developments that signaled shifts in the histories of these religions. It is important to note that these buildings, although deemed religious, were each in their own way a new and unique kind of center of worship. It is certainly reasonable to assume that they were inspired by temple-building cultures across the ancient Near East, but at some point in history, (whether from the adoption of temple-building activity, or at a later date, is difficult to ascertain) the buildings and their religious functions ceased to resemble ancient Near Eastern temples and developed toward becoming what we associate with the modern religions. This change is obvious and, given the span of time considered in these brief notes, seems inevitable in order to accommodate the diverse needs of a

community in diaspora.¹³⁰

These three points of comparison suggest very interesting parallels in the historical development of the religions known in the 21st century as Judaism and Zoroastrianism. In attempting to discuss the long and varied histories of these religions, it becomes clear that issues of continuity make the choice of precise terminology difficult. Using the names of these deities as a point of continuity, consider the sources and information available to an investigation regarding “origins:” texts deemed religious and epigraphic attestations.

The most obvious, and perhaps problematic, sources of information for this investigation are the Hebrew and Avestan texts themselves. Although the Hebrew Bible is much more widely known than the Avestan texts, particularly through its adaptation to Christian and Muslim textual traditions, its usefulness for dating the origins of worship are no more reliable than the Zoroastrian scriptures. It may be argued that the Hebrew texts are potentially even *less* reliable, in part, because of their widespread acceptance as texts deemed religious. Support for this argument might be found in faith-based perspectives of adherents (scholars and non-academics alike) in the ultimate “Truth-value” of the Hebrew Bible that has lent it a misleading amount of authority as historical witness to the religio-historical narratives contained within. With this noted, the question remains: how old is the evidence provided by the texts? In *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*, Kenton Sparks identifies the Song of Deborah (Judges 5) as one of the oldest texts of the Hebrew Bible.¹³¹ He cites agreement among a number of scholars, at the time of writing, and suggests a 9th century BCE date (a pragmatic estimate that sets aside the various dates assigned to other biblical texts).¹³² This date appears to be one of the more reasonable and

¹³⁰ Lee I. Levine, “Art, Architecture, and Archaeology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman, Jeremy Cohen, and David Jan Sorkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 842.

¹³¹ Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 109.

¹³² Sparks, 112.

conservative dates among the various chronologies proposed in the literature.

In contrast, the Avestan texts, are divided by philologists into two linguistic “eras” of composition: “Old” Avestan, dated by its relationship to Old Indic/archaic Sanskrit, and “Young” Avestan, dated, in part by its relationship to Old Persian. In *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism* Prods Oktor Skjærvø writes: “there was never a single book (or manuscript) with all of the texts. Rather, the manuscripts contain only individual texts or groups of texts. These manuscripts are from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries, the history of a few of which can be followed back to about 1000 CE.”¹³³ Although the Avestan texts appear to have been preserved linguistically using written Pahlavi scripts from the Common Era, the potential for distortion involved in “millennia-long transmission of oral compositions” makes some scholars hesitant to invest too much historical authority in these texts.¹³⁴

For purposes of this discussion, it is important to note that various scholars date the languages of the Avestan texts across the 1st and 2nd millennia BCE. In the absence of concrete archaeological evidence, the lack of consensus among scholars regarding the specific dates of the Avestan texts (and thus religions) appears to come from two interconnected philological issues: first, the difficulty of establishing the relationship between “Old,” “Young,” and possibly “Middle” Avestan languages; and second, the issue of establishing the relationships between these and other languages.¹³⁵ Among the earliest possible dates for the Old Avestan texts (and thus the worship of Ahura Mazda) are those suggested by the relationship Iranian and Indo-Aryan languages (including Old Indic) placed in the first half of the 2nd millennium. This dating is argued on the basis of a reconstructed “mother” language, (Proto) Indo-Iranian, that itself

¹³³ Prods Oktor Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, The Sacred Literature Series (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2011), 2–3.

¹³⁴ Skjærvø, 3.

¹³⁵ Almut Hintze, “Zarathustra’s Time and Homeland: Linguistic Perspectives,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, The Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 32.

likely derived from (Proto) Indo-European. In *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language*, David W. Anthony suggests that by 2500 BCE Proto-Indo-European was a dying (if not dead) language giving rise to one of the last of its children from northeastern dialects: “Pre-Indo-Iranian” developed between 2500 and 2200 BCE.¹³⁶ He links “Common Indo-Iranian” to the Sintashta material culture, dating it to the period 2100-1800 BCE and suggests that what he calls “Archaic Old Indic” differentiated between 1800 and 1600 BCE.¹³⁷ Complicating Anthony’s scheme is the evidence for Indo-Aryan speakers in the names of deities, kings, and equestrian technology in the Hurrian-speaking Mitanni kingdom in northern Syria. An inscription on a statue of Idrimi of Alalah found at Tell Atchana dates the likely beginning of the Mitanni kingdom to roughly 1500 BCE, suggesting that Old Indic may have developed on the earlier side of Anthony’s range.¹³⁸ The presence of Indo-Aryan components in the names of deities in the treaty documents of the Mitanni points to a very important fact: the language and *religions* of Indo-Aryan speakers must have developed prior to westward movement, from Central Asia, if it could be recognizably similar to aspects of that which is found in ancient India. Although this lends credibility to a potentially early 2nd millennium date for the Old Avestan texts that appear to have been composed for the purpose of worshipping Ahura Mazda, like the Hebrew Bible, the question of dating remains open to debate.¹³⁹

Aside from the Hebrew and Avestan texts, there is epigraphic evidence to draw upon for investigating the origins of the religions centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda. In contrast to the relative dates suggested by the two different textual corpora, the oldest inscriptions

¹³⁶ David W. Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007), 81.

¹³⁷ Anthony, 408.

¹³⁸ Amélie. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2006), 289.

¹³⁹ Consider Skjærvø’s observation: “There is no identifiably historical information in the Avestan texts, but the language and contents are similar to those of the Rigvedic hymns, the oldest of which can be dated to approximately 1500-1000 BCE. It is therefore likely that the oldest part of the Avesta, the Old Avesta...had reached its final form by about 1000 BCE and the Young Avesta before the Achaemenid period, perhaps during the Median period (ca. 700-550 BCE).” Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 2–3.

mentioning Ahura Mazda are dated much later than those mentioning YHWH. In “The Tetragrammaton in Egyptian Sources – Facts and Fiction” Faried Adrom and Matthias Muller write, “In the Nubian temples at Soleb and Amarah-West, a total of three lists with names of foreign places and peoples survived, containing names that have been connected with the Tetragrammaton. The oldest two attestations survived in the temple of Amenhotep III at Soleb, dedicated to the god Amun and celebrating the so-called ‘Sed festival’ (Heb Sed) of the king.”¹⁴⁰ The inscriptions, ostensibly dated to the 14th century BCE contain a word that, although it appears linguistically cognate with the Tetragrammaton, does not seem to refer to an individual name or bear any discernable religious meaning.¹⁴¹

With so little information regarding the potential usage of this word one must look to its placement in the context of the so-called “Shasu-sequence” in order to draw conclusions.¹⁴² Adrom and Muller write, “From what is known about Egypt, the Levant, and Mesopotamia, the Shasu-names (and thus also Y-h-w) might have been derived from divine, personal, group or tribal, place, scenic, mountain, or homestead names...The toponomastic (not topographical) possibilities of interpretation the sparse Egyptian data allow for, are much too limited for far-reaching conclusions on the history of names, or on the religious and settlement history.”¹⁴³ This pragmatic caution is needed for such an enticing set of inscriptions because this evidence cannot serve as concrete proof of the biblical deity in Egypt. Despite this conclusion, the association with the Shasu implies something of the later the YHWH-center religion in the hieroglyphic texts.

The term “Shasu,” seems to have been used in Egyptian texts as early as the middle of the

¹⁴⁰ Faried Adrom and Matthias Muller, “The Tetragrammaton in Egyptian Sources - Facts and Fiction,” in *The Origins of Yahwism*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Markus Witte, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 484 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 96.

¹⁴¹ Adrom and Muller, 110.

¹⁴² Adrom and Muller, 110.

¹⁴³ Adrom and Muller, 110.

3rd millennium to refer, generically, to the apparently mobile societies encountered by the Egyptians.¹⁴⁴ In *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* Donald Redford writes,

The verb...meant basically to move on foot, and it is often used of journeys or of the daily motion of the sun, which is all innocent enough. But very early it took on a nuance of speed and furtiveness: messengers speed on foot to far-off places, and malcontents flee punishment. A participial form was applied from at least as early as the 5th dynasty to those ‘wanderers’ the Egyptians habitually came into contact with in the north, and rapidly became a term with societal implications. The resultant... ‘Shasu,’ came to be used of wandering groups whom we would call bedu, with significant distinction that unlike their modern counterparts they lacked the camel.¹⁴⁵

Redford’s explanation makes it easy to understand how scholars of the Hebrew texts might begin to “connect the dots” between biblical narratives of Abraham (and his descendants) encountering hostility while “sojourning in Egypt” and terminology used by Egyptians for just such peoples.

In *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* Lester Grabbe calls the identification of the Shasu with the Israelites “more ingenious than convincing” explaining that it is possible that some group of Shasu might have joined what emerged as “Israel” eventually, but there is not solid evidence to link the groups.¹⁴⁶ Following Grabbe, no case can be made to argue that there is evidence that the Shasu can be equated with the societies out of which the biblical Israel arose. However, in consideration of the work of this dissertation, it is possible to note that a link with the Hebrew Bible is not necessary to understanding the significance of YHWH-like words in the Shasu-sequence inscriptions at Soleb and Amarah-West. It is not unreasonable to point out the textual connection between something akin to the Tetragrammaton and the term Shasu suggests an association of mobile society with the name. This is no smoking gun, for without the Hebrew texts to point the way scholars might never have thought to be interested in

¹⁴⁴ Donald B. Redford, Mazal Holocaust Collection., and Rogers D. Spotswood Collection., *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 271.

¹⁴⁵ Redford, Mazal Holocaust Collection., and Rogers D. Spotswood Collection., 271.

¹⁴⁶ Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, Revised edition. (London, UK: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017), 126–27.

these inscribed words.¹⁴⁷ However, the mere association between a word, allegedly cognate with YHWH, and the generic (and derogatory) term for non-Egyptian mobile societies points to a *potential* context for the development of the worship of YHWH.

The oldest attestation of the name YHWH that appears to have been intended in reference to the deity appears on the “Mesha Stele.” Grabbe writes, “Apart from the biblical text, the name Yhwh is clearly attested first in the Moabite stone or Mesha Stele from the ninth century BCE: Mesha took Nebo from Israel and dedicated the ‘vessels of Yhwh’...to his god Chemosh.”¹⁴⁸ This stele, found in Dhiban, Jordan in the late 19th century offers a more reliable attestation and date than the Egyptian sources. Although the destruction and later reconstruction of the text from transcriptions made during excavation lends the authority of this source an air of potential interference, consider its usefulness for dating the origin of YHWH-worship.

In *The Israelites in History and Tradition* Niels Peter Lemche writes, “As a result of this investigation it seems that the Judean state as a comprehensive political construction, perhaps a territorial state in contrast to the system of city-states which was the normal kind of political arrangement in Palestine in antiquity, hardly survived for more than a few generations. The short period would not have allowed Judah to develop ethnic peculiarities not already present before the formation of the state.”¹⁴⁹ Consider the amount of time between the attestation on the Mesha Stele and the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and “Exile” (attested in non-biblical sources): roughly 300 years. It is not prudent to assume too strong a link between the name on the Mesha Stele and the focus of worship in the Babylonian community that would develop early Judaism. But it is worth considering the point, mentioned above, of survival in the face of adversity. The

¹⁴⁷ It is also important to note a parallel circumstances between Yhw in the Shasu-sequence and Israel in an Ugarit text. Mark S. Smith, Phillip R. Davies, and Meindert Dijkstra each point to the attribution of a name “Israel” to a “maryanu” in KTU 4.623.3.

¹⁴⁸ Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, 193.

¹⁴⁹ Niels Peter Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition*, Library of Ancient Israel. (London: SPCK, 1998), 81.

inscription on the Mesha Stele, written from a Moabite perspective, rife with praise for Chemosh, is clearly not a love-letter to YHWH and paints a fairly dismal picture of “Israel” and its fate. Note the fact that this attestation speaks to hostility between the Moabites, who cared about a deity named Chemosh, and a political body called “Israel” that was religiously associated with the name YHWH. If this is a piece of political propaganda, at the very least the selling power of this narrative, to its intended audience, must be acknowledged. As an additional note, consider that Grabbe writes, “In all the inscriptions and linguistic data from the surrounding region, there is nothing to indicate that Yhwh was worshipped generally over the entire region.”¹⁵⁰

So, if the earliest and most reliable non-biblical attestation of the name of this deity appears in the language of destruction and defeat, what does that say about the stability of this religious identity? The answer to this question, as it pertains to a pre-Exilic religion, may be found in the post-Exilic history of what is known today as Judaism: survival despite hostility and violent opposition. The idea that something of the original religion of YHWH has survived, despite many logical (from an outside perspective) reasons to “disappear into the crowd” hints at two insights pertinent to this investigation: 1) something must have developed strongly and early enough to withstand encounters with numerically (and politically) dominant religious societies; 2) the significance of this religion to the identities of adherents in the society from which it arises must have developed so integrally so as to be obvious to outsiders and sustainable in diaspora. Recalling Lemche’s comments, it seems possible to conclude that the developmental history of YHWH-centered religion, prior to the association with Jerusalem and the polity of Judah, must extend long enough backward into history, prior to the production of the Mesha Stele, such that a discernable and stable religious identity could establish itself. Does this insight

¹⁵⁰ Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, 196.

lend credibility to inscriptions at Soleb and Amarah-West? No, but it is possible the worship of YHWH developed between the dates of Soleb, Amarah-West, and the Mesha Stele.

Although the earliest epigraphic attestation of the worship of Ahura Mazda is far later than the philological dating of the Old Avestan texts, it is far more reliable and easily dated than these Egyptian and Moabite sources. A number of inscriptions dated to the reign of Darius I very clearly articulate the significance of Ahura Mazda to the Achaemenid king.¹⁵¹ The earliest text written in Old Persian, Darius I's inscription at Behistun (6th century BCE), is overflowing with the name of Ahura Mazda: he attributes his success, ascension to the throne, and motivations as a ruler to the deity.¹⁵² These inscriptions point to the development of Mazda-worship in the centuries following its likely origin in the 2nd millennium BCE: it spread from the Eurasian steppe to the Iranian plateau. The clarity of the religious language in Darius I's inscriptions reveals no small amount of useful information: 1) the singularity of the name of Ahura Mazda, in light of the absence of other divine names, identifies this deity as particularly special; 2) the presence of this inscription in the western Iranian Plateau speaks to the geographic mobility of the religion; 3) the use of the worship of Ahura Mazda (or lack thereof) as *casus belli* for military action against the Scythians/Saka, implies the continued presence of this religion (or variations) in Central Asia and surrounding steppe lands; 4) the emphasis on the relationship between Darius I and Ahura Mazda points to the geopolitical significance of this religion in the Achaemenid empire, both in its influence on the most powerful individuals and its apparent political clout (that mention of Ahura Mazda should be deemed so politically beneficial as to warrant inclusion in such inscriptions).

Experimentally, were this discussion to personify, as a human individual, the figure of

¹⁵¹ Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge, 2007), 135–57.

¹⁵² It is notable that Almut Hintze writes, "The earliest absolute dates of texts in any Iranian language come from the beginning of the reign of the Achaemenid king Darius the Great (522-486 BCE)...at Bisotun in Media. Hintze, "Zarathustra's Time and Homeland: Linguistic Perspectives," 32.

Ahura Mazda given in the Old Avestan texts, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this person had really “come up in the world” by the time of Darius I. It is also very important to recognize that he would have had plenty of time to do so: over 1000 years by conservative dating. The development of Mazda-worship from the 2nd to 1st millennium offers insights into context (and way) in which this religion originated. The first connection suggested by the list of insights, drawn above from Darius I’s inscriptions at Behistun, pertains most obviously to the title of this chapter: the mention of Ahura Mazda and the exclusion of other deities from the text.¹⁵³ This is not meant to argue for the development of numeric isolation that might support an evaluation of Darius I’s religion as “monotheism.” Rather, it highlights the strength and continuity of Mazda-worship, specifically, throughout the history of religious development from Old Avestan-speaking societies to modern Zoroastrianism. In the interest of space, the case made above regarding the implications of the survival of YHWH-centered religion, is noted here (rather than reiterated) applicable to the survival of Mazda-worship.

It is also important to note the apparent spread of Mazda-worship implied at Behistun: first, that there are enough politically significant Mazda-worshippers in the Achaemenid empire to make mention of this religious identity valuable to Darius I; and second, that the worship of Ahura Mazda either does or “should” continue in the lands associated with the Scythians/Saka. If the Behistun inscriptions, like the Mesha Stele, can be considered a piece of political propaganda, then they reveal an interesting assumption on the part of the author/authority: this narrative has selling power.

It is interesting to note that Darius I, like the Neo-Assyrian king Sargon II, appears to be a usurper who invested much effort in rehabilitating his image and rationalizing his rise to

¹⁵³ Kuhrt mentions that Ahura Mazda is the only deity named in inscriptions of Darius I and II, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes I. She notes “others are occasionally referred to collectively as ‘the gods’ or ‘all the gods’”. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 2007, 1:152 fn 5.

power.¹⁵⁴ The strategy of appealing to religious authority for political means was well established by the time of Darius I: the founding ruler of the Achaemenid Persian empire, Cyrus II, seems to have used religious tolerance and his role as king in religious functions to great effect. It seems quite logical that Darius I should emulate the actions (or sentiments) of his predecessors as a form of “appeal to authority” in both political and religious terms. The differences in divine name-dropping between the Cyrus Cylinder and Darius I’s Behistun inscription reveals a change in the political landscape of the Achaemenid empire. Whether this shift was the result of conversion to Mazda-worship by the populace, or by an elite few, is revealed in the fact that the trilingual (Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian) Behistun inscription was written down. Although it is difficult to establish whether or not it was disseminated orally to what might be assumed to have been a predominantly illiterate public, the likelihood that the message would have resonated, in some way, to an audience of readers able to view the inscription (or transcriptions) is significant.

Chapter Four (“Mobile Pastoralism”) examines the archaeological and historical data concerning the social contexts within which these religions appear to have developed. A history of mobile pastoralism among Avestan speaking societies appears to be reasonably established in the literature and may have had some influence on the spread of Mazda-worship onto the Iranian plateau. It is worth considering the idea that, at the very least, the building blocks that would have lent the religion success in a mobile context could be considered reasonably fit for other contexts in which mobility is needed. The relationship between this process of development and selective environmental pressures reveals the influence of agriculturally marginal landscapes on these religions deemed monotheistic. The implied presence of Mazda-worship in Scythian/Saka controlled regions, as well as in the Achaemenid empire, points to the fitness of some aspects of

¹⁵⁴ Kuhrt, 1:48–49; Amélie. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2006), 497–98.

the religion behind the composition of the Old Avestan texts and the importance of the environmental context underlying their development.

This discussion, of the earliest epigraphic attestations of the divine names YHWH and Ahura Mazda, has mentioned both the Achaemenid empire and the Babylonian Exile, without remarking on the moment of historical overlap that occurred as the Persians moved into Mesopotamia and the Near East. Scholarship on the Hebrew Bible is full of references to the “Persian Period” but often only in chronological terms, without reference to the Persian people or their religions. This is also very clearly a moment in which the histories of the religions respectively centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH are not yet parallel: Mazda-worship is climbing to imperial heights while the worship of YHWH is struggling to survive.

In *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* Jenny Rose writes, “The defeat of Babylon was a crucial event in the religious history of several peoples, whose texts incorporate Cyrus into the redemptive activity of their own divinities.”¹⁵⁵ One of the texts Rose points to is the Hebrew Bible, which narrates the religious importance of Cyrus to the history of Israel across various books. The commentary on 2 Chronicles offered in *The Jewish Study Bible* highlights the full extent of this narrative: “The present passage [36:22-23], like Ezra ch 1, makes additional claims. It proclaims that YHVH, God of heaven—an appellation found primarily in Persian period documents and sources—has given to Cyrus sovereignty over the world and he (Cyrus) order both the rebuilding of the Temple and the right of all (exiled) Jews to return to Jerusalem.”¹⁵⁶ The integration of salvation narratives, focused on Cyrus II, into the religious societies over which the Achaemenids ruled seems to have served a political (and some would argue religious) goal of establishing order in the empire. Rose writes,

¹⁵⁵ Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, I.B. Tauris Introductions to Religion. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 61.

¹⁵⁶ Jewish Publication Society, *The Jewish Study Bible: Jewish Publication Society Tanakh Translation*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1830–31.

Around 519 BCE, Darius commanded the Persian satrap of Egypt, Aryandes, to assemble experts to codify the pharaonic laws, resulting 16 years later in an Egyptian code of law inscribed in both Aramaic and Demotic on papyrus rolls. In keeping with this policy of preserving a law based on local cultural and religious distinctions, Artaxerxes is said to have called upon Ezra, ‘a priest and expert in Torah’, to regulate Jews living in Judah and the Trans-Euphrates province ‘according to the law of your God’ (*Ezra* 7.12-14, 25-6). It was under Persian rule, then, that Ezra promulgated the Torah and established it as the ‘law’ of the Jewish people within the empire, which was then considered as part of Persian royal law.¹⁵⁷

Rose’s explanation points to the importance of understanding the history of Zoroastrianism, particularly the development of Avestan religion in the “Persian Period,” in the study of ancient Near and Middle Eastern religions. In “Religion and Politics in Pre-Islamic Iran” Albert de Jong explains the significance of Achaemenid political power to the development of Mazda-worship in the empire.¹⁵⁸ He writes,

It is unimaginable that all of this would have occurred spontaneously: Some of the developments clearly point to Persia as the locus of its origins (the judgment of the soul), whereas others (the calendar) can be shown to have spread all over the empire. Taken together, they build a very strong case for the fact that we should not interpret the Achaemenid evidence on the basis of what we “know” of Zoroastrianism, but that we should recognize the fact that the Zoroastrianism we know (best), was given shape – purposely, in an act of imperial unification – by the Achaemenids. This will also give us instruments to judge developments in later periods. It is to these that we must turn now.¹⁵⁹

From de Jong’s comments, an important conclusion regarding the development of both YHWH- and Mazda-worship during the “Persian Period” can be drawn: each religion was “given shape – purposely” by the Achaemenid policies and their respective communities of worship. This adaptability is a feature of these religions, recalling the discussion of survival mentioned throughout this chapter, that one might expect to find in religions developed in societies described by Frachetti’s “Non-Uniform Complexity Theory.”

¹⁵⁷ Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 62.

¹⁵⁸ Albert de Jong, “Religion and Politics in Pre-Islamic Iran,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, The Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 85–102.

¹⁵⁹ de Jong, 93.

In preparation for discussing the applicability of Frachetti's theory to the worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda in Chapter Four, it is important to comment on the distinction made, between religious and social or "ethnic" identities in the Hebrew and Avestan texts. This distinction appears to be specifically pertinent to their categorization as "religions deemed monotheistic." The fact that this separation appears to be evident these and other religions deemed monotheistic (like Christianity and Islam), suggests that it reflects a building block (or combination thereof) common to the category. The struggle of scholars of "Religion" to use terminology that mimics this separation when attempting to describe, for instance, "Egyptian religion" as an institution distinct from "Egyptian society (or culture)" highlights the absence of such features from religions deemed polytheistic. What is Mesopotamian religion? The religion of the Mesopotamians. What is Mazda-worship? The religion of the Aryans.

Chapter Eight examines this distinction in the context of narratives describing how "the people" got their "Religion." This appears to be *the* pivotal moment in the internal histories of these (and other) religions deemed monotheistic. Within the narratives of the Avestan and Hebrew texts, the separateness of the Aryan and Israelite people, respectively, from the religions centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH, appears to be connected to the survival and spread of these religions. De Jong writes, "It must be assumed that at a certain moment in history there were people in the Iranian world who chose to adopt this religion, who did not speak Avestan, but were convinced that it was important for their belonging to the community of Mazda-worshippers to use the Avestan texts in their prayers and rituals. This has been evoked, somewhat romantically, as a result of the work of Zoroastrian missionaries whose activities are to some extent recorded."¹⁶⁰ De Jong's comments highlight the results of this building block: the distinction allows for non-adherents of various social or ethnic identities to adopt the religion. It

¹⁶⁰ de Jong, 88.

is also important to point out that within de Jong's remark concerning "the work of Zoroastrian missionaries" we can see a glimmer of what Jan Assmann evaluates as "antagonistic acculturation."¹⁶¹ This concept concerns the interaction of religions deemed monotheistic with religions deemed polytheistic in confrontational terms. The next section considers particularly building blocks that appear to define the former category and underlie the propensity of these religions to define those in the latter category as "Other."

¹⁶¹ Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, 7.

Deemed

In *The Price of Monotheism*, Jan Assmann uses the terms “primary religion” and “secondary religion” in the place of “religions deemed polytheistic” and “religions deemed monotheistic” respectively. The use of this terminology highlights his discomfort (he is not alone) with the limiting and loaded terms “monotheism” and “polytheism.” One of the benefits of Assmann’s shift in terminology is the freedom (from the constraints of loaded terms) he uses to define, at length, his categories. He writes,

The distinction between “primary” and “secondary” religions goes back to a suggestion made by the scholar of religion Theo Sundermeier. Primary religions evolve historically over hundreds and thousands of years within a single culture, society, and generally also language, with all of which they are inextricably entwined. Religions of this kind include the cultic and divine worlds of Egyptian, Babylonian and Greco-Roman antiquity, among many others. Secondary religions, by contrast, are those that owe their existence to an act of revelation and foundation, build on primary religions, and typically differentiate themselves from the latter by denouncing them as paganism, idolatry and superstition.¹⁶²

Despite differences in terminology, in the larger discussion of “monotheism” Assmann appears to be “saying what everyone is thinking.” He points to the assumptions of categorical differences that seem implied with the usage of various terminology in discussions of “monotheism.” He goes on to define the category of “secondary religions” by identifying some building blocks of religions deemed monotheistic: “All secondary religions, which are at the same time book, world, and (with the possible exception of Buddhism) monotheistic religions, look down on the primary religions as pagan.”¹⁶³ It is this last notion that leads the discussion from the last section into this one: these religions “look down on the primary religions as pagan.”

Assmann points to the feature of “secondary religions” that seems to underlie this perspective as “Truth.” He writes, “What all of these religions have in common is an emphatic concept of truth. They all rest on a distinction between true and false religion, proclaiming a truth

¹⁶² Assmann, 7.

¹⁶³ Assmann, 7.

that does not stand in a complementary relationship to other truths, but consigns all traditional or rival truths to the realm of falsehood.”¹⁶⁴ This is a fairly prominent component of religions deemed monotheistic in the modern world and appears integral to the potential for proselytization referenced by de Jong above. Although there does not seem to be any certainty as to which came first, it seems reasonable to draw a connection between this “emphatic concept of truth” and the separation of ethnic and religious identities. Considering the global spread of Islam and Christianity over the last thousand years, it is easy to see how an exclusive claim of (and on) “Truth” can facilitate the conversion of people with various social or “ethnic” identities. Although he does not use the language of Taves’ “Building Block Approach” (though such a framework would strengthen his work) Assmann argues that this feature of “secondary religions” is connected to a building block of religions discussed above: texts deemed religious. He writes, “This exclusive truth is something genuinely new, and its novel, exclusive and exclusionary character is clearly reflected in the manner in which it is communicated and codified. It claims to have been revealed to humankind once and for all, since no path of merely human fashioning could have led from the experiences accumulated over countless generations to this goal; and it has been deposited in a canon of sacred texts, since no cult or rite would have been capable of preserving this revealed truth down the ages.”¹⁶⁵ The significance of “the Book” to the proselytization efforts of Protestant sects of Christianity is a well-established fact in the 21st century and requires no more proof than a visit to any hotel room in the United States. It is important to understand that although the unit of “building block” is considered, for purposes of discussion, in isolation in this analysis, in reality, they appear to function together in complex ways to form religions deemed monotheistic.

As noted above, Assmann identifies the other side of this perspective as one of “looking

¹⁶⁴ Assmann, 8.

¹⁶⁵ Assmann, 8.

down” on other religions, particularly those deemed polytheistic (or “primary” in Assmann’s words). He argues, “Even though they may have assimilated many elements of primary religions in the course of a ‘syncretistic acculturation,’ they are still marked in their self-understanding by an ‘antagonistic acculturation,’ and they have strong ideas about what is incompatible with the truth (or orthodoxy) they proclaim.”¹⁶⁶ However problematic this appears to have proven in the histories of Christian and Muslim conquests, the notion of “incompatibility” does seem to be a logical consequence of this “emphatic concept of Truth.” When compared to ancient Greek, Egyptian, or Mesopotamian religions (often the paragons of religions deemed polytheistic in the ancient world) the presence of this feature as a building block in religions deemed monotheistic becomes quite obvious. Although no one can speak to the lived experiences or thought-processes of ancient individuals, it is easy enough to use what information is available to imagine that the complex and apparently integral connections between markers of identity would make it illogical that someone with non-Greek political, ethnic, and cultural identities could assume a Greek religious identity. Rather, as Assmann points out, the syncretistic tendency of religions deemed polytheistic stands out in stark contrast to the notion of “incompatibility” he identifies in religions deemed monotheistic.¹⁶⁷

The contrast between patterns of syncretistic alignment of deities, a sort of ultimate religious “compatibility,” and the pattern of identifying and confronting “incompatibility” identified by Assmann, leads him to use the term “counterreligion” to describe “secondary religions.”¹⁶⁸ He writes, “The truth derives its depth, its clear contours, and its capacity to orient and direct action from this antagonistic energy, and from the sure knowledge of what is incompatible with the truth. These new religions can therefore perhaps be characterized most

¹⁶⁶ Assmann, 7.

¹⁶⁷ Assmann, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Assmann, 8.

adequately by the term “counterreligion.”¹⁶⁹ Assmann’s usage of the term points to the assumption underlying much of the discourse on “monotheism:” this category of religions is “new” or fundamentally different from the religions of “old.” Most interestingly, it seems that the narratives of “incompatibility” integral to religions deemed monotheistic have succeeded, historically, in setting up and reinforcing the distinction between those religions of the “old” type and those that belong to this “new” category.

The “emphatic concept of Truth” that Assman refers to is more than just a sales pitch for conversion: it is the “law” that guides and binds adherents into a community of worship.

Assmann writes,

To sum up, whereas “monotheism” is a regulative idea, “polytheism” designates a religious practice that stands opposed to this idea. There has never been a religion that declared its commitment to polytheism as a regulative idea. Polytheism is a concept suitable only for describing monotheism as a counterreligion that polemically distances itself from other religions. While the concept of polytheism may have served historically as a neutral substitute for the unambiguously polemical and vituperative concept of idolatry (“idol worship”), it has inherited the negative connotations of its precursor, since both concepts have precisely the same meaning in an extensional sense.¹⁷⁰

Assmann’s remarks are particularly cogent to understanding the category of religions deemed monotheistic. His argument suggests something of *an* answer to the question of survival raised in the previous section.

In *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel*, Sparks gives a list of principles for studying “ethnic sentiments,” a few of which appear to shed some light on the potential relationship between the interconnected building blocks mentioned by Assmann and the development (and survival) of these religions deemed monotheistic. He writes, “We should first recognize that ethnicity is one of the many varieties of human behavior and is perceptible only in certain cultural contexts... This implies that our comprehension of a given ethnic community is achieved

¹⁶⁹ Assmann, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Assmann, 25.

primarily as we come to identify its discursive strategies of self-definition and also as we understand the devices it uses to [distinguish] itself from other communities.”¹⁷¹ Although he discusses “ethnic sentiments,” Sparks’ comments can easily be translated to the present discussion on religious identity. If “religious sentiments” might be described as “one of the many varieties of human behavior...perceptible only in certain cultural contexts” then it seems that the discussion returns to Taves’ work. One strategy of her Building Block Approach is to contextualize things deemed religious in broader discussions about human experiences, beliefs, and behaviors. It is particularly important to consider the implication noted by Sparks regarding the “discursive strategies of self-definition” and “devices” used to distinguish one community from another. Following Assmann, it might be said that among the discursive strategies and devices-for-distinguishing used by religions deemed monotheistic are those derived from the distinction between “ethnic” and religious identities and the sense of “incompatibility” with an “emphatic concept of Truth.”

Consider another of Sparks’ principles: “Third, ethnic sentiments do not arise in a vacuum but as distinctive behaviors in contrast to other social groups, and both the members and nonmembers usually recognize these sentiments. This distinctive identity is intensified (and some would say created) by competition, either between ethnic groups or between an ethnic group and other social modalities.”¹⁷² Translating this to apply to “religious sentiments” points to an insight noted by a number of scholars of the Hebrew and Avestan texts: the relationship of the protagonists with the “Other” clarifies and strengthens the identity of the “in-group” community of worship. In both textual corpora, each of what de Jong calls the “we-group” in the text has an antagonistic counterpart: in contrast to Israel, the reader/listener of the Hebrew Bible is told

¹⁷¹ Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible*, 18.

¹⁷² Sparks, 19.

about the Canaanites; and the Avestan texts identify the Tuiria and Chionians as the enemies of the Aryans.¹⁷³ Interestingly, the enemies of the “ethnic” identities of these “we-groups” is only half of the picture: the religious opposition faced by Mazda-worshippers comes from the worshippers of the Daevas; the community of worship centered on YHWH are threatened by any number of “false” or “other gods.”¹⁷⁴

Sparks’ suggestion that “distinctive identity is intensified (and some would say created) by competition” shows how these religious identities might have survived, in part, *due* to encounters with other religious societies. Recall Frachetti’s theory describes the development of social institutions in pragmatic response to both geographic as well as social landscapes. It is possible that the building blocks implied by Assmann’s list might have developed in response to social and environmental pressures and functioned to preserve aspects of the religions across time and space under different, but perhaps no less pressing, circumstances. The separation of “Religion” from “Ethnicity” allows for the possibility of a religious community surviving despite, and because of, its geographic (not tied to a locale) and social (not tied to a society) mobility. It is plausible that the “carrots and sticks” of conversion, in the form of an “emphatic concept of Truth” and “looking-down” on “incompatible” religions could have functioned in conjunction with physically mobile adherents to spread the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda. Although this story is familiar to a 21st century world dominated by Islam and Christianity, it is reasonable to consider its potential in the early development of the very ancient religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH because they all belong to the category of religions deemed monotheistic.

¹⁷³ de Jong, “Religion and Politics in Pre-Islamic Iran,” 87; Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 24.

¹⁷⁴ For insights regarding these enemies in the respective texts, see: Jean. Kellens, *Essays on Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism*, trans. Prods O. Skjærvø, Bibliotheca Iranica. No. 1. Zoroastrian Studies Series (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda Publishers, 2000), 21–22; Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and Their Expression in the Hebrew Bible*, 119–20.

In *Big Gods* Norenzayan points to the survival of ancient religions into the modern era as evidence of their particular fitness in the difficult game of cultural selection.¹⁷⁵ He writes, “religions have always been multiplying, growing, and mutating at a brisk pace. In one estimate, new religions sprout at an average rate of two to three per day. ‘Many are called, but few are chosen,’ says the Gospel according to Matthew (22:14). This ‘Matthew Effect’ might as well refer to the iron law of religious evolution, which dictates that while legions of new religious elements are created, most of them die out, save a potent few that endure and flourish.”¹⁷⁶ Norenzayan’s point highlights the fact that the religions centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda didn’t just survive, but appear as forerunners of a category of “potent” religions deemed monotheistic that have out-endured and out-flourished many religions deemed polytheistic over the last few millennia.

The category of “religions deemed monotheistic” appears to map neatly onto Assmann’s category of “secondary religions” giving the impression that all religions in this category are obviously connected. One benefit of a category defined using Taves’ framework is the ease with which it can be applied: religions are simply “deemed” into the category. It must be noted, however, that not all religions deemed monotheistic are deemed similarly. Before moving on to the last section in this chapter, “Monotheistic,” consider, briefly, four case studies of religions deemed monotheistic that may inform an understanding of the process, and politics, involved in a religion being “deemed:” Judaism, Zoroastrianism, the worship of the Aten in Egypt, and the worship of Ngai in East Africa.

In *Of God and Gods*, Assmann writes, “monotheism is a Jewish achievement.”¹⁷⁷ This concise statement appears to summarize the place of Judaism in discourses on “monotheism.”

¹⁷⁵ Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 1–7.

¹⁷⁶ Norenzayan, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, 7.

The case is so particularly closed that it is worth remarking on the seemingly inviolability of Jewish “monotheism” in the history of literature on the subject. Scholars like Mark S. Smith have sought to highlight the incongruous history of “polytheism” that underlies the eventual “monotheism” so closely associated with Judaism.¹⁷⁸ The major issues identified by Smith (and others) concern the presence of deities other than YHWH in the Hebrew Bible and as a (non-YHWH) “theophoric” element in the name “Israel.” These are reasonable points in a fairly compelling series of arguments that might validate the confusion a reader, new to the Hebrew Bible, may feel at seeing the variety of deities present throughout the biblical texts. The different terms developed (some mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) in response to issues like these shows a great deal of ingenuity and frustration on the part of theologians and scholars. Considering respective adaptations of the Hebrew texts (and Jewish history) by Christian and Muslim communities in the Common Era, the stakes for deeming Judaism monotheistic seem particularly high. The case of Judaism’s undisputed status as the benchmark for religions deemed monotheistic exemplifies the issues of association (with other religions) in the process of deeming. No religion is deemed monotheistic or polytheistic in a vacuum.

That aspects of Judaism are regarded as integral to the respective developmental histories of Islam and Christianity appears to have contributed to its being deemed monotheistic. In contrast, the debate on Zoroastrian “monotheism” appears to have existed since before the Muslim conquest of the Sassanian empire more than 1300 years ago. The “problem” of monotheism, for theologians encountering Zoroastrianism, actually appears to be a “solution” to a familiar problem in “monotheistic” theologies: why does an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent deity allow bad things to happen? Sometimes called “dualism,” Zoroastrian

¹⁷⁸ Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel’s Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990).

cosmology includes an acknowledgement of (and explanations for) the “chaos” that exists beyond, and in contrast to, “order” (*aša-*).¹⁷⁹ This allows Ahura Mazda to be associated with only “good,” “true,” and “orderly” qualities, whereas the opposite of these things cannot, by definition, be associated with the deity. The eventual hypostatisation of those opposite concepts, in the form of Angra Mainyu (“Destructive Spirit”), has been looked to as influential in Christian and Muslim constructions of “Satan.”¹⁸⁰ Like the presence of other deities in the Hebrew Bible, the figure of “the devil” or “Satan” in these cosmologies seems to have given rise to any number of explanations (and terms) for defining monotheism “despite.” The case of Zoroastrianism reveals that the criteria for deeming religions monotheistic may not just include shared answers, but shared questions.¹⁸¹

The case of the so-called “Egyptian monotheism” appears to share some of the “answers” of religions deemed monotheistic but not the “questions.” The attempted transformation of the ancient Egyptian religious landscape in the 14th century BCE by the ruler Akhenaten (formerly Amenophis IV) lasted just a few years into the reign of his successor before collapsing into history. Although the religion of Akhenaten and his family, centered around the Aten, appears to have met the criteria for what might be called “numeric monotheism,” it seems to remain somehow different from other religions deemed monotheistic. Assmann, an Egyptologist who has argued for the influence of Egypt on the development of Jewish monotheism, differentiates between the worship of the Aten (a kind of monotheism perhaps better articulated as “mature polytheism”) and the worship of YHWH (an exclusive and revolutionary kind of

¹⁷⁹ Consider Rose’s note that “*Asha* can be translated as ‘order’ or ‘arranged in cosmic cohesion’, and thus ‘right’ in the sense of ‘as it should be’: it is often translated as ‘truth’. *Asha* is a concept that occurs in the earliest sacral poetry of the Iranians” Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Rose, 89.

¹⁸¹ For an interesting discussion regarding the interplay of questions and answers between the Avestan and Hebrew texts, see: Morton Smith, “II Isaiah and the Persians,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 83, no. 4 (1963): 419–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/597160>.

monotheism).¹⁸² The case of Akhenaten's religion highlights, quite pointedly, that the process of deeming religions monotheistic or polytheistic is more than just a "numbers game."

The worship of Ngai, by the Maasai and Kikuyu (respectively) in East Africa, is a very curious case in the history of religions deemed monotheistic. A variety of sources published in the 20th century make statements about the religions of these societies being unequivocally monotheistic and then proceed to the next point of discussion.¹⁸³ Generally, these claims are offered with encyclopedic authority, lacking citation and explanation. The ubiquitous nature of this pattern is revealed by its extension to both the Wikipedia entry on the Kikuyu: "The Gĩkũyũ were – and still are – monotheists believing in an omnipotent God whom they refer to as *Ngai*. All of the Gĩkũyũ, Embu, and Kamba use this name"¹⁸⁴ and in a children's book on the Maasai: "Actually, the Masai believe in only one god, Enkai. Enkai is spoken of as the Black God when he answers his people's prayers by sending them rain and tall grass."¹⁸⁵ The consistency of these references might be very easily explained: the information could be accurate. Considering the increasing volume of literature on monotheism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, three religions unquestionably deemed monotheistic by the 20st century, the absence of scholarship on these religions, so clearly deemed monotheistic, in East Africa is not so easy to dismiss. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to consider the question of this absence further, it is important to observe that, in the wake of European colonialism, the exclusion – by ignorance, or malice – of languages, cultures, and peoples from the attention of Western scholarship is an all too familiar narrative. The case of the Maasai and Kikuyu religions points to

¹⁸² Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, 25.

¹⁸³ W. Scoresby. Routledge and Katherine. Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People: The Akikuyu of British East Africa* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1968); L. S. B. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903 v.1*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (London: Academic Press, 1977); Sonia. Bleeker, *The Masai: Herders of East Africa*. (Dennis Hobson, 1963); Paul Spencer and University of London. School of Oriental and African Studies., *Nomads in Alliance; Symbiosis and Growth among the Rendille and Samburu of Kenya*. (London,: Oxford University Press, 1973).

¹⁸⁴ "Kikuyu People," Wikipedia, August 16, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kikuyu_people.

¹⁸⁵ Bleeker, *The Masai: Herders of East Africa*., 107.

the role of power, privilege, and politics in the determination of religions deemed monotheistic.

Monotheistic

The term “polytheism” derives from a Greek word, πολυθεΐα, that appears very differently in usage between Aeschylus (writing in the 5th/6th centuries BCE) and Philo of Alexandria (writing between the first centuries BCE and CE.)¹⁸⁶ The former seems to use the term in a particular literal sense of the word, with regard to religious objects dedicated to multiple (associated) deities¹⁸⁷ In contrast, Philo of Alexandria appears to use the term polemically to condemn non-Jewish “idol worship.”¹⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, the adaptation of the word to Jean Bodin’s *Démonomanie des sorciers* in the 16th century CE appears to be directly inspired by Philo of Alexandria’s usage.¹⁸⁹ The term monotheism seems to have been coined in English in the 17th century by Henry More in *An Explanation of The Grand Mystery of Godliness*.¹⁹⁰ In the second chapter of Book III (under a general heading of “The Pagan Evasion of Polytheism”), More quotes Plutarch’s “Isis and Osiris” in order to offer veiled argument against Unitarian theological movement.¹⁹¹ He writes,

Lastly, The *Ægyptians*, a people more infamous for *Polytheism* and variety of Religions then any nation under the cope of Heaven...the Priests reserving the knowledge of the Unity for the Object of their worship as *Arcanum* only belonging to themselves....But that *This One Object of Worship* was not the true God, but the *Material World*, the very figure they make use of does most naturally intimate; and I have noted above that *Mundus* and *Jupiter* in the Pagan Philosophy is one and the same. And *Plutarch* speaks expresly concerning the *Ægyptians*...*That they account the World or Universe to be the same with the prime God or First Cause of all things.* Him the *Ægyptians* worshipped under the name of *Serapis*....From which Hypothesis is most easily understood what is meant by that Enigmatical Inscription in the Temple of *Sais* in *Ægypt*...*I am all that was, and is, and is to come, and my veil no mortall ever did yet uncover.* A venerable Riddle under which there lyes not one grane of Truth, unless there be nothing but *modified matter* in Being. But thus to make the *World* God, is to make

¹⁸⁶ Etienne Balibar, *Secularism and Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 71–72.

¹⁸⁷ Balibar, 71–72.

¹⁸⁸ Almut Hintze, “Monotheism the Zoroastrian Way,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, no. 02 (April 2014): 226.

¹⁸⁹ Frevel, “Beyond Monotheism?,” 2.

¹⁹⁰ Ahn Gregor, “Monotheismus,” *Metzler Lexikon Religion: Gegenwart, Alltag, Medien* 2 (1999): 482.

¹⁹¹ Balibar, *Secularism and Cosmopolitanism*, 76.

no God at all; and therefore this Kinde of *Monotheisme* of the Heathen is as rank *Atheisme* as their *Polytheisme* was proved to be before.¹⁹²

More's antagonistic text reflects the polemical history of the terminology with which he has chosen to deploy his multiple attacks. It is important to understand the way More coins the term "Monotheisme" in order to *further* the use of "Atheisme" and "Polytheisme" in his argument. This history of usage for these terms reveals that "polytheism" and "monotheism," as they have been adapted or invented in the modern period are, put simply, "fightin' words."

In order to understand the function of these terms as such, consider some of the points made in this chapter concerning "the fight:"

1. The archaeological histories of the religions centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda are told, in large part, through epigraphic sources that provide evidence of (and appear to have been created as a result of) hostile encounters with other societies.
2. The geographic mobility and spread of these religions appear to have resulted in more of these encounters, more regularly (in some cases more permanently).
3. The perspectives of peoples encountered, with regard to the relationship between their political, cultural, "ethnic," and "religious" identities, may have been very different from the worshippers of Ahura Mazda and YHWH.
4. Social mobility, and the potential for joining these religions, seems to have spread these religions beyond the societies in which they were generated. If this process had effects (on encounters) that reflect anything of Christian and Muslim proselytization throughout history, this may have resulted in hostilities that were ultimately short-lived due to conversion or conflict.

¹⁹² Henry More, *An Explanation of the Grand Mystery of Godliness, or, A True and Faithfull Representation of the Everlasting Gospel of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Onely Begotten Son of God and Sovereign over Men and Angels* by H. More ..., Early English Books, 1641-1700 / 114:03 (London : Printed by J. Flesher for W. Morden ..., 1660., 1660), 61–62.

5. A few of the building blocks comprising these (and other) religions deemed monotheistic, identified by Assmann, included “looking down on other religions as pagan” as part of an understanding of “incompatibility of Truth concepts” with other religions.
6. The incorporation of “ethnic” and religious enemies in the narratives of the Avestan and Hebrew texts points to the potential role of encounters with the “Other” in identity development.
7. In the background of these encounters are biological and cultural evolutionary processes that blindly privilege developments and societies that can outcompete one another for survival. This also highlights the fact that these religions have survived into the 21st century.
8. Finally, it is important to recall the lessons of the four cases studies of religions deemed monotheistic. They show how important the process of deeming has been, and continues to be, to the formation of identity and figuration of the “pagan,” the “incompatible,” or the “Other.”

The polemical terms “polytheism” and “monotheism” appear to have been born in “the fight” and developed specifically for it. They function to mark out, via processes of “deeming,” who is in (friend) and who is out (foe). Although the intention may be less polemic, usage of these terms as shorthand, for the incompatible differences between religions deemed polytheistic and those deemed monotheistic, continues in and outside of the academy in the 21st century.

This discussion has identified a number of tools, terminology included, used by religions deemed monotheistic in this competition for survival. These may be easier for many people in the modern world to identify and understand because they are the tools that appear to be winning “the fight.” If this chapter has given the impression that religions deemed monotheistic invented, and remain in control of, the language of discourse regarding the difference between this “new”

type of religion and the “old” it is because this appears to be the case. Using the word “competition” instead of “fight” emphasizes the chronological scale on which this contest is unfolding. This competition is undergirded by processes of natural and cultural selection that will, inevitably, make “old” the category of religions deemed monotheistic at some point. The next chapter will examine the social contexts within which the religions centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda developed the building blocks that have made these religions fit for competition.

Chapter Four: Mobile Pastoralism

*“The geography and history of Central Eurasia are inseparable.”*¹⁹³

The religions deemed monotheistic centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH do not appear to have originated in isolation. The generation and development of these religions took place in societies that were shaped by the social and physical worlds around them. The last chapter sketched out some of the building blocks that define the category of “religions deemed monotheistic” and hinted that their origins can be traced to ancient societies that adapted to survive what some might consider to be “difficult” social and geographic environments. This chapter will examine the category of “mobile pastoralism” to which these societies (that appear to have given rise to these religions) belong. The consistency with which this category of societies seems to be defined by environmental (and social) pragmatic responsiveness makes sense of the emergence of religious innovations such as the building blocks underlying these religions deemed monotheistic. Thus, it is difficult to deny the influence (direct or indirect) of agriculturally marginal landscapes on these societies and the religions they produced.

Among the building blocks that appear to be integral to the category of “religions deemed monotheistic” are: 1) emphatic concepts of “Truth”; 2) perceptions of “incompatibility” with other religions (primarily those deemed polytheistic); 3) perspectives that separate social or “ethnic” identities from religious identities; 4) written (or oral) texts deemed religious; 5) a focus on (a) supernatural agent/s that exist beyond the material world. In his assessment of “secondary religions” Assmann suggests that all in this category are “world” religions, an important acknowledgement of the social and geographic mobility of religions deemed monotheistic.¹⁹⁴ Additionally, the last chapter pointed to what could be called the “chronological” mobility of

¹⁹³ Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*, 1.

¹⁹⁴ Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, 7.

these religions: the survival of some key building blocks that define each religion across time and space. These types of mobility appear to be connected to the function of building blocks that define this category of religions and may be the result of mobile pastoral developmental contexts.

In order to examine the potential mobile social origins of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, it is useful to understand some of the terminology used in such investigations. Following Frachetti, this dissertation uses the phrase “mobile pastoralism” to describe various social and economic strategies that belong to a category that is primarily defined by “mobility.” Historically, societies in this category have stood out in stark contrast to “settled” societies that are often associated with agricultural modes of food production. Like categories of “religions deemed monotheistic” and “religions deemed polytheistic” the differences between categories of “mobile pastoralism” and “settled agriculturalism” are more complex than a simple (and artificial) contrast between modes of food production. In *Pastoralists*, Philip Carl Salzman writes,

[M]any anthropologists have, over the past decades, found it convenient to disaggregate analytically the two main elements of the term *nomad*: (1) raising livestock on natural pasture, and (2) moving from place to place. The current convention is to use *pastoralism* to refer to the raising of livestock on nature pasture and *nomadism* to refer to moving from place to place. This disaggregation allows scholars to acknowledge and investigate various subsistence activities undertaken by mobile societies, including small-scale agriculture, hunting/fishing, gathering, and herding. Interestingly, Salzman notes that the etymology of the word “nomad” from Greek, through Latin, to English derives, ultimately, from the same meaning as “pastoralism.”¹⁹⁵

Salzman’s comments point to the historical association of pastoralism and mobility as well as an understanding that these activities are undertaken by, and define, various societies that can be grouped into a common category. Salzman writes, “[The] reference in the *OED* definition to ‘a race or tribe’ (admittedly outmoded terminology) clearly points to nomadism as, in some sense, a

¹⁹⁵ Philip Carl Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State* (Colorado: Westview Press, A Member of the Perseus Books Group, 2004), 17.

collective activity, participated in by a community larger than the individual household.”¹⁹⁶ This is particularly cogent to the current investigation, as this dissertation is concerned with social and religious developments at the scale of society.

Scale seems to be key in distinguishing between subsistence activities undertaken by mobile and settled peoples. Salzman points out “[Nomadism] refers not to the rare or occasional displacement of people from one location to another, as in moving to a new house or migrating to a new community or country; rather, it refers to the regular, repeated, and frequent displacement of household and home base and community.”¹⁹⁷ If mobility or settlement could be quantified, Salzman’s observation might suggest that the “amount” of mobility or settlement defines the social categories of “mobile pastoralism” or “settled agriculturalism.” It seems that the same can be said for describing the “pastoralism” of mobile societies as somehow “more” than the same activities undertaken by settled societies. Salzman writes, “Pastoralism may be extremely important in a community or society, but it would be misleading to reduce the nature of that society to pastoralism. Similarly, there are many agricultural and even industrial societies in which pastoralism is very important. Cattle herding in the American West and the pampas of Argentina is integral to the economies and diets of those countries, and India, which has the largest population of cattle in the world, most of it nourished on so-called natural pasture, depends upon cattle for dairy products, fertilizer, and traction for plowing.”¹⁹⁸ This points to the significance not merely of the “amount” of pastoralism invested in by a society, but the “percentage” of subsistence activities taken up by this mode of food production. Applying this insight to mobility, it seems reasonable to follow Salzman’s notion that the extent of the population involved, and the percentage of time and effort invested, in *movement* identify these

¹⁹⁶ Salzman, 18.

¹⁹⁷ Salzman, 18.

¹⁹⁸ Salzman, 9.

societies as fundamentally different from settled “civilizations.” These insights are particularly useful in differentiating between categories, like those to which different religions belong, that have long been assumed to be more complex than previously described.

The last chapter pointed to the historical dominance of narratives of differentiations, “incompatibility,” and “Otherness,” building blocks apparently integral to religions deemed monotheistic, in discourse on “monotheism” and “polytheism” in and outside of the academy. Interestingly, a similar bias can be identified with regard to scholarship regarding mobile pastoralist societies into the 21st century: the lenses through which these peoples are viewed, recorded, reported, and analyzed stem from settled agriculturalist perspectives. The numeric dominance of settled agriculturalist populations around the globe suggests a virtual inevitability of this situation. Recall Redford’s note regarding Egyptian reports of “Shasu” as early as the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE in which this term applied to all of “those ‘wanderers’ the Egyptians habitually came into contact with in the north, and rapidly became a term with societal implications.”¹⁹⁹ Redford’s explanation points to the ongoing difficulty of rendering mobile societies in terms authentic to the self-identification and experiences of insiders. This is cogent to the present investigation because this dissertation, like the sources engaged in this chapter, is the product of a settled social context.

One might be prompted to ask, at this juncture, how the observations from this discussion relate to the dominance of narratives of religions deemed monotheistic noted in the last chapter? If, in the 21st century, the majority of the global population lives in settled agriculturalist societies and belongs to religions deemed monotheistic, does this not suggest a correlation between these categories? Norenzayan’s argument in *Big Gods* would seem to agree. However, as noted above, the answer to this question appears to lie in the three types of mobility identified

¹⁹⁹ Redford, Mazal Holocaust Collection., and Rogers D. Spotswood Collection., *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, 271.

in the last chapter: social, geographic, and chronological. The fact that these categories (“settled agriculturalist societies” and “religions deemed monotheistic”) are connected in the modern world speaks to the power of mobility in spreading these religions across physical and cultural borders to “outcompete” other religions (often religions deemed polytheistic). With regard to Judaism and Zoroastrianism, respectively, the last chapter suggested the importance of the spread and survival of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, across time and space, to the identities of adherents in the modern world. It seems that the modern iterations of YHWH-worship and Mazda-worship were developed in the process of spreading. The epigraphic evidence for these names would suggest religions that seem to have historically “come out of nowhere.” Although this chapter argues that these religions originated in mobile pastoralist societies, it does not suggest that all mobile peoples developed or adhere to religions deemed monotheistic. Furthermore, the same argument cannot be made for all other religions deemed monotheistic: despite the likely influence of YHWH- and Mazda-worship on the development of Christianity, this religion was very clearly a product of the settled agriculturalist Roman empire.²⁰⁰ What evidence supports a claim that the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda originated in mobile pastoralist societies?²⁰¹

The most significant evidence for mobile origins is, in fact, the near complete absence of evidence. Despite the general discomfort of historians with so-called “arguments from silence” in the case of archaeological evidence, such absences can be compelling. With regard to these particular religious communities, the silence is rather deafening. The evidence that does exist appears to point to social contexts that are in various ways “other” than the kinds of settled agriculturalist “civilizations” of the ancient Near and Middle East. Recall the association of a

²⁰⁰ Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women’s Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993); Lori Anne Ferrell, *The Bible and the People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

²⁰¹ See Figure 15 (in Appendix A: Supplementary Figures) for a visual distribution of artifacts containing the earliest attestations of the names “YHWH,” “Israel,” “Ahura Mazda,” or “Aryan” juxtaposed with the approximate regions from which worship centered on YHWH and Ahura Mazda appears to have arisen.

name related to the Tetragrammaton with the Shasu in inscriptions at Amara West and Soleb. At the most, these nebulous attestations point to the potential connection between this name and any number of the mobile people in and outside of Egyptian political boundaries. The difficulty of interpreting the meager archaeological evidence found is apparent in the well-established “necessity” of using either the Hebrew or Old Avestan texts as a framework for “piecing it together.” Further complicating the situation is the fact that the social, or “ethnic,” identities of these communities are understood to be separate from the religion.

The worship of Ahura Mazda happens to be the religion of the Avestan speaking ancient Iranians, thus, an investigation of the historical origins of Mazda-worship must include a search for both “Ahura Mazda” and “Iranian,” (or “Aryan”) as well as a connection between these names.²⁰² Outside of the Avestan texts, this connection appears in the inscriptions of the Achaemenid king Darius I. Texts from the fortifications at Susa include the following lines: “A great is Auramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder sky, who created man, who created happiness for man, who made Darius king, one king of many, one lord of many./ I (am) Darius, great king, king of kings, king of countries, king on this great earth far and wide, son of Hystaspes, an Achaemenid, a Persian, son of a Persian, an Aryan, of Aryan lineage.”²⁰³ The Old Avestan texts offer support in assuming a mobile pastoralist social context in primarily two ways: first, in the linguistic relationship of the Old Avestan to Old Indic and back to (proto-) Indo-Iranian, and (proto-) Indo-European; second, in the pastoral language of the Old Avestan texts.

The linguistic relationship between Old Avestan and Old Indic, outlined in the last chapter, has served philologists in efforts to reconstruct a parent language, (proto-) Indo-Iranian,

²⁰² It is ironic that parallel historical situations of social marginalization of Jewish and Zoroastrian communities in diaspora appears to have resulted in the reverse of this separation in the modern world: each of these groups can be described as a “religio-ethnic” population.

²⁰³ Amélie Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, vol. 2 (London: Routledge, 2007), 491.

as well as the older (proto-) Indo-European language, from which Indo-Iranian developed. One benefit of the comparative methods by which these dead languages have been hypothesized is the suggestion of vocabularies that hint at conceptual realities for speakers.²⁰⁴ An example, given by Anthony, are words related to “wheel” that suggest the invention of the concept among (proto-) Indo-European speakers. He writes, “The meaning of *wheel* is given additional support by the fact that it has an Indo-European etymology...It was a word created from another Indo-European root. That root **k^wel-*, a verb that meant ‘to turn.’ So **k^wék^wlos* [wheel] is not just a random string of phonemes reconstructed from the cognates for *wheel*; it meant ‘the thing that turn.’”²⁰⁵ The picture painted by the reconstruction of (proto-) Indo-European appears to be one of mixed subsistence strategies and technological innovations, like the wheel, that facilitated movement in the western Eurasian steppe.²⁰⁶

The spread of Indo-European languages across the Eurasian land mass speaks, in part, to the mobility of the societies that spoke (proto-) Indo-European. Out of this social context, in the central and eastern steppe, the (proto-) Indo-Iranian language developed. The reconstruction of the “mother” from “daughter” Old Iranian (including Old Avestan and Old Persian) and Indo-Aryan (including Old Indic) languages reveals the presence of non-Indo-European loanwords, from contact with a source that appears to have further enriched the vocabulary of Old Indic in a later period.²⁰⁷ Anthony suggests that societies in the Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex (BMAC) are the most likely sources of the 55 loanwords found in (proto-) Indo-Iranian.²⁰⁸ Most cogent to this dissertation is the presence specific terms related to agriculture and settlement in

²⁰⁴ Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*, 4–5.

²⁰⁵ Anthony, 34.

²⁰⁶ Anthony, 5–6.

²⁰⁷ Anthony, 455.

²⁰⁸ Anthony, 455.

this list of loanwords: “bread,” “ploughshare,” “brick,” and “camel.”²⁰⁹ It is particularly significant that of the families of daughter languages, the Indo-Aryan branch appears to have been more heavily influenced by contact with speakers of this language group. An obvious, but partial, explanation is the movement of Indo-Aryan speakers out of Central Asia south west into northern Syria and south east into northwestern India. This movement would logically have taken Indo-Aryan speakers through BMAC settlements – but, as noted in the last chapter, the timing would have been such that both the languages and religions of Indo-Aryan speakers could have diverged from (proto-) Indo-Iranian and subsequent Old Avestan speakers enough to allow two independent groups of Indo-Aryan speakers to reference apparently similar deities nearly 3000 kilometers away from each other.²¹⁰

This explanation, as it appears in the literature, logically focuses on Old Indic speakers and their religion. It is possible, however, that Old Avestan speakers played an important role in the process of differentiation. Setting aside implications for chronologies, references in the Old Avestan *Gathas*, referring to the antithesis of the Mazda-worshipper, the Daeva-worshipper, exemplifies the “looking down” on religions “incompatible” with the “emphatic concept of Truth” integral to Mazda-worship. Considering the categorical difference between the worship of Ahura Mazda and so many other religions, known in the ancient Near and Middle East at the time, it seems reasonable to suggest that religious developments in the Old Avestan speaking population may have played a role in the differentiation between Old Avestan and Old Indic societies. In *The Origin of the Indo-Iranians*, E. E. Kuz'mina associates archaeological materials belonging to the “Andronovo horizon” with (proto-) Indo-Iranian speaking populations.²¹¹ Anthony suggests that Old Indic populations arose from Andronovo/Tazabagyab “hybrid

²⁰⁹ Anthony, 455.

²¹⁰ Anthony, 81; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 2007, 1:289; T. Burrow, “The Proto-Indoaryans,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 2 (1973): 123.

²¹¹ E. E. Kuz'mina, *The Origin of the Indo-Iranians* (Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 138.

cultures” geographically proximate to BMAC culture (in the south) and Iranian (Old Avestan) dialects likely developed in the north among Andronovo/Srubnaya cultures.²¹² Kuz’mina’s and Anthony’s arguments reveal two important facts: 1) there is no obvious link to the language or religion of Old Avestan speakers found among archaeological material from the steppe (no “smoking gun”); 2) the geographic spread of Andronovo material found across the steppe suggests that there was plenty of physical room for the (proto-) Indo-Iranian to branch into daughter languages and religions before the migrations of Old Indic speakers out of Central Asia. Taken together, these points support the idea that Mazda-worship arose from a mobile pastoralist social context.

Further support for this idea is found in the pastoral allusions and assumptions of the Old Avestan texts themselves. In “Zarathustra’s Time and Homeland: Geographical Perspectives” Frantz Grenet writes “The material realities [implied by the texts] are entirely pastoral: one finds a mention of ‘dwelled-in abodes’ (*šiiēitibiiō vižibiiō*, *Y* 53.8) but we find no references to towns, temples, canals, or farming (except one possible mention of *yauua-* ‘barley’, ‘grain’, or ‘beer’, *Y* 49.1). Not one recognizable geographical name is mentioned.”²¹³ Grenet’s observation echoes Anthony’s assessment of the reconstructed (proto-) Indo-Iranian language: the absence of autochthonous terms for settlement and agriculture suggests a mobile pastoralist social context. References to the cow (or “soul of the cow”), milk, and horses throughout the Old Avestan texts point clearly to the dominance of pastoralist modes of food production and the mobility required (and provided) by domesticated animals.²¹⁴ In contrast to the limited scope and size of the Old

²¹² Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*, 454.

²¹³ Franz Grenet, “Zarathustra’s Time and Homeland: Geographical Perspectives,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, The Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 22.

²¹⁴ John G. Galaty clarifies that pastoralism, as a subsistence strategy, is primarily based on milk, not meat production. This is an important reminder for interpreting the numerous references to milk products in the Old Avestan texts. John G. Galaty, “Introduction: Nomadic Pastoralists and Social Change - Processes and Perspectives,” in *Change and Development in Nomadic and Pastoral Societies*, ed. John G. Galaty and Philip C.

Avestan corpus, the Hebrew Bible contains religio-historical narratives that portray the founding community of worship centered around YHWH as mobile (and pastoralist).

The stories of the “Patriarchs” in the Hebrew Book of Genesis depict a “sojourning” people whose subsistence strategy appears to be primarily pastoralism. Descriptions of Abraham and his family moving from place to place, taking “all their possessions” with them, and concerning themselves with the business of managing herds and flocks offers a compellingly sympathetic portrait of mobile pastoralism. This sense of sympathy (or mobile perspective) is emphasized by the contrasting stories of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18 and 19. Abraham’s scene in Genesis 18:1-10 reads like an advertisement for pastoral life: the setting is bright, Abraham is active, food is plentiful, and his hospitality is generous. The same number of verses at the beginning of chapter 19 describe Lot as slow to move, with fewer resources, and less generous with his guests. Most tantalizing about the contrast of these chapters is the less obvious language being used to tell a story of contrasts: the words for “tent” (אֹהֶל) and “house” (בַּיִת) each appear in the first lines of Genesis 18 and 19 respectively. Each word, as it used in the sense of “home or dwelling place,” appears five times within ten lines at the beginning of its respective chapter: “tent” in Genesis 18:1-10 and “house” in Genesis 19:2-11. This sort of precision suggests a perspective of sympathy with mobile society that paints settled societies unfavorably in a deliberately harsh contrast. Although it seems to point to authorial intent, it does not offer specifics regarding that intention. Considering the problematic nature of establishing the provenance of the Hebrew biblical texts, this kind of “evidence” must be considered dubious at best. Despite this necessity, it is reasonable to compare the tone of this kind of narrative to the perspectives of established settled agriculturalist “civilizations” in the ancient Near East in order to understand the perspective(s) behind its composition.

Salzman, *International Studies in Sociology and Social Anthropology*, XXXIII (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1981), 7.

In *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, Marc Van de Mieroop describes the urban bias apparent in Mesopotamian sources. He writes, “[It] is remarkable that there is no trace at all of an awareness or recognition of culture outside the cities. Non-urban people had a culture; oral tradition, religion, and art are found universally among villagers and nomads. In Mesopotamian tradition there is no acknowledgment of the fact that they had or could have influenced the urban culture. This is especially true with regard to religion and literacy, where the urban bias is absolute.”²¹⁵ Van de Mieroop’s explanation, including the suggestion that this bias also dismissed culture in non-urban settlements, appears to agree with Redford’s portrayal of the Egyptian perspective on the Shasu. For purposes of the present discussion it is important to observe that the attitudes exemplified by these cases, regarding mobile pastoralists, appear to have ranged from dismissive neutrality to belittling hostility. There is no room in this range for the kind of positive portrayal of mobile pastoralism found in the Hebrew texts. Furthermore, the religio-historical function of the biblical narratives is presented as the founding story of a polity called Israel and the religion of YHWH. The glaring difference in attitudes toward mobile pastoralist societies, between urban settled agriculturalist societies Egypt and Mesopotamia and that presented in the Hebrew texts, provides an implication, if not evidence, of mobile pastoralist social origins.

Similar to the situation of finds evidencing the society from which the worship of Ahura Mazda arose, there is no archaeological evidence revealing the original social setting of YHWH-worship. The earliest potential attestation of a name like YHWH is unreliable and, despite the apparent connection with *a* mobile people, the name “Israel” does not appear in the “Shasu sequences” Amara West or Soleb. Interestingly the earliest attestation of a polity named “Israel” also derives from Egypt, on the so-called “Merneptah Stele” dated to the late 13th century

²¹⁵ Marc Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 215.

BCE.²¹⁶ The inscription seems to describe Egyptian military victories in the Levantine region and identifies an “Israel” (Egyptian *Ysr3r*) rendered in a way that suggests a people rather than a geographic location.²¹⁷ This source appears to be only as useful as the inscriptions at Soleb and Amara West: it gives a name recognizable with aid of the Hebrew texts and suggest a rough association between that name and mobile societies. Although this text, by itself, is hardly conclusive, it seems to be perhaps one of the more informative extra-biblical sources regarding a historical society called “Israel.”

Other early attestations of the name are found in epigraphic sources variously dated to the 9th and 8th centuries BCE and mentioning a “king of Israel” (Tel Dan fragments; Mesha Stele) or “Israelite” (Kurkh Monolith). Whatever might be learned about the name of “Israel” from these sources, the impetus for seeking out a polity by this name ultimately derives from the Hebrew texts. The other evidence for a historical “Israel” is informed by the Hebrew Bible: these and other inscriptions contain proper names that appear tantalizingly similar to those found in the biblical texts. The history of “biblical archaeology” has long shown the problematic nature of using the Hebrew Bible as either source or lens for establishing non-religious histories. In recent decades the biblical notion of a historical “Kingdom of Israel” has proven difficult to maintain in the face of non-biblical interpretations of archaeological evidence from the Near East.²¹⁸ Based on these extra-biblical sources, a few conclusions can be drawn regarding a historical polity

²¹⁶ Note that the earliest appearance of the name “Israel” is in an Ugaritic text dated before the destruction of Ugarit in the 13th century BCE. Mark S. Smith, Phillip R. Davies, and Meindert Dijkstra each point to the attribution of a name “Israel” to an individual “maryanu” in KTU 4.623.3. Mark S. Smith, “Canaanite Backgrounds to the Psalms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms*, ed. William P. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 43; Philip R. Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel,”* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 148 (London: Bloomsbury UK, 2015), 57; Meindert Dijkstra, in *Between Evidence and Ideology: Essays on the History of Ancient Israel Read at the Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Oud Testamentisch Werkgezelschap, Lincoln, July 2009*, ed. England) Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap in Nederland en België Lincoln, Bob. Becking, and Lester L. Grabbe, vol. 59, Old Testament Studies (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 47.

²¹⁷ Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, 85–86.

²¹⁸ Davies, *In Search of “Ancient Israel,”*; Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Nancy O. Meyer, *The Real Israel Disembarked: The Phoenician Origins of Samaria* (Claremont Graduate University: Dissertation, 2018).

called “Israel:” 1) a minimum of one society was perceived by outsiders to have existed by this name; 2) such an entity (or entities) was considered to be noteworthy enough for mention in an inscription; 3) a number of encounters with this society were of a military nature.

In a particularly remarkable coincidence, the presentation of this (or these) “Israel” in these sources seems to foreshadow the later history of the worshippers of YHWH into the 21st century. It seems that all of these inscriptions, including the Merneptah Stele, mention the name in the context of violent struggle. In each of these sources ranging from Egypt to Mesopotamia, across five centuries, a polity called “Israel” is defeated spectacularly. Consider the following lines:

“Israel is stripped bare, wholly lacking seed!”²¹⁹ (Merneptah Stele)

“And I killed of [them chari-]

ot and thousands (or 2000) of riders [

king of Israel. And I kill[ed]”²²⁰ (Tel Dan fragments)

“but I looked down on him and on his house, and Israel has gone to ruin, yes, it has gone to ruin for ever!”²²¹ (Mesha Stele)

“10,000 footsoldiers of Ahab... ‘the Israelite’... I defeated them from Qarqar to Gilzau. I slew 14,000 of their soldiers”²²² (Kurkh Monolith)

To be sure “Israel” is not the only victim of defeat mentioned in these sources, nor is it specifically described as an enemy of note, but taken together these lines paint a picture of military engagement and defeat for something called “Israel.”

This dissertation is not focused on the origins of “Israel” but rather on the origins of the worship of YHWH and the society in which it developed. Where is YHWH in these sources? The Mesha Stele appears to be both the earliest reliable attestation of the divine name and the only one of these sources in which it is linked with “Israel.” The connection between something political/social being called “Israel” and something religious named “YHWH” is clear: the

²¹⁹ Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, 85.

²²⁰ Grabbe, 165.

²²¹ Grabbe, 167.

²²² Grabbe, 167.

inscription refers to the defeat of Israel followed by the “vessels of YHWH” being taken and put before the Moabite deity “Kemosh.”²²³ This is cogent to the investigation at hand not merely because it shows a connection, but because it reveals the extreme absence of such data. In *Rediscovering Eve*, Carol Meyers observes “The land of the Bible has probably been excavated more than any other place of comparable size on earth.”²²⁴ No one can say for certain that nothing remains to be found, there is too much digging left to do to support such a claim, however, Meyers’ comment recalls the work of “biblical archaeologists” who would have built mountains out of the smallest molehill, had such evidence revealed itself. The fact that there are no smoking guns – hardly even any lukewarm ones – makes very real the low probability that proof of a settled agriculturalist society called “Israel” that worshipped “YHWH” will be found to have existed prior to the Achaemenid Persian period.

For many who view the narratives of the Hebrew texts as historical, it may be perfectly reasonable to assume that such proof would only indicate a later development of Israelite society, such as the united and divided monarchies. The argument laid out in this chapter may appear to some as a reconstitution of “nomadic” theories proffered in the first half of the 20th century, but this is not the case.²²⁵ Although those theories and the suggestions made in this discussion appear to be aimed at the same conclusion, that the origins of YHWH-worship lie in a mobile pastoralist society (potentially called “Israel”), the basic premises, and implications derived from such conclusions, are fundamentally different. The theories of scholars like Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth, as with a number of the earliest “biblical archaeologists,” seem to have relied on the religio-historical narratives in the Hebrew Bible as historical witnesses to the events they claim

²²³ William W. Hallo and K. Lawson. Younger, *Context of Scripture*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 138.

²²⁴ Carol L. Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27.

²²⁵ Lemche, *The Israelites in History and Tradition*.

to report.²²⁶ Furthermore, the theological lenses of Christian biblical interpretation of the “Old Testament” seem to have shaded conclusions drawn from data collected using the very same perspectives. In this dissertation, the information presented by the Hebrew texts, far from being assumed to be historical witness, is problematized and attributed far less authority than archaeological data. This allows insights, such as the curiously positive attitude of author/s (and one might assume the receiving audience) toward a mobile pastoralist history, to contribute to the discussion without being lost in the baggage of textual issues. Despite what Martin Leuenberger calls the “well founded abandonment of the classical paradigm of a ‘nomadic god’” the textual and archaeological support for locating the origins of YHWH-worship in a mobile pastoralist social context appears to be more compelling than for one of settled agriculturalism.²²⁷

In *Pastoralist Landscapes* Frachetti writes, “The geography and history of Central Eurasia are inseparable. Together they reflect the formation of Eurasia's diverse landscapes through time.”²²⁸ Frachetti’s remarks are a reminder of the significance of understanding the potential social context in which the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda originated. If, as it appears, the histories of these religions deemed monotheistic began in mobile pastoralist settings, then it may be possible to examine the “inseparable” ties with the geographic contexts to understand the influence of the natural environments on the development of these religions. Although his research focuses on ancient societies in the Eurasian Steppe, Frachetti’s work offers important opportunities for understanding processes of social and cultural development across the category of mobile pastoralist societies.

Frachetti’s “Non-Uniform Complexity Theory” is aimed at explaining the apparent

²²⁶ Lemche, 138–40; Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, 116–22.

²²⁷ Martin Leuenberger, “YHWH’s Provenance from the South: A New Evaluation of the Arguments pro and Contra,” in *The Origins of Yahwism*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Markus Witte, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 484 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 158–59.

²²⁸ Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*, 1.

differences in institutional development between societies in the Eurasian Steppe.²²⁹ He writes, “Archaeological research increasingly illustrates that Bronze Age societies of the Eurasian steppe were inherently more diverse in their ways of life than their related material culture might imply. Bronze Age steppe communities illustrate comparatively different scales of social, economic, and political organization, as well as local variability in their extents of mobility and geographic ranges of interaction.”²³⁰ This observation is key to understanding the diverse variety of societies that might belong to a category called “mobile pastoralism.” In *Pastoralists* Salzman uses a variety 20th century ethnographic studies on “nomadic pastoralists” to understand the nature of this category. A notable observation reiterated throughout the work is that scholars should expect to find variety among and differences between mobile pastoralist societies rather than similarities.²³¹ This supports Frachetti’s evaluation that this category is defined, in part, by heterogeneity, consolidation, and fragmentation.²³² Considering the range of options for expressions of “mobility” and “pastoralism” it is not difficult to understand how variety could be the “norm” for this category.

Frachetti’s theory suggests that the roots of this diversity lie in the pragmatic responsiveness of each society to the various social and natural landscapes in which they function.²³³ This “Environmental Pragmatism” is not limited to a single event or particular institution in the history of the societies, rather it describes a society-level perspective of strategic adaptability in all domains.²³⁴ Frachetti writes, “Non-uniformity is the result of some general institutional codes being homogenized between diverse groups or re-shaped among them

²²⁹ Frachetti, “Differentiated Landscapes and Non-Uniform Complexity among Bronze Age Societies of the Eurasian Steppe,” 19.

²³⁰ Frachetti, 19.

²³¹ Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*, 98.

²³² Frachetti, “Differentiated Landscapes and Non-Uniform Complexity among Bronze Age Societies of the Eurasian Steppe,” 20.

²³³ Frachetti, 27.

²³⁴ Frachetti, 24.

for strategic purposes, while other institutions remain individually or specifically defined. Thus, for each participant community, its degree of organizational consolidation or fragmentation vis-à-vis its neighbors depends on the scalar cohesion of various institutional structures and the periodic willingness of those communities to adopt or develop similar constraints to their modes of interaction.”²³⁵ Frachetti’s claims reframe the concept of “survival” in mobile pastoralist societies as a paradigm of strategic evaluation, deliberation, and innovation. Frachetti explains that this process is dynamic and continuous:

Scalar reorganization is well documented ethnographically among pastoralist groups. Pastoralists strategically negotiate their political and environmental landscape, periodically causing aspects of institutional parity to collapse, or *fraction*. In such periods, groups commonly regress to smaller-scale units, and their shared institutions and practices may be regionally reformulated to be relevant at the extant scale of political integration. *Fractioning* is reflected archaeologically in periods of material diversity and landscape reform (changes in settlement geography, burial diversity, etc.). The inherent variability of mobile pastoral strategies often precludes long-term stability at a given state of organization; throughout the second millennium bce, various steppe groups teetered on the edge of more highly institutional forms of social and political integration. These periods of social consolidation and fractioning, fundamental to the model proposed here, confound a conventional picture of progress from simpler to categorically more complex organization in a linear socio-evolutionary sense.²³⁶

The picture suggested by Frachetti is one that does not just merely “confound a conventional” idea of institutional development based on settled agricultural models, but also upsets familiar depictions of mobile pastoralists as peoples *acted upon* rather than actors in their own right.

In his introduction to *Change and Development in Nomadic Pastoral Societies*, John G. Galaty warns, “Pastoralists have perspectives on agencies of change, and we would do well to try to understand change from within, as part of a complex field of symbols and significant events in multiple domains and sectors, rather than from without, in just another monologue of national

²³⁵ Frachetti, 21–22.

²³⁶ Frachetti, 25.

‘development’ within an academic social science.”²³⁷ Galaty’s comments, written a few decades before Frachetti’s article, emphasizes the continuing difficulty on the part of many scholars to reconcile their settled agriculturalist perspectives with the very different worldviews of their subjects. Understanding the significance of Frachetti’s and Galaty’s observations on mobile pastoralist societies allows some comprehension of how religious development in such a social context might have reflected the influence of the natural environment on the origins of YHWH and Ahura Mazda.

In *Religion Explained* Pascal Boyer weaves Cognitive Science of Religion theories together to offer insights into some species-level processes by which things religious are generated. He writes

[We] should abandon the search for a *historical* origin of religion in the sense of a point in time (however long ago) when people created religion where there was none. All scenarios that describe people sitting around and inventing religion are dubious. Even the ones that see religion as slowly emerging out of confused thoughts have this problem...religion emerges (has its origins, if you want) in the selection of concepts and the selection of memories. Does this mean that at some point in history people had lots of possible versions of religion and that somehow one of them proved more successful? Not at all. What it means is that, *at all times and all the time*, indefinite many variants of religious notions were and are created inside individual minds. Not all these variants are equally successful in cultural transmission. What we call a cultural phenomenon is the result of a selection that is taking place all the time and everywhere.²³⁸

Boyer’s comments point to a significant reality underlying the adaptability and responsiveness of mobile pastoralist societies: human creativity and ingenuity. The innovative strength of the strategic “Environmental Pragmatism” described by Frachetti relies on, to adapt Boyer, the “variants of [social,] [political,] [economic,] [cultural, and] religious notions [that] were and are created inside individual minds.” Processes of biological and cultural evolution might be said to “sort through” these various ideas by selecting for fitness in social or natural environmental

²³⁷ Galaty, “Introduction: Nomadic Pastoralists and Social Change - Processes and Perspectives,” 24.

²³⁸ Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 33.

niches. The religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda were once small ideas that proved fit for survival in their respective originating contexts.

Three themes emerged from the comparison of Judaism and Zoroastrianism in the last chapter: survival, change, and mobility. First, these modern religions are evidence of the millennia-long survival of the worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, respectively. Second, although certain building blocks appear to have lasted, these religions have undergone significant changes throughout these thousands of years. Third, the religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH have spread across geographic and social boundaries to include adherents whose languages and “ethnic” identities do not resemble those of “original” worshippers. Taken together, these themes appear to summarize the major points of mobile pastoralist societies described by Frachetti’s theory. “Environmental Pragmatism” is not merely embracing change, but instigating it, strategically, for purposes of survival. The diversity of mobile pastoralist societies, highlighted by Salzman and Frachetti, emphasizes that physical movement (of humans and herds) is integral to maintaining the flexibility required to adjust to any natural or social circumstances. It is not unreasonable to assume that religions originating in mobile, strategically responsive societies, would be shaped by such contexts. It does not appear coincidental that these religions deemed monotheistic, historically notable for their social and geographic mobility and capacity to endure despite adversity (a sort of chronological mobility, perhaps), would seem to have originated in societies belonging to a category defined by the very same characteristics.

Salzman offers a number of “general observations,” drawn from his appraisal of ethnographic work on “nomadism”, that emphasize the importance of these themes to the category of mobile pastoralism. The significance of mobility to survival can be found in both the provision of access to sparse resources, as well as in escape, “opportunistic ‘rapid response’ to

the sudden and temporary availability of irregular and unpredictable resources.”²³⁹ Galaty writes, “Students of pastoral societies have often pointed out the impunity with which pastoralists cross national boundaries, or, put simply, how little ranch boundaries influence their stock movements. While true, it is often left unstated that nomadic pastoralists *know* when they are crossing frontiers and boundaries and, hence, they calculate their degrees of freedom.”²⁴⁰ This is not the mobility of a wind-blown leaf in water, but rather the deliberate use of mobile strategies toward particular ends. Salzman observes, “Nomadism is not ‘wandering off’ in the sense of purposeless or directionless movement. Nomadic movement is highly purposeful, oriented toward achieving specific production (or other) goals. Nomads continually discuss where and when to move and why, and they are constantly searching for, assessing, and reassessing relevant information from direct experience and secondary sources in order to make good decisions about migration.”²⁴¹ Salzman’s comments point to a significant feature of mobile pastoralist societies: they are held together by mutual interest and consensus.

The significance of individual choice (and the freedom to choose) appears to be a key aspect of these religions deemed monotheistic that likely derives from their respective origins in mobile pastoralist social contexts. Mobility offers individuals the freedom (and responsibility) to choose to remain an active part of society through contributing to, among other things, security and food production.²⁴² Salzman writes, “Mobility is a political factor, for it provides the possibility of escape from an oppressor, whether an autocratic leader, an extortionate tax collector, or an exploitive property owner....The nomadism so useful in adjusting to a variant environment also served to undercut hierarchical power.”²⁴³ The social mobility that sets the

²³⁹ Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*, 23–24.

²⁴⁰ Galaty, “Introduction: Nomadic Pastoralists and Social Change - Processes and Perspectives,” 13.

²⁴¹ Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*, 24.

²⁴² Salzman, 125.

²⁴³ Salzman, 68–69.

category of religions deemed monotheistic apart is connected to three important building blocks of religion mentioned in the last chapter: the separation of religious and “ethnic” identities, an emphatic concept of “Truth,” and the differentiation, via narratives of incompatibility, from religions deemed polytheistic. Because these features all appear to act in favor of sustaining and increasing group cohesion it is not difficult to understand the influence of mobile pastoralist societies on the development of these building blocks.

Consider the idea of competition (for adherents) among a number of religions deemed monotheistic in the modern world. The application of economic theories to Religious Studies highlights the significance of individual choice in processes of cultural selection.²⁴⁴ It is difficult to extricate a model of economic-style religious competition from narratives of differentiation and “Truth” integral to religions deemed monotheistic. Models of competition and freedom of choice based on free market theories stemming from a perspective of economic liberalism are, themselves, indelibly marked by the dominance of religions deemed monotheistic in 18th century Europe. This connection emphasizes the usefulness of an economic model of competition to understanding the impact of mobile pastoralist societies on the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda. Salzman points to the importance of individual choice to group cohesion in these societies; in the modern world this is taken for granted and the marketing and public relations industries thrive on the perceived (or cultivated) “need” of various sectors to motivate consumers and constituents. The implementation of the tools of this trade have been adapted by religious groups across the world and the application of marketing techniques to the competition for adherents is nowhere more evident than on any freeway in Los Angeles, California. Bumper stickers employ a range of tactics aimed at selling “the Message” to passing vehicles: “Try God,”

²⁴⁴ Laurence Iannaccone, Rodney Stark, and Roger Finke, “Rationality and the ‘Religious Mind,’” *Economic Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (1998): 373–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1465-7295.1998.tb01721.x>; Eli Berman, Laurence Iannaccone, and National Bureau of Economic Research, *Religious Extremism: The Good, the Bad, and the Deadly*, NBER Working Paper Series 11663 (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005).

“Real Men Love Jesus,” or “Honk if you love Jesus.”²⁴⁵ Tools for building consensus, cultivating loyalty, and maintaining group identity, integral to the survival of mobile pastoralist societies, can be found in the language of the Old Avestan and Hebrew texts.

Chapter Eight explores the significance of narratives of “prophet-founders” (the literary figures of Moses and Zarathustra) to the cohesion and spread of the Mazda- and YHWH-worship. The texts appear to express the religious sentiments of communities of worship *and* serve as tools for building and maintaining these communities. At the most basic level this can be understood by the simple framing of each religion as something that came to worshippers after they already formed a society. This basic tool is powerful: the societies in which YHWH and Ahura Mazda originated, respectively, *chose* to worship these deities. Because this kind of worship constructed as an active choice, not a passive act, adherents of Zoroastrianism and Judaism in the modern world must continue to *choose* adherence. The texts lay out many reasons for making this choice, but the fact that it is offered is a most significant aspect that directly relates to the freedom of choice available to mobile pastoralists – and that does not seem to have been available, to the same degree, to settled agriculturalists. This choice underlies the social mobility that contributed to the spread of these religions: it is a choice *in favor of* a particular emphatic concept of “Truth,” *against* other (ostensibly incompatible) religions, and does not conflict with non-religious identities.

The option to choose to worship Ahura Mazda or YHWH does not necessarily inspire religious conversion by itself. The Hebrew and Old Avestan texts are clear about the necessity of choosing these religions: the deity is the most powerful ally. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to track the historical development of narratives outlining the necessity to choose either of these religions, it is important to highlight the connection between these notions

²⁴⁵ A Google search for “religious bumper stickers” reveals a wide range of slogans and symbols originating from a variety of religious and non-religious sources.

and a perception of need to sway the choice of an individual to the worship of YHWH or Ahura Mazda. A variety of cosmic “carrots and sticks” are offered throughout Zoroastrian and Jewish texts that, viewed through the lens of this chapter, appear strategically aimed at ensuring loyalty and motivating individual agents. Consider Salzman’s comments regarding the position of “tribal chief” in mobile pastoralist societies:

The ineffective tribal chief or the oppressive tribal chief, if he survived assassination, would have seen his tribe melt away, his ‘subjects’ having disappeared over the horizon—to villages, to other chiefs, to other parts of the country. He would have become an ex-chief, for one could not be a chief without followers. Nomadic tribesmen, mobile warriors, free herd owners could not be held against their will. If they felt that, on balance, their interests were not being served or that they were being abused, they would have resisted, rebelled, and departed...no one knew this better than the successful chief. He knew that he was chief by virtues of his tribesmen. He knew that their consent was the foundation of his political power. He knew that he had always to be aware of public opinion and act within its parameters...The successful chief knew that to act outside of public opinion risked undermining the consent upon which his rule was based. Finally, he knew that the truly effective chief was successful in shaping and leading public opinion.²⁴⁶

The reality for a leader of free and equal individuals, each of whom has the physical option of literally walking away from society, appears to necessitate deft and pragmatic social skills.

Salzman’s description suggests that the building blocks of religion integral to the survival of the worship across time and space may have been useful in the survival of the societies in which they originated. Having been well-established enough to contribute to the survival of worship into the 21st century, surely conceptualizations of these deities, the “prophet-founders” who taught their worship, and the texts deemed religious that contain the narratives of these revelations, must have aided in the cultivation of stakeholdership in the mobile pastoralist societies from which these religions arose millennia ago.

The freedom of individuals in mobile pastoralist societies is balanced by the constant

²⁴⁶ Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*, 85.

need for survival in challenging social and physical landscapes. It is important to recall that the basis for Frachetti's Non-Uniform Complexity Theory is a model of continuous fluctuations in natural and social environmental conditions that require an ever-ready perspective of strategic responsiveness. Salzman writes,

What is absent in segmentary tribal societies is civil peace, in which disputes and conflicts are resolved according to specified rules, without recourse to violence. In civil society—society in which security is based institution of civil peace—small official groups specialize in legal procedures and the enforcement of legal decisions. This frees most men from military activities, allowing them to devote their energies to crafts, industries, services, commerce, and professions, thus facilitating economic and artistic productivity and innovation. Thus, there is a major opportunity cost in segmentary, tribal societies, where men must devote themselves to military skills and combat at the expense of productive creativity.²⁴⁷

Salzman's insights recall, and seem to explain, the epigraphic evidence for the religions (and peoples) of YHWH and Ahura Mazda: the earliest attestations appear in accounts of violent encounters. Israelites, Aryans, and their respective deities first (and repeatedly) appear in archaeological history through reports of battle or defeat. This is not unique to these peoples, for the monuments of Egypt and Mesopotamia are replete with depictions and descriptions of royal military victories against all variety of enemies. It is, however, significant that these descriptions appear to be the *only* evidence of the names associated with the societies and religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH. Furthermore, the religio-historical narratives of antagonistic relations with religious and "ethnic" enemies in the Old Avestan and Hebrew texts only seem to confirm the general picture of these societies and religions found in the epigraphic sources.

In the conclusion of the last chapter, the language of a "fight" was used to describe a general pattern (and perhaps result) of building blocks associated with religions deemed monotheistic. Salzman's description of the role violence plays in the biological and cultural evolutionary competition for survival among mobile pastoral societies highlights the significance

²⁴⁷ Salzman, 130.

of social and natural environmental contexts to the development of these religions. In her introduction to *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, Nicola Di Cosmo explains that the association of natural environmental conditions and the development of militarily capable mobile pastoralists was observed by ancient sources.²⁴⁸ She writes,

Ancient theories associated physical and psychological traits with characteristics of the environment, especially in relation to temperature, available food, and vulnerability to the elements. Peoples living in the steppes, exposed to a harsher climate and a less varied diet, were regarded as braver than the people from warmer climates, afflicted by a softer temperament. From the earliest accounts of nomadic societies, it was the barren, arid, prohibitively cold steppe environment that was responsible for making a special sort of individual. Their peculiar nomadic wandering was another molding feature. The consuming attention required by the animals, the lack of fixed abode, and the constant threat of enemy attacks, made the nomad's life, in the eyes of Europeans, Chinese, and other chroniclers, poor, dangerous, and uninspiring.²⁴⁹

Di Cosmo's remarks point to an awareness on the part of ancient observers regarding the ultimate significance of the environmental reality of survival on the development of human individuals and groups.

The societies in which the religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH originated were comprised of pragmatic strategists engaged with continuously challenging human and natural environmental landscapes that offered limits and opportunities for innovation, creativity, and competition. It is no surprise to find that processes of biological and cultural evolution selecting for the best "fighters" in physical, social, and *religious* senses of meaning. The particular fitness of building blocks, of the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, for survival is proven in two important ways: first, by the survival of these blocks and other aspects of the worship of these deities into the 21st century; second, by the incorporation of the blocks (or versions thereof) into the development of other religions deemed monotheistic. The origination of these religious

²⁴⁸ Nicola Di Cosmo, "Introduction: Inner Asian Ways of Warfare in Historical Perspective," in *Warfare in Inner Asian History (500-1800)*, ed. Nicola Di Cosmo, vol. 6, Handbook of Oriental Studies 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2–3.

²⁴⁹ Di Cosmo, 3–4.

building blocks, and their respective roles in defining the worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, in mobile pastoralist social contexts explains and supports the historical evidence for the development of the religions that would become Judaism and Zoroastrianism respectively. The influence of agriculturally marginal landscapes on the development of these societies and their religions is complex and paramount in “setting the scene” for the emergence of this category of religions.

Chapter Five: Agriculturally Marginal Landscapes

*“the very properties of concepts are created as a result of the way the brain and body are structured and the way they function in interpersonal relations and in the physical world.”*²⁵⁰

The last chapter explored the mobile pastoralist social origins of religions deemed monotheistic, based on the worship of Ahura Mazda and YHWH, respectively. It appears that social and spatial mobility, characteristics of these religions, can be reasonably linked to the same features in mobile pastoralist societies. In mobile pastoralist contexts, spatial mobility underlies social mobility: individual freedom of choice is predicated on (and enforced by) the physical freedom to “walk away” from society. This freedom (and the connected responsibility) to choose whether or not to belong to a community appears to have shaped certain building blocks of these religions deemed monotheistic including, emphatic concepts of “Truth”, perceptions of “incompatibility” with other religions (primarily those deemed polytheistic) and perspectives that separate social or “ethnic” identities from religious identities. The last chapter explained that the freedom of individuals in mobile pastoralist societies is balanced by the constant need for survival in challenging social and physical landscapes. The category of religions deemed monotheistic also appears to be linked to the category of mobile pastoralist societies through the significance of violence to the struggles of biological and cultural competition. Key to this dissertation is the role of the natural environments that contextualize these competitive processes. This chapter will examine the category of “agricultural marginal landscapes” within which mobile pastoralist societies appear to develop.

Calling this category of environmental zones “agriculturally marginal landscapes” points to the difficulty of specifying a set of ecological features to describe the various contexts in

²⁵⁰ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh : The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, 37.

which mobile pastoralist societies function. In *Pastoralists* Salzman writes, “Nomadism is found in both isolated, remote, and unpopulated regions and in more crowded and developed regions. Some nomadic populations occupy remote regions, environmentally marginal and distant from centers of civilization and power...But other nomadic populations...migrate through regions of agricultural settlements and pass and even stop at major cities.”²⁵¹ This observation emphasizes the heterogeneous nature of the category of “mobile pastoralist societies” and the logical diversity that might be expected of a category that encompasses the various landscapes that contextualize them. By highlighting the pragmatic responsiveness of mobile pastoralist societies to physical and social landscapes, Frachetti’s Non-Uniform Complexity Theory articulates the diversity of institutional developments that underlie this heterogeneity. Frachetti and Salzman seem to agree that the variety of mobile pastoralist societies is linked to the range of different environmental contexts in which they function. The diverse character of ecological conditions, within which mobile pastoralist societies survive, supports Frachetti’s notion that the thread of continuity across the category is constant and strategic “Environmental Pragmatism.”

The emphasis on agriculture in the title of this category of environmental regions points to the subject of this chapter: agricultural landscapes. The extreme variety of ecological zones that appear to fall within the breadth of a category of agriculturally marginal landscapes suggests the potential folly of investigating traits that mobile pastoralist landscapes might *possess*. Instead, the current investigation will consider what particular recipe of features these environments *lack* (or possess in critically low quantities). This chapter will examine environmental data in order to understand the various features of the ecological niches that contextualized the origins and developments of settled agricultural societies. Any landscape not possessing the necessary formation of these components might be considered to fall within the

²⁵¹ Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*, 28.

category of agriculturally marginal landscapes within which different mobile pastoralist societies develop and survive.

The datasets presented in this chapter are derived from a variety of digital and non-digital sources and are presented in maps produced using QGIS.²⁵² Open-source spatial analysis software, QGIS is described on its website as “a user friendly Open Source Geographic Information System (GIS) licensed under the GNU General Public License. QGIS is an official project of the Open Source Geospatial Foundation (OSGeo).”²⁵³ This program allows for the production of maps made up of various layers of photographic and geometric data that allow for both human and machine analysis.²⁵⁴ Although these layers render patterns of data at particular levels of distance, it is important to note that geographic and chronological scales of this investigation make small-scale precision difficult (if not impossible).

The use of georeferenced settlement data in this examination acknowledges the regional scale of these experiments for identifying broad trends rather than individual details. The process of “georeferencing” data can be described as digitizing a print map and locating the information within a system of geographic coordinates. The result is an approximate replication of the data contained within the print map that reflects the inaccuracies of the original cartography. In contrast to digital maps, which contain data that can be preserved, replicated, and presented with fidelity at various scales, print maps range from relatively accurate details in “close-up” formats to broad sketches at “distant” scales. Because the scale at which the current investigation is concerned is closer to the latter (broad sketches), the incorporation of georeferenced data from variously accurate (or inaccurate) print maps should suffice for purposes of discussion.

²⁵² “Welcome to the QGIS Project!,” accessed November 17, 2018, <https://www.qgis.org/en/site/>.

²⁵³ “Discover QGIS.”

²⁵⁴ Each of the maps used in this chapter has been created using a base layer world map from ESRI: “Dark Gray Canvas (WGS84)”, Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community. Additionally, all figures have an overlay of “Global Surface Water” data from the Copernicus Programme (Source: EC JRC/Google).

Figure 1: Agricultural Land and Cradles of Civilization

Figure 1 presents one such dataset, “Cradles of Civilization,” georeferenced from Figure “2.1. Locations of seven early civilizations” in Bruce G. Trigger’s *Understanding Early Civilizations*.²⁵⁵ Trigger writes,

This study compares seven early civilizations that developed in different parts of the world: Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt (2700–1780 B.C.), southern Mesopotamia from Early Dynastic III to Old Babylonian times (2500–1600 B.C.), northern China in the late Shang and early Western Zhou periods (1200–950 B.C.), the Valley of Mexico in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries A.D., the Classic Maya (A.D. 250–800), the Inka kingdom during the early sixteenth century A.D., and the Yoruba and Benin peoples of West Africa from the mid-eighteenth century to the beginning of the colonial era in the late nineteenth century (Figs. 2.1, 2.2). The Yoruba states and Benin, selected to represent sub-Saharan Africa, constituted the best-documented and one of the culturally most advanced early civilizations of that region. The same is true of the Late Aztec period in the Valley of Mexico in the broader context of highland Mesoamerica,

²⁵⁵ Bruce G. Trigger, *Understanding Early Civilizations: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 31.

of the Inka kingdom in the context of Peru, of the Shang state in relation to all of China, and of southern Mesopotamia in relation to the Middle East. Ancient Egypt and the Classic Maya were the sole early civilizations that developed in their particular areas.²⁵⁶

In Figure 1, this information is juxtaposed with modern agricultural land cover data produced using an algorithm for interpreting global satellite imagery.²⁵⁷ Navin Ramankutty et al. explain,

The agricultural inventory data, with much greater spatial detail than previously available, is used to train a land cover classification data set obtained by merging two different satellite-derived products (Boston University's MODIS-derived land cover product and the GLC2000 data set). Our data are presented at 5 min (10 km) spatial resolution in longitude by longitude, have greater accuracy than previously available, and for the first time include statistical confidence intervals on the estimates. According to the data, there were 15.0 (90% confidence range of 12.2–17.1) million km of cropland (12% of the Earth's ice-free land surface) and 28.0 90% confidence range of 23.6–30.0) million km of pasture (22%) in the year 2000.²⁵⁸

This figure suggests a relationship between modern and ancient regions of agricultural settlement. The connection between settlement and agriculture is further emphasized in Figure 2, which layers the same agricultural land cover dataset with information regarding modern population centers.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ Trigger, 28.

²⁵⁷ Cropland data from: "Cropland and Pasture Area in 2000," EarthStat, accessed November 16, 2018, <http://www.earthstat.org/cropland-pasture-area-2000/>; Navin Ramankutty et al., "Farming the Planet: 1. Geographic Distribution of Global Agricultural Lands in the Year 2000," *Global Biogeochemical Cycles* 22, no. 1 (March 1, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1029/2007GB002952>; Navin Ramankutty and Jonathan A. Foley, "Estimating Historical Changes in Land Cover: North American Croplands from 1850 to 1992," *Global Ecology and Biogeography* 8, no. 5 (1999): 381–96.

²⁵⁸ Ramankutty et al., "Farming the Planet: 1. Geographic Distribution of Global Agricultural Lands in the Year 2000."

²⁵⁹ Data from Natural Earth: "Populated Places | Natural Earth," accessed November 16, 2018, <https://www.naturalearthdata.com/downloads/10m-cultural-vectors/10m-populated-places/>.

Figure 2: Agricultural Land and Modern Cities

The same cropland data is compared with ancient settlement information georeferenced from volumes on the archaeology and history of the ancient Near East, Middle East, and Central Asia in Figure 3.²⁶⁰ At a regional scale, the relationship between modern agricultural land cover and ancient settlement data is particularly striking.

²⁶⁰ Data georeferenced from maps found within: Anthony, *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*, 390, 414; William G. Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 265, 396; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 2006, 1:57, 83, 131, 233, 319, 366; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 2006, 2:549, 563, 627, 635; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 2007, 1:190–91; Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 61, 95, 115, 153, 177, 309, 370; Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 10–11 Only one data point is mapped per settlement, regardless of how many times it is attested in these sources.

Figure 3: Agricultural Land and Ancient Settlements

In *Against the Grain*, James C. Scott argues that the connection between agriculture and settled “civilization” is notably pronounced in grain-based farming cultures.²⁶¹ He writes, “In a grain state, one or two cereal grains provided the main food starch, the unit of taxation in kind, and the basis for a hegemonic agrarian calendar. Such states were confined to the ecological niches where alluvial soils and available water made them possible....The key to the nexus between grains and states lies, I believe, in the fact that only the cereal grains can serve as a basis for taxation: visible, divisible, assessable, storable, transportable, and ‘rationable.’”²⁶² Scott’s suggestion provides a reasonable explanation for the apparent stability of a relationship between

²⁶¹ James C. Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, Yale Agrarian Studies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 128.

²⁶² Scott, 128–29.

settled states and agricultural modes of food production (of a particular category of crops). Although they are not grouped according to state or political affiliation, the ancient settlements shown in Figure 3 seem to distribute along the general shapes of large polities (states and empires) known in the region before the Common Era (the largest and longest-lived are identifiable in Figure 1, georeferenced from Trigger's work). This connection is useful to identifying the category of environmental zone that contextualizes the earliest settled agricultural societies.

The category of landscape *not* “agriculturally marginal” might be called “agriculturally ideal.” Scott notes that states, being predominately agrarian, were geographically limited by the environmental needs of agriculture until the modern era.²⁶³ Figure 1 offers a glimpse of the limited extent agricultural land cover in recent decades and suggests that the majority of global land mass does not seem to be used for farming. The small and scattered zones which gave rise to “cradles” of agricultural settlement identified in this figure point to the reality that large-scale agriculture (particularly those “grain-based” economies on which Scott bases his research) has been historically possible in a small percentage of the land in the world. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), just less than one third (4.17 billion hectares) of the land surface of the globe (13.4 billion ha) is, to varying degrees, potentially suitable for agricultural production.²⁶⁴ This number far outstrips what the FAO estimates is the *actual* global extent of cropland by the early 21st century: approximately 1.5 billion ha (just over a third of the estimated *potential*).²⁶⁵ In numeric terms, it appears that the vast majority of the global land surface area falls within the category of agriculturally marginal landscapes. In order to understand the environmental features of agriculturally ideal landscapes that set this category

²⁶³ Scott, 14.

²⁶⁴ “World Agriculture: Towards 2015/2030 - An FAO Perspective,” accessed November 19, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/005/y4252e/y4252e06.htm>.

²⁶⁵ “World Agriculture: Towards 2015/2030 - An FAO Perspective.”

apart from agriculturally marginal landscapes this examination includes environmental data comprising the most basic “recipe” for farming: soil, water, and sunlight.

Figure 4: Soil Composition and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements

Soil composition features prominently in Scott’s work: “We can be more specific about the geographical conditions for state building. Only the richest soils were productive enough per hectare to sustain a large population in a compact area and to produce a taxable surplus. In practice this meant loess (wind deposited) or alluvial (flood deposited) soils. Alluvia, the historic gift of the annual floods of the Tigris and Euphrates and their tributaries, were the sites of state making in Mesopotamia: no alluvium, no state.”²⁶⁶ Scott’s comments allude to the interconnection of environmental variables in *creating* as well as *maintaining* the conditions

²⁶⁶ Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, 124.

necessary for agriculture to take support large settled populations. Further, the identification of loess or alluvial soil deposits highlights the specificity of the “recipe” for agriculturally ideal landscapes. Figure 4 compares the ancient settlement dataset from Figure 3 with soil composition data, aggregated from modern sources and made available by the FAO in the Harmonized World Soil Database (HWSD).²⁶⁷

HWSD Soil Type	Description	Ancient Settlements	Percentage of Settlements
Calcisols	Soils with accumulation of secondary calcium carbonates	143	21.80%
Leptosols	Very shallow soils over hard rock or in unconsolidated very gravelly material	111	16.92%
Fluvisols	Young soils in alluvial deposits	94	14.33%
Luvisols	Soils with subsurface accumulation of high activity clays and high base saturation	92	14.02%
Vertisols	Dark-coloured cracking and swelling clays	53	8.08%
Regosols	Soils with very limited soil development	39	5.95%
Cambisols	Weakly to moderately developed soils	26	3.96%
Arenosols	Sandy soils featuring very weak or no soil development	22	3.35%
Chernozems	Soils with a thick, dark topsoil, rich in organic matter with a calcareous subsoil	12	1.83%
Solonchaks	Strongly saline soils	12	1.83%
Water Bodies	Water Bodies	10	1.52%
No Data	No data	10	1.52%

Table 1: Soil Composition and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements

The visual cacophony of information presented in this sample region reveals the complex distribution of soil types across globe. Table 1 clarifies the relationship between the ancient settlement data (see Figure 3) used in this chapter (not globally comprehensive, but inclusive of the regions with which this dissertation is concerned) and the HWSD soil composition dataset.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁷ Data from: “Harmonized World Soil Database v1.2 | FAO SOILS PORTAL | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,” accessed November 16, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/soils-portal/soil-survey/soil-maps-and-databases/harmonized-world-soil-database-v12/en/>; G. Fischer et al., “Global Agro-Ecological Zones Assessment for Agriculture (GAEZ 2008). IIASA, Laxenburg, Austria and FAO, Rome, Italy,,” 2008.

²⁶⁸ In order to conserve space, Table 1 includes only the soil types associated with a minimum of one percent of ancient settlement data.

Although it is important to recall the unreliability of the georeferenced ancient settlement data at scales small enough to require precise coordinates, the information contained within Table 1 lends credence to Scott’s suggestion that wind- or water-deposited soils account for the majority of land on which agricultural settlements were founded. Comparing the modern cities dataset (see Figure 2) with the HWSD soil data, Table 2 confirms many of the associations between soil types and settled agricultural centers suggested in Table 1.²⁶⁹

HWSD Soil Type	Description	Populated Places	Percentage of Places
Cambisols	Weakly to moderately developed soils	734	10.25%
Fluvisols	Young soils in alluvial deposits	593	8.28%
Luvisols	Soils with subsurface accumulation of high activity clays and high base saturation	502	7.01%
Acrisols	Soils with subsurface accumulation of low activity clays and low base saturation	493	6.88%
Leptosols	Very shallow soils over hard rock or in unconsolidated very gravelly material	448	6.26%
Ferralsols	Deep, strongly weathered soils with a chemically poor, but physically stable subsoil	408	5.70%
Calcisols	Soils with accumulation of secondary calcium carbonates	401	5.60%
Gleysols	Soils with permanent or temporary wetness near the surface	398	5.56%

Table 2: Soil Composition and the Distribution of Modern Cities

According to the FAO’s *World Reference Base for Soil Resources 2014*, the soil types “Calcisols,” “Fluvisols,” “Luvisols,” and some “Cambisols” appear to fit the descriptions of deposited material used by Scott (loess or alluvial).²⁷⁰ Together these soil types are associated with just over half of the ancient settlements in the dataset and account for approximately 550 million hectares of global land surface.²⁷¹ The same volume describes the soil type “Leptosols”

²⁶⁹ In order to conserve space, Table 2 includes only the soil types associated with a minimum of five percent of modern city data.

²⁷⁰ IUSS Working Group WRB, *World Reference Base for Soil Resources 2014, Update 2015 International Soil Classification System for Naming Soils and Creating Legends for Soil Maps*, World Soil Resources Reports 106 (Rome: FAO, 2015), 151–52, 157–58, 165–66.

²⁷¹ IUSS Working Group WRB, 151, 158, 167.

as the most extensive (1.655 billion ha) comprising thin layers of soil predominately found in mountainous regions.²⁷² The large number of settlements found within this group of soils suggest the need for an examination of the potential role of topography in the development of agriculture. The relationship between topography and the ancient settlement dataset (Figure 5) appears to be

Figure 5: Topographic Distribution of Ancient Settlements

inconsistent enough to discount this feature as a major variable in the definition of agriculturally ideal landscapes.²⁷³ Although a direct role of topographic variation in the environmental “recipe” for agricultural settlement is not indicated in Figure 5, the shape of physical landscapes significantly does seem to affect the distribution of weather, surface water, and soil deposits.

²⁷² IUSS Working Group WRB, 163–64.

²⁷³ Data from: “Global Multi-Resolution Terrain Elevation Data 2010 (GMTED2010),” accessed October 31, 2018, https://topotools.cr.usgs.gov/gmted_viewer/.

Figure 6: Freshwater Regions and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements

Figure 6 shows Freshwater Ecoregions of the World (FEOW) data and the associated number of ancient settlements appearing within each region.²⁷⁴ A visual comparison of Figure 5 and Figure 6 reveals the importance of topographic contours to ecoregional distinctions. The clarification of the distribution of settlements across these zones in Table 3 highlights the importance of river watersheds to agricultural centers.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Data from: “The Nature Conservancy, Freshwater Ecoregions Of the World (FEOW),” accessed November 16, 2018, <http://maps.tnc.org/files/metadata/FEOW.xml>; “Freshwater Ecoregions Of the World,” accessed November 16, 2018, <http://www.feow.org/>.

²⁷⁵ In order to conserve space, Table 3 includes only the soil types associated with a minimum of one percent of ancient settlement data.

WWF Freshwater Ecoregion	World Wildlife Fund Major Habitat Type	Ancient Settlements	Percentage of Settlements
Coastal Levant	xeric freshwaters and endorheic (closed) basins	127	19.27%
Jordan River	xeric freshwaters and endorheic (closed) basins	101	15.33%
Lower Nile	xeric freshwaters and endorheic (closed) basins	97	14.72%
Nile Delta	large river deltas	56	8.50%
Northern Anatolia	temperate coastal rivers	41	6.22%
Upper Tigris & Euphrates	temperate floodplain rivers and wetlands	35	5.31%
Lower Tigris & Euphrates	temperate floodplain rivers and wetlands	33	5.01%
Western Anatolia	temperate coastal rivers	22	3.34%
Southern Anatolia	temperate coastal rivers	21	3.19%
Central Anatolia	xeric freshwaters and endorheic (closed) basins	19	2.88%
Volga - Ural	temperate floodplain rivers and wetlands	15	2.28%
Orontes	temperate coastal rivers	12	1.82%
Middle Amu Darya	temperate upland rivers	11	1.67%
Ob	polar freshwaters	9	1.37%
Sinai	xeric freshwaters and endorheic (closed) basins	9	1.37%
Thrace	temperate coastal rivers	7	1.06%
Arabian Interior	xeric freshwaters and endorheic (closed) basins	7	1.06%

Table 3: Freshwater Regions and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements

The top half of entries in the first column of Table 3 read as an inventory of major sources of water in the ancient Near East. Scott observes that regular flooding of rivers like the Tigris, Euphrates, and Nile provided not just irrigation, but the deposition of alluvial soils.²⁷⁶ He writes, “If reliable and non-catastrophic floods allowed, flood-retreat agriculture could be practiced on the easily worked and nutritious silt (in Egypt along the Nile as well), in which case the density of the population might be even greater. Much the same can be said for the earliest state centers

²⁷⁶ Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, 124.

in China (Qin and Han Dynasties), in the loess soils along the Yellow River, where population density reached levels rare for preindustrial societies.”²⁷⁷ Scott’s comments emphasize the significance of seasonal natural irrigation to the complex interplay between environmental variables that create and maintain agriculturally ideal contexts.

Figure 7: Ancient Annual Precipitation and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements

Rain is another significant form of regular natural irrigation that is also key to seasonal patterns of flooding. Figure 7 compares the ancient settlement dataset with a paleoclimatic model of annual precipitation 6000 years ago (mid-Holocene).²⁷⁸ The model of precipitation in Figure 7 appears to approximate the modern distribution of agricultural land cover in Figure 3. Further,

²⁷⁷ Scott, 124.

²⁷⁸ Data from: R.J. Hijmans, “Downscaled Paleoclimate Data | WorldClim - Global Climate Data,” WorldClim, accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.worldclim.org/paleo-climate1>; R.J. Hijmans, et al., “Very High Resolution Interpolated Climate Surfaces for Global Land Areas,” *International Journal of Climatology* 25, no. 15 (n.d.): 1965–78.

the pattern of settlements in Figure 7 does seem to fall within the general shape of the model. Although technological innovations in irrigation have allowed agriculture to expand throughout history, it is difficult to deny the relationship of rain and river flooding to the development of settled agriculturalist societies.

Figure 8: Ancient Average Temperature and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements

Closely interconnected with the distribution of atmospheric water, the last major environmental factor to be considered in this chapter is sunlight (temperature) and its effect on the development of agriculturally ideal landscapes. A paleoclimatic model for average annual temperature is compared with the ancient settlement data in Figure 8.²⁷⁹ With regard to the question underlying the current examination, a logical conclusion to draw from this map is that

²⁷⁹ Data from: Hijmans, “Downscaled Paleoclimate Data | WorldClim - Global Climate Data”; Hijmans, et al., “Very High Resolution Interpolated Climate Surfaces for Global Land Areas.”

there does not appear to be an obvious connection between temperature and agricultural landscapes. Although reasonable, this conclusion may speak more to the lack of information included in a measurement such as “average annual temperature.” Figure 9 offers a more nuanced model compared with the ancient settlement dataset: average monthly range of temperatures.²⁸⁰

Figure 9: Ancient Mean Diurnal Temperature and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements

The trend of temperature data and settlements in Figure 9 seems to be more stable than in Figure 8. This relationship appears to suggest that, whether the overall annual temperature is high or low, agricultural landscapes fall within zone with some range between maximum and minimum temperatures: if the climate is either too cold or too hot, too consistently, large-scale agriculture

²⁸⁰ Data from: Hijmans, “Downscaled Paleoclimate Data | WorldClim - Global Climate Data”; Hijmans, et al., “Very High Resolution Interpolated Climate Surfaces for Global Land Areas.”

may not be viable.

It seems that a range of warmer (yet variable) temperatures combined with atmospheric and ground-based sources of water and particular types of soils combine to make an agriculturally ideal landscape. Examining each variable, in turn, the particular specificity of this combination of environmental “recipe” emerges, supporting the FAO data regarding the particularly limited use and availability of agriculturally viable land. Scott points out that, despite the appearance of stability among historical states, the ecological fragility of agricultural landscapes has meant limits to actual state power.²⁸¹ He writes, “it is essential to acknowledge the fundamental structural vulnerability of the grain complex on which all early states rested. Sedentism arose in very special and circumscribed niches...State-making sites were above all structurally vulnerable to subsistence failures that had little to do with how adept or incompetent their rulers were.”²⁸² The idea that agriculturally-based food supplies are particularly vulnerable to the overwhelming influence of environmental conditions makes Scott’s comments especially poignant in light of modern climate change. Considering the particular combination of variables necessary to produce these “very special and circumscribed niches” it is not difficult to understand the reality of such vulnerability.

The alternative to such particular niches is a variety of environmental zones that belong to a category of agriculturally marginal landscapes. The spread of *Homo sapiens* across the surface of the globe is evidence of the adaptability and “Environmental Pragmatism” innate to the species. The examination of environmental and settlement data, taken up in this chapter, suggests that settled agriculturalists like mobile pastoralist societies take strategic risks on the predictability of environmental variables. The differences in variability between the two categories of landscapes could not, it appears, be greater. Agriculture seems to require a specific

²⁸¹ Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, 14–16.

²⁸² Scott, 188–89.

formula of variables that remain relatively stable across time and space; whereas agriculturally marginal landscapes are defined by the very instability (both across and within zones) of these variables.

Despite the limited estimates of agriculturally viable land across the globe, the production of material culture and preservation of written records have expanded the historical footprint of settled agriculturalist societies. Scott writes,

The states in question were only rarely and then quite briefly the formidable Leviathans that a description of their most powerful reign tends to convey. In most cases, interregna, fragmentation, and ‘dark ages’ were more common than consolidate, effective rule. Here again, we—and the historians as well—are likely to be mesmerized by the records of a dynasty’s founding or its classical period, while periods of disintegration and disorder leave little or nothing in the way of records... This is entirely understandable if the purpose of a history is to examine the cultural achievements that we revere, but it overlooks the brittleness and fragility of state forms.²⁸³

Scott’s comments recall the discussion in the last chapter regarding the perceptions of settled agricultural “civilizations” regarding mobile pastoralist societies. In addition to the inconsistency of historical data available on mobile peoples, Scott’s observation points to the significance of agriculturally ideal landscapes as contexts for these perceptions. Settled agricultural activities seem to rely on certain levels of environmental predictability, reliability, and continuity that appear to contribute to the perception of settlement (or “civilization”) as comparably stable. However unstable or incomprehensible mobile pastoralist societies appear to settled peoples throughout history, they seem to be viewed, as the Shasu from Egypt, as predictably belonging to a stable category of “Other.” As noted in the last chapter, artificially homogenizing perceptions of mobile pastoralism persist in the modern world. In his argument for the Non-Uniform Complexity Theory, Frachetti remarks on the need for more nuanced (and thus realistic)

²⁸³ Scott, 15.

perspectives.²⁸⁴ He writes, “Archaeological research increasingly illustrates that Bronze Age societies of the Eurasian steppe were inherently more diverse in their ways of life than their related material culture might imply. Bronze Age steppe communities illustrate comparatively different scales of social, economic, and political organization, as well as local variability in their extents of mobility and geographic ranges of interaction.”²⁸⁵ The diverse forms of “mobile pastoralism” emphasized by Frachetti are directly connected to the variety of environmental contexts that fall within the category of agriculturally marginal landscapes.

In stark contrast to agriculturally ideal conditions, the variety of “everything else,” that groups agriculturally marginal landscapes, presents mobile pastoralist societies with a wide assortment of opportunities for innovation. The strategic “Environmental Pragmatism” (core to Frachetti’s theory) that appears necessary for survival in such natural environments underlies cultural developments such as the building blocks of the worship of Ahura Mazda and YHWH. In evolutionary terms, the environmental pressures of survival offer a creative challenge to mobile pastoralist societies. The social landscapes that result from variously divergent or discontinuous pragmatic responses to diverse patchworks of physical environmental contexts further shape the development of cultural evolutionary pressures. Frachetti writes,

the Bronze Age landscape of the steppe may be depicted as a ‘jigsaw puzzle’ of fluctuating socio-economic arenas that served to link otherwise discrete and localized pastoral populations. Pastoralist strategies, by definition, contribute to a heightened degree of variation in mobility and subsistence strategies, in settlement ecology, and in commercial activity – both within and across regions...Differing degrees of mobility, productivity, and interaction, as well as environmental factors, are essential to the way pastoralists practically define and change the landscape within which they live, and this variation structures the venues and geographic extent of their interaction and assimilation with their neighbors.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Frachetti, “Differentiated Landscapes and Non-Uniform Complexity among Bronze Age Societies of the Eurasian Steppe,” 19.

²⁸⁵ Frachetti, 19.

²⁸⁶ Frachetti, 41.

Frachetti argues for the power of mobile pastoralists as agents, active in the process of determining and deploying strategies required to survive in agriculturally marginal landscapes.

The last chapter discussed Salzman's conclusions regarding the significance of individual freedom and agency to the sustention of mobile pastoralist societies.²⁸⁷ The strategic pragmatism of these societies appears to be the direct result of consensus among autonomous individuals who choose to work together for common preservation and benefit. Norenzayan argues that a variety of pressures associated with pro-social "Big God" religions encourage cooperative behavior in critical areas necessary for one group of humans to outcompete another.²⁸⁸ He writes "Prosocial religions, with their Big Gods who watch, intervene, and demand hard-to-fake loyalty displays, facilitated the rise of cooperation in large groups of anonymous strangers. In turn, these expanding groups took their prosocial religious beliefs and practices with them, further ratcheting up large-scale cooperation in a runaway process of cultural evolution."²⁸⁹ Despite the incongruity of his emphasis on "large groups of anonymous strangers" and the focus of this dissertation on small-scale mobile societies, Norenzayan's comments highlight the biological evolutionary consequences of cultural selection processes and social institutional development. Although the issues with Botero et al.'s article, discussed in the first chapter, make that research unreliable for supporting the argument of this dissertation, it is important to recall the general argument for purposes of the current discussion. Botero et al. argue that intraspecies cooperation is a survival strategy developed in response to environmental challenges that has proven successful among non-human animals.²⁹⁰ Botero et al. follow Norenzayan in suggesting that, among humans, the biological evolutionary fitness of this approach extends to the cultural adaptation of intragroup cooperation: religious developments that favor pro-social cooperation

²⁸⁷ Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*, 85.

²⁸⁸ Norenzayan, *Big Gods*, 10.

²⁸⁹ Norenzayan, 8.

²⁹⁰ Botero et al., "The Ecology of Religious Beliefs," 16784.

facilitate their own propagation by means of group survival.²⁹¹ The arguments of Norenzayan and Botero et al., in broad strokes, appear to explain the strategic value of religions like the worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, respectively, in agriculturally marginal environmental contexts.

In order for the worship to spread, the biological survival of the worshippers of Ahura Mazda and YHWH in their originating environmental contexts must have been supported, to some degree, by the development of these religions. If the emphatic concept of “Truth” conceived by these religions included pro-social components, it is reasonable to assume that they would have contributed to sustaining a critical number of followers for continuation of worship. Building blocks such as an emphatic concept of “Truth,” perception of “incompatibility” with other religions, and perspective that separates social or “ethnic” identities from religious identities seem to constitute a set of tools for cooperative survival and competitive expansion used by these (and other) religions deemed monotheistic. They could promote intragroup cooperation by defining the group as adherents or worshippers of YHWH or Ahura Mazda. The competitive advantage of this approach has been discussed earlier in this dissertation: by making membership to the group contingent upon choice or adherence, non-group members have the potential to opt out of “the fight” by converting and thus gain the benefits (and responsibility) of intragroup cooperation.

It is important to comment, briefly, on the potential for so-called “free riders” to take advantage of benefits by joining the group without contributing to the community. In “The Evolution of Costly Displays, Cooperation and Religion” Joseph Henrich proposes a species-wide adaptation to guard against those who say one thing and do another.²⁹² His theory of

²⁹¹ Botero et al., 16784.

²⁹² Joseph Henrich, “The Evolution of Costly Displays, Cooperation and Religion: Credibility Enhancing Displays and Their Implications for Cultural Evolution,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 30, no. 4 (July 1, 2009): 244–60, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2009.03.005>.

credibility-enhancing displays (CREDs) concerns the process of cultural learning and the evolutionary challenge presented by potential models/teachers who can manipulate or misinform observers/learners.²⁹³ It is built upon a concept of “hard-to-fake displays” which can be summarized as a demonstration of skill or strength that communicates the fact in a self-evident manner (a show of physical strength, for example, is “hard to fake”).²⁹⁴ Henrich writes,

A model, for example, might express the view that donating to charity is important, but not donate when given the opportunity. The action, not donating, should indicate to a learner that while the model may believe in some sense that giving to charity is a good idea, he is probably not deeply committed to it. As we will see, cultural learners under such conditions would simply acquire the practice of talking about how good it is to give to charity, without actually giving. Learners imitate the model, in both actions (talking about how important charitable giving is) and in degree of commitment (little). Conversely, when a model actually gives to charity at a cost to himself, learners more readily acquire both the representation that giving to charity is good and a deeper commitment to or belief in that representation. Cultural learners are using these actions to more accurately assess the models' degree of commitment or beliefs in the expressed representation. Such diagnostic actions are credibility-enhancing displays (CREDs).²⁹⁵

The application of this concept to the process of conversion is clear with regard to many religions deemed monotheistic in the modern world: in order to show belonging adherents must demonstrate belief and practice according to religious standards. Although this mechanism is not exclusive to either religions deemed monotheistic or mobile pastoralist societies, it is important to identify its expression in these contexts.

The category of agriculturally marginal landscapes includes the majority of environmental regions on the planet: nearly two-thirds of global land surface. This would seem to group too many different landscapes into a collection that is too broad to be useful for this research. However, the variety of ecological contexts, in which mobile pastoralist societies pragmatically strategize methods of survival, offers seemingly endless challenge to the creative

²⁹³ Henrich, 246.

²⁹⁴ Henrich, 254.

²⁹⁵ Henrich, 247.

power of human minds. From the innumerable innovations and ideas born in this variety of challenging contexts, biological and cultural evolutionary processes selected for fitness building blocks of religion that comprised the worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda. These religions developed, spread, and survived based on the products of these processes and their religious descendants in the 21st century CE bear the marks of mobile pastoralist origins in agriculturally marginal landscapes.

Chapter Six: Buildings Deemed Religious

*“Gods required temples, and temples needed to be located in cities.”*²⁹⁶

In *The Histories*, Herodotus claims that the Persians do not build temples, statues, or altars and sacrifice to their deities outdoors.²⁹⁷ Although his “observation” is well-known to many students and scholars of ancient Mazda-worship, it seems to apply to both religions deemed monotheistic examined in this dissertation. Comments concerning the general absence of temples dedicated to the worship of Ahura Mazda or YHWH can be found throughout the literature and the trend seems to be supported in the archaeological record. This chapter will explore the influence of mobile pastoralist social origins on the absence of archaeological data concerning “temples” dedicated to YHWH or Ahura Mazda and the impact of settled agricultural contexts on later developments of synagogues and fire temples. The absence of buildings deemed religious, in the mobile social contexts within which the worship of YHWH and of Ahura Mazda respectively originated, appears to have shaped conceptions of these deities and religions deemed monotheistic. These connections reveal the significance of natural landscapes on the invention, or adoption, of specific building blocks of religions in these communities of worship.

Chapter Three (“Religions Deemed Monotheistic”) discussed the importance of “deeming” with regard to scholarly conceptualizations of “monotheism” and “polytheism.” In order to examine the data concerning buildings deemed religious, it is vital to acknowledge the difficult work of interpreting archaeological evidence. Although the language of this chapter is framed using Taves’ Building Block Approach, a search for “buildings deemed religious” in the literature is fruitless. As suggested in Taves’ argument for her methodology, the terminology used by various scholars across time is neither consistent nor clear. Though a reader might apprehend

²⁹⁶ Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 217.

²⁹⁷ Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Tom Holland (New York: Viking, 2014), 67–68.

differences among the referents for terms like “shrine,” “temple,” “temple complex,” “sanctuary,” “house of god,” or “sacred precinct,” it is difficult to avoid concluding, from the literature, that each definition of these concepts appears to be specific to the scholar using the word.

The issue with terminology seems, in part, to be the result of differences among builders: buildings deemed religious from different cultures may look different. These differences can be useful (as well as misleading) as evidence for scholarly interpretation of archaeological finds. A brilliant parody of archaeology (and the difficulty of interpretation) is illustrated by David Macaulay in his 1979 book *Motel of the Mysteries*.²⁹⁸ The hit-and-miss reading of a 1980’s motel room as a cultic center, by protagonists Howard Carson and Harriet Burton, highlights the challenge of understanding how artifacts would have been regarded by the societies in which they functioned. The pattern of Carson and Burton deeming things religious, in Macaulay’s book, reflects some of the history of archaeology in the 19th and 20th centuries: what cannot be readily identified may be deemed “cultic.” This is important to understanding processes of deeming buildings religious that contribute to the determination of evidence available for scholarship.

The chronological distance between artifact and interpreter appears to play a role in the information available for deeming buildings religious or otherwise. Macaulay’s work, though a parody, suggests that a certain amount of time (more than 2000 years in the case of *Motels of the Mysteries*) would have to pass for hilariously absurd mis-interpretations of modern artifacts. A clear example of the effect of time can be found in the difficulty scholars have in understanding archaeological finds at Göbekli Tepe in southern Turkey. In “Göbekli Tepe: A Neolithic Site in Southeastern Anatolia” Klaus Schmidt notes that the 8,000 – 10,000-year-old monumental pillars

²⁹⁸ David Macaulay and Houghton Mifflin Company, *Motel of the Mysteries* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979).

and sculpted animal shapes inspire more questions than answers about the site.²⁹⁹ As with other monumental products of ancient and pre-historic societies, Göbekli Tepe challenges assumptions about the capabilities, motivations, and interests of people in the past. Schmidt writes, “Though only partially excavated, it has become increasingly obvious that the findings from Göbekli Tepe may contribute significantly to our understanding of the transition from a subsistence pattern based exclusively on hunting and foraging at the end of the Pleistocene to the appearance of agriculture and animal husbandry in the course of the early Holocene.”³⁰⁰ Schmidt’s comments are pertinent to this chapter, in particular, because of the implications of a monumental (and apparently religious) structure discovered outside of a more obviously settled context. Despite various similarly enigmatic megalithic (frequently deemed religious) structures elsewhere in the world, the historical preponderance of “built” things deemed religious found in association with “built” settlements makes a site like Göbekli Tepe unusual rather than typical.

A notable aspect of the relationship between “temple” building culture and settled agriculturalist societies is the association of buildings deemed religious with popular conceptions of ancient “civilizations.” In the modern world, it is hard to miss the significance assigned to these expressions of building culture as iconic studies in the development of building technology and style. Consider the Wikipedia entry on “Architecture:” 35% (17 out of 48) of the photographed buildings presented in the article are clearly identified as buildings deemed religious, included the first two that appear at the top of the page (Florence Cathedral, Italy and Longxing Buddhist Temple, China).³⁰¹ Similarly, the photos of buildings deemed religious in the

²⁹⁹ Klaus Schmidt, “Göbekli Tepe: A Neolithic Site in Southeastern Anatolia,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Anatolia: (10,000-323 BCE)*, ed. Gregory McMahon and Sharon Steadman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 930.

³⁰⁰ Schmidt, 917.

³⁰¹ “Architecture,” in *Wikipedia*, November 15, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Architecture&oldid=868957897>.

entry for “Building” account for 30% (3 out of 10) of the buildings presented.³⁰² Like the “Architecture” page buildings deemed religious make up the first two photos on the page and following a similar pattern of a Domed European Christian Church (the Church of Saint Sava in Serbia) followed by a Chinese Buddhist site (a Shaolin Monastery building).³⁰³

The fact that this association appears on Wikipedia can be said to reflect both the acceptability of such information in the minds of potential editors and the accessibility of this link to an extraordinarily large community of user-readers. The benefits of examining information that appears in this volunteer-constructed, consensus-driven, and crowd-sourced encyclopedia project derive, in large part, from two features: editability and accessibility. That the site is open for editing by anyone with time, interest, and access to the internet points to the necessary result that consensus must be sought among potential editors. Because information presented on a particular article can be changed by another party at any time contributors must be cautious about edits. This is, by no means, an affirmation of the veracity of claims or accuracy of information presented on various Wikipedia entries, rather, it is an emphasis on the role of the (direct and indirect) democratic power of internet users on the construction and approval of such presentations. It is no exaggeration to describe Wikipedia as the most widely available and easily accessible source of information in the world. According to website statistical monitor Alexa Internet, Wikipedia is, at the time of this writing, the fifth most popular website by traffic (it is listed behind google.com, youtube.com, facebook.com, baidu.com.)³⁰⁴ The statistics generated using Wikimedia Toolforge’s Pageviews tool for counting “hits” (not unique users) for the calendar year 2017 are staggering: Wikipedia’s “Main Page” was accessed (either directly by users or by other sites/bots) almost seven billion times, averaging nearly 19 million “hits” each

³⁰² “Building,” in *Wikipedia*, November 17, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Building&oldid=869211343>.

³⁰³ “Building,”

³⁰⁴ “Alexa Top 500 Global Sites,” accessed December 17, 2018, <https://www.alexa.com/topsites>.

day.³⁰⁵ The fact that a user does not need to pass through the “Main Page” in order to access individual entries suggests that the overall number of times a portion of Wikipedia is accessed each day is much higher. Thus, whether the association between building culture and buildings deemed religious, is reflected in or reinforced by these entries on Wikipedia, it is clear that such a connection is stable enough to be presented and accepted.

The association between settled societies and buildings deemed religious is readily apparent in the archaeological record. Figure 10 compares the dataset of georeferenced ancient settlements from the last chapter with a substantial sample set of ancient “temple sites” listed in a variety of general reference volumes.³⁰⁶ Whether deemed so by scholars digging at each site, or later interpreters of the date, “temples” at these sites are specifically identified in these sources; because this chapter concerns the presence (or absence) of this particular building block in the

³⁰⁵ MusikAnimal, Kaldari, and Marcel Ruiz Forns, “Pageviews Analysis: Wikipedia (Main Page),” Wikimedia Toolforge: Pageviews Analysis, accessed December 17, 2018, https://tools.wmflabs.org/pageviews/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&range=last-year&pages=Main_Page.

³⁰⁶ Data drawn from: Juliette van. Krieken-Pieters, ed., *Art and Archaeology of Afghanistan: Its Fall and Survival : A Multi-Disciplinary Approach*, vol. 14, Handbuch Der Orientalistik, Section 8, Central Asia, 0169-8524 (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Evi Melas, ed., *Temples and Sanctuaries of Ancient Greece: A Companion Guide* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973); UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “UNESCO World Heritage Centre - World Heritage List,” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed November 28, 2018, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list>; UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “UNESCO World Heritage Centre - Tentative Lists,” UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed November 28, 2018, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/>; “Encyclopædia Iranica | Home,” accessed November 28, 2018, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/>; Seton Lloyd, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia: From the Old Stone Age to the Persian Conquest*, The World of Archaeology; World of Archaeology. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978); William E. Mierse, *Temples and Sanctuaries from the Early Iron Age Levant Recovery after Collapse*, History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2012); Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia; the Classical Art of the Near East*. (London: Phaidon, 1969); John Griffiths Pedley, *Greek Art and Archaeology* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1993); Michael Shenkar, “Temple Architecture in the Iranian World before the Macedonian Conquest,” *Iran & the Caucasus* 11, no. 2 (2007): 169–94; Sharon R. Steadman and John Gregory McMahon, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Anatolia, 10,000-323 B.C.E.*, Oxford Handbooks Series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); David Stronach, “Uartian and Achaemenian Tower Temples,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 26, no. 4 (1967): 278–88, <https://doi.org/10.1086/371920>; James. Whitley, *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece*, Cambridge World Archaeology (Cambridge, U.K. ; Cambridge University Press, 2001); Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt*; G. R. H. Wright, *Ancient Building in Cyprus*, Handbuch Der Orientalistik. Siebente Abteilung, Kunst Und Archäologie (Leiden ; E.J. Brill, 1992); G. R. H. Wright, *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine*, Handbuch Der Orientalistik. Siebente Abteilung, Kunst Und Archäologie (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985); Lloyd, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia* Each of the maps used in this chapter has been created using a base layer world map from ESRI: “Dark Gray Canvas (WGS84)”, Credits: Esri, HERE, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community.

Figure 10: Ancient Temple Sites and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements (Points)

early development of specific religions, sites dated to the Achaemenid Persian Period (6th century BCE) and later have been excluded.³⁰⁷ At the regional scale there seems to be a clear relationship between the distribution of settlements and “temple” building activities. Taves’ linguistic orientation makes the reason for this connection obvious: it is perfectly logical to assume that, generally, buildings deemed religious could be found in places where there are other buildings or building-cultures. This relationship serves as background to the interpretation of archaeological findings at Göbekli Tepe and it is in light of this connection that the site is considered an outlier to a well-established trend. If there is, at some future point, evidence discovered to show settlement at, or close to, Göbekli Tepe, it would be reasonable to assume that scholars would,

³⁰⁷ It is reasonably clear that, with the conquests of Cyrus in the mid-sixth century BCE, the societies in the greater Near East lost autonomous local political (and perhaps religious) power.

generally, not be surprised.

The relationship between settled building cultures and buildings deemed religious offers credence to both Herodotus' comments regarding Persian religious practices and the curiosity with which they are delivered. Mention of Scythia (among others) in *The Histories* reveals that, at least in an intellectual sense, Herodotus is familiar with mobile pastoralist societies. However, his perspective, rooted in a settled agriculturalist social context, is limited to observable (to his sources, one imagines) differences between his culture and the cultures of others. That he finds the absence of Persian “temples” remarkable is important; that he is supported by the lack of archaeological evidence is interesting. Figure 11 further highlights the relationship revealed in Figure 10: by presenting the ancient settlements dataset as a heatmap and the “temple” sites as points, the connection is particularly clear.

Absent from Figures 10 and 11 is data regarding the religious affiliation of the “temple” site dataset. Table 4 shows the “religion” associated with each site as interpreted from the attesting source. At first glance, the category to which nearly all of these sites belong is revealed by the name of the “religion:” religions deemed polytheistic. The distinction made between religious and “ethnic” identities, in the communities of worship centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda and other religions deemed monotheistic, suggests that the usage of religious identity in Table 4 is perhaps anachronistic. The differences between “Mazda-worshipper” and “Aryan” identities cannot so easily be imposed on ancient Egyptian religion, society, and culture.

Figure 11: Ancient Temple Sites and the Distribution of Ancient Settlements (Heatmap)

Furthermore, the continuity implied by terms used for religious identification within religions deemed monotheistic artificially harmonizes all aspects of religious culture (and perhaps non-religious as well) across time in a certain space. Despite these issues, it is important for purposes of this dissertation to differentiate between the religious systems to which the “temple” sites in this dataset belong.³⁰⁸ A visualization of the data in Table 4 is presented with the distribution of sites by date (century BCE) in Figure 12. The dates attested in the sources suggest consistent “temple-building” activity across the established histories of the numerically-heavy Egyptian and

³⁰⁸ Please note that some of the polities included in this dataset, like “BMAC” (Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex) or “Phoenician,” do not necessarily represent the self-identification of these societies but are used here according to the name designated by the authors of the attesting sources. Also, note that lacking any conclusive association in the above-cited sources, the following sites are marked “Unclear” in the dataset: Arslantepe, Buyukkale, Ebla, Harran, Kultepe, Ras Shamra (two sites attested), Sarissa, Tell Atchana, Tepe Sialk, Tilman Hoyuk

"Religion"	Count	Percentage of Sites
BMAC	7	2.52%
Canaanite	25	8.99%
Cypriot	3	1.08%
Egyptian	137	49.28%
Elamite	4	1.44%
Greek	15	5.40%
Hittite	10	3.60%
Israelite?	2	0.72%
Mesopotamian	37	13.31%
Moabite	1	0.36%
Mycenean	1	0.36%
Philistine	5	1.80%
Phoenician	11	3.96%
Unclear	10	3.60%
Urtian	10	3.60%

Table 4: Ancient Temple Sites by Religions

Mesopotamian sites. The dominance of Egyptian sites in the data presented is striking and far from surprising, considering the history of archaeological interest in the region and conditions for environmentally well-preserved remains. Equally striking (although not surprising, given the literature) is the relative absence of “Israelite” and “Aryan” buildings deemed religious from the dataset. The two sites listed as questionable “Israelite” are controversial and their inclusion requires discussion: Arad and Jerusalem.

Evidence (or lack thereof) for a temple at Jerusalem is an issue to which the general response of scholars has been summarized by William G. Dever in *Beyond the Texts*: “No remains of a royal temple in Jerusalem have been found, but that fact means little or nothing, since the relevant areas have never been excavated”³⁰⁹ Dever’s observation emphasizes the quandary of including this site in the dataset, despite the lack of archaeological evidence supporting its attestation in the sources. In *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine* G. R.

³⁰⁹ Dever, *Beyond the Texts: An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 497.

Figure 12: Outer Ring: Ancient Temple Sites by Religions; Inner Ring: Dates Assigned by Source Volumes (in centuries BCE)

H. Wright seems to capture the sentiment of many scholars in the West: “Common sense advises that little or nothing should be said here of Solomon's Temple since there are no remains of this building accessible for investigation. However the peculiar status of the building in our civilisation overrides common sense.”³¹⁰ Despite common sense, but in consideration of the

³¹⁰ Wright, *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine*, 254.

unique status afforded to the biblically attested Solomonic “First” Temple at Jerusalem by scholars deeming this building into discursive reality, the questionably “Israelite” site appears in the dataset.

Similar to Jerusalem, the inclusion of Arad in the dataset is based on a variety of scholarly opinions. In *Ancient Israel*, Grabbe observes: “Arad has often been discussed in connection with the reign of Josiah, but it is a site about which prominent archaeologists have come to some significantly different conclusions, mainly because the excavator Y. Aharoni was not able to publish a full report before his death.”³¹¹ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to consider the various interpretations of Aharoni’s finds, but it is important to acknowledge the two layers of difficulty in the task: 1) establishing whether or not the remains of a building can be deemed religious; and 2) establishing the relationship of this building to the worship of YHWH (or otherwise defined “Israelite” religion). This site is thus included on the basis that, like Jerusalem, despite scant and nebulous evidence to support such conclusions, it has been deemed by a number of scholars as a potentially “Israelite” temple site. The fact that these two cases are the *strongest* possible sites for buildings deemed religious to be associated with the worship of YHWH is very important to this chapter.

A corollary to the explanation for the relationship between the ancient settlement and “temple” site datasets presented in Figures 10 and 11 is that the absence of building culture might explain a lack of buildings deemed religious. This logical association makes sense of the dearth of buildings deemed religious that have been conclusively linked to the worship of YHWH and Ahura Mazda. Figure 12 paints a picture of religions deemed polytheistic: buildings deemed religious figure prominently and consistently across the category. This conclusion, however, does not turn on the revelation of a single or couple of buildings which may yet be

³¹¹ Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?*, 215.

interpreted as connected to YHWH- or Mazda-worship. If buildings deemed religious were integral to the origins of the religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH, then it would not be difficult to find something relatively conclusive. The prominence of Egyptian sites in the dataset speaks to the history of archaeologists literally tripping over ancient remains preserved by the desert climate. Recall Meyers' observation that "The land of the Bible has probably been excavated more than any other place of comparable size on earth."³¹² Meyers' observation highlights the probability that early YHWH worship did not take place in buildings deemed religious and any "temples" that might have been built might be considered signals of change.

It is important to note that the Hebrew Bible appears to be quite clear about the development of buildings deemed religious as a process connected to a series of developments and changes in both the worship of YHWH and social/political institutions. Although the motivations for crafting the "Tabernacle/Tent of Meeting" and building the "First/Solomon's Temple" are attributed to divine revelation or will, the religio-historical narratives, of the books of Exodus and Kings respectively, indicate that these are innovations. Although the biblical text cannot serve as historical witness to (or evidence of) such events, it is significant that the internal narratives seem to agree with the picture of early YHWH worship that emerges from the archaeological record. The absence of buildings deemed religious is reasonably explained by the mobile pastoralist social and agriculturally marginal environmental origins of the community of worship: as other social institutions, including government and settlement, shift it is logical that religious changes may occur. Within the biblical text, the building of Solomon's Temple is connected to the burgeoning monarchy – two innovations assimilated from neighboring settled societies – marking a new era in the religio-historical narrative. Wright describes the intersection of these religious and political shifts: "So far as can be judged from these sources Solomon's

³¹² Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 27.

Temple was designed to serve the needs of a newly constituted political regime with a rather unusual religious sanction.”³¹³ In highlighting the pragmatic instigation of change to serve the needs of the moment, Wright’s comments echo the spirit of Frachetti’s Non-Uniform Complexity Theory.

The assimilation of building blocks of religion, like buildings deemed religious, for strategic advantage seems more obvious in the history of Mazda-worship. The absence of buildings deemed religious dedicated to the worship of Ahura Mazda is, going back to Herodotus, fairly well-established among historians of Zoroastrianism. The development of the fire temple, a building deemed religious associated with the religion since early in the Common Era, is understood to be an innovation in the history of Mazda-worship. In “Temple Architecture in the Iranian World before the Macedonian Conquest” Michael Shenkar explains, “Given the nomadic background of the ancient Iranians, they probably became acquainted with temple architecture once they came into close contact with the highly developed civilizations of Margiana, Elam and Mesopotamia.”³¹⁴ Shenkar’s comments support the argument of this chapter as well as acknowledge the adaptive qualities of Mazda-worship attested over the centuries.

Although the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda each appear to have originated in mobile pastoralist social contexts and without notable building cultures, the buildings deemed religious that developed are still uniquely associated with Judaism (synagogue) and Zoroastrianism (fire temple). Like the invention of the synagogue, the fire temple is understood by scholars and adherents alike to be a later development in the religion. Shenkar’s explanation of this development points to the influence of other cultures, specifically those of settled agriculturalist societies, on the impetus to adopt this building block. It is clear from the archaeological evidence, however, that the development of buildings deemed religious in the

³¹³ Wright, *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine*, 254.

³¹⁴ Shenkar, “Temple Architecture in the Iranian World before the Macedonian Conquest,” 178.

religion of Ahura Mazda did not develop until many centuries after worshippers “came into close contact with the highly developed civilizations of Margiana, Elam and Mesopotamia.”³¹⁵ Once invented (and adopted), these buildings are unlike each other, and mostly importantly, different from other temples in societies associated with religions deemed polytheistic.

In *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, Schneider explains the concept of buildings deemed religious in Mesopotamia:

The temple was literally the 'house' of the god and contained the deity's cult image. It was where the god lived with family and servants, ate, drank, slept, was entertained, and worked. In order to thoroughly service the gods, the temple was equipped like a household with essential provisions for the god's meals (kitchens and vessels for making, storing, and serving), sleeping rooms with beds, side rooms for the deity's family, a courtyard with a basin and water for cleansing visitors, and stables for the god's chariot and draft animals.³¹⁶

It is fair to say that Schneider’s description applies to a number of cultures across the ancient Near East. Glenn Holland’s outline of religious building activity among Egyptian and Syro-Palestinian societies seems to agree with Schneider.³¹⁷ Schneider writes, “As the deity's residence, the temple was critical to the ancient Mesopotamians' sense of place in the identity of their cities and the city's own self-identity. Temples were not places where the general populace went to meet personally with the deity, but served as the public face and home of the deity.”³¹⁸ At first glance, the differences in accessibility and status between synagogues, fire temples, and ancient “temples” are readily apparent.

In the modern world, although Jewish synagogues and Zoroastrian fire temples are buildings deemed religious in which adherents and religious personnel worship, it seems that the practices and prayers of individual members outside of these centers are considered to be integral

³¹⁵ Shenkar, 178.

³¹⁶ Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 68.

³¹⁷ Glenn Stanfield Holland, *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 78, 171, 257–58.

³¹⁸ Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 66.

to the adherence to these religions. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to conduct a detailed comparison of the distinction between the types of ritual, practice, and worship conducted at these kinds of buildings deemed religious, it is enough to suggest that they reflect the different histories and needs of each community of worship. Whether it is considered a freedom or requirement, the significance of individual worshippers to the religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH appears to be a considerable difference between these and neighboring religions deemed polytheistic. Schneider writes, “Each Mesopotamian city was home to a deity, and each of the prominent deities was the patron of a city. Mesopotamian culture was urban, so all of the known temples from Mesopotamia were located in cities.”³¹⁹ There is no comparable situation among mobile pastoralist societies that do not build cities. Instead it seems that the same freedom of choice and responsibility, afforded to individuals by the mobility that characterizes these societies, shaped the religious power dynamics of these religions deemed monotheistic in a manner identifiable by the functions of the buildings deemed religious that eventually developed.

Herodotus claims that the Persians worship outdoors, a likelihood supported by the relief sculpture at the tomb of Darius I at Naqsh-e Rostam (near Persepolis) and remains of plinths at Pasargadae suggesting a setting analogous to the one depicted at Naqsh-e Rostam.³²⁰ It is reasonable to assume that some amount (there is no way to be certain of what percentage) of religious activity, among early worshippers of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, was conducted outdoors. With regard to the question underlying this chapter, Mary Boyce suggests that the absence of buildings deemed religious and outdoor worship facilitated the invention of more universally powerful concepts of the divine.³²¹ In the first volume of *A History of*

³¹⁹ Schneider, 67–68.

³²⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 67; Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 2007, 2:500; David Stronach, “On the Evolution of the Early Iranian Fire Temple,” in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 607.

³²¹ Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 22.

Zoroastrianism, she writes, “The Indo-Iranians, as wanderers, had had no temples with images, such as reduced the divinities of settled peoples to local powers with fixed habitations and merely regional authority.”³²² Boyce’s claim is a striking explanation of one example of the influence of agriculturally marginal landscapes on the development of these ancient religions deemed monotheistic. Although, as mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, she does not offer evidence for her claim, she appears to find support in the present discussion.

In *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, Boyce writes, “The vastness of the steppes encouraged the Indo-Iranians to conceive their gods as cosmic, not local, divinities.”³²³ Boyce, quite reasonably, seems to note that the mobile range of worshippers may have been translated, at some point, to the range of mobility attributed to the deities they worship. The Mesopotamian model of “house of the deity” described by Schneider may, as Boyce suggests, have imposed spatial limits on conceptions of deities in religions deemed polytheistic. At the most extreme, this may have restricted the range of power, influence, or attention of a deity to the direct vicinity of the building deemed religious (not unlike so many city-dwellers and their homes). At a minimum the idea of the “temple” as something analogous to a post office box seems to tether the deity to a particular locale. In stark contrast, the mobility of Ahura Mazda and YHWH far outstrips the potential geographic range of worshippers.

This appears to have facilitated the social (and subsequent geographic) mobility that has characterized the spread of these religions over the last two millennia. The range of these deities extends across and beyond the area of the globe and worship can be conducted anywhere, indoors or outside. In *The Price of Monotheism*, Assmann explains that these conceptualizations of more universally powerful, and spatially limitless, deities are characteristic of religions

³²² Boyce, 1:22.

³²³ Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, *Textual Sources for the Study of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 9.

deemed monotheistic.³²⁴ He writes, “[In] Polytheism...The divine cannot be divorced from the world. Monotheism, however, sets out to do just that. The divine is emancipated from its symbiotic attachment to the cosmos, society, and fate and turns to face the world as a sovereign power.”³²⁵ Assmann’s comments are important to understanding the relationship between social constructions of individual freedom, mobility, and conceptualizations of divine figures in these religions deemed monotheistic: the significance of agriculturally marginal landscapes to the development of these constructs seems to be clear. The absence of this building block in the formations that are identified in this dissertation as the worship of Ahura Mazda and of YHWH, respectively, seems to be a result of their mobile pastoralist social origins. The physical mobility of these societies, a strategic response to agriculturally marginal landscapes, appears to underlie: 1) the absence of buildings deemed religious; 2) the decentralized power dynamics of worship that shaped the functions of the buildings that eventually developed; and 3) cosmic, not local, conceptions of deities. “Buildings deemed religious” appears to be a building block of religions that is strongly associated with settled agriculturalist societies. Put simply: building cultures build buildings deemed religious.

³²⁴ Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, 28.

³²⁵ Assmann, 28.

Chapter Seven: Art Deemed Religious

*“Today we see the art of the past as nobody saw it before. We actually perceive it in a different way.”*³²⁶

The last chapter discussed the initial absence, and eventual development, of buildings deemed religious in communities of worship centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH. Along with the lack of temples dedicated to their worship, there appears to be strong scholarly consensus that these deities were generally not associated with any specific imagery or iconography. Although forms of art and specific images have come to be identified with the modern religions of Judaism and Zoroastrianism, these appear, like synagogues and fire temples, to be later developments that coincide with other changes in the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda. Despite an apparently universal human propensity to create images, the attestations of art connected to these religions appear relatively late in their respective histories. This chapter will suggest that the paucity of autochthonous art deemed religious in these religions deemed monotheistic can be explained by their respective mobile pastoralist social contexts and development in agriculturally marginal landscapes.

In contrast to this dissertation, many studies use the term “iconography” in discussions of ancient art deemed religious. Unlike the word “temple” this term does not necessarily imply religious meaning, but like the popular term for certain buildings deemed religious, “iconography” seems to presuppose understanding for the sake of identification. The term is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “[the] description or illustration of any subject by means of drawings or figures; any book or work in which this is done; also, the branch of knowledge which deals with the representation of persons or objects by any application of the

³²⁶ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, A Pelican Original (London: British Broadcasting Corp., 1977), 16.

arts of design.”³²⁷ This appears to suggest that iconographic art is, by definition, representational. With regard to ancient art, it is difficult to comprehend the likelihood of meaning in order to claim that an image is particularly rich in symbolic representational meaning in design. Setting aside the issue of identifying the thing(s) to which a particular image refers, unless all ancient art is considered to be potentially iconographic, the assumption that one can discern which images are representational, and which are not, can be problematic.

In *Intangible Spirits and Graven Image*, Shenkar suggests a differentiation between the “content, symbolism, and context” of a given image.³²⁸ He refers to Erwin Panofsky’s three-level approach: “*Pre-iconographical description*” (concerning the “*Primary or natural* subject matter...world of artistic motifs”), “*Iconographical analysis*” (concerning the “*Secondary or conventional* subject matter...world of *images, stories and allegories*”), and “*Iconological interpretation... (Iconographical synthesis)*” (concerning “*Intrinsic meaning or content...world of ‘symbolical’ values*”).³²⁹ Although Panofsky’s suggested levels are not so clearly differentiated from one another, his separation of the “pre-iconographical description” from forms of interpretation aimed at describing referent and (or) meaning behind the image is useful to the present investigation.³³⁰ In order to avoid mis-interpreting the art under consideration in this chapter, this discussion will privilege information available with regard to the content and context of each piece, while carefully observing that any variety of potential symbolic meanings are possible for a work of ancient art.

The task of gleaning meaning from a given image produced in the 21st century (CE) is

³²⁷ Oxford University Press, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), <http://dictionary.oed.com/entrance.dtl>.

³²⁸ Michael Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images: The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World* (The Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 1.

³²⁹ Reference to Panofsky: Shenkar, 1; Terminology and definitions from: Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance.*, Harper Torchbooks. Academy Library. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 14.

³³⁰ Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance.*, 9.

challenging, to attempt the same feat with art now many centuries out of context is particularly difficult. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger emphasizes the role of the viewer in experiencing art: “Every image embodies a way of seeing... Yet, although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing.”³³¹

Berger’s insight into the distance between artist/maker and viewer/audience highlights the risk of bringing modern a lens and sensibilities to ancient art. Beyond art, this challenge has deep roots in the histories of scholarship regarding the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda. As noted in previous chapters, religio-historical “Truth” claims and assumptions that underlie the social contexts out of which arose “Western” academia continue to mark (and often muddy) interpretations of ancient texts and archaeological data. Berger writes,

[When] an image is presented as a work of art, the way people look at it is affected by a whole series of learnt assumptions about art. Assumptions concerning: Beauty/ Truth/ Genius/ Civilization/ Form/ Status/ Taste, etc. Many of these assumptions no longer accord with the world as it is... Out of true with the present, these assumptions obscure the past. They mystify rather than clarify. The past is never there waiting to be discovered, to be recognized for exactly what it is.³³²

The significance of a viewer’s perspective, biases, and experiences to process of interpreting an art object appears, from Berger’s comments, to be particularly one-sided. Regardless of the intention of the artist or design, it seems that not only “Beauty” but also “Meaning” can be said to be found “in the eye of the beholder.” This is not to discount the importance of the artists, designers, and patrons/clients to the process of creating art, but rather to emphasize the difficulty of understanding a variety of aspects concerning the complex relationship between intention, perception, and reception in the production of ancient art.

Berger’s comments echo Taves’ suggestion that “ways things can be set apart as special” connect aspects of “doing religion” with cross-culturally similar activities in a variety of non-

³³¹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 10.

³³² Berger, 11.

religious domains. There exists a considerable variety of studies regarding the similarity between how things religious and art are produced and regarded.³³³ The study of Art, like Religious Studies, belongs to the category described by Taves' as "raider disciplines."³³⁴ Chapter Two ("An Approach: Theories and Methodology") discussed the challenge of defining "Religion" and the benefit of Taves' approach to avoiding the issue. In an effort to allow for potential intentions and perceptions of the ancient objects under examination in the present discussion, this chapter considers a broad variety of visual products that may be deemed "Art" further deemed religious. The difficulty of identifying or interpreting layers of intended and perceived meanings (or functions) in ancient art frequently results in a simplification of categories to which various objects might be assigned. Although a comprehensive exploration of potential approaches to categorizing these objects is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to note that a wide variety of descriptions exist for visual art in the modern world. More work is needed to consider the usefulness of categories such as "Outsider Art," "Folk Art," "Propaganda," "Advertisement," "Pop Art," "Decorative Arts," "Handicraft," or "Wearable Art," to name a few, to the evaluation and interpretation of ancient artifacts.

Recalling Hartenstein's differentiation between scholarly investigations concerning "origins" versus those focused on "beginnings," it seems that a good place to start exploring the art deemed religious respectively associated with the communities of worship centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda is in the modern period. However they may have originated or developed across time, the images claimed by living adherents of Judaism and Zoroastrianism

³³³ For example: Ron G. Williams and James W. Boyd, *Ritual Art and Knowledge: Aesthetic Theory and Zoroastrian Ritual*, Studies in Comparative Religion (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, "Visual Arts as Ways of Being Religious," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, ed. Frank Burch Brown, Oxford Handbooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 220–37, and Guthrie S.E., "Religion and Art: A Cognitive and Evolutionary Approach," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 9, no. 3 (2015): 283–311, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.v9i3.23971>.

³³⁴ Taves, "2010 Presidential Address: 'Religion' in the Humanities and the Humanities in the University," 289.

are given meaning in the 21st century. In the modern world, the forms and associations of “traditional” visual culture belonging to each of these religions appears to be relatively stable and reliably linked in the minds of various non-adherent parties. Consider the images chosen for a series of introductory textbooks on these religions. Publisher I.B. Tauris describes their “Introductions to Religion” series:

Avoiding oversimplification, jargon or unhelpful stereotypes, *I.B. Tauris Introductions to Religion* embraces the opportunity to explore religious tradition in a sensitive, objective and nuanced manner. A specially commissioned series for undergraduate students, it offers concise, clearly written overviews, by leading experts in the field, of the world’s major religious faiths, and of the challenges posed to all the religions by progress, globalization and diaspora. Covering the fundamentals of history, theology, ritual and worship, these books place an emphasis above all on the modern world, and on the lived faiths of contemporary believers. They explore, in a way that will engage followers and non-believers alike, the fascinating and sometimes difficult contradictions of reconciling ancient tradition with headlong cultural and technological change.³³⁵

This description suggests that the series is part of a deliberate effort toward authentically representing and accurately disseminating information about these religions. It is thus reasonable to assume that the images chosen for the covers of Oliver Leaman’s *Judaism: An Introduction* and Rose’s *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* should reflect the associations of art and religion in the minds of “followers and non-believers alike.”³³⁶

Similarly colored monochromatic symbols representing each religion appear on the top of each spine: a winged figure on Rose’s book, a seven-branched menorah on Leaman’s volume. These icons appear prominently centered beneath the title on the front covers of *Zoroastrianism* and *Judaism* respectively. Taking up the top half of the front cover of Rose’s volume (above the title) is a photograph of a figure in white (ostensibly, as identifiable from other photos within, a

³³⁵ “I.B. Tauris Publishers: Introductions to Religion,” accessed December 18, 2018, <https://www.ibtauris.com/series/ib%20tauris%20introductions%20to%20religion>; Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*; Oliver Leaman, *Judaism: An Introduction*, I.B. Tauris Introductions to Religion (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

³³⁶ Leaman, *Judaism: An Introduction*; Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*.

mowbed or priest) obscured by a fire-in-a-holder.³³⁷ Similarly, the top half of the front cover of *Judaism*, is filled by a photo of a child (dressed in a broad-collared white shirt, black jacket, black brimmed hat, and displaying curled sidelocks), seated at a table with silver candlesticks (each with a golden tapered candle), dishes of food, glasses with white and red napkins rolled and folded within, behind a long braided loaf of what appears to be bread. It is significant that these images are left uncaptioned and unidentified within the first few pages of each book: the uninformed reader must look to the text for understanding. It may be possible to guess from this situation that the publishers have chosen images so closely linked with each religion that the association of these images in the minds of potential readers, if not already established, will begin to form before one chooses to read the book.

Consider the covers of these books, following Macaulay's *Motel of Mysteries*, as isolated works of art (ripped from their volumes) as sole evidence of each of these religions.³³⁸ Each of the images appears to depict ritual: *Zoroastrianism* suggests fire, contained in a polished holder, as a possible ritual focus for the figure obscured; *Judaism* seems to associate food or a meal with the religion, the child's dress and solemn facial expression suggest, perhaps a serious or perfunctory religious occasion. Taken together, the dominant features of each cover might be described humans, clothes, fire, and food. In consideration of the argument taken up in this dissertation, it must be noted that each of these components is particularly mobile: neither volume is adorned with buildings, immobile objects, or other indications of geographic permanence. Despite having survived in settled agriculturalist social contexts for at least two thousand years, the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda are each associated with art in the modern period that bears the marks of mobile social (and thus agriculturally marginal environmental) contexts.

³³⁷ Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 5.

³³⁸ Macaulay and Houghton Mifflin Company, *Motel of the Mysteries*.

Another major source of evidence of the images associated with these religions can be found in the entries on “Zoroastrianism” and “Judaism” in English-language pages of Wikipedia. Whereas the I.B. Tauris series is the product of information curated and developed by individual scholars, aimed at education, Wikipedia, as described in the last chapter, is both the most democratically constructed and the most widely accessible source of information in the world. Like the I.B. Tauris series, symbols appear to be used to identify these and other pages into larger organizational systems: each page belongs to a different “Part of a series on...” collection that can be accessed through the linked “Judaism Portal” or “Zoroastrianism Portal” marked with various icons.³³⁹ The entry on Judaism is identified with the series and portal of the same name, the former marked with a blue Star of David, grey “Decalogue” tablets, and a golden menorah; the latter branded with a small blue Star of David.³⁴⁰ The counterparts to these icons on the Zoroastrianism entry are a grey silhouette of a fire-in-a-holder for the “Part of a series on Zoroastrianism” box and a small winged figure in black marking the “Zoroastrianism Portal.”³⁴¹ The use of these symbols as markers for these religions on Wikipedia seems agree with the associations presented as cover art for Rose’s volume but not as well with Leaman’s: whereas Zoroastrianism is linked with fire-in-a-holder and a winged figure in both cases, the Star of David and Decalogue tablets do not appear on the cover of *Judaism: An Introduction*.

The narratives in which these images appear is not merely visual, it is important to note the presentation (and thus construction) of associations between these icons and the texts to which they are adjoined. The headers “Part of a series on...” and “...Portal” describe collections of entries on a related theme, the meaning of which is emphasized by and emphasizes the visual

³³⁹ “Judaism,” in *Wikipedia*, August 25, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Judaism&oldid=856463208>; “Zoroastrianism,” in *Wikipedia*, August 27, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Zoroastrianism&oldid=856712041>.

³⁴⁰ “Judaism.”

³⁴¹ “Zoroastrianism.”

“version” of these themes in the symbols mentioned above. This is similar to the appearance of the homogenously monochromatic icons of the menorah and winged figure respectively displayed on the top inch of the spines displayed next to the large-print titles of the I.B. Tauris introductions to *Judaism* and *Zoroastrianism*. The visual narratives presented by the captioned photos distributed throughout the entries seem to serve a purpose similar to the photos chosen for the covers of the I.B. Tauris volumes. Considering the images and their captions without the text of the article, reveals a stronger agreement between the visual narrative of the Wikipedia entry and *Introductions to Religion* volume on Judaism than the one on Zoroastrianism. The 19 images presented in this article depict a variety of people, places, and things described by captions including: “Judaica...,” “A 19th-century silver Macedonian Hanukkah menorah,” “A Yemenite Jew at morning prayers, wearing a kippah skullcap, prayer shawl and tefillin,” and “Interior of Belz Great Synagogue in Jerusalem.”³⁴² The subjects of these images and captions are primarily people (dressed in a variety of clothing from different cultures and periods) and objects (many decorated with Hebrew text and indicated for use in ritual). Setting aside the variety of people and objects, it is notable that the overarching narrative of Judaism described by these photos appears to be the same as the image displayed on cover of Leaman’s *Judaism*. The connection between this narrative and the history of Judaism over the millennia is significant to this dissertation: people and objects are each geographically (physically) and socially (symbolically) mobile. The parallel survival of potentially mobile images depicting mobile people, objects, and activities suggests the influence of these environmental contexts on the eventual capacity for art deemed religious in the formations of building blocks that make up these religions.

In *Jewish Art*, Cecil Roth explains the relative absence of Jewish artifacts dating from pre-Renaissance Europe:

³⁴² “Judaism.”

The primary reason for this was presumably the vicissitudes of Jewish life. Synagogues everywhere were sacked, burned, and pillaged; communities were driven into exile, expressly forbidden to take with them anything made of precious material: synagogues could sell their sacred treasures in order to ransom prisoners or succor refugees...Hardly more than a handful of specimens anterior to the sixteenth century are now traceable.³⁴³

Roth's comments emphasize the point that whatever the origins, the cultural evolutionary fitness of modern art deemed religious associated with Judaism is proven by its survival. It is important to observe that if art deemed religious functioned in the worship of YHWH as it appears to have in Mesopotamian religion, then the destruction of images and artifacts might have resulted in a major shift in, if not the end of, the religion. In *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, Schneider writes "the statue served as the god in the context of the temple's rituals. The connection between the deity and its cult statue explains why, when temples were destroyed and the image was carried off, usually in times of war, the people viewed it as the deity abandoning them and the city."³⁴⁴ Although this discussion has thusfar been concerned with the presence and function of art deemed religious in a historically recent version of Judaism, it suggests that in order for the worship of YHWH to have survived into the 21st century CE, it must not have been so closely linked (as in the case of Mesopotamia) to artifacts that might belong to a category of "visual culture."

This also appears to be the case with the visual narrative laid out in the Wikipedia entry on Zoroastrianism as well. Like Judaism, Zoroastrianism appears to be presented as a religion centered on people and their practices. Of the subjects depicted in the 15 images in the entry, nearly a third are people, almost as many again are buildings (identified as fire temples and decorated with the winged figure), and a number are either maps or art.³⁴⁵ Although a photo of a

³⁴³ Cecil Roth, "Ritual Art," in *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History*, ed. Cecil Roth and Bezalel Narkiss, Revised and enlarged (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 118–19.

³⁴⁴ Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 77.

³⁴⁵ "Zoroastrianism."

relief sculpture of the winged figure, from Persepolis, is identified as “Fravahar,” apart from the text of the article, this symbol is given no further explanation in the photo captions. Although the particular images from the cover of Rose’s *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction* are reflected throughout the photos in the entry, the variety of subjects appears to confuse, rather than clarify, the depiction of the religion as a whole. Whereas the icons associated with things Zoroastrian on Wikipedia are few and consistent with its counterpart in the *Introductions to Religion* series, the images in the entry offer a rather disjointed picture of the religion that seems to stand out in stark contrast to the simplicity of the image on Rose’s book. The situation appears to be reversed with the Wikipedia entry and I.B. Tauris volume on Judaism: there seems to be disagreement on the particular symbols to stand in for the religion in each source, but the general depiction of the religion in photographs is consistent between the cover and encyclopedia.

Among the symbols and images presented in these sources, the absence of images identified as Ahura Mazda and YHWH is glaring. Despite the fact that this discussion has focused on only two sources for each modern religion, the breadth of information necessary for such introductory surveys makes it is reasonable to assume that if any such figurative images were strongly associated with these religions in the modern world they would appear in these sources. Consider the English-language Wikipedia entry on “Ancient Egyptian Religion.”³⁴⁶ All but one of the 14 images include either a depiction, or a symbol associated with, a deity; ten of these are art deemed religious, the subject of which, is one or more deities. The various entries on “Hittite Mythology and Religion,” “Ancient Mesopotamian Religion,” and “Hinduism” each contain numerous images the subjects of which are identified as deities.³⁴⁷ The obvious

³⁴⁶ “Ancient Egyptian Religion,” in *Wikipedia*, December 19, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ancient_Egyptian_religion&oldid=874546679.

³⁴⁷ “Hittite Mythology and Religion,” in *Wikipedia*, November 19, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hittite_mythology_and_religion&oldid=869658146; “Ancient Mesopotamian Religion,” in *Wikipedia*, December 13, 2018,

categorical differences between these religions might lead one to believe that images depicting deities are associated only with religions deemed polytheistic, but the incredible volume (and history) of art rendering the divine (or deified) Christ for adherents of a religion deemed monotheistic suggests otherwise.³⁴⁸

The absence of images associated with YHWH and Ahura Mazda in Judaism and Zoroastrianism, respectively, appears to confirm the consensus among scholars that no such images can be confirmed in sources dated to Before the Common Era. In “The Origins and Beginnings of the Worship of YHWH: The Iconographic Evidence” Angelika Berlejung writes “The attempt to reach back to the origins and beginnings of the worship of YHWH iconographically is destined to fail if one approaches the problem by seeking visual material from Israel/Palestine that clearly depicts YHWH (or depicts him for the first time). During the entire span of time from the beginnings of the worship of YHWH through the Hellenistic period, there are no depictions of deities that can be interpreted beyond doubt as pictorial representations of YHWH.”³⁴⁹ Berlejung’s comments suggest that, like temples dedicated to the worship of YHWH, any images that might be confirmed to be depicting the deity would constitute an exception, not a trend. The nearest example of this might be a drawing of humanoid figures found on a pot sherd at Kuntillet ‘Ajrud in the northern Sinai. An inscription on the sherd appears to accompany the image and has been taken by many to identify at least one of the figures as YHWH, though there are only two names mentioned on a drawing of three entities. Berlejung identifies a variety of issues with the object, not least of which is the likelihood that the drawing

https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ancient_Mesopotamian_religion&oldid=873419515; “Hinduism,” in *Wikipedia*, December 14, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Hinduism&oldid=873728711>.

³⁴⁸ It is notable that no fewer than 20 images of Jesus (in various forms) appear in the Wikipedia entry on Christianity: “Christianity - Wikipedia,” accessed December 20, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>.

³⁴⁹ Angelika Berlejung, “The Origins and Beginnings of the Worship of YHWH: The Iconographic Evidence,” in *The Origins of Yahwism*, ed. Jürgen van Oorschot and Markus Witte, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 484 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 67.

and inscription were produced at different times.³⁵⁰ It is not incidental that the image appears to be singularly unique among the attestations of YHWH or Israel in the archaeological record.

The images that appear to have been concretely linked with Ahura Mazda are few and specifically date to the first centuries of the Common Era. Shenkar notes that although only one “unquestionable” depiction of Ahura Mazda (found on four Kushan coins) is found in eastern Iran, numerous anthropomorphic representations of the deity originate in the Sasanian Persian empire.³⁵¹ He writes, “The first fully anthropomorphic representation of Ahura Mazdā appears in Western Iran simultaneously with the rise of the Sasanian dynasty on three rock-reliefs attributed to the first Sasanian king, Ardašīr.”³⁵² Significant to the discussion regarding modern images associated with the Zoroastrian worship of Ahura Mazda, is the question of where did the Sasanian image go? Why does no “fully anthropomorphic representation of Ahura Mazdā” appear on the cover of Rose’s book or within the English-language Wikipedia entry on Zoroastrianism? If the worship of Ahura Mazda was linked to these images, how did the religion survive the dissolution of the Sasanian empire under Muslim conquest in the seventh century CE? The answer appears to lie in the likelihood that communities of worship were *not* dependent upon these images.

Consider the chronological gap between the composition of the Old Avestan texts (likely during the 2nd millennium BCE) and the rise of Ardashir and the Sasanian empire (early third century CE): a minimum of one thousand years of worship without unquestionable visual representations. Like the eventual development of buildings deemed religious, whatever images may have been developed at later points must be considered signals of change, rather than remnants of the context from which worship of the deity arose. The failure of Sasanian images to

³⁵⁰ Berlejung, 73–74.

³⁵¹ Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images: The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World*, 61, 51.

³⁵² Shenkar, 51.

survive in the formation of modern Zoroastrianism may reflect this history as well as attest to the limits of Sasanian imperial decision-making power as concerns popular worship of Ahura Mazda across the continent. It seems clear that a major strategic tool deployed by the Sasanian rulers in asserting their political ambitions was to differentiate themselves from the Parthian empire and appropriate (or reinterpret) visual political messages from the Achaemenids. Shenkar remarks that the absence of any potential representations of Ahura Mazda from Parthian imperial art is a signal of the cultural and religious affinity between the Parthians and mobile pastoralist societies in northeastern Iran.³⁵³ Shenkar's insight speaks directly to the argument taken up in this dissertation: the general absence of visual representations of Ahura Mazda may be connected to the mobile pastoralist (and agriculturally marginal) context in which this religion developed. The fact that the Sasanians, whether they understood the intended or historically perceived meaning of images left behind by the Achaemenids centuries prior, had art (thus deemed) preserved in stone to draw upon for inspiration and build upon for political gain.

The human and economic resources necessary to create long-lived public works of art would seem to diminish, if not preclude, the potential of mobile pastoralist societies from creating and preserving such artifacts. The apparently universal propensity of human societies to surround themselves with meaning-rich visual culture leaves little doubt that art and art deemed religious were created by worshippers of Ahura Mazda or YHWH at some point in the past. The fact that little to none of it remains to be found also suggests one potential category of media used to create it: perishable or disposable. The ancient art found across the Near East generally appears to be made of (or on) varieties of durable material: stone, metal, and clay. The rare pieces of textile, wood, or paper-like material preserved by unusual environmental conditions offer insight into the variety of media used by ancient artists. The size and availability of durable

³⁵³ Shenkar, 50.

media as well as the necessary investment of resources into tasks of creation and preservation are but two major factors that would seem to explain the small numbers of mobile pastoralist art. A third, perhaps just as important, is the availability of culturally appropriate “sites” for the deposition or preservation of art. The association of art and architecture reveals the significance of buildings-as-canvas to the creation and preservation of art deemed religious. As noted in the last chapter, the lack of building culture would logically seem to inhibit the development of temple-building culture. Likewise, the absence of built edifices would seem to diminish the potential for the development of monumental art styles.

The presence of vast stockpiles of art objects among Scythian grave-goods speaks to the importance of cultural or religious formations that make available such sites for the preservation of art.³⁵⁴ From within these catalogues of grave goods, it is possible to identify certain modern categories of “functional art” that lend insight into sites for artistic activity in mobile pastoralist societies. What, in the 21st century, might be called “decorative arts,” “wearable art,” or “handicraft” all seem to be valid categories to describe the highly detailed adornments of weapons, clothing, and tools found among Scythian grave goods. Furthermore, the preservation of some corpses adorned with tattoos adds to the limited evidence (across cultures and time) attesting to the use of the body-as-canvas.³⁵⁵ It is also noteworthy that many of the styles attested among the Scythian objects suggest artists living in settled societies across the ancient Near and Middle East. The potential “foreign” origins of such private or small-scale art offers insight into one of the few ways that people might be exposed to the images adorning these objects. The example of Scythian grave goods provides for possible avenues of expression, religious or

³⁵⁴ N.Y. Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York and Los Angeles County Museum of Art., *From the Lands of the Scythians: Ancient Treasures from the Museums of the U.S.S.R., 3000 B.C.-100 B.C. : The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.*, vol. 32, Bulletin (Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.)) 5 (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975); St John Simpson et al., *Scythians: Warriors of Ancient Siberia* (New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 2017).

³⁵⁵ Simpson et al., *Scythians: Warriors of Ancient Siberia*, 95–97.

otherwise, through art that may only be preserved beyond the immediate vicinity (and lifespan) of its owner by unusual treatment, including perhaps trade, capture, or destruction (burial in a grave, for example). It is not difficult to assume that the relatively transitive nature of clothing, tool, and weapon styles across time and cultures, while beneficial for dating objects of “handicraft” or “wearable art,” would prevent some adorning images from surviving long enough for person-to-person exposure to reach a particularly wide audience. This supposition, though only that, offers a potential explanation for the possibility, if not likelihood, that the mobile pastoralist societies within which the religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH arose, created art (religious or not) that did not gain traction as images related to the respective worship of each deity.

The images that do appear to have survived the processes of cultural evolution to remain associated with these religions into the modern period are not figurative (or apparently direct) representations of either YHWH or Ahura Mazda. The absence of images of these deities does not necessarily diminish the presence of art deemed religious as a building block of modern Judaism or Zoroastrianism. It does, however, suggest that such images cannot be considered autochthonous developments of the mobile pastoralist societies in which YHWH- and Mazda-worship seem to have originated. A prime example of this is the inconsistent and fraught identification of the winged figure with Ahura Mazda. Shenkar writes,

The first image of Ahura Mazdā created by the Iranians is probably the Achaemenian ‘Figure in the Winged Ring’, which is undoubtedly the most significant divine image to emerge from Achaemenian art and is one of its most well known and recognizable manifestations. This figure is found in countless variations in almost every form of media, including rock-reliefs, seals, bullae and satrapal coinage. It makes its first—and most detailed and elaborate—appearance on the victory relief of Darius I carved at the rock of Behestün.³⁵⁶

Shenkar’s careful language reveals the level of confidence with which an adroit scholar can

³⁵⁶ Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images: The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World*, 47.

assert any relationship between the image and deity: “probably.” In her entry on Ahura Mazda in the *Encyclopedia Iranica* Mary Boyce claims that, although many have considered the winged figure (or figure in the winged disc) to represent the deity, the image has been shown to refer to the concept of “glory” or “fortune”, *xwarenah*.³⁵⁷ Despite Boyce’s conclusion, it seems prudent to defer to Rose’s observation that, ultimately, “[both] the iconography and identification of this motif are uncertain”.³⁵⁸

This uncertainty appears to be connected to the lack of clarity surrounding the beliefs of the Achaemenid rulers who, following Cyrus, adapted, adopted, appropriated, and assimilated various cultural products and social systems to build the first Persian empire. It seems clear that the images, institutions, and concepts absorbed into the Achaemenid imperial project were interpreted through Iranian lenses resulting in a hybrid culture the decipherment of which, as in the case of the winged figure, continues to vex scholars. The figureless winged disc, for example, is an image attested across ancient Near Eastern visual sources and examples of winged figure closely related to those attributed to the Achaemenids appear throughout Neo-Assyrian and Urartian sources.³⁵⁹ Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the volume of variations on this type of symbol it is important to note that it cannot be identified as having originated in the same context as the worship of Ahura Mazda. Whatever the meaning assigned to it in the Achaemenid and modern periods, the association of the winged figure with the religion that would become Zoroastrianism seems to be a later development in the history of Mazda-worship.

Above, an examination of art associated with Zoroastrianism in the 21st century CE

³⁵⁷ Mary Boyce, “AHURA MAZDĀ – Encyclopaedia Iranica,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, accessed December 5, 2018, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahura-mazda>.

³⁵⁸ Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 45–46.

³⁵⁹ Shenkar, *Intangible Spirits and Graven Images: The Iconography of Deities in the Pre-Islamic Iranian World*, 50.

revealed the strength of association between the modern religion and the symbol of the winged figure, despite the lack of certainty as to the “original” meaning of this image in its Achaemenid context. Another “icon” so closely linked to the present-day religion, fire-in-a-holder, also appears to have its roots in the visual culture of the first Persian empire. The reliefs on the tombs of Darius I and Xerxes I at Naqsh-e Rostam, for example, depict scenes of the figures (ostensibly the rulers, themselves) standing before a fire-in-a-holder (or altar). These scenes appear to have been integrated into the Sasanian imperial project as well, as the volume of coins bearing similar images attests. Because of its persistence into the modern period, it is clear that these scenes depict some form of ritual that was either originally, or came to be, related to the worship of Ahura Mazda.³⁶⁰ This is significant to the discussion taken up in this chapter because it is art that can be deemed religious as a consequence of its depiction of religious activities. Like the photographs that appear in the English-language Wikipedia entries for Zoroastrianism, as well as Judaism, these ancient depictions, of religious activity conducted before fire-in-a-holder, seem to show “real life” examples of people “doing” religion. It is not insignificant that, with regard to the Achaemenid rulers, this seems to be the visual equivalent of Darius I’s inscriptions claiming a relationship with Ahura Mazda. Recall Albert de Jong’s insight into the role that Achaemenid ambitions of empire-building played in the formation of religion centered around the worship of Ahura Mazda that would give rise to Zoroastrianism.³⁶¹ It appears reasonable to assume that, just as the decision to declare himself a worshipper of Ahura Mazda must have been perceived to have political value for Darius I, the strategic appropriation and presentation of particular images must have been understood to carry specific political benefits.

³⁶⁰ The appearance of such ritual scenes in area linked to Central Asian Steppe societies (north and northeastern Iran) religious activities of pre-Achaemenid Iranian cultures. See Roman Ghirshman, *The Arts of Ancient Iran: From Its Origins to the Time of Alexander the Great*, The Arts of Mankind (New York: Golden Press, 1964), 88–89; Edith Porada, *The Art of Ancient Iran: Pre-Islamic Cultures*, Art of the World, Non-European Cultures: The Historical, Sociological, and Religious Backgrounds (New York: Crown Publishers, 1965), 138, 190.

³⁶¹ de Jong, “Religion and Politics in Pre-Islamic Iran,” 93.

The art deemed, at once both religious and political, developed by the different Persian empires appears to have been aimed at influencing adherents, but by responding to, and working within, the conceptual frameworks available at the time. It is these schemata that have been lost to modern viewers, as noted above by Berger. What can be reconstructed, however, is that the art deemed religious that has been claimed and reproduced by adherents across time and space are the symbols that have lasted into the modern period. The fact that the earliest appearance of connections between the winged figure, fire-in-a-holder, and worshippers of Ahura Mazda can be dated to the reign of Darius I suggests that the building block of art deemed religious was not integral to the origination of Mazda-worship in its mobile pastoralist social context. The parallel absence of depictions of YHWH in Judaism suggest that, like the absence of the block buildings deemed religious, this component might not (or not so easily) be developed in agriculturally marginal landscapes.

Like the development of the winged figure and fire-in-a-holder images, some ancient attestations of the symbols associated with modern Judaism suggest that they became linked to the worship of YHWH as the result of adoption or adaptation. In *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts*, Philip Birnbaum writes,

Like the seven-branched *Menorah*, the *Magen David*, composed of two triangles, has been a symbolical ornament of Judaism for many centuries. It was found in the Capernaum synagogue of the third century and on a Jewish tombstone in southern Italy, likewise dated as early as the third century of the common era. Since the *Magen David* (David's shield) is not mentioned in rabbinic literature, and has been found on Roman mosaic pavements, it is assumed that the star formed of two superimposed triangles is not of Jewish origin.³⁶²

Birnbaum's conclusion is not surprising considering the scant attestations linking this symbol with early Jewish communities. It is significant that among the "Roman mosaic pavements" to which he refers is the floor of a Roman villa found at Neo Paphos in southern Cyprus dated to

³⁶² Philip Birnbaum, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts* (New York: Hebrew Pub. Co., 1979), 328.

the late fourth century BCE.³⁶³ The image of a six-pointed star next to a swastika is startling to 21st century eyes, but the apparent *lack* of significance intended for the image amidst a mosaic floor (8.40m wide) covered in geometric shapes highlights the danger of assuming ancient meaning through modern lenses.³⁶⁴ Two shapes that are unquestionably associated with beliefs and history in the current period are easily lost in a mosaic containing a variety of what might be called a *potpourri* of geometric shapes. It is cogent to Birnbaum's comments that this shape appears in a context that renders it fairly meaningless to viewers more than two-thousand years beyond its creation. The absence of its association with either the worship of YHWH or the nascent Jewish communities of the late first millennium BCE emphasizes the potential for this shape to have either been adopted by adherents or to have originated in multiple independent societies. The seeming ubiquity of certain simple geometric shapes across cultures suggests that some designs have stronger potential for "multiple independent origins" than others.

By virtue of its functional simplicity and flexibility of design, a candelabra might be described as a tool the image of which could appear organically in multiple independent contexts. It is highly likely, however, that the design or artistic rendering of such tools would be very different across cultures. This makes the modern Jewish symbol of the menorah much more easily identified in ancient sources, such as the Roman "Arch of Titus." The image of a distinctly familiar candelabra depicted in association with the conquest of Jerusalem in the first century CE strongly suggests that this is an early attestation of the modern symbol of Judaism. In *Sacred Images* Joseph Gutmann explains that there is some disagreement among scholars as to the relationship between the menorah depicted on the Arch of Titus and those that appear on early

³⁶³ K. Nikolaou, "A Roman Villa at Paphos," *Archaeology* 21, no. 1 (1968): 48–53.

³⁶⁴ Nikolau describes the floor containing the six-pointed star as "Room paved with geometric patterns (Room XI). Width 8.40 m." Nikolaou, 52.

synagogue mosaics.³⁶⁵ The question, he explains, concerns the determination of the origins of the image and an attempt to understand the potentially historical situation of objects in Solomon's Temple. He writes,

Is the seven-branched menorah, then, a fiction relating to an object which never really existed? This can hardly be the case, as it is mentioned in the Book of Maccabees (I Macc 1 21) and of course is prominently depicted on the Arch of Titus as one of the spoils of the Jerusalem Temple. The menorah described in Exodus was probably *the* menorah – the one, that is, which stood in the Second Temple and which was projected back into the wilderness Tabernacle by the priestly writers in order to establish its sanctity and antiquity in the Second Temple. The present confusion between the ten historical menorot of Solomon's Temple and the ahistorical menorah in the Tabernacle stems from the effort of the priestly writers to legitimize the menorah they saw in the Second Temple.³⁶⁶

Gutmann's comments highlight the incongruities between images across the ancient sources in which they are found, as well as, the significance of the Hebrew texts to explaining the origins of this art deemed religious. Like the symbolic fire (and holder) associated with ancient and modern worshippers of Ahura Mazda, the image of a menorah depicts a "real life" counterpart used in ritual settings (as in modern celebration of Hanukkah). This insight suggests that the difficulty of ascertaining the origins of either symbol is perhaps irrelevant to an examination of how art deemed religious, as a building block, was expressed in communities of adherents to the religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH. The depiction of worship, rather than the object of worship, is an expression of this building block that appears to agree with the general absence of buildings deemed religious (a likely indicator of some form of outdoor worship) among the mobile pastoralist societies out of which these deities arose.

It is important to comment on the dates associated with the images discussed in this chapter: they all appear after the point of contact between worshippers of YHWH and Ahura Mazda. This is not insignificant to an examination of the origins of the respective symbolic use

³⁶⁵ Joseph Gutmann, *Sacred Images: Studies in Jewish Art from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, Variorum Reprint CS303 (Northampton: Variorum Reprints, 1989), 290.

³⁶⁶ Gutmann, 289–90.

of images of the Star of David and menorah, or winged figure and fire-in-a-holder, by these communities. This makes certain comparisons unreliable: the independent origins and meaning of portable fire, for instance, between the menorah and fire holder cannot be considered from the images produced after contact. The examination undertaken in this chapter reveals that processes of assimilation, adaptation, appropriation, and adoption are visible in the histories of art deemed religious claimed by these communities – there is no reason to discount the possibility that adherents of these two religions deemed monotheistic could, and did, interact.³⁶⁷

In “Aesthetics and Religion” Richard Viladesau writes “Virtually all religions contain some degree of practice of religious aesthetics—that is, the making of judgments about perception, beauty, feeling, the arts, and the sensible elements in knowledge and communication, insofar as they relate to God, revelation, morality, community, or sacred values.”³⁶⁸ Although it appears that no concretely identifiable images of YHWH or Ahura Mazda appear in evidence prior to the Common Era, it is highly unlikely that images of YHWH and Ahura Mazda were *never* made. To the contrary, it is very reasonable to assume that a variety of objects depicting these deities have been or will be created. It is significant that not a single one of these images, however, has been claimed by a community that would spread it along with the religion across time and space to survive in the modern world. It is difficult to deny the role of agriculturally marginal landscapes and subsequent mobile pastoralist social contexts on the diminished potential for expressions of this building block. Without regular access to sites, resources, and motivating pressures, the production of art deemed religious on the scale of those that appear within settled agriculturalist societies across the ancient Near East seems imprudent and hardly

³⁶⁷ Maximilian Kon points specifically to the potential Persian influence on the development of early Jewish art via return of exiles to Palestine: Maximilian Kon, “Jewish Art at the Time of Second Temple,” in *Jewish Art: An Illustrated History*, ed. Cecil Roth and Bezalel Narkiss, Revised and enlarged (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 51.

³⁶⁸ Richard Viladesau, “Aesthetics and Religion,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts*, ed. Frank Burch Brown, Oxford Handbooks (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 27.

environmentally pragmatic. It is possible that the societies that gave rise to the respective religions of Ahura Mazda and YHWH created art, but on such small and temporary scales that no image survived the processes of cultural evolution to survive in association with one of these deities. What effect might this have had on the development of these religions?

In *Ways of Seeing*, Berger explores the impact of technology on perceptions and experiences of art in the modern world. He writes “The uniqueness of every painting was once part of the uniqueness of the place where it resided. Sometimes the painting was transportable. But it could never be seen in two places at the same time. When the camera reproduces a painting, it destroys the uniqueness of its image. As a result its meaning changes. Or, more exactly, its meaning multiplies and fragments into many meanings.”³⁶⁹ Berger’s observation points to the importance of physical setting to intention of meaning as well as the experience of art. Although he is clearly focused on paintings (particularly those of the European Renaissance and later), Berger’s insight seems applicable to the art produced (or assimilated) in mobile pastoralist societies: in order to survive, symbols may need to resist change, multiplication, or fragmentation. Evidence for methods of producing (and reproducing) images as what might be called “mobile art” found throughout the ancient Near East suggest that this need is not necessarily limited to mobile pastoralist social contexts. Studies of coinage, for instance, suggest that types of reproducible, mobile art serve to (re-)enforce meaning in ways that seem to resist such change and fragmentation. The dominance of the image of a fire-in-a-holder on Sasanian coins appears to be intentionally designed to brand the rulers in a way that reflects the scenes sculpted into immobile monumental art.³⁷⁰ Similarly, in the 21st century businesses, governments, and non-profit organizations invest incredible amounts of money into advertising,

³⁶⁹ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 19.

³⁷⁰ Nikolaus Schindel, “Sasanian Coinage,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*, ed. Daniel T. Potts, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 833–34.

branding, and public relations to manage the meanings associated with their names in the societies in which they function. The power of mobile art deemed religious to brand meaning is leveraged by adherents of various religions around the world: clothing, jewelry, and tattoos offer opportunities to communicate one's religious beliefs, affiliations, and identities in society.

In *Carnal Knowing*, Margaret Miles explores visual strategies used to advertise, educate, and ultimately condition meaning regarding the figure of “woman” in medieval European Christianity.³⁷¹ She writes, “If people are to be attracted to certain values, attitudes, and explanatory myths, a variety of methods and media must be employed. Certainly, language plays a large role; stories, admonition, debate and discussion—all verbal exchanges—define, express, and extend common interests. But no society in the Christian West neglected the powerful medium of religious images; even cultures that practiced and advocated iconoclasm proscribed only certain kinds of images.”³⁷² Miles' comments highlight the importance of understanding art deemed religious as visual rhetoric. The apparent lack of images depicting YHWH or Ahura Mazda stands out against the religious backdrop of the ancient Near East where the abundance of divine images communicates a diversity of religious thoughts. Consider one potential narrative produced (or reflected) by this absence in the figuration of these deities: the power and natures of YHWH and Ahura Mazda cannot be captured by the limited (and reductive) means of visual representation. Recall Boyce's comment that the “vastness of the steppes encouraged the Indo-Iranians to conceive their gods as cosmic, not local, divinities.”³⁷³ Like the potentially limiting effects that localization-by-temple may have had on deities in religions deemed polytheistic, it seems reasonable to assume that visual representations, anthropomorphic or not, are less capacious than the imaginations of adherents. It is possible that diminished potential for

³⁷¹ Margaret R. Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1989).

³⁷² Miles, 119.

³⁷³ Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, 9.

buildings deemed religious and permanent public art deemed religious religions resulting from mobile pastoralist social and agriculturally marginal environmental contexts shaped the scale on which YHWH and Ahura Mazda were conceived in these religions deemed monotheistic.

Chapter Eight: People (and Texts) Deemed Religious

*“[If] there was a composer of the Gāthās, then it was Ahura Mazdā”*³⁷⁴

Who founded the religions of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, or Greece? Although it is perfectly reasonable, using an anthropological lens, to assume that a number of individuals in these societies must have created various components of these religions, such a question seems anachronistic. The chronological inapplicability of this question appears to be related to the categorical difference between religions deemed polytheistic and religions deemed monotheistic. The consistency of religio-historical narratives of “prophet-founders” across the latter suggests that this building block is significant to that category of religions. In a modern world dominated by religions deemed monotheistic, it is easy to understand the religious schema underlying such a question asked above and the impetus to apply it, however inappropriately, to religions deemed polytheistic. This chapter examines the narratives of Zarathustra and Moses as two “prophet-founders” to whom are attributed authorship of the texts that construct them: the five Old Avestan Gathas and five Biblical Hebrew books comprising Torah, respectively. Serving as paradigms for the building block (“prophet-founders”) in later religions deemed monotheistic, these literary figures appear to be both expressions of their religious communities and tools for cultivating and maintaining such groups. The close relationship between these narratives, the texts in which they are preserved, and the social and geographic mobility of the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, point to the importance of mobile pastoralist social and agriculturally marginal environmental contexts on the development of these building blocks.

An examination of art associated with the modern religions of Judaism and

³⁷⁴ Michael Stausberg, “Zarathustra: Post-Gathic Trajectories,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, The Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 70.

Zoroastrianism in the last chapter revealed the significance of people to the depiction of these religions. It seems that much of the art deemed religious linked to the respective histories of Mazda- and YHWH-worship depicts adherents, religious functionaries, ritual activities, or objects for (but not of) worship. Although the primary focus of this chapter is aimed at understanding the figuration and function of Zarathustra and Moses, within the texts, the last chapter points to three groups of people that might be deemed religious within these communities: adherents (most broadly, “the people”), functionaries (religious professionals), and founders (the most important “prophets”). Despite the fact that, in title and discussion, this chapter is focused on people, the significance of the Avestan and Hebrew texts to the identities, functions, and interactions each of these groups is hard to miss. Additionally, although the last chapter was titled “Art Deemed Religious,” it focused on visual art to the exclusion of other forms; this chapter, by including a discussion of the texts deemed religious of communities of worship centered on YHWH and Ahura Mazda, can be said to consider some of the literary art deemed religious that fell beyond the scope of the last chapter.

As noted in previous chapters, establishing reliable dating, fidelity of transmission, and accurate translation are a few of the issues that make the use of the Hebrew and Old Avestan texts in scholarly research difficult. In this chapter the information drawn from these texts is regarded as data that might be gleaned from any work of art, literature, or other cultural products of particular social contexts: potentially indicative of attitudes and perspectives held by the authors and/or those assumed to be held by the intended audience. Like other art, the survival and continued significance of the Hebrew Bible and Old Avestan texts to Judaism and Zoroastrianism, respectively, raises questions of rhetoric and messaging within various adherent populations across time. It is important to acknowledge the integral role that “people deemed religious” play in giving purpose and meaning to these texts in each context. In a highly literate

social context, one might be tempted to assume that texts can “speak for themselves,” but this notion ignores the highly social aspect of learning in human groups.³⁷⁵ Put simply, there is a significant difference between the social value assigned to a library card and that given to a college degree. In the modern world, between community scripture study groups; the deployment of religious texts in discussions, sermons, and sales pitches; and curated “daily scripture” email chains, adherents and officials of various religions deemed monotheistic can be found to demonstrate the importance of social interaction on the use of texts deemed religious. Historically low rates of literacy emphasize the likelihood that the Hebrew and Old Avestan texts were composed in contexts in which social interaction would have been the only way of disseminating religious narratives. Furthermore, it is important to note that the survival and continued deployment of such narratives may be considered, to an extent, to be a signal of acceptance or approval by the communities of worship centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH.

The separation of religious and “ethnic” or social identities is notable in the religio-historical textual narratives of YHWH- and Mazda-worship (as well as other religions deemed monotheistic) and appears to have been integral to the social and spatial mobility of these religions. Despite the conflation of, or interconnection between, these identities among modern Jewish and Zoroastrian communities, the Avestan and Hebrew texts are explicit concerning the respective names of societies and religions. Further, it seems important to these narratives that the Israelites and Iranians did not always “have” or practice the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda, but “received” them at some point in their (religio-) histories. This is significant to understanding the role of texts deemed religious and narratives of “prophet-founders” in these

³⁷⁵ Deacon makes a compelling evolutionary argument for the interconnected development of hypersociality, symbolic thinking, and verbal communication: Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*.

religions: in order for these tools to function to preserve and build religious communities centered around Ahura Mazda or YHWH, they must be adopted and used by a people. In strategically responsive mobile pastoralist societies, it is reasonable to assume that the standards by which such tools would be judged “useful” would be pragmatically high. Like the absence of monumental architecture and lasting works of art, it is logical to assume that the creation of texts deemed religious must have returned cultural evolutionary dividends in order to survive in such an environment.

The promulgation of emphatic concepts of “Truth” and the provision of fodder for perceptions of incompatibility with “Others” are two functions of texts deemed religions in these religions deemed monotheistic. Chapters Three (“Religions Deemed Monotheistic”) and Four (“Mobile Pastoralism”) discussed the role of conflict with social and religious enemies presented in the Hebrew Bible and Old Avestan texts. Connected with these narratives are the respective association of adherents (the literary protagonist “in-groups”) with “goodness” or “right” for having been selected (or for selecting) to worship YHWH or Ahura Mazda. These descriptions stand out in contrast to the “Others” who either do not follow these religions or oppose communities that do. The Hebrew Book of Genesis, for example, appears to offer a long history of relationships between the “Patriarchs,” ancestors of the “in-group” variously described in subsequent books as the “Sons-,” “People-,” or “Children of Israel,” and the Deity.³⁷⁶ The depiction of these relationships as an agreement or covenant between two parties is notable and could be key to understanding something of how adherents regard themselves, in religious terms.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, there is a clear tension between the actions of “the people” and the interests of the Deity. The latter, despite being described throughout the *Torah* as having

³⁷⁶ After Schneider, the term “Deity” will be used in reference to the divine character in the Hebrew texts. This practice acknowledges the appearance of names other than YHWH for a character that is treated, for the most part, as a consistent and singular individual within the texts (and by modern adherents). Tammi J. Schneider, *Mothers of Promise: Women in the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 10.

the power to control or destroy human populations, is depicted in struggle with “the people.” Contrast this notion with the idea, in ancient Mesopotamia, that humans were created to serve the deities: “Since humans were on earth to serve the gods, the temple offered the ultimate opportunity for service. The only purpose for the state – even, in its earliest manifestations, the justification for its survival – was to shelter, maintain, and serve the gods.”³⁷⁷ Schneider’s comments illuminate a worldview that appears to be found in a number of ancient religions deemed polytheistic. Recall that individual choice (and the freedom to choose) appears to be a key aspect of the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda – one that seems likely to have derived from respective origins in mobile pastoralist social contexts. In *The Price of Monotheism*, Assmann writes,

[For] Polytheism...The divine cannot be divorced from the world. Monotheism, however, sets out to do just that. The divine is emancipated from its symbiotic attachment to the cosmos, society, and fate and turns to face the world as a sovereign power. In the same stroke, man is likewise emancipated from his symbiotic relationship with the world and develops, in partnership with the One God, who dwells outside the world yet turned towards it, into an autonomous—or rather theonomous—individual. Therein lies the most significant of monotheism’s psychohistorical consequences. This is what “freedom” means in the religious sense. Monotheism transforms the self-image of man no less fundamentally than it does his image of god.³⁷⁸

Although Assmann takes this line of thinking into a discussion that reads like a series of wild speculations, this insight is significant and appears to be grounded in a variety of modern religions deemed monotheistic. It is applicable to the present chapter because it highlights differences in conceptions of the role of human beings between religions deemed polytheistic and those deemed monotheistic.

It seems that, whereas the preservation of ancient religions deemed polytheistic was linked to the solvency of government (on various scales), individual worshippers of YHWH and

³⁷⁷ Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 66.

³⁷⁸ Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, 28.

Ahura Mazda are integral to the development and maintenance (and spread) of these religious communities.³⁷⁹ One may consider, in theory, that all societies are composed of individuals or groups that must choose to exist together, but it seems likely that in these religious communities, like in mobile pastoralist societies, individuals are more aware, at some level of thought, of their power to choose.³⁸⁰ It is difficult to ignore the different environmental contexts underlying the apparent general patterns of centralized power in settled agriculturalist societies and its seeming decentralization in mobile pastoralist communities. Recall Scott's argument that various aspects of crop production provided opportunities for the development of early state governments among grain-based farming cultures.³⁸¹ The distribution of economic and military power across various, necessarily smaller, mobile pastoralist populations appears to map onto the available data indicating the relative distribution of religious power in the religious communities centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH.

Differences in perspectives regarding the religious significance of "the people," between ancient religions deemed polytheistic and these deemed monotheistic, seems to be connected to differences in the functions of religious professionals in each category. The Old Avestan *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (*Yasna* 35-41) seems to offer insight into the importance of the community to the role of religious functionaries. The Old Avestan texts have come down to modern scholars (and adherents) as the central part of the *Yasna* liturgy, with the seven-chapter *Yasna Haptanghaiti* at the center of the 72-part composition. Almut Hintze explains that the "concentric compositional structure" of the *Yasna* liturgy appears to be numerically centered around the Old Avestan texts,

³⁷⁹ Holland, *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East*, 21, 29–30, 39; Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 65.

³⁸⁰ Galaty, "Introduction: Nomadic Pastoralists and Social Change - Processes and Perspectives," 13; Salzman, *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*, 24.

³⁸¹ Scott, *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*, 128.

with the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* at its core (with the *Gathas* distributed before and after).³⁸² Of its significance, Hintze writes,

[While] the ritual function of the *Gathas* does not emerge clearly, that of the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* is obvious. The predominant use of the first person plural ‘we’ in the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, in contrast to the singular ‘I’ of the *Gathas*, indicates that this text was meant to be recited by or on behalf of the community of worshipping Mazdayasnians....It appears, therefore, that the YH is *the* text of worship par excellence, being entirely dedicated to the worship and praise...of Ahura Mazdā and his spiritual and physical creations. Furthermore, in this text the worshippers express their commitment to dedicating their thoughts, words and deeds to strengthen and support what is good. Being a text of ritual worship, the YH, much more than the *Gathas*, lent itself to being imitated in later periods. The practice of deriving inspiration and borrowing expressions from the YH...indicate that the priests of the Younger Avestan period were aware of both the ritual and doctrinal importance of the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*.³⁸³

Hintze’s insights emphasize the importance of the community of worship as “a people” deemed religious, as well as suggest something of the role of religious professionals within the community. The notion that the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* was “meant to be recited by or on behalf of the community” hints that priests involved in worship served Ahura Mazda as well as community. This concept seems to stand out in contrast to the functions of priests serving deities in their temple “houses” in ancient Mesopotamia: “As the deity’s residence, the temple was critical to the ancient Mesopotamians’ sense of place in the identity of their cities and the city’s own self-identity. Temples were not places where the general populace went to meet personally with the deity, but served as the public face and home of the deity.”³⁸⁴ Schneider’s explanation recalls the fact that the settled populations, within which an ancient Mesopotamian priest functioned, would have been based on hierarchical social, political, and economic systems that positioned the deities in the highest (and least accessible) echelons of power. The *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, as suggested by Hintze’s comments, appears to be oriented toward worship of a

³⁸² Almut Hintze, “On the Ritual Significance of the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*,” in *Zoroastrian Rituals in Context*, ed. Michael Stausberg (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 293.

³⁸³ Hintze, 315–16.

³⁸⁴ Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 66.

highly accessible divine figure who is interested in the active participation of individual worshippers “to strengthen and support what is good.”³⁸⁵

In “Art, Architecture, and Archaeology” Lee I. Levine describes the development of the synagogue as a response, shaped by the power of local religious communities, to the needs of early Jewish populations for services.³⁸⁶ He writes, “The control exercised by the community included the hiring and firing of synagogue functionaries. One account notes that the synagogue community of Tarbanat (on the border between the Lower Galilee and the Jezreel Valley) dismissed Rabbi Simeon when the latter proved unwilling to comply with their requests (Yerushalmi Megillah 4, 5, 75b).”³⁸⁷ In highlighting the power of the community, Levine’s explanation reveals a perspective, presented in Talmudic literature, on the service-oriented function of Rabbis within Jewish communities that places power in the hands of “the people.” As an indication of the local nature (and perhaps, variety) of such perspectives, Levine notes the lack of clarity in the sources regarding the influence of Rabbis in early Jewish communities: “On the one hand, the rabbis were far from all-dominant in Jewish life at the time—either politically, socially, or even religiously. On the other hand, rabbinic influence was clearly in ascendance between the second and ninth-tenth centuries, when it was given institutional backing under Islamic rule.”³⁸⁸ The lack of consensus among the sources suggested by Levine makes it seem possible that a variety of roles were taken up by religious officials throughout the early development of Judaism according to the needs of the communities to which they belonged. Among these roles, however, it seems highly unlikely that a centralized hierarchal religious bureaucracy ever developed. To the contrary, the textual evidence of Rabbinical Judaism seems to present the culture of religious professionals as something between academy and parliament:

³⁸⁵ Hintze, “On the Ritual Significance of the Yasna Haptanhaiti,” 315–16.

³⁸⁶ Levine, “Art, Architecture, and Archaeology,” 842.

³⁸⁷ Levine, 842–43.

³⁸⁸ Levine, 846.

ongoing discussion and negotiation toward meeting the needs of “the people” as well as YHWH.³⁸⁹

The functions of Rabbis and Zoroastrian priests in their respective modern religious communities appear to center around ritual and education.³⁹⁰ In “Rituals” Michael Stausberg and Ramiyar P. Karanjia write, “Apart from performing rituals on behalf of their patrons (mainly the laity), the priests are also educators; teaching the basic elements of the religion starts with transmitting the basic formulae such as the *Yaθā Ahū Vairiō* (Y 27.13). These formulas are used throughout the entire register of rituals, from a short private prayer to the most elaborate priestly ceremonies. the more elaborate the rituals, the more texts need to be memorized and recited.”³⁹¹ Stausberg and Karanjia note the significance of priests to the dissemination and ritual use of the Avestan texts. Although to an outsider it may appear that the texts are of primary importance to the functions of these professional classes of “people deemed religious,” as noted earlier in this chapter, this would seem to ignore the active role of these officials in the vitalization of these ancient texts deemed religious.

In the modern period Biblical Hebrew and Avestan (Old and Young) are dead languages preserved in the texts and liturgical use by Jewish and Zoroastrian communities in diaspora. The loss of fluency in Hebrew by Greek speaking worshippers of YHWH that is said to have motivated the translation of the Septuagint, when considered alongside the survival of the Avestan texts in phonetic oral tradition and transliteration in various scripts, speak to a potential role of ancient religious professionals in these communities: explication and interpretation. The

³⁸⁹ The connection between the depictions of a culture of constant strategic pragmatism and the social/political instability associated with “landlessness” in diasporic Jewish literature is (perhaps not so) surprisingly similar to the picture of environmental pragmatism among mobile pastoralist societies described in Frachetti’s Non-Uniform Complexity Theory.

³⁹⁰ Birnbaum, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Concepts*, 565–67; Michael Stausberg and Ramiyar P. Karanjia, “Rituals,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina, The Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc., 2015), 366.

³⁹¹ Stausberg and Karanjia, “Rituals,” 366.

need to translate and explain the texts deemed religious for adherents would seem connected to the functions of officials as educators, counsellors, and arbiters. It is difficult to deny the theme of mediation or intercession common to these roles – a theme that is integral to the ritual functions of these professionals and reflects the notion that adherents have agency in their relationships with the divine.

Interestingly, it is possible to see a connection between the role of religious educator within communities of Mazda- or YHWH-worshippers and the work of spreading the “Truth” to non-believers. In “Zarathustra’s Time and Homeland: Linguistic Perspectives” Almut Hintze writes,

Chapter 5 of the [Young Avestan] priestly treatise entitled *Herbedestān* seems to suggest that each family was expected to send out at least one of its members for ‘priestly service’ within a certain period of time for the dual purpose of disseminating the teachings of the Mazdayasnian religion and of carrying out various religious and ritual activities. The newly formed communities would then in turn have to send out some of their own members for *aθauruna-*, thus creating a domino effect which would account for the spread of the Mazdayasnian religion throughout the lands inhabited by Iranians.³⁹²

Hintze’s reading of this portion of the *Herbedestan* seems to link the priestly responsibility for in-community religious service with efforts at a form of proselytization to other non-adherent populations. Although Christian and Muslim proselytization have come to define the process of “spreading” religions deemed monotheistic in particularly aggressive terms, these may be but extreme expressions of specific building blocks (for example, emphatic concepts of “Truth” and perceptions of incompatibility with other religions) that underlie the roles of religious professionals in education and community building among YHWH- and Mazda-worshippers.³⁹³

The religious professionals associated with Judaism from late antiquity to the present day

³⁹² Hintze, “Zarathustra’s Time and Homeland: Linguistic Perspectives,” 38.

³⁹³ In further support for this notion, it is worth considering the variety of techniques used in advertising, rhetoric, and propaganda: sometimes the seemingly authentic testimony of a happy customer can be more effective than the practiced patter of a “pitch artist.”

are not the same priests described in the Hebrew Bible. Despite the apparently continuous use of the Old Avestan texts in a liturgical context, it is very difficult to reconstruct the ritual setting and interactions within which they were designed to function. In both of these cases the texts deemed religious offer scant clues to the historical reality of religious professionals in the early periods of development of the worship of Ahura Mazda and YHWH. The mostly first person singular and plural voices of the Old Avestan *Gathas* and *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, respectively, could seem to offer a depiction of a priest/poet/reciter, as ritual functionary and professional community member from an internal perspective. By performing the same “lines” as any number of officials before, the reader or reciter of these texts can glean information, about the experience intended for the ritual performer. The performative aspect suggests that this experience was intended to depict the priest, or priesthood, in a particular manner to a witness (including Ahura Mazda) or audience (as with the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*). Within the declarations of faith and worship found across the *Gathas*, there are questions and requests for information. Consider the messaging of *Yasna 44* with regard to the depiction of Mazda-worshippers and priests: nearly 20 stanzas begin with a line raising a question to Ahura Mazda (to follow in the rest of the passage) and imploring the deity’s truthful reply. Although it is impossible to precisely understand the intention and reception of this composition in its original context, it is difficult to avoid reading the depiction of singer/speaker as a figure with a particular motivation, perspective, and relationship with the object of worship, Ahura Mazda. The character has the freedom or power to make firm requests, however rhetorical, of the deity – and seems to understand that Ahura Mazda is the source of truthful answers. Additionally, the self-description of the speaker as a “friend” (*friia-*) or “friendly” with Ahura Mazda, in the first of these passage (*Yasna 44.1*), paints a picture of supplication that is far from hostile. Considering the discussion of the significance of a concept of empowered adherents with the freedom to choose participation to these religions deemed

monotheistic, it comes as no surprise to find this language in the Old Avestan texts. Furthermore, it is easy to imagine how such literary constructs can both reflect and shape the religious sentiments of communities of worship within which this text is deemed religious.

It is tempting to characterize the religio-historical narratives (many delivered in the 3rd person) of the *Torah* as sharply contrasting the powerful first-person perspectives of the Old Avestan texts. The voice of the Book of Genesis, for example, is quite clearly 3rd person in its narration of the stories of creation and the “Patriarchs.” The other four books (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), however, seem to take a turn once the story leads Moses to encounter the Deity. An incredible number of verses spanning these books are delivered in 2nd person speech between Moses and the two parties that he serves: the Deity and “the people.” It is hard to miss the strong message that the “word of God” is being spoken directly to the reader/listener/audience by both the Deity as a character in the text as well as the speaker/singer in performance of the text. Whereas the Old Avestan texts seem to be fairly clear with regard to the role of performer-as-character and performer-as-adherent, the texts of the *Torah* appear to “mask” the intended audience as a character in the story. The messaging of Leviticus, for example, does not appear to be aimed at subtlety and the apparent message of the text (divine law intended for readers/listeners) seems to have been received by many adherents of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Consider the intended experience of the text as literary product: with whom is the audience supposed to identify? Where is the reader/listener expected to locate themselves in this text? This question may be asked (with similar difficulty) to other texts including, for the sake of comparison, portions of Ayn Rand’s *Atlas Shrugged*. Depending on a reader’s edition of the novel, the length of the climactic “radio address,” that lays out Rand’s objectivist philosophy in chapter VII (“This is John Galt Speaking”), may range well over 50 pages. It is reasonable to

assume that the reader has, up to that point in the book, been intended to identify with the main protagonist of the book, who, like the reader, seems left to sit quietly and listen to this lengthy speech. Like the Levitical speeches, there can be little doubt that the message is intended for the reader as listener. Borrowing from this comparison, it would seem logical to surmise that the intended position of the reader/listener in the last four books of the *Torah* is either with Moses, or “the people” quietly listening to the proclamations of the Deity. If this is the case, it suggests a message (similar to that of the Old Avestan texts) of empowerment and agency in terms of interaction with the Deity: neither Moses, nor “the people,” are reticent about making requests (with the expectation of results). The depiction of priests in the *Torah* appears more complex as a result of this reading. Of the three categories of “people deemed religious” discussed in this chapter the religious professional characters in the Pentateuch seem to be the most removed from the experience (and thus perhaps intended position) of the reader/listener/audience.

In order to understand the significance of a potential identification of the audience with the “prophet-founder” Moses, one must identify the ways in which the texts articulate this character. Using Schneider’s method of “verbing the character,” it is possible to identify some of the ways in which the literary figures of Moses and Zarathustra are constructed through their presentation as subject-actors and objects acted upon. Before turning to an analysis of the data, it is important to observe the difficulty of comparing these characters as independent conceptions. There seems to be little question that philological evidence places the composition of the Old Avestan texts in a time and place away from any potential communities of worship dedicated to YHWH. The reverse, unfortunately, is far from established. The earliest reasonable date available to put to the composition of the *Torah* appears to be the translation of the texts into Greek in the latter half of the first millennium BCE. The presence of Mazda-worshippers across the Achaemenid Persian empire by this time would seem to make contact almost inevitable. Like the

absence of autochthonous temple-building culture and depictions of the Deity, it seems very reasonable to assume that some form of these texts deemed religious functioned within communities of YHWH-worshippers for enough time so as to resist extensive assimilation and dissolution under the pressures of more politically powerful religious cultures. Despite this, the presence of the Sargon-esque birth narrative (concerning the Akkadian Sargon I, but dated to the Neo-Assyrian Sargon II) in the Moses story appears to speak to the influence of neighboring religions on the development of these texts.³⁹⁴ Thus, an examination of the building block of “prophet-founder” narratives in both Hebrew and Old Avestan texts can only proceed with an awareness that the apparently earlier composition of Zarathustra as a literary figure *may* have shaped, to some extent, the figuration of Moses after contact between these communities occurred. This examination is significant to the discussion taken up in this chapter because it is clear that however externally influenced the composition of particular details of the *Torah* might have been, the construction of the Moses character would have had to be designed in a manner deemed acceptable to an audience of YHWH-worshippers in order to survive. This dissertation has shown that such communities seem to have preserved, rather than abandoned, particular formations of building blocks that appear to have been marked by the mobile pastoralist social and agriculturally marginal environmental contexts in which they likely developed.

In *Mothers of Promise*, Schneider describes her method of “verbing the character” as a means of “quantifying qualitative data.”³⁹⁵ The present examination takes up the first two of the four perspectives laid out in Schneider’s book: the character as the subject, and as the object, of verbs.³⁹⁶ Although there are specific situations in which the Biblical Hebrew or Old Avestan languages point directly to the subject or object (direct and indirect) of a verb, the more than

³⁹⁴ Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire*, 2007, 1:48–49; Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 BC*, 2006, 2:479.

³⁹⁵ Schneider, *Mothers of Promise*, 11.

³⁹⁶ The other two perspectives concern adjectival descriptions of the character and relationships with other characters. Schneider, 11.

occasional lack of clarity is addressed by Schneider: “All references are embedded in a literary text; thus just because a character is the subject of a verb does not necessarily mean they are in charge of a situation...there are places where the distinction between someone functioning as the subject is not as clear-cut as it may appear in a translation, and I will treat those cases that seem to best reflect the agency of that character.”³⁹⁷ A good example of this complexity can be identified in the case of Moses as the subject of verbs he is commanded, as object, to perform. As noted above, this is delivered mostly in the form of lengthy second-person speeches that would seem to be directed at the reader/listener rather than the character of Moses. Table 5 shows that the total number of instances (across 220 verbs), in which Moses is either the subject or object of a verb within the Hebrew Bible is 2371; an additional 86 verbs are noted, but unclear, including the enigmatic postscript to Moses’ death at the beginning of Deuteronomy 34:6, וַיִּקְבֹּר אֱתוֹ (“and he buried him”).³⁹⁸ The 691 instances coded as “Command” point to the many times Moses is the subject of a verb, but as Schneider notes, he is not in control of the situation – he acts, or is informed that he will act, at behest of the Deity. This is important to understanding the ratio of subject to object counts. Overall, this ratio appears to be more than two to one, suggesting Moses acts far more than he is acted upon. Accounting for instances of command, the balance is dramatically shifted toward Moses as acted upon or involuntary actor, with the adjusted proportion of subject instances at less than 40% (947) of the total count. It is notable that nearly half of the verbs seem to appear in dialogue: 1266 first- or second-person instances. The overwhelming majority of verbs appear with Moses as either the singular subject or object. Together, these observations agree with the top two verbs appearing in the dataset presented in Figure 13 (a visualization of the verbs appearing a minimum of ten times). Table 6 (details of the

³⁹⁷ Schneider, 12.

³⁹⁸ The category of “Alternate Names and Body Parts” that appears at the bottom of Figure 1 indicates the number of specific references to Moses using words that include: “child,” “servant,” or “hand of Moses.”

verbs appearing a minimum of ten times) confirms that nearly a quarter of instances in which Moses is either the subject or object of a verb have to do with verbs דָּבַר (“speak”) and אָמַר (“say”). In simple terms, the Hebrew Bible presents this “prophet-founder” of the religion that would develop, eventually, into Judaism as a social go-between. With a cropped view of the top verbs appearing in the dataset, Table 7 reveals patterns that characterize this form of interaction with the Deity, “the people,” and the religious professionals. Moses appears to be spoken/said to the majority of the time (300/544 instances), the text specifically notes commands to him more often than he issues commands (100/181 instances), and roughly 40% of these commands include doing/making (15%) speaking/saying (14%), giving/putting (7%), and taking (5%). Together, these commands appear to support construct the construction of the character of Moses as an obedient actor, whose actions are given to him within instances in which he is acted upon.

Moses Dataset	Totals
Instances (220 verbs)	2371
Subject	1638
Object	733
Subject Unclear	64
Object Unclear	22
Negation	94
1st Person	361
Plural	91
Singular	270
2nd Person	905
Plural	183
Singular	722
3rd Person	1105
Plural	177
Singular	928
Total	2371
Plural	451
Singular	1391
Hypothetical	63
Cohortative-like	18

Command	691
Alternate Names and Body Parts	96

Table 5: Moses as the Subject and the Object of Verbs in the Hebrew Bible

Figure 13: Moses Verbs Appearing a Minimum of Ten Times

Hebrew	Translation	Count	Neg	Subject Unclear	Subject	Object	Object Unclear	1p	1s	2p	2s	3p	3s	Command
אָמַר	say/utter	307	0	5	143	164	5	2	28	2	43	29	203	42
דַּבֵּר	speak	237	1	2	101	136	1	1	9	8	57	21	141	53
נָתַן	give	181	0	0	81	100	6	1	49	0	19	6	106	9
צִוָּה	charge/command													
עָשָׂה	do/make	147	5	25	136	11	0	4	6	9	109	9	10	104
נָתַן	give/put	116	4	2	90	26	0	7	17	15	43	0	34	45
קָבַל	take/take along (bring)/marry	70	0	0	66	4	1	1	0	3	40	2	24	37
בֹּאֵה	come in/go in/bring	58	6	0	44	14	0	2	6	3	21	11	15	15
הִלָּךְ	go/walk/come	46	2	2	39	7	0	10	4	9	16	3	4	24
רָאָה	see/appear	44	5	2	24	20	1	0	7	5	22	3	7	15
צָאָה	go out/come out/bring	44	1	1	38	6	0	4	4	2	8	9	17	6
שָׁלַח	send	38	0	2	19	19	1	0	9	5	5	5	14	4
שָׂם	put/place	35	0	0	32	3	1	0	2	1	16	0	16	13
עָלָה	go up/ascend/climb	34	2	1	33	1	0	2	3	4	16	3	6	12
הָיָה	become/be	33	0	0	13	20	3	1	3	8	12	0	9	5
קָרָא	call/proclaim	31	0	2	19	12	0	1	1	0	2	4	23	1
קָרַב	approach/draw near/bring near	29	0	0	21	8	0	0	2	1	10	2	14	11
פָּקַד	visit/attend to	23	1	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	11	9	3	11
עָמַד	stand/take one's stand	22	2	1	15	7	0	0	3	2	8	4	5	6
שָׁמַע	hear	20	11	1	0	20	0	0	8	3	4	4	1	2

Table 6: Moses Verbs Appearing a Minimum of Ten Times

Hebrew Translation	אָמַר say/utter	דָּבַר speak	צִוָּה give charge/command	עָשָׂה do/make	נָתַן give/put
Count	307	237	181	147	116
Subject	143	101	81	136	90
Object	164	136	100	11	26
Subject Unclear	5	2	0	25	2
Object Unclear	5	1	6	0	0
Neg	0	1	0	5	4
1st Person	30	10	50	10	24
Plural	2	1	1	4	7
Singular	28	9	49	6	17
2nd Person	45	65	19	118	58
Plural	2	8	0	9	15
Singular	43	57	19	109	43
3rd Person	232	162	112	19	34
Plural	29	21	6	9	0
Singular	203	141	106	10	34
Total	179	115	98	166	102
Plural	33	30	7	22	22
Singular	146	85	91	144	80
Hypothetical	0	1	1	4	1
Cohortative-like	0	0	0	0	1
Command	42	53	9	104	45

Table 7: Five Most Frequently Occurring Moses Verbs

The figuration of Moses as mostly object, often commanded subject, also seems to construct the Deity in a way that supports the image of empowered adherents noted throughout this chapter. Recall that the Moses narrative arc is rife with the struggle between “the people” and the Deity. Additionally, the lengthy speeches apparently delivered through Moses to “the people” may be understood to serve the function of cultivating the same experience for the reader/listener. The Deity is depicted as particularly concerned with “the people” and uses Moses not merely to exact the Deity’s will concerning them, but as a conduit for two-way communication. If Moses is one of the early models of “prophet-founders” it is not difficult to understand the messaging of the biblical text concerning the shape of this building block of

religion. Consider the fact that Moses, despite the literary depiction of his individual significance to the salvation of “the people,” the development of social and religious institutions, and production of the written *Torah*, is not the focal point of worship in Judaism. Although a number of Christian interpreters over the centuries have read in the Moses narrative a prefiguration of the salvific Christ figure, the characterization of the “prophet-founder” as facilitator, rather than focus, of worship is a key difference between this and the way in which the object of Christian worship appears to be constructed.³⁹⁹

Like Moses, the literary figure of Zarathustra has been credited with the authorship or production of the texts that serve as the earliest information regarding his “person.” Figure 14 shows the verbs associated with Zarathustra in the Old Avestan texts (*Gathas*, *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, the *Ahuna Vairya* and *Airyaman Ishya* prayers); Table 8 presents a detailed view. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, the extant Old Avestan texts are quite small: the latter are composed of roughly two percent of the number of words making up the former. The information presented in this chapter is based on a reading of the text in a particularly flat manner, without theological assumptions underlying the assembly of the datasets. There can be little question that, while this is a rigorous scholarly approach, it deliberately ignores the high likelihood that these texts were composed within a particular religious context and designed based on assumptions reasonable to that culture. Further, there is no doubt that these texts, in their liturgical functions have been (and continue to be) received, preserved, and dissemination within frameworks of religious expectations and beliefs. This observation foregrounds the acknowledgement that reading either the Hebrew Bible or Old Avestan texts as compositions authored by alleged historical figures who depict themselves as “prophet-founders” within their work changes the standards by which

³⁹⁹ Theodore Ziolkowski, *Uses and Abuses of Moses: Literary Representations since the Enlightenment* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), 14.

Figure 14: Zarathustra Verbs

Transliteration of Avestan Stem	Translation in Context	Count	Subject	Object	Negation	Subject Unclear	Object Unclear	1s	2s	3s	Nom.		Dat.		Acc.	
											Case		Case		Case	
<i>dā-</i>	give/put/establish	5	1	4	0	0	0	0	0	3	1		1		0	
<i>rādah-</i>	show favor/be gracious	2	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0		0		2	
(Implied Verb)	have	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0		1		0	
<i>zao-</i>	invoke	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0				0	
(Implied Verb)	ally/support	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		1		0	
<i>maga-</i>	assign/gift/the ceremony of exchange of gifts	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0		0	
<i>zōišənu-</i>	be angry	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0		0		0	
<i>var-</i>	choose	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0		0	
<i>aog-</i>	declare (to be)	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1		0		0	
<i>vaēd-</i>	find	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0		0	
<i>frād-</i>	further	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0		0		0	
<i>bar-</i>	lift/carry/take away	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0		0	
<i>gaoš-</i>	listen	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0		0	
<i>raod-</i>	obstruct	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		0		1	
<i>man-</i>	think/regard	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0		0		0	
<i>nəmah-</i>	to do homage	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1		0		0	
<i>varz-</i>	do/make/produce	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0		0		0	
<i>han-</i>	gain/earn/deserve	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0		0		0	
<i>vak-/vac-</i>	speak	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0		0		0	
Totals		21	8	13	1	3	2	1	0	11	8		3		3	

Table 8: Zarathustra Verbs

verbs are understood to apply to these characters.⁴⁰⁰ It is no accident that creation of the textual tools used in building and maintaining the religious communities in which they function became, at some point, attributed to the literary figures constructed by those very activities. It appears that both texts and the “prophet-founders” found within function as tools for facilitating the social mobility of the worship of Ahura Mazda and YHWH.

The figure of Zarathustra appears to be constructed in seventeen stanzas across the *Gathas*.⁴⁰¹ Interestingly, it appears that the character is the subject in roughly 38% of instances presented in Table 8 – this is strangely close to the percentage noted above for Moses after the total is adjusted for commanded subject instances. Unfortunately, the Old Avestan dataset is small enough to make it difficult to read too much into the potential relationship between these percentages, but it may be worth noting a pattern that both cases appear to present: the role of “prophet-founders” is characterized by the figures being acted upon more than acting. This is reflected in the fact that the verb most associated with Zarathustra (and nearly always as an object) has to do giving, putting, or establishing. To a reader socialized in a modern world dominated by religions deemed monotheistic, each with some expression of a “prophet-founders” building block, the majority of verbs used to figure Zarathustra would seem to outlining the basic shape of this “type:” “being given,” “being shown favor,” “being supported,” “establishing,” “invoking,” “declaring,” “listening,” and “doing homage.” If the Old Avestan texts construct the “prophet-founder” in a way that resembles those of other religions deemed monotheistic, the direction of influence is obvious: the Old Avestan example appears to be the earliest attested version of such a character.

An examination of the 17 passages in which the name of Zarathustra appears suggests

⁴⁰⁰ Stausberg observes, “It remains a matter of faith or speculation whether there ever lived a person by the name of Zarathustra.” Stausberg, “Zarathustra: Post-Gathic Trajectories,” 69.

⁴⁰¹ *Yasna* 28.6, 29.8, 33.14, 43.8, 43.16, 46.13, 46.14, 46.19, 49.12, 50.6, 51.11, 51.15, 53.1, 53.2, 53.3, 54.1

that a significant number of terms are used to shape the figure of the “prophet-founder” beyond the instances of verbal acting or beyond acted upon. Consider that in the first part of *Yasna* 33.14 Zarathustra is the subject of *dadāiti* (3rd person singular “gives”), but much information constructing his character lies in the direct objects that he gives: “Thus, Zarathustra is giving as gift the life breath of nothing less than his own body as the foremost share of his sacrifice and of his good thought to the All-knowing one, as well as what is the foremost share of his action through Order and that of his utterance: his readiness to listen...and the command of his sacrifice.”⁴⁰² Although Skjaervo’s translation reveals that grammatically the English sounds a bit convoluted, the image of Zarathustra is quite clear: the “prophet-founder” sacrifices himself in support of Ahura Mazda.⁴⁰³ This image is evoked by more than just the mention of the character as subject of the verb. Table 9 presents a list of 20 concepts that appear across the passages in which Zarathustra appears and the frequency with which they appear. The top six of these appear in *Yasna* 33.14 and seem to underlie much of the Zoroastrian code, “Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds.”⁴⁰⁴ This dataset offers a different glimpse of the experience of the reader/listener/audience and the potential rhetorical (and psychological) strategy of associating these concepts with the character. Whether or not Zarathustra interacts directly with Ahura Mazda in these passages, the name of the divine character appears and thus, together, these figures are constructed (in part) using concepts of *aša*- (“order/truth”), *manah*- (“mind/thought”), *vahu*- (“good”), and *dā*- (“give/put/establish”). The experience of a worshipper who was fluent in Old Avestan may have been intentionally shaped by the consistent repetition of these words within proximity to the name of Zarathustra.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰² Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 214.

⁴⁰³ Kellens, *Essays on Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism*, 74.

⁴⁰⁴ Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 3.

⁴⁰⁵ This idea is further supported by the appearance of Zarathustra’s name in *Yasna* 53.1-3, not as a character acting or being acted upon, but rather twice as possessor of something (genitive case) and once as a family name or

Transliteration of Avestan	Translation of Concept	Count in Passages
<i>mazdā</i>	Ahura Mazda	15
<i>aša-</i>	order/truth	13
<i>manah-</i>	mind/thought	13
<i>vahu-</i>	good	13
<i>dā-</i>	give/put/establish	11
<i>šiiəθana-</i>	act/deed	5
<i>uxδa-</i>	word/utterance	4
<i>ārmaiti-</i>	devotion/piety/humility	3
<i>maga-</i>	gift/the ceremony of exchange of gifts	3
<i>spənta-</i>	beneficent/holy/sacred	3
<i>uruuāta-</i>	deal (between deities or between deities and humans)	3
<i>xšaθra-</i>	power/command	3
<i>xšnao-</i>	favor/recognition/succor	3
<i>daēnā-</i>	attitude/intention/insight/vision	2
<i>frā- + srao-</i>	enunciation/cause to make renowned in song	2
<i>hacā-</i>	according to/from/together with	2
<i>mīžda-</i>	wages/rewards/prize/fee	2
<i>pauruuiia-</i>	first/original	2
<i>uštāna-</i>	life breath/life force/vitality	2
<i>vacah-</i>	word/speech	2

Table 9: Concepts Appearing in Zarathustra Passages

In the *Torah*, the narratives concerning the character of Moses are given much space and attention, suggesting that this figure is the intended focus for readers/listeners. References to Moses in the rest of the Hebrew Bible appear consistent in holding him up as a model of sorts. That the passages of the *Gathas* containing the name of Zarathustra account for less than six percent of the number of words in the Old Avestan textual corpus highlights the deliberate incorporation and figuration of this character. It is easy to comprehend the message that Zarathustra is a model worshipper and conduit for the religion of Ahura Mazda. Jean Kellens writes,

Zaraθuštra bears an official title *mąθrān-*, [Old Indic] *mantrín-*, literally, ‘he who possesses the *mąθras*.’ One must be well aware, however, that [Old Avestan] *mąθra-* is used in a way that distinguishes it radically from its Indic equivalent, in that it does not denote a human word, the poem, but a divine word. The gods

ethnonym. Considering the size of the corpus and brevity of text mentioning Zarathustra, it is difficult to ignore the significance of associations made in these three stanzas to the figuration of his character.

make known their will by a certain number of words, which all have their specific, technical, name. Among them, there are the *maqθra*- ‘formula’ and *sāsnā*- ‘lesson,’ which are always closely associated. Both come from Ahura Mazdā. He made them in accordance with [Aša] (Y.29.7), and Zaraθuštra’s characteristic feature is that he, and only he, is able to hear these words (Y.29.8). The text uses the word ‘hear’ (*guš*), and not ‘listen to’ (*sru*), lending Zaraθuštra not piety, but a special kind of obedience, a particular function, namely that of transmitter between gods and men.⁴⁰⁶

Kellens description points to a potentially significant function of a “prophet-founder” building block in these religions deemed monotheistic: to cultivate consensus. One way in which these texts function as tools for building and maintaining community may be found in the development of Zarathustra and Moses as models for cultivating “pro-social” behaviors. In *The Secret of Our Success*, Henrich writes,

CREDs are actions that a person would be unlikely to perform if he or she believes something different from their verbally stated beliefs or if they prefer something different from their stated preferences... A good CRED for actually believing that blue mushrooms are delicious and nutritious is to eat a lot of blue mushrooms and feed them to one’s children. If a learner observes a potential model doing this, he should then be willing to weight the model’s statements about the nutritional value of blue mushrooms more heavily in forming his own beliefs.⁴⁰⁷

This description recalls the image of sacrifice made by Zarathustra in *Yasna* 33.14 as well as the strength of resolute faith and obedience Moses demonstrated before Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus. The fundamentally human nature of these characters seems to make these actions serve to increase the value of the figures as models of adherence. Recall Norenzayan’s argument that prosocial religions appear to promote intragroup cooperation and facilitate success in intergroup competition.⁴⁰⁸ In terms of cultural evolution, if the narrative figure of a “prophet-founder” contributed to the competitive success of that religious community, then the model would, logically, survive together with the community.

⁴⁰⁶ Kellens, *Essays on Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism*, 88.

⁴⁰⁷ Joseph Henrich, *The Secret of Our Success: How Culture Is Driving Human Evolution, Domesticating Our Species, and Making Us Smarter* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016), 258.

⁴⁰⁸ Norenzayan, *Big Gods*.

The social mobility that sets the category of religions deemed monotheistic apart is connected to three important building blocks of religion: the separation of religious and “ethnic” identities, an emphatic concept of “Truth”, and the differentiation, via narratives of incompatibility, from religions deemed polytheistic. The texts deemed religious examined in this chapter, articulate these building blocks and explain that they ultimately originate with the actions of model people deemed religious: “prophet-founders.” Thus, narratives of Zarathustra and Moses “giving” the respective worship of Ahura Mazda and YHWH to “the people,” offer examples that encourage the social mobility of these religions and preservation of religion and community.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

*“What unites humans of the distant past with our possible future kin is an ability to survive adverse conditions by splitting into distant but connected bands. And what makes us human is our ability to build homes and communities almost anywhere. We should treasure this skill, because it is the cornerstone of our best survival strategy.”*⁴⁰⁹

In *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember*, Annalee Newitz takes a long view of mass extinctions and the survival of life on this planet in order to understand the potential of *Homo sapiens* to live through catastrophic climate disasters.⁴¹⁰ In reflecting upon her experience of conducting the research, she writes,

Everything I had read in the fields of fiction and science led me to a single, dark conclusion. Humans are screwed, and so is our planet. And so, a few years ago, I set out to write a book about how we are all doomed. I even printed out a brief outline of what I would research, then scribbled at the bottom: ‘Life is still nasty, brutish and short.’ With this idea in mind, I immersed myself in the scientific literature on mass extinction. But soon I discovered something I didn’t expect—a single, bright narrative thread that ran through every story of death. That thread was survival.⁴¹¹

Newitz’s insight reflects a theme that may be drawn from the insights of this dissertation: survival. It is no accident that the title of her book, *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember*, appears to accurately describe the respective histories of communities of worship centered around Ahura Mazda and YHWH. The parallel circumstances of geographic and social mobility that characterize the trajectories of these religions into 21st century Zoroastrianism and Judaism speak to the fitness of building blocks integral to these formations for survival in the physical and cognitive/social niches in which modern humans evolved.⁴¹²

This dissertation has shown that the presence or absence of certain building blocks in

⁴⁰⁹ Annalee Newitz, *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction* (New York: Anchor Books, 2014), 263.

⁴¹⁰ Newitz, *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction*.

⁴¹¹ Newitz, 6.

⁴¹² Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*; Deacon and Cashman, “The Role of Symbolic Capacity in the Origins of Religion.”

these religions can be traced to the mobile pastoralist social and agriculturally marginal environmental contexts in which the communities of worship centered around YHWH and Ahura Mazda appear to have originated. The connections between the following building blocks appear to have been integral to the maintenance and geographic/social spread of these communities: emphatic concepts of *Truth*; perceptions of *incompatibility* with other religions; perspectives that separate social or *ethnic* identities from religious identities; narratives of *prophet-founders*; texts deemed religious; a focus on supernatural agent/s that exist beyond the material world. Together, these components did not just form the basis for communities of Mazda- and YHWH-worship, but the proven fitness of these building blocks seems to have inspired the development of the category of religions deemed monotheistic.

Unlike Newitz's work, this dissertation is not aimed specifically at highlighting opportunities for survival in the face of climate change. Despite a difference of intended outcomes, the present investigation yields similar insights: innovation and strategic adaptation appear to be successful "methods" of surviving potential destruction. The power of human creativity, strategic responsiveness, and "Environmental Pragmatism" is attested throughout this dissertation. The influence of agriculturally marginal landscapes on the origins of these two religions deemed monotheistic, though multi-faceted and complex, appears most broadly as the unstable provision of opportunities and challenges for survival. If "necessity is the mother of invention," then perhaps ongoing and ever-changing *necessity* could be an impetus for constant innovation. The intensity with which biological and cultural evolutionary processes might winnow-out those ideas unfit for survival (or strengthen those proven fit) in such landscapes appears to have resulted in robust formations of building blocks in these religions. This is not to offer a value judgement as to whether these religions or their component blocks are "good" or "right," but rather to note that history has proven them "fit" for survival.

This research has shown that, despite the dominance of religions deemed monotheistic across settled agriculturalist “civilizations” in the modern world, the roots of building blocks that define the category appear to be found in the agriculturally marginal environmental and mobile pastoralist social contexts from which the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda seem to have arisen. This has implications concerning power dynamics regarding social and environmental justice: the religions of mobile peoples have given rise to a category of religions that numerically dominate settled societies around the globe. The research presented in this dissertation makes clear that human beings are affected by their environmental contexts not just physically or socially, but also *religiously*. Insights from Lakoff and Johnson, Geertz, and Deacon highlight the seemingly universal fact that the physical reality of human bodily existence in the world shapes, contextualizes, and underlies mental activities and cognitive development.⁴¹³ Unlike the “religio-ecological method” proposed by Hultkrantz, the conclusions of these scholars and this dissertation are not limited in applicability to one population or category of human beings. Rather, these specific case studies have implications for all minds embodied in human flesh across the history of the species. To speak of *Homo sapiens* is not to refer to “Western,” “Industrial,” or “Wealthy” populations around the globe, instead it is to discuss all peoples regardless of settled, mobile, agriculturalist, or pastoralist social contexts. How will human beings survive the shifts in climate and biosphere already causing so many environmental disasters in the 21st century? The answers lie in some seven-billion minds, living in a variety of bodies, spread across the globe: minds evolved with the same capacities for strategic innovation, pragmatic responsiveness, and robust creativity that have proven fit for survival. These are traits that seem to have allowed human beings to seek out new niches and adapt to nearly every ecological region on the planet. These also are the traits that appear to have led to the generation

⁴¹³ Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh : The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*; Geertz, “Brain, Body and Culture”; Deacon, *The Symbolic Species: The Co-Evolution of Language and the Brain*.

of the religions of YHWH and Ahura Mazda under environmental conditions many in modern cities might consider “harsh.” Following Newitz, it seems that these are the traits that will lead to the survival of human beings in a climate-changed world.

Appendix A: Supplementary Figures

Figure 15: Earliest Attestations and Estimated Areas of "Origin"

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