Fall 2016

Mobile People, Mobile God: Mobile Societies, Monotheism, and the Effects of Ecological Landscapes on the Development of Ancient Religions

Edward Surman
Claremont Graduate University

Mobile People, Mobile God:
Mobile Societies, Monotheism, and the Effects of Ecological Landscapes on the Development of Ancient Religions

by
Edward N. Surman

Claremont Graduate University
2016

APPROVAL OF THE MA THESIS COMMITTEE

This thesis 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 MA in Religion.

Tammi Schneider, Chair
Claremont Graduate University
Professor of Religion

Jenny Rose
Claremont Graduate University
Adjunct Professor of Zoroastrian Studies

Ashley Sanders
Claremont Graduate University
Professor of History and Cultural Studies and Director of the Claremont Colleges Digital Research Studio.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....iii

Table of Figures.....iv

Introduction.....1

Chapter 1:
On the Lack of Native Temple-Building Culture within early expressions of the Israelite and Iranian Religions.....5

Chapter 2:
On the Proto-Monotheistic Roots of Zoroastrianism and Judaism.....27

Chapter 3:
On the Significance of the Agriculturally Marginal Landscape on the Development of a Monotheistic Worldview.....50

Bibliography.....70

Table of Figures

Figure 1:
Temple sites (points) compared to areas of settlement (heat map) in the greater Near East through the Iron Age.....v

Figure 2:
Temple sites by religious culture (points) compared to areas of settlement (heat map) in the greater Near East through the Iron Age.....vi

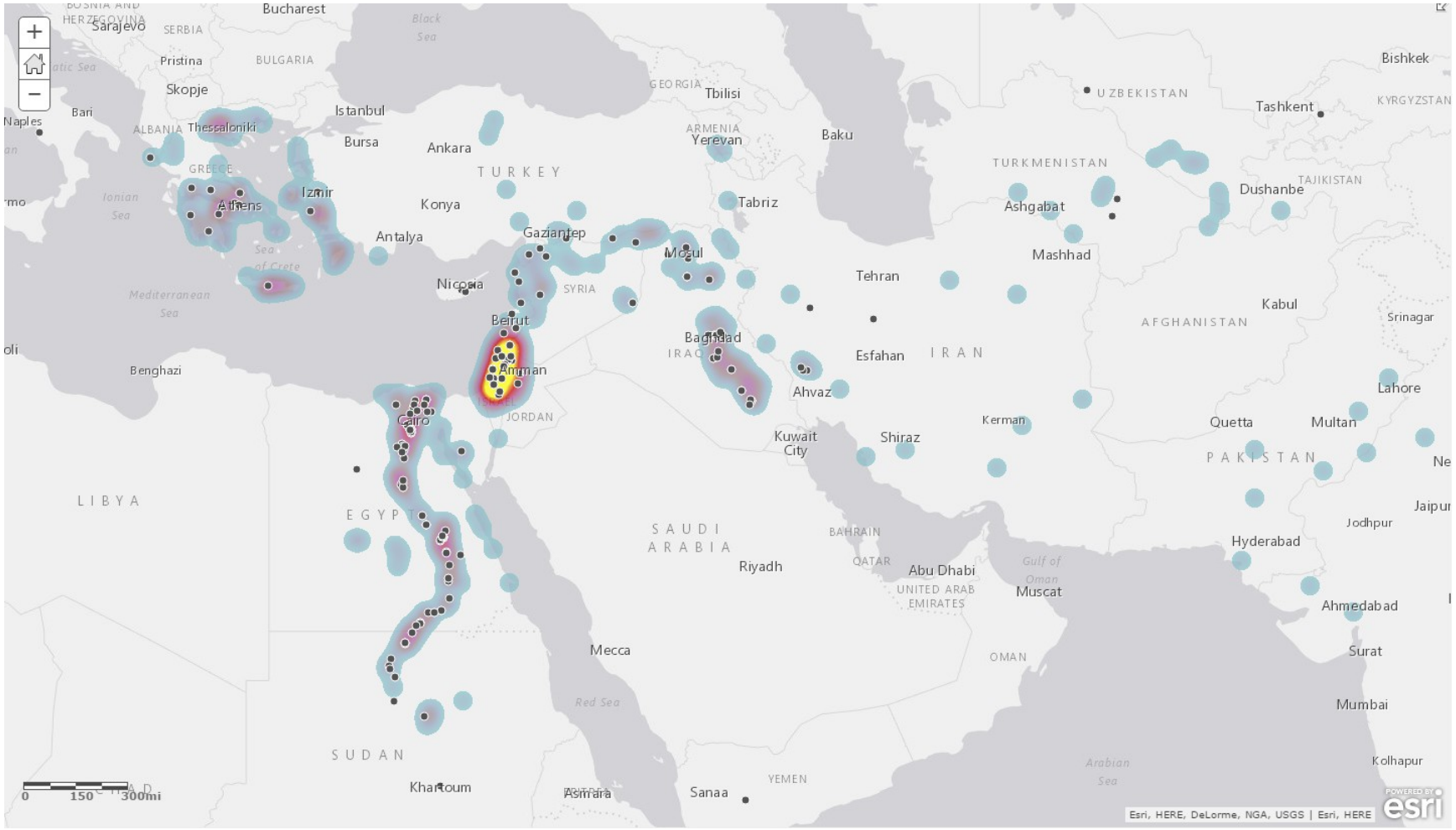

Figure 1. Temple sites (points) compared to areas of settlement (heat map) in the greater Near East through the Iron Age

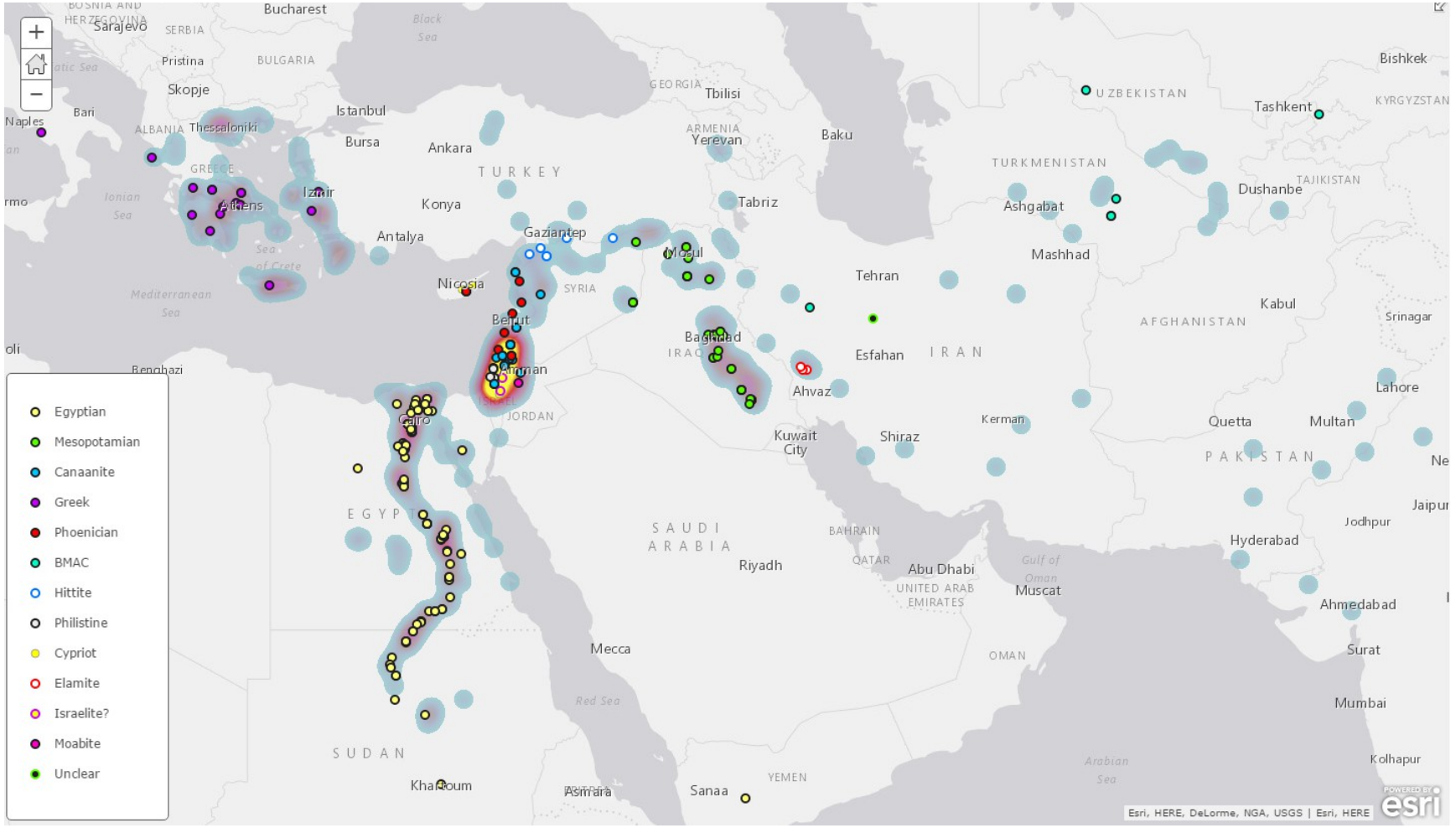

Figure 2. Temple sites by religious culture (points) compared to areas of settlement (heat map) in the greater Near East through the Iron Age

Introduction[1]

"The worshipper of Nature finds the artificial, well measured halls of a temple or of a church too narrow, too sultry; he feels at his ease only under the lofty, boundless sky which appears to the contemplation of his senses."[2]

"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."[3]

Together, the words of Ludwig Feuerbach and Mary Boyce summarize both the path that this research has taken and the line of argument presented in the following chapters. Feuerbach's supposition connects (perhaps unintentionally) to the observation of the ancient Greek historian Herodotus that the Persians built no temples and worshipped outdoors. Boyce's comments seem to serve as an explanation for this apparent lack of religious edifices: the religion of the ancient Iranians was shaped, in part, by the physical landscape. It is this explanation which constitutes the overarching thesis of this research: the ecological landscape in which a society develops will inform the development of that society's religious culture, including its 'beliefs and observances'. The specific connection for which I will argue in this writing is the correlation between agriculturally marginal landscapes[4] and the development of monotheism. Using comparative case studies, I will argue that the respective religions of the ancient Iranians and early Israelites

1 A digital version of this thesis can be found at: http://scalar.usc.edu/works/edwardsurmanmathesis/index

2 Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, trans. Alexander. Loos, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004), 10.

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

4 For purposes of this writing, 'agriculturally marginal landscapes' will be defined as zones in which environmental factors result in constraints on crop productivity, thus limiting the viability (and hindering development) of agricultural systems.

developed in pragmatic response to the same ecological landscapes that gave rise to their mobile societies.

Any scholarly investigation must begin with the definition of terms and for purposes of this writing the terms which must be defined at the outset are those describing the peoples whose societies and religions serve as comparative subjects for this study. Because the focus of this work concerns the origins of specific religions, the path of this argument begins with the chronologically latest peoples and works backward. The opposite path will be taken to explain the boundaries which will mark out the various religious societies included in this study. For the sake of clarity and simplicity, I offer the following list of terms:

1. Indo-Iranian: The Indo-Iranian religion has been reconstructed using textual evidence from early Zoroastrian and Vedic Indian religions of a "common linguistic and literary tradition, including that of oral religious poetry, [which] is evidenced in themes, concepts, terminology and the poetic syntax of the *Gathas* [early Zoroastrian texts] that echo those of the *Rig Veda* [early Vedic texts]."[5] For our purposes, it is important to consider that it is the Indo-Iranian religion which serves as the earliest comprehensible religious ancestor of the developmental lines which culminate in Zoroastrianism and Hinduism. Scholar of Iranian languages Prods Oktor Skjærvø notes the geography and period of the Indo-Iranians: "The closer relationship between the languages and literatures of the ancient Iranians and Indo-Aryans proves they were once a single people, who probably lived in Central Asia east and southeast of the Aral Sea as far back as the third millennium BCE."[6]

5 Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, Introductions to Religion; I.B. Tauris Introductions to Religion. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 13.

6 Prods O. Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, The Sacred Literature Series (New Haven [Conn.]: Yale University Press, 2011), 1.

2. Ancient Iranian: Within the lineage of development from the religion of the Indo-Iranians to Zoroastrianism, the ancient Iranian religion could be considered 'proto-Zoroastrianism'. For our purposes the ancient Iranian religion must be described as a development of the Indo-Iranian religion as it took on a particularly Iranian/Zoroastrian character and which can be contrasted with the Indo-Aryan/Vedic Indian religion.[7] Skjærvø begins his book *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism* by identifying the earliest roots of Zoroastrianism in this ancient religious society: "...in the second millennium BCE among Iranian tribes in Central Asia."[8] Additionally, I will defer to Skjærvø's linguistic definition of the term 'Iranian': "*Iranians* are here defined as speakers of Iranian languages. These include the ancient languages Avestan, Old Persian, Middle Persian = Pahlavi, and others, from which modern Persian (Farsi), Kurdish, Pashto (Afghan), and many others are descended."[9]
3. Zoroastrianism: For this research, I consider the development of the Zoroastrian religion, as we might know it today, to be the result of a developmental process which does not bear a definitive chronological marker as might be found in the origins of Christianity or Islam.[10] The closest marker of transition from the religion of the ancient Iranians to Zoroastrianism could be associated with the composition of oral poetry/scripture attributed to the religion's 'prophet' Zarathustra.[11] It is important to resist Jewish or Christian notions of reformation and prophet-centered religious revolution, for it would

7 Elton L. Daniel, *The History of Iran*, The Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations, 1096-2905 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 30.
8 Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 1.
9 Ibid.
10 Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 3.
11 Jamsheed K. Choksy, "Hagiography and Monotheism in History: Doctrinal Encounters between Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity 1," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 14, no. 4 (October 1, 2003): 408.

seem that the effort of Zarathustra produced both documentation, of a sort, of the religious culture which permeated his life as well as inspiration for developments toward what we might recognize as Zoroastrianism today. Scholar of religion Jamsheed Choksy describes the name and position of Zarathustra in the context of the ancient Iranian religion: "

> In established Mazdean or Zoroastrian belief, Zarathushtra (later called Zarduxsht and Zardosht, also known as Zoroaster from the ancient Greek rendering Zoroastres) is acknowledged as the prophet who founded the Iranian religion of Mazda-worship now named after him. But, rather than viewing himself as a prophet or religious founder who created a new confessional community, Zarathushtra may have regarded himself as a devotional poet. In that role, he would have been continuing longstanding Indo-European and Indo-Iranian practices of praising order and certain spiritual entities associated with the maintenance of order while ascribing blame for disorder to other spiritual entities.[12]

4. Persian: I will begin the first chapter of this argument with a quote from Herodotus concerning the Persian religion. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the fascinating discussion of whether or not all of the Achaemenid rulers, themselves, were Zoroastrian, it is sufficient for this study that Herodotus' observation of Persian religious custom, directly or indirectly, reveals a curious difference between Zoroastrianism and the neighboring polytheisms of the Near East. Skjærvø writes: "The Achaemenids (the dynasty founded by Cyrus the Great) were, to our knowledge, the first Iranians to use writing, inspired by their literate neighbors...The earliest known is the Bisotun (Behistun) inscription (520 BCE), in which Darius I (522-486 BCE) narrates how he came to power and united the Iranian lands...as well as his relationship with Ahura Mazdā."[13] For our purposes, it is important to consider the presence and relevance

12 Ibid.
13 Skjærvø, *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 4–5.

of Zoroastrianism in "...three great Iranian [Persian] empires, the Achaemenids (550-330 BCE), the Arsacids/Parthians (247 BCE-224 CE), and the Sasanians (224-650)."[14]

5. Indo-Aryan: Skjærvø writes: "Their [that is, Iranian languages] closest non-Iranian relatives are the Indo-Aryan (Indic) languages (Sanskrit, Hindi, etc.)."[15] The religion of the earliest Indo-Aryan speakers serves, in this writing, in comparison and contrast to that of the ancient Iranians as it developed from the 'mother' religion of the Indo-Iranians. Before the Indo-Aryans moved into and through the Indus River Valley, their religious culture had individuated from that of the ancient Iranians: it belongs to a lineage in which we find the Vedic religion and eventually the modern Hindu religions of India.
6. Israelite: In contrast to the development lineage of Indo-Iranian, ancient Iranian, and Zoroastrian religions, there is a strong argument to be made that the pre-Jewish (defined below) Israelite religion existed, as such, before the late 6th century BCE destruction of Solomon's Temple and the Babylonian Exile. Biblical scholar Glenn S. Holland describes the early history of the Israelites: "According to their own traditions, the Israelites first entered Syria-Palestine as nomadic herders of sheep and goats, living in autonomous family groups united by blood and a common allegiance to their god. The people later settled into agricultural communities and fortified cities, primarily in the central hilly country of Palestine and in the Jordan Valley, away from trade routes controlled by the Philistines and the Canaanite cities."[16] Just as with Indo-Iranian society, it is difficult to be precise regarding the earliest history of the Israelites. For purposes of

14 Ibid., 1.
15 Ibid.
16 Glenn Stanfield Holland, *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 195.

this research it is important to consider the history of the Israelites in two general phases: mobile and settled. I will argue that the earliest Israelite society was mobile and that settlement was as significant a change to the circumstances of the people and their religion as would be the eventual Exile.

7. Judaism: The Jewish religion is here considered to be that which developed after the destruction of the Temple, during the time of the Exile. Biblical scholar Mark S. Smith writes that some scholars "...including T. J. Meek, date the emergence of monotheism around the time of the "Exile" (587– 538). Faced with the prospect of overwhelming earthly powers, Judeans exalted their deity in absolute terms. There is no doubt that this camp has an easier task in criticizing those who hold an early date for monotheism."[17] Although I will argue that the roots of what would come to be understood as the monotheism of Judaism can be found in the monotheistic worldview of the Israelites, I must position my usage of the term Judaism in the camp which Smith describes. The period of Exile corresponds with a marked development (however we might characterize it) in the religion of the Israelites toward what we might recognize as Rabbinic (and eventually modern) Judaism.

In the way of defining one additional term, it is important to consider the use of the category of 'monotheism' as it might apply to Zoroastrianism or Judaism.

This research revolves around the comparison of these two religions, their respective antecedents, and thus developmental lines. I will argue that a large number of similarities, particular parallel circumstances and religious developments, make the respective religions of the ancient Iranians and early Israelites more alike to one another than to neighboring religious

17 Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, 150.

societies. One of these similarities is the eventual development of monotheism in Zoroastrianism and Judaism. This is not to say that each religion expresses monotheism in identical fashion; as we shall see in Chapter 2, the differences between the theologies of monotheistic religions in the modern world support the notion that the religious framework connected with monotheism extends beyond a divine headcount. While many adherents of both Zoroastrianism and Judaism throughout history might identify as monotheists, there are still characteristics of each religion which complicate the seemingly simple effort of categorization.

Although the use of the name Zoroastrianism identifies it with the holy personage of Zarathustra (and a Hellenized spelling, at that), it is a religion which has long been characterized by the worship of Ahura Mazda. Consider the explanation of scholar of religions Jenny Rose: "Some adherents choose to refer to their religion by the ancient Iranian terms *Mazdayasna* ('worship of Ahura Mazda'), *daena Mazdayasni* ('the religion of Mazda worship') or *daena vanguhi*. This latter term, usually translated as 'the good religion', occurs in the *Gathas*, the oldest texts of the religion."[18] In addition to acknowledging the various 'spirits' and other deities which have been (and continue to be) present to various extents in the belief system of Zoroastrianism, it is important to note the position of the deity as the focal point of worship in the ancient and modern religions. Philologist Almut Hintze argues against applying an Abrahamic, or biblical, definition of monotheism onto the religion[19] and suggests "...that Zoroastrianism has its own particular form of monotheism – which is the Zoroastrian way."[20] Skjærvø explains that categories of 'monotheism', 'dualism', and 'polytheism' have variously fit

18 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, xix.
19 Almut Hintze, "Monotheism the Zoroastrian Way," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 24, no. 2 (April 2014): 226.
20 Ibid., 227.

Zoroastrianism at different times throughout its history and he writes that "although stringent terminology is useful...categorizing seems less important than describing as accurately as possible the form of the system in the various periods."[21] Although the scholarly debate around such categorization cannot be concisely resolved within this writing, I will argue, in line with Skjærvø, that we must avoid overemphasizing the terminology of numeric monotheism as a shorthand for the belief, practices, and perspectives which belong to each religious system: I suggest that, in both religions, these aspects derive from monotheistic worldviews.[22]

There appears to be significantly less debate surrounding the eventual development of monotheism in the Jewish religion than in Zoroastrianism. This is not to say that the categorization of monotheism easily fits all aspects of Judaism – nor can it easily be applied to the (preceding) Israelite religion. It is cogent to this argument to acknowledge that the type of monotheism that is, (according to Hintze) by definition, a feature of Jewish and Christian religions is itself monotheism done 'a Jewish way' and 'a Christian way' respectively. I point this out to offer a reminder that the category must be defined by both the Zoroastrian and Jewish 'ways' of expressing monotheism. Because I will argue in this writing that the religion of the Israelites developed the kernel of monotheistic thinking which would be refined into the monotheism of Judaism, it is vital to remember that many aspects of the former made their way into the latter. Mark S. Smith notes: "...the Bible as a whole simply does not teach the existence

21 Prods Oktor Skjaervo, "Zarathustra: A Revolutionary Monotheist?," in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism*, ed. Beate. Pongratz-Leisten (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 350.

22 After Tammi Schneider, I suggest that a monotheistic worldview is characterized by flatter divine hierarchy than might be found in a polytheistic worldview. One in which there are fewer degrees of separation between the supreme deity and the lowest human. In such a system, the supreme deity must be both transcendent and immanent and available for worship, as we shall examine in Chapter 2, the supreme deities of both Mesopotamian and Egyptian religions were characterized by transcendence-in-the-extreme, a position only made possible by a large divine bureaucracy which appears characteristic of polytheism. This raises an interesting opportunity for further investigation into the correlation between human and divine hierarchies.

of only one God."[23] Smith's comments point to the importance of the Hebrew Bible beyond its use as historical documentary of a long-dead people, but as the scriptural canon of a living religion in the modern world. Smith reminds us that however monotheistic Judaism (as well as Christianity and Islam) might be understood, the significance of a corpus of scripture which bears evidence[24] of historical (numeric) polytheism in a modern context reveals the difficult of such categorization.

This writing opened with Feuerbach's comments as a brief introduction of the question which began this research: did the Persians build temples? The first chapter concerns the research project which was developed to answer this question and the analysis of the data assembled in the effort. Utilizing digital geographic information systems (GIS) software, I mapped temple sites of the greater Near East through the Iron Age which are in established archaeological record. The results of this study reveal a substantive correlation between temple building culture and settlement in the region. In my analysis, I will suggest that this connection may be key to investigating the potential effects of the ecological landscape on the development of religion. Rather than investigating the temple building cultures of settled societies, however, my focus will be on an examination of the apparent interconnection between mobile societies, monotheism, and a respective *lack* of temple building culture.

The religions of the ancient Iranians and early Israelites developed into what can arguably be considered two of the earliest monotheistic religions of the ancient world. In the second chapter of my argument I will show that the familiar monotheistic religions we might recognize

23 Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 150.

24 For example, see the various 'names used for the deity' which get reduced in translation to 'God', 'Lord', and 'God Almighty' respectively: אֱלֹהִים, יְהוָה, אֵל שַׁדַּי

as Zoroastrian and Judaism developed directly from the monotheistic worldviews of the respective ancient Iranian and Israelite precursors. Using brief case studies from Mesopotamia and Egyptian religions for support, I argue against narratives of revolution 'overthrowing' established polytheism in favor of familiar monotheism. Instead, I will suggest that, because of the monotheistic worldview that would have been refined in the development of Zoroastrianism and Judaism, it would be more useful to consider the numerically polytheistic religions of the ancient Iranians and Israelites to have been 'proto-monotheistic'. This designation is particularly useful in examining religious parallels between the two societies. These parallels cannot be extricated from other common social and economic constructions, like the development of mobile society.

The connection of these commonalities and parallels to similar ecological developmental contexts will be addressed in Chapter 3. I will argue that the development of religion must be contextualized in the ecological landscape in which a particular society grew. Just as scholars consider the development of a settled or mobile society to be, in part, a pragmatic response of human beings to a particular set of environmental circumstances (available arable land, for instance), so too must we consider religion among the human constructs developed, in part, in response to the natural environment.[25] Once I have laid out my argument for this theory, I will look beyond the Near East to apply the question to agriculturally marginal landscapes in East Africa and the Great Plains of North America. In brief examination of the Maasai, Kikuyu, and Lakota, I will show that there is both support for the validity of this theory and a shameful gap in research beyond European colonial perspectives on the religions of these societies. There is

25 Ake Hultkrantz, "An Ecological Approach to Religion," *Ethnos* 31, no. 1–4 (1966): 132–33.

enough evidence to warrant significant consideration and further examination of the effects of ecological landscapes on the development of religions.

While it is interesting to consider the effects of the natural environment on the development of very ancient religions, this research bears real implications for our modern world. To claim that ancient humans, as biological beings, would have been affected psychologically by their respective ecological cradles seems no great revolution. I suggest that this research is eminently relevant to modern humans because we *continue* to be affected by natural and built environments. Our modern minds and bodies are shaped, partly, in pragmatic response to spaces in which we develop individually and collectively. I position this research and writing as one call for more work to be done to understand the effects of our environments on our minds and ways of thinking. This call for scholarship – for understanding – comes, not accidentally, at a time when the implications of human psychological responses to the environment are particularly unsettling. As the tide of human-caused climate change begins to flood our societies and world, how too might the currents of an unraveling biosphere affect our minds? If the development of a mobile deity and mobile society was the pragmatic response of a people to agriculturally marginal landscapes, what economic, social, and religious constructs might be borne of ecological devastation?

Chapter 1

On the Lack of Native Temple-Building Culture within early expressions of the Israelite and Iranian Religions

"Civilizations is the most complex cultural level reached by man. Its symptom is the city."[26]

"Gods required temples, and temples needed to be located in cities."[27]

In the late 5th century BCE, Herodotus wrote of the Persians: "They have among them neither statues, temples, nor altars."[28] The impetus for this study came from noting the curious incongruity, between a religion to which temple-building is integral to its (religious) culture and one which appears to lack such a practice, as suggested by Herodotus' statement. The fact that Herodotus would remark on such a specific feature (or lack thereof) in Ancient Persian culture, points to the plausible historical reality of this incongruity between religious cultures.[29] In order to understand whence this peculiar difference in religious cultures came, the question naturally arises: what other characteristics might be understood to differentiate Greek and Persian religions? With little more than general knowledge of these religions, it seems that an obvious answer reveals an interesting possible connection: whereas the Greeks were very clear 'polytheists', the Persian Zoroastrians were more 'monotheistic'. This potential connection, between polytheism and temple-building culture, serves as subject for this chapter. I suggest that there is substantial correlation between polytheistic belief and the development of temples, in

26 Walter Ashlin Fairservis, *The Roots of Ancient India: The Archaeology of Early Indian Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 217.
27 Marc Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press ;, 1997), 217.
28 Herodotus, *The Ancient History of Herodotus*, trans. William Beloe (Derby & Jackson, 1859), 41.
29 Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, Introductions to Religion; I.B. Tauris Introductions to Religion. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 46.

contrast with the lack of native temple-building culture and the monotheistic and proto-monotheistic religions of the ancient Near East and Eurasian steppe. In order to establish this claim, we will examine available data and scholarship on the ancient Iranians and Israelites regarding the presence of temple-building practices within each religious culture.

There are primarily two types of sources which may inform this investigation: textual references and archaeological findings. For the purposes of this study, it is clear that the data must be verifiable, and although both sources of data require critical examination in order to establish the veracity of claims that a temple existed in a certain site, I have chosen the archaeological record as the source for this study because the fact of material remains appears, arguably, stronger evidence than textual attestations. In order to examine the archaeological record, then, I have compiled a dataset of temple sites in the greater Near East which have been determined by excavators to have been built prior to the end of the Iron Age around 586 BCE. Working within ArcGIS, a suite of geographic information systems tools developed by Esri (Environmental Systems Research Institute), I have assembled a dataset which establishes the trends of temple-building culture among the included religious civilizations of the greater Near East up to the couple decades before the establishment of the Persian Empire. Before these trends can be examined, we must understand the parameters of data, sources, and processes which govern this digital mapping project.

At its core, this project is aimed at investigating the veracity of Herodotus' claim within the archaeological record. Before the sources of data can be addressed, it is important to outline the boundaries of the data to be included in this project. The title of this project is *Temple Sites in the Greater Near East through the Iron Age,* and in order to define the parameters of the data

for this project, I will take a page from scholar of Near Eastern religions Tammi Schneider; as she writes in *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* 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"[30] in this project.

Temple

There are many sites of worship mentioned in various sources throughout the civilizations of the Near East; most open air worship sites, altars, sacred spaces are lost to history for without archaeological evidence it is extremely difficult to confirm any site as the spot for worship. By my working definition, a temple must be a human-made building specifically constructed and used for worship. In *Gods in the Desert: Religions in the Ancient Near East* biblical scholar Glenn S. Holland describes Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Syrian-Palestinian temples each with difference emphasis; I have compiled these descriptors to produce a rubric for defining what can be considered a temple:

1. "a complex, including the temple building and the precinct immediately surrounding it"[31]
2. "the dwelling-place of the city's patron god where the daily rituals of worship and sacrifice took place"[32]
3. "[a] building [the main feature of which] was a large central room with an altar where sacrifices were offered…might include shrines for other gods in addition to the primary god worshipped in the temple"[33]

30 Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011), 3.
31 Glenn Stanfield Holland, *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 78.
32 Ibid., 171.
33 Ibid., 258.

Thus spaces considered to be a temple for this project must: be enclosed within a building, which itself *may* be part of a complex; be considered the dwelling place of a deity and the site of ritual worship and sacrifice or offering; and be designed and furnished for such rituals with altars, shrines, etc.

Sites

In many cases, the remnants we have are perhaps just enough to identify a building as having been built and maintained specifically as a temple. Although many are collapsed or demolished remains, while some are still standing or have been reconstructed, still, our best chance of understanding how a space was regarded must be partially speculative, as we have such limited records of the daily workings of each particular site. For this project I am concerned with the temples as sites situated in a society as markers of that culture's religion and so each structure need not be deeply investigated – its identification and location are sufficient to provide evidence for the presence of a religious edifice that space.

in

It is beyond the scope of this project to be concerned with the individual dates of building and usage of each temple beyond confirming their existence at some point during the period with which I am concerned. Insofar as the greater scope of the project concerns the question of religious origins of monotheistic traditions it is important to limit the cut-off date of sites to a time before modern Zoroastrian Fire Temples and Jewish Synagogues, as such, would have developed. If a temple is confirmed in the archaeological record to have been constructed within the following geographic limits and in use at some time prior to the end of the Iron Age (586 BCE) it qualifies as extant for this project.

the Greater

The purpose of this project is to investigate a lack of, or the extremely limited nature of, temple building culture by the earliest ancient Iranian and Israelite societies. This can only be achieved by showing, in contrast, the proliferation of temples in neighboring religious cultures. Thus, I have considered a geographic scope large enough to include sufficient contrasting evidence from regions which are not traditionally included in conceptualizations of the Near East.

Near East

Historian Marc Van De Mieroop writes in *A History of the Ancient Near East* that "[i]t is in the Near East and northeast Africa that many of the elements we associate with advanced civilization first originated...The Near East and Egypt encompass a vast area, stretching from the Black Sea to the Aswan Dam, and from the Aegean Sea to the highlands of Iran, an area that was densely inhabited throughout its history."[34] Van De Mieroop's description summarizes the 'known' and 'unknown' qualities of describing a region such as the Near East; his suggestion of boundaries highlights the difficult task of demarcating edges of a nebulous conceptual zone that attempts to encompass many civilizations over a broad span of time. In order to compare the ancient Iranians and Israelites with the prolific building societies of Egypt and Mesopotamia, a span of geographic space must be included in this study. Inspired by the approximate political boundaries of the Persian Empire under Darius I (an imperial power too late, chronologically, to be included in this research), the geographical parameters of this project were established to include the following modern countries (or specific portions described): Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel (including Palestinian territories), Jordan,

34 Marc. Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, Ca. 3000-323 B.C.*, Blackwell History of the Ancient World (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), xviii–xix.

Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan (areas west of the Indus river).

through

For this project I have relied upon the dates given in *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000 – 586 B.C.E.* by Amihai Mazar for the Iron Age: the Iron IA period beginning in 1200 BCE and the end of Iron IIC in 586 BCE.[35] Because I am concerned with understanding temple-building culture as an organic development of specific types of religion, this beginning date is less important than the end. The inclusion of the word *through* here indicates that it is the end date which is of primary importance: a stricter end date allows for the inclusion of temples that would have been constructed and in use up to the the few decades before the Persian conquest, excluding those which would have been built by a civilization under foreign imperial rule. I am working with a more flexible beginning date in order to allow for acknowledgment of the periods in which some temples were originally built and would have been a part of that particular religious civilization up to the end of the Iron Age.

the Iron Age

There are many different ways in which to periodize the history of a particular civilization or site, each significant to a specific lens or focus. This project is an effort to bring together data from different regions in which individual historians or archaeologists might have differing opinions about an effective terminology for periods describing each particular site. My modest archaeological experience in Israel informs my sense of stratigraphic periodization and is explained by Mazar: "Terminology for the early periods in Palestine is based upon worldwide

35 Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 1st ed., The Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 30.

periodization maintained since the 1819 work of the Danish archaeologist Ch. J. Thomsen. This is the Three Age System, which divides the early periods into three major units: the Stone Age, the Bronze Age, and the Iron Age."[36] My choice of the Iron Age as the final period from which data may be included in this project is specifically aimed at marking 586 BCE as the end date for this study. It is important to note that this date is close to the chronological boundary of independence for religious civilizations in the region prior to their occupation by the Persian Empire and coincides, approximately, with the destruction of the First Temple and a major turning point in the development of ancient Judaism.

In constructing the most simple of temple site lists within these parameters, the first question concerns which source material is valid. The availability of archaeological evidence to confirm each temple site in this project is a critical standard for all of the data, with the exception of a single listing: Solomon's Temple. In *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine*, G.R.H. Wright begins thirteen pages of exposition on the Solomonic Temple with a statement to which I will defer in the decision to include this single exception in this project: "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."[37]

Without delving into a deep discussion of the steps of building this dataset, it is important to acknowledge that the process of assembling, verifying, and incorporating the information for this project began with a 'wide-net' approach before moving to a refined selectivity to what could be called 'quality data'. The necessary first step was the production of a thorough list, by

36 Ibid., 29.

37 G. R. H. Wright, *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine*, Handbuch Der Orientalistik. Siebente Abteilung, Kunst Und Archäologie (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 254.

region or civilization, of potentially viable data points: in this case temple sites within the geographic parameters and temporal limits. Since the purpose of this data assemblage is to understand a relationship between temple-building culture and the structure of a particular religion, the collection of temple sites as data points must then have logically been found in sources which focus on a particular region, religion, or civilization. The majority of sources for the preliminary list were archaeological and architectural in focus: the former being clearly concerned with the excavation and verification of a variety of tangible ruins including temple sites. The latter is specifically concerned with categories of building cultures and styles which attempt to differentiate religious structures (and others) from rest of the site.

The dataset from these initial sources had to be verified and it was in the archaeological record that confirmation was found. The archaeological record, as I use the reference here, describes a body of material that is not merely limited to the published excavation reports but includes accessible site notes, plans, photos, and find lists. These 'verification materials' serve not just to support the argument for inclusion of a particular site in the project data, but to enhance each specific listing with layers of additional data and provide a level of transparency that is very useful in this form of research. When a listing had associated sources, it was considered valid and viable for integration into the dataset to be mapped and otherwise analyzed. Although this digital project is an effort to establish data that would otherwise require an entire companion volume to evidence, the dataset draws authoritative strength as much on data as on clarity and proper sourcing. With these parameters outlined, we next must turn to the trends of temple-building culture revealed by the dataset.

In *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, Marc Van de Mieroop writes: "Gods required temples, and temples needed to be located in cities."[38] Although his remarks are made specifically regarding Mesopotamian religion, his comments seem to summarize the trend of temple-building cultural across the greater Near East through the Iron Age. In *figure 1*, we can see the temple site locations as points superimposed on a heat map of settlement areas. Ignoring the heat map, it is obvious that the distribution of points across the region correlates along the political boundaries of the prolific building societies in the region which are easily recognizable to anyone with a passing familiarity with 'ancient history'. The sites seem to cluster in along the Nile in Egypt, the fertile crescent in Mesopotamia, and the Levantine coast of the Mediterranean. For comparison, it is useful to observe the heat map, identical in *figures 1* and *2*, which identifies areas of settlement within the same regional parameters governing the inclusion of temple site data in the project.[39]

In *figure 1* it is clear that with just a few outlying points, the locations of temple sites fall within the areas of settlement. The highest concentration of settlement appears to correlate with the highest concentration of temple sites within modern-day Israel (and Palestinian territories). It is worth noting, that one of the biases of the parameters of this project lies in an emphasis on temple-*building*: it does not consider destruction, renovation, or re-building. Compared to the

38 Marc Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City* (Oxford: Clarendon Press ;, 1997), 217.

39 The layer of settlement data is georeferenced from maps utilized in the various regionally specific histories: 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); Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, Ca. 3000-323 B.C.*; Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*; James. Whitley, *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece*, Cambridge World Archaeology (Cambridge, U.K. ; Cambridge University Press, 2001); Marc Van de Mieroop, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Nadine Moeller, *The Archaeology of Urbanism in Ancient Egypt: From the Predynastic Period to the End of the Middle Kingdom* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Charles Gates and Neslihan. Yılmaz, *Ancient Cities: The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece, and Rome*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2011).

ebb and flow of settlement, conquest, and political dissolution across the Levantine region, the religious culture and political unity of Mesopotamian and Egyptian societies might seem relatively stable (only by comparison) until the period of the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Thus, it is possible to see new sites settled and new temples built repeatedly over time in the same politically unstable area in a way that is not reflected to the same degree on the scales of seemingly more stable neighboring civilizations. This is not to say that any society in this region was free from factors of instability which might alter patterns of settlement and temple-building, but it is clear that whatever shifts occurred within Egyptian society and religion, for instance, prior to the Persian conquest, the society which was settled and developed along the Nile could arguably be considered Egyptian and the temples built as belonging to Egyptian religious culture.

In *figure 2* I have identified temple site locations by 'religion' which requires some explanation in order to be useful to our discussion. Egyptologist Jan Assman describes the inextricable situation of religion and culture in the ancient world: "To speak of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Greek, and Roman 'religions' means to reconfigure— or even distort— the historical phenomena according to a perception of reality proper to monotheism but alien to 'paganism.' There were no 'religions' in pagan societies, only 'cults' and 'cultures.' 'Religion,' like 'paganism,' is an invention of monotheism."[40] For purposes of this study, I am utilizing the term 'religion' and 'religious culture' interchangeably to describe the religious practices, beliefs, and spaces in these various ancient civilizations. In order to examine temple-building as a factor in, or product of, the development of a religious culture, it is sufficient to our discussion to identify the 'religion' of a particular people with that people.[41]

40 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), 10.
41 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 63.

There can be no doubt that the temples in this dataset which are associated with Egypt and Mesopotamia hold numeric domination over any other religion represented on the map. This reinforces our understanding from *figure 1* that the settlement patterns of these various societies are correlated with their temple-building culture. If we accept a connection between ancient Iranian and Persian religions, a close examination of *figure 2* would seem to confirm the veracity of Herodotus' statement regarding Persian religious culture. Similarly, we can see a lack of temple-building culture among the Israelites, despite the clear regional preference for temple-based worship. The identification of archaeological remains as ancient Iranian or Israelite temple sites is far from clear, requiring further discussion. Before we turn to consider that, however, it is important to observe the overall trend revealed in this project and *figures 1* and *2*: temple-building culture is not simply correlated with settlement patterns, it is a significant aspect of settlement-building societies. *Figure 2* shows that among the prodigious building societies of Egypt and Mesopotamia, temple-building was not undertaken in moderation or as a rare event. Thus, what can be extrapolated regarding the religions of ancient Iranians and Israelites is that even if temple-building constituted an aspect of religious culture, it was significantly different from that of neighboring religions.[42] We can understand this more clearly by examining the situation of Mesopotamian temples in an urban context.

A brief survey of the scholarly literature regarding Mesopotamian temples reveals, among others, one consistent fact about the nature of these buildings: they were considered the 'house' of the deity.[43] Tammi Schneider describes the extent of this conception:

42 Michael Shenkar, "Temple Architecture in the Iranian World before the Macedonian Conquest," *Iran & the Caucasus* 11, no. 2 (2007): 178.
43 Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 68.

> 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.[44]

This is vital to comprehending the association of temple-building culture with settlement in the extreme case of Mesopotamia. Even without understanding the situation of temple sites in the archaeological record as we have established, it isn't difficult to perceive a logical overlap between societies that build buildings/cities and societies that build temples. In a Mesopotamian context, Van de Mieroop explains, temple-building culture is wholly situated within settled society: "We can thus say that the institutionalized cult in Mesopotamia was entirely an urban phenomenon. Even if gods had powers over elements outside the cities, they could only be venerated in an urban setting."[45] He goes on to postulate a source for the evolution of temple-based worship in Mesopotamia: "This seemingly contradictory situation derived, in my opinion, from the original role that temples played in Mesopotamian society. They were not primarily centres of cult, but centres of administration."[46] Van de Mieroop's comments point directly to the correlation revealed by *figures 1* and *2*, suggesting that religious temple-building culture was concomitantly developed with the civic settlement-building phenomena.

The interconnection between religious and civic/political systems, as Van de Mieroop and Assmann have observed, would have been integral and natural to Mesopotamian society. Tammi Schneider explains that the temple was integral to a sense of belonging and self of

44 Ibid.
45 Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 217.
46 Ibid.

Mesopotamians[47]; this connection can best be seen at the level of the city: "The fortune of the Mesopotamian city was connected to its specific deities, whose divine powers in turn rose and fell with the political status of the deity's city. This is evidenced in the *Enuma Elish*, which reflected the political and cosmic rise of Babylon."[48] This localization of a deity is not exclusive to Mesopotamia, but is significant to understanding the extent to which religion in settled societies developed in response to and along with settled culture. Van de Mieroop points out that this interconnection created a specific religiously-shaded perspective on what might otherwise be considered 'non-religious' events concerning a city:

> The connection between god and city was thought to have been so close that the decline of a city was usually blamed on its abandonment by the patron deity. Thus, when the Sumerian cities were overrun by invaders from the east in the last years of the third millennium, the literary compositions described their fall in terms of the gods' departure, not as a military disaster.[49]

Van de Mieroop's description paints a picture which might seem familiar to many religious cultures throughout global human history and recalling Herodotus' curiosity at a *lack* of temples, points to the overwhelming association of religions developed in settled society with urban culture.

Although the connection appears clear, with regard to the case of Mesopotamian temple-building culture, it is worth noting the extent to which the worldview of this particular civilization, and thus religion, was dominated by urban settlement. Schneider and Van de Mieroop agree that the only information available in the archaeological record is of temples built

47 Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011), 66.
48 Ibid., 68.
49 Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 47.

within cities.[50] This clarifies the context of Mesopotamian sites located within the dataset of the project which has been introduced within this paper and emphasizes the significance of the correlation presented. Van de Mieroop goes further:

> ...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 acknowledgement 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.[51]

This last comment, that "urban bias is absolute" is strikingly appropriate to describe the connection between temple-building culture and the religions of settled societies. The question which cannot be answered by Mesopotamia, by virtue of such bias, is what effect might a lack of such building culture, temple or settlement, have on the development of other religions? In order to consider this question, we must identify such religions as do lack such a culture. Thus we next turn to the temple sites that have been controversially associated with ancient Iranian and Israelite religious cultures.

It is clear from *figure 2* that there are a small number of temples in Central Asia; I have labeled these as religiously 'BMAC' after the archaeological designation of the ancient region: Bactria-Margiana Archaeological Complex. Published reports from excavators including Viktor Sarianidi initially identified the temples present at these sites as 'fire temples'.[52] Archaeologist Michael Shenkar explains:

> ...the 'temple' of Togolok-1, Togolok-21, and the 'fire temple' of Gonur...were excavated in Margiana in Turkmenistan and dated around 1000 BCE. The excavator, V. Sarianidi, quite decisively declared that he had uncovered 'a proto-

50 Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 67–68; Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 215.
51 Van de Mieroop, *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*, 215.
52 Shenkar, "Temple Architecture in the Iranian World before the Macedonian Conquest," 170–171.

> Zoroastrian temple of the Indo-Iranian, Aryan tribes'. This conjecture was based on traces of fire worship and a libation cult (interpreted by Sarianidi as *haoma*), which led him to believe that ancient Margiana was actually the long-sought homeland of the prophet Zoroaster.[53]

Shenkar points out that these hasty assumptions "evoked a wave of criticism...use of the term 'proto-Zoroastrian' came under especial fire, since we do not know exactly when and where the great prophet of the ancient Iranian religion lived."[54] This controversial mislabelling does not diminish the archaeological reality of religiously significant buildings in the region, however, it does place them in a settled context and beyond conclusive determination as specifically 'Zoroastrian' or even 'ancient Iranian'.[55] These sites are the only potential evidence for the establishment of ancient Iranian temples prior to the development of the Zoroastrian fire temple, the earliest evidence of which dates to the Parthian period.[56]

Whether informed by the lack of extant archaeological evidence or textual data such as can be derived from the likes of Herodotus, it appears there is scholarly agreement on the absence of ancient Iranian ('Zoroastrian') temples for at least the early Achaemenid period.[57] Historian of religions Jenny Rose notes the lack of temple language within the scriptural tradition of the religion: "There is no Avestan term for a fire temple, although *Videvdad* refers to a 'lawful place' where fire may be set"[58] Rose's note is significant to our understanding of an agreement of three major sources of information (archaeology, internal scripture, and external texts) on the

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 171.
55 This is not to say that connections are impossible, as with David Stronach's analysis of the Median site of Tepe Nush-i-jan, it is difficult to conclude that there is no connection between sites bearing evidence of fire used in a ritual setting and a religion which would come to be known for such ritual activity. While likely, the arguments and evidence for such connections are far from conclusive.
56 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 48.
57 Ibid., 46–47; A.F. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 133)* (Brill, Leiden, 1997), 93–94; W. B. Fisher et al., *The Cambridge History of Iran.*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 695.
58 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 48.

nature of early Zoroastrian religion.[59] While it seems safe to conclude that the religion of the ancient Iranian did not develop a native temple-building culture, there are yet excavations to be undertaken and any number of ruins to unearth which may offer more conclusive temple sites. Michael Shenkar summarizes the situation of potential temples clearly: "Whereas the majority of Iranians worshipped under the open sky, closed temples, though they probably existed, were exceptional."[60] The possibility of temples does not change the reality that if religion among the ancient Iranians, of Central Asia and the Iranian plateau, was characterized by a propensity to worship within temples, there would be no argument over the identification of a meager few sites and no question of the significance of temple-building culture to the religion.

There is no disagreement over the prominent temple-building activities of any number of settled peoples in the greater Near East, including those we have discussed: Egypt and Mesopotamia. The specific correlation between areas of settlement and temple sites serves as the very explanation offered by scholar of Zoroastrianism Mary Boyce to address the lack of temple-building activities which is evidenced in early Zoroastrian religious culture: "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."[61] Boyce connects the mobility of the Indo-Iranians to this lack of temples and postulates the resulting cosmological implications. To Boyce the lack of temples within this mobile religion is not merely an indication of outdoor worship, but explains the nature of Indo-Iranian deities: "The vastness of

59 Jong, *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 133)*, 94.
60 Shenkar, "Temple Architecture in the Iranian World before the Macedonian Conquest," 178.
61 Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 22.

the steppes encouraged the Indo-Iranians to conceive their gods as cosmic, not local, divinities"[62] We have discussed the logic of developing temple-building culture as a product of religions that permeate societies which are themselves characterized by the construction of urban settlements. Boyce's comments suggest that just as differences between mobile and settled societies can be identified in economic or social systems so too differences in temple-building must be accompanied by identifiable differences in religious development. In order to identify some of these differences, we must compare the case of the ancient Iranians to the only other 'major' ancient religious society which is barely represented in the dataset here presented – that of the Israelites.

Despite the concentration of settlement and temple-building activity in the Levantine region or the scriptural narratives regarding Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, it is clear that there is no more archaeological certainty regarding the presence of Israelite temples in the Levant than among the ancient Iranians in Central Asia. Archaeologist Amihai Mazar, in *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, describes the situation of temple building prior to Solomon's Temple: "The archaeological evidence for Israelite religious practices during the period of the Judges is meager."[63] Archaeological architect George Roy Haslam Wright, to whom I deferred with regard to including Solomon's Temple in the dataset presented, reminds us that even Solomon's Temple is evidenced only in "ancient literary sources; various passages in the Bible principally..."[64] It is beyond the scope of this paper to negotiate the historicity of the Hebrew Bible, but it is sufficient to acknowledge that so far as the archaeological record is concerned with the sites which have

62 Mary Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, Textual Sources for the Study of Religion (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 9.
63 Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 348.
64 Wright, *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine*, 254.

been tenuously linked with Israelite religious culture are 'few and far between'. Wright summarizes the state of archaeological evidence regarding Israelite temples:

> Archaeology has supplied one piece of solid evidence. A temple was built in the important Judaean fortress of Arad on the Negev border. This is the most clearly established, in fact perhaps the only clearly established, Israelite temple since there is sufficient correspondence with biblical prescriptions to indicate that it should be dedicated to the Yahweh cult...What can be said is what has been universally observed in these various discussions. The Arad Temple, except for the presence of a *debir* and the East orientation, has no connection with the plan of the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem. Instead it is interesting to note that it derives ultimately from the aboriginal temple type, the *Breitraum* village-house plan, which was the ruling form, indeed virtually the sole form in Chalcolithic—EB times and gave the basis of temple design until well on into the second millennium.[65]

Wright's observation both confirms the presence of a temple which can be linked to Israelite religion and suggests that its building was an adaptation of temple architecture native to surrounding (non-Israelite) settlements. This is an important observation which requires additional examination in order to understand the situation of temple building culture in Israelite religion.

Wright's comments on the Arad temple (9th century BCE) offer not just a description but, in explanation of the potentially complicated origins of this temple, acknowledgment of the circumstances which would make this site unique in Israelite culture. The rarity of Israelite temples (within the given parameters) clearly necessitates consideration of and explanation for any which might be identified from within the archaeological record. It is clear that regarding temple-building activities the Israelites were not prolific, but Wright's observations on both Arad and Solomon's Temple suggest that temple-building was not completely foreign to Israelite culture. An important question is whether or not these temples derived from a native practice of

65 Ibid., 252–253.

temple-based worship among the Israelites or are the innovative product of assimilated temple-building culture which we have evidenced as prolific across the Levantine region. In considering the narratives around Solomon's Temple and its position with the Hebrew Bible, we can understand the potential for temple-building culture to have been developed as innovation and assimilation rather than stemming naturally from a practice already present within the established religion of the Israelites.

The connection of the first Temple of Israel to the burgeoning monarchy in the scriptural narrative appears evidence of innovation, as both are changes which mark the monarchic era apart in the Hebrew Bible. Wright describes the intersection of these religious and political shift with regard to the city of Jerusalem: "So far as can be judged from these sources Solomon's Temple was designed to serve the needs of a newly constituted political regime with a rather unusual religious sanction...Whatever the regional origin of the cult may have been it was not from Jerusalem, the connection with Jerusalem being avowedly one of political history."[66] This is important to understanding that Solomon's Temple is inextricably linked to the political situation of Jerusalem – just as temple-building culture in Mesopotamia developed (according to Van de Mieroop), in part, as a result of political or civic functions on the part of religious buildings. In his recorded Hebrew Bible course at Harvard University, biblical historian Shaye J. D. Cohen (roughly transcribed from the video) extrapolates on this interconnection to explain the division of the monarchy:

> Northern tribes break off because they don't like the monarchy; they don't like this dynastic monarchy; and they probably don't like the temple. Because building a temple, a fancy-shmancy building, as Solomon does, this represents, also, an innovation. In the wilderness we have a memory of this tent, this portable tent shrine, when the Israelites come to the land of Canaan, or when their Israelite

66 Ibid., 254.

> identity emerges, they have various local shrines, including the ark at one shrine in Shiloh...But it doesn't occur to anybody to build a fancy building. The king, however, becomes king and then immediately wants to build a building. So I don't know which one you're rejecting first, but you wind up rejecting both. The northern tribes see both of these as innovations: 'we don't want dynastic monarchy and we don't want a temple.' And the Judean monarchy has both. In the eyes of the narrator of Kings, that's what makes the Judean monarchy legitimate—it has the one and only legitimate temple and it has the one and only legitimate royal line. But in the eyes of the northern Israelites, apparently, these two very points are the ones that make it illegitimate, that make it: innovations, new, untraditional...And the northern tribes break off.[67]

Here, Cohen makes an unmistakable link between the interconnected innovations of dynastic monarchy, temple-building activity, and the breaking off of the Northern Israelites. His comments highlight the very real probability that not all Israelites would have been happy with change to traditional forms of either religious worship or governance. Whether the historical reality of Cohen's assessment is accurate or not, it is reasonable to assume that the institutionalization of innovative political and religious changes would not have been popularly assimilated without question.

The explanation as to why the Israelite religion might not have developed a native temple-building culture is identical to that applied to the ancient Iranians: theirs was a mobile society. Biblical scholar Menahem Haran explains: "Temples make their appearance in Israel's life only after the settlement in Canaan."[68] Like many scholars, Haran points to the biblical narratives of the Patriarchs as identifying earliest Israelite society as mobile: "Temples, however, are still beyond the ken of the Patriarchs, as is also priesthood, since in semi-nomadic

67 Shaye J.D. Cohen and Harvard University, *Lecture 16: Saul, Samuel, David, Solomon*, Podcast Audio, The Hebrew Bible, accessed November 20, 2015, https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/the-hebrew-bible/id819616149?ign-mpt=uo%3D8 Timestamp: 44:05-45:35.

68 Menahem. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford [England]: Clarendon Press, 1977), 17–18.

societies both temples and priesthood usually have no place."[69] In his footnote he continues plainly: "This is the straightforward reason for the absence of temples in the Genesis stories and in the social background of the Patriarchs. That the society of the Patriarchs still lives under nomadic or semi-nomadic conditions."[70]

Although we have discussed the correlation between settled societies and temple-building religious culture, the correlation of the lack of native temple-building culture (particularly among the ancient Iranians and Israelites) appears especially useful in examining the potential connections between ecological landscapes and the development of ancient religions. What struck Herodotus as notable, this lack of temples, warrants examination, particularly given the connections between these two religious cultures, which mark them more alike to one another than to neighboring societies. In addition to a similar lack of temple-building culture (and the associated observations of worshipping outdoors), the ancient Iranians and Israelites are both said to have come from long established mobile pastoral roots. Also the religions of the Israelites and ancient Iranians would become what could be considered, arguably, two of the 'original' monotheistic religions of the ancient world. It is difficult to deny the possibility that these three features – a lack of temple-building culture, a society constructed around mobility rather than settlement[71], and a monotheistic worldview – are intrinsically interlinked.

It would seem logical that, given the necessary lack of permanent building culture associated with mobile societies, the development of outdoor (or non-temple) worship is natural;

69 Ibid., 17.
70 Ibid. fn: 7.
71 I use the term 'mobile society', after anthropologist Michael Frachetti, to include the various societies which have been constructed around the direct or indirect management of herd animals in response to agriculturally marginal landscapes and acknowledge the range of modes of mobility which might have characterized each of these at different periods of time.

among other variables, it might be this aspect which offered the earliest kernels of belief in a religion which would facilitate the development of the monotheistic worldviews we might identify in these cultures. It is reasonable to consider the usefulness of mobile, universally accessible, deities to the religions of mobile societies. In order to understand the significance of the connections between the lack of temple-building culture, mobile society, and monotheism, we must understand the lineage of development of a monotheistic worldview from the religions of the ancient Iranians and Israelites to to Zoroastrianism and Judaism. It is the development of this worldview which, like the development of mobile society, took place within the context of an agriculturally marginal landscape.

Chapter 2

On the Proto-Monotheistic Roots of Zoroastrianism and Judaism

"I won't look further than my own backyard"[72]

Egyptologist Jan Assmann, in his book *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, describes a trend of modern scholarly interest in monotheism which he suggests is linked to the perception of violence perpetrated by, and against, monotheistic religions: "The times are over when religion could be viewed as the 'opium of the people.' Nowadays, in the hands and minds of certain movements, religion appears as the 'dynamite of the people'...during the past fifteen years monotheism has become one of the most hotly debated topics in theological and intellectual circles, at least in the Western world."[73] It is not just the nature and impact of monotheism, but questions of origin and source which appear to inspire such research and it is difficult to deny that much of the research on the subject focuses solely on biblical monotheism, assuming as Assmann does, that "...monotheism is a Jewish achievement."[74] Theophile James Meek, scholar of the Old Testament, summarizes this bias in *Hebrew Origins*: "...with no people in ancient times did that tendency [toward monotheism] attain such full expression as it did with the Hebrews, and the question immediately arises, whence and how came that monotheism?"[75] This chapter will consider Meek's questions of "whence and how" regarding both Jewish and Zoroastrian monotheism. I suggest that it was the respective monotheistic worldviews of ancient

72 Victor Fleming, *The Wizard of Oz* (Warner Home Video [distributor], 2005).
73 Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, 5.
74 Ibid., 7.
75 Theophile James Meek, *Hebrew Origins.*, Rev. ed. (New York,: Harper, 1950), 184.

Iranian and Israelite religions that was refined in the development of the recognizable forms of Zoroastrianism and Judaism respectively.

In order to address the question of whence came monotheism, as it is associated not only with Judaism, but also Zoroastrianism, we must understand what constitutes this 'type' of religion. Historically there are many ways in which religions have been categorized[76] and it is beyond the scope of this writing to negotiate the merits of various taxonomic structures which might best describe the boxes into which these monotheistic religions fit. Though it seems overly simple, we might consider biblical scholar Mark S. Smith's observation to serve as a reasonable *communis opinio*: "...in discussing monotheism, one must exclude the reality of other gods...it is preferable to restrict the discussion to examples that clearly articulate monotheism, not those that simply exclude veneration of other deities."[77] If this definition is accepted with regard to modern Judaism and Zoroastrianism, one can be fairly safe in asserting that the religions are monotheistic. This is not to say that both religions can be said to express monotheism in the same way. For example, differences between characterization of the divine and recognition of other spiritual agents differentiate these two not just from each other but from other monotheistic religions, particularly Christianity and Islam. In order to understand the complex religious systems typically characterized by categories such as 'monotheism' or 'polytheism', we must separate the conception of a religious worldview from the numerical definition which are often lumped in the shorthand of those '-isms'.

76 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1–8.

77 Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 153.

For our purposes, it is important to consider that just as Zoroastrianism and Judaism express monotheism differently in the modern period, we could expect that their respective antecedents would be also differentiated. It is in comparing these antecedents, the ancient Iranian and Israelite societies respectively, that we might better understand characteristics of a monotheistic worldview which includes differences between mono- and polytheisms with regard to the distance between the supreme deity of a pantheon and human society. It is beyond the argument of this work to consider the various details of differentiation between monotheistic and polytheistic worldviews; for present purposes, I suggest this specific focus on the relationship between a supreme deity and human beings as a short hand for identifying the religious frameworks that go beyond the numbers game attached to the prefixes *mono*- and *poly*-. It is useful to consider a working definition of monotheistic worldview as one characterized by flatter divine hierarchy than might be found in a polytheistic worldview, and therefore comprising fewer degrees of separation between the supreme deity and the lowest human..

As we shall discuss, an example of this difference might yet be understood numerically as it seems that religions, such as those of the ancient Iranians and Israelites, with a (proto-)monotheistic worldview can be associated with a smaller pantheon than a polytheistic worldview.[78] Interestingly, although it is beyond the scope of this research there appears to be a potential correlation between the number of levels in the hierarchies of humans and deities – as if the society of the gods reflects the power dynamics governing the society of human beings. With regard to the religions of the ancient Iranians and Israelites, if we can understand how these two are similar to one another, yet different from other societies in the greater Near East (with

78 Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:22; Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 151.

religions constructed around a polytheistic worldview), we can comprehend the religious systems (and their monotheistic worldviews) which would develop into religions characterized by monotheism. We shall begin with an exploration of the religion of the ancient Iranians because, as Assmann notes, the "...histories of God, of Israelite religion, and of biblical literature are fields that have been richly cultivated."[79]

The religion that would become Zoroastrianism belonged to what historian of religion Jenny Rose describes as "a common linguistic and literary tradition, including that of oral religious poetry, [which] is evidenced in themes, concepts, terminology and the poetic syntax of the *Gathas* that echo those of the *Rig Veda*...plac[ing] them initially within an Indo-Iranian continuum, rather than an Ancient Near Eastern mindset."[80]. This linguistic and ideological relationship between Vedic religion and early Zoroastrianism gives insight into a common heritage which allows us to trace the divergence in thought between ancient Iranians and early Indians. Scholar of Zoroastrianism Mary Boyce relates the perception of these differences in order to describe the sensibility of each religion: "For a long while it was held that abundance meant a greater tenacity, and that the testimony of the Vedas was to be regarded as superior; but further investigations have shown that in some respects the sparser Avestan [i.e. Iranian] material is more reliable. 'The Vedic evidence is valuable for its richness, the Avestan evidence for its fidelity.'"[81] Boyce's comments on the Zoroastrian scriptures or "Avestan material" characterizes the source material for reconstructing the religion of the ancient Iranians as reliable in contributing to our understanding of both the early Zoroastrian and earlier Indo-Iranian religions. In order to parse what commonalities between the Indic Vedas and the Iranian Avesta might

79 Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, 3.
80 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 13.
81 Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:17–18.

reveal in terms of aspects of an earlier Indo-Iranian religion, it is important to take note of the ancient relationship between what would become one of the modern world's few 'major' polytheistic religions and what was one of the two 'major' monotheistic religions of the ancient world.

It is beyond the scope of this investigation to delve too deeply into the complex and fascinating relationship between the Zoroastrian and Hindu traditions, but it is important to acknowledge how this connection informs our understanding of the lineage of development from the Indo-Iranian religion, through the ancient Iranian religion, to Zoroastrianism. Boyce describes the influential legacy of the Indo-Iranian religious heritage,

> Many divine beings are honoured in the Avesta, and probably the original pantheon of Iranian gods is very largely represented there...a few of the greatest were worshipped also by the Vedic Indians. These particular divinities must have been venerated for countless generations by the Indo-Iranians in their nomad days for their cults to have survived in this manner long after the two peoples had parted and made their slow ways to new and very different homes...[82]

If the roots of the pre-Iranian religion are as strong as Boyce describes, then it would seem a great feat indeed to throw off such polytheism for monotheistic innovation. It seems more likely that there existed in that Indo-Iranian religion the seed of a sort of proto-monotheism which, in the case of the ancient Iranians was allowed development in the time after the two groups diverged, but perhaps, in the case of the Indians, was not given the same expression as they crossed the Indus River Valley.

In order to shed light on the formative influence of this proto-monotheism, we must consider two specific aspects of the Zoroastrian expression of monotheism which differentiate it from that of Judaism: the first, as described by Rose, is "...a system of ethical and cosmological

82 Ibid., 1:22.

opposition..."[83]; the second, as Boyce puts it, is that "the ancient...*asuras* [gods] all personify abstract concepts."[84]. Many of these aspects have clear roots in the Indo-Iranian religion and while the first understanding of Zoroastrian monotheism has been dismissed by some biblical scholars as a dualism which undermines the power of a singular deity[85], the second expression appears closely connected to modern (Christian) conceptions of 'high monotheism'.[86] Although we might identify each of these concepts with some biblical analogue, as I have here, such interpretations appear as a clunky and reductionist attempt to distill the intricate worldview to which they belong.

It is important to consider each of these aspects a bit further in order to understand both the Zoroastrian expression of monotheism and the indelible marks of its early Indo-Iranian heritage on such an expression. Perhaps the most concise example of an Indo-Iranian deity from which we can understand this construction of abstract-concept-as-god is Mitra. Indologist Paul Thieme writes: "*Mitra* turns out to be...not a god of the sun or some other phenomenon of nature, conceived as a divinity, but the personification of this sacred concept 'contract, treaty,' designated in the *Rigveda* and in the *Avesta* by the appellative noun *mitra-/miϴra-*."[87] In contrast to the Mesopotamian sun-god Shamash, who eventually came to be the god of justice as well[88], Mitra *is* the power of the contract, bond, or treaty. This construction brings to mind assertions for the 'natural' dominance of 'higher monotheism' made by such early religious theorists as Tylor

83 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 20.
84 Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:23.
85 Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 166.
86 E. O. James, *The Worship of the Sky-God.*, Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion, 00006 (London: Athlone Press, 1963), 3.
87 Paul Thieme, "Mithra in the Avesta," in *Etudes Mithriaques: Actes Du 2e Congrès International, Téhéran, Du 1er Au 8 Septembre 1975.*, Première Série, Actes de Congrès ; v. 4; Acta Iranica ; 17. (Téhéran: Bibliothèque Pahlavi, 1978), 501.
88 Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 55.

and Frazer.[89] Boyce suggests as much in her comment that "...the high gods of the Indo-Iranians already resembled the Deity of monotheistic religions, and foreshadowed in their greatness the dignity of Zoroaster's own concept of the supreme Lord."[90] This is key to understanding that Indo-Iranian and ancient Iranian religions served as more than just loose inspiration in the lineage of the development of Zoroastrianism: it was the core which directly informed the ideological distillations and innovations that were spun around it.

Another Indo-Iranian concept, that of "cosmological opposition," which can poorly be described in western terms of 'good vs. evil', reflects the construction of what Boyce describes as "...a universal principle of what ought to be, [in Avestan] 'asha', [in Sanskrit] 'rta', variously translated as 'order, righteousness, truth'."[91] This idea underlies the framework of both Zoroastrian and Vedic religion, but Rose outlines how the understanding of the concept then developed differently within the two emerging religions:

> In the Gathas the opposite of *asha* is not a simple negation, such as is the case with Rig Vedic *anrta*. The contrary ethos to *asha* is *druj* – the deception that brings chaos to the good, ordered creations of Ahura Mazda. *Druj* confuses the true nature of the working of the world, so that one is unable to make the right choices, as did the *daevas*, the unnamed 'false or erroneous gods', who, in confusion, made bad choices in opposition to *asha*. *Druj* is usually translated as 'the Lie' in the sense of a deception or a misrepresentation of reality.[92]

If we are to attempt to interpret this religious construction, the "cosmological opposition" is better described in terms of 'truth vs. lie' rather than 'good vs. evil'. It is cogent to this discussion to suggest a dissociation between this opposition, of *asha* and *druj*, and what theologian Patrick D. Miller calls "[t]he conflict between the 'children of light' and the 'children of darkness' in

89 Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 47–48.
90 Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:22–23.
91 Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, 9.
92 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 18.

apocalyptic thinking..."[93] Commenting on the effects of such dualism in the Israelite religion, he suggests that this conflict "...was a further indication of an incipient dualistic way of thinking that served to undermine the integration of divine power in Yahweh of Israel without, however, fully undoing it."[94] While Miller's comments might well apply to dualism in a biblical context, the ancient Iranian concept of opposition could support the integrative power of the singular deity of Zoroastrianism.[95] It seems more likely, given the historical penchant of humans for religious syncretism, that the integration of multiple deities into one would seem facilitated by a structure which would identify unwanted religious activities as 'false' or 'lie' rather than 'evil'. This concept lends itself readily to the language used in expressing the regard of one religious group to another: one may not regard the religion to which one does not adhere as 'evil' but as 'false' relative to one's own 'true' religion. This is one connection between Zoroastrianism and its antecedent Iranian religion which cannot be dismissed as unrelated to the direct development of the former from the latter. In order to understand another connection, we must explore the significance of constructing deities of abstract concepts.

The process which occupies our current discussion is that which lead from the apparently (numerically) polytheistic religious system of the Indo-Iranians and ancient Iranians to the expression of monotheism in Zoroastrianism. It is a reasonable step from Boyce's suggestion that the "...high gods of the Indo-Iranians already resembled the Deity of monotheistic religions..."[96] to conceiving of a monotheistic worldview, which characterized the pre-Zoroastrian religion of the ancient Iranians, that directly facilitated the development of the

93 Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (London: SPCK ;, 2000), 28.
94 Ibid.
95 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 16.
96 Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:22–23.

specific monotheism of followers of Zarathushtra. Like Mitra, the name and conception of the supreme deity of Zoroastrianism is fixed in the abstract:

> *Mazda* is a cognate agent noun from the compound *man* + *dā*, and is most accurately translated as 'the one who keeps mental track' or 'the one who is wise/knowledgeable'. The other epithet that often appears alongside *mazda* in the *Gathas* is *ahura*. One etymology for *ahura* is from a verb meaning 'to engender'. The most accurate translation of the two-part name Ahura Mazda is 'Wise Lord'.[97]

Boyce speculates that the specific religious focus on Ahura Mazda is deep rooted in the Indo-Iranian religion and it is this worship that continued throughout the ancient Iranian religion directly into modern Zoroastrianism.[98] Boyce observes: "It seems therefore that in pagan days Mazdā was so regularly spoken of and invoked with his own name and the title Ahura that these became fused together in time to form a single appellation."[99] Thus it is not difficult to plot the trajectory of a stable conception of this deity from the ancient Iranian religion to Zoroastrianism and would suggest that whatever worldview contextualized the construction of Ahura Mazda in the former religion could not have been so foreign to the latter. It is the apparent 'organic' development from one religion to the other that suggests the implausibility of a narrative of a monotheistic Zarathustra 'overthrowing' the polytheism of the ancient Iranian religion.

It seems clear from this case that the development of Zoroastrianism was inextricable from its roots in the religion of the ancient Iranians, a religion, itself, partly derived from the religion of the Indo-Iranians. It seems unreasonable to assume, given this narrow lineage, that an established polytheistic worldview could have been thrown out in favor of an unfamiliar monotheistic one. It is much more plausible that the worldview which characterized the religion of the ancient Iranians was monotheistic in nature. To scholars like E. O. James this conclusion

97 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 12.
98 Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:24.
99 Ibid., 1:49.

is too strong because the characteristics of supreme deities among polytheistic religions so closely resemble monotheistic conceptions of the divine that, in the words of Egyptologist Erik Hornung, "[f]rom a modern, strictly logical point of view, it would take only one small step to turn this unique god, this god of all gods, into a single one who tolerated no other deity besides himself."[100] It is cogent to our discussion to consider the case of a well-established polytheistic "god of all gods" to understand the inextricable relationship between the conception of a deity and its context within a particular religion. Thus, in order to understand the significance of a specifically mono- or polytheistic worldview to conceptions of a supreme deity we next must turn to a brief examination of the Mesopotamian deity An/Anu.[101]

In his glossary of Sumerian names in *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, Assyriologist Jeremy A. Black describes An as "the supreme deity, very distant from the affairs of humans."[102] In a very concise way, this statement sums up the treatment and functions of An/Anu in Mesopotamian religion. It is important to consider whether or not there is a natural path of evolution or development from supreme deity of a polytheistic religion to singular god of a monotheistic one. The characterization of An (known as Anu in Akkadian texts) resembles that of monotheistic deities in a number of ways: he is universally recognizable, ever-present, and impossibly distant. It is the functions of the An/Anu character within a variety of literary and archaeological sources that we must briefly examine in order to understand how he exhibits these characteristics and exemplifies the reality of ultimate power in his removal from the daily concerns of life in both the heavens and earth.

100Erik. Hornung, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 21.
101Sumerian: An; Akkadian: Anu
102 Jeremy A. Black, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer* (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2004), 360.

Mesopotamian texts reveal the character and position of An/Anu to be consistently presented as passive, powerful, and transcendentally present. Within the mythological literature there are the three forms in which An/Anu is made present in the various myths: as a source of power, as distant bystander, or as a discussing, delegating superior. The name of An/Anu appears in a large number of myths in extant Sumerian and Akkadian available corpora, though this is frequently in the abstract as he is referenced by other characters present in the narrative. When he appears directly he is either observing action from afar or interacting primarily to delegate actions to a subordinate deity. There are few ways in which An/Anu functions within the mythological texts but each of these remind the reader of his position of power: so great he need not be subject to the struggles of life. We can see a similar trend in An/Anu's appearance and treatment in iconography. Just as the deity's Sumerian written name serves as a generic marker for the divine, the other symbols associated with An/Anu are so often used as markers of divinity that they cannot be assumed to indicate the visual presence of An/Anu in Mesopotamian art and architecture. Finally, it is important to note the presence of An/Anu in temple-site dedications, for it is within these (or lack thereof) we find data suggesting that Mesopotamians, in practice, did not consider the ritual worship of this deity an integral part of religious life. In a sample of 37 temple sites listed by Seton Lloyd in *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia* and Anton Moortgat in *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia*, the meager number of temples dedicated to An/Anu *supports* the characterization of the 'supreme deity' as distant and unapproachable.[103] Out of these 37 identifiable sites (nearly half of which are dated to the Sumerian period), there are only two temples dedicated to the deity, and one of those is shared with a dedication to Adad, the

103 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); Anton Moortgat, *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia; the Classical Art of the Near East.* (London,: Phaidon, 1969).

storm/rain god. It is clear that despite his position as supreme deity of Sumerian civilization, the sky god was regarded as less actively involved in earthly functions that other deities.

To some, such passive authority, distance, and transcendent power might appear sufficient to describe a monotheistic deity, however, E. O. James suggests: "To be effective, gods, whatever their rank and status, must be ritually accessible and efficacious, immanent as well as transcendent."[104] This is important to contextualizing a deity like An/Anu, whose distant authority and passive functionality provide the ultimate example of power which can only exist in a highly populated (and hierarchically vertical) religious system in which the various needs of all levels of human society can be addressed by any number of other deities. This point is emphasized by James:

> Everywhere it would seem there is always a small minority to whom the purely transcendental aspects of religion make a ready appeal, but for the majority it is only, or at least chiefly, at certain times and seasons, such as birth, marriage and death, the solstices, sowing and harvest, that the religious emotion is aroused to any very appreciable extent.[105]

In a context such as Mesopotamian religion, which understood the purpose of human life as primarily working on behalf of the deities, it is not surprisingly that, within the hierarchy of life-forms, there would be a natural inverse correlation between power and work. An/Anu exemplifies the extreme opposite to the average human, on such a scale: whereas the latter must work constantly and live 'at-effect' in the world, the 'supreme deity' is so removed from the concerns of work that his presence is best understood as theoretical rather than concrete. It is within this context that the construction of An/Anu as a supreme deity make sense and it is within this system that he is able to 'function' as a passive, powerful, and transcendent being. If

104 James, *The Worship of the Sky-God.*, 9.
105 Ibid., 8.

we are to consider a theoretical path which might lead a "god of all gods" from a native polytheism to the position as sole deity of some monotheism then we must imagine a revolution so drastic that the treatment and characterization of a deity such as An/Anu would be fundamentally changed – so much as to hardly be recognizable. While such radical innovation is not impossible (as we shall see in the case of Egypt), it is reasonable to consider it improbable. Recalling our examination of the religion of the ancient Iranians, from its influence on the Zoroastrian religion, it seems implausible that the development of the latter (with its expression of monotheism) was the result of such a drastic revolution. In order to look beyond this one example, we must next examine the case of the Israelites.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the vast scholarship on the subject of biblical monotheism there are any number of disagreements over, and conceptions of, the religion of the Israelites.[106] As with Zoroastrianism, it is reasonable to begin with the information we do have: Judaism as a modern religion which has long been the paradigm of monotheism, alongside evidence of an antecedent religion which was not identical. Mark S. Smith pragmatically warns against indulging "...claims of 'practical monotheism,' 'de facto monotheism,' 'virtual monotheism,' or even 'monolatry' [which] overlook the biblical evidence to the contrary, retrojecting onto 'biblical Israel' a singularity of divinity that the Bible itself does not claim for ancient Israel."[107] Smith's concern is valid given the history of biblical scholarship and it is not the purpose of this study to seek evidence in favor of the 'purity' of monotheism from the earliest roots of this religion. Instead, this work is aimed at deconstructing inappropriately strict categories of numeric mono- and polytheism, disentangling worldviews from divine head-counts, and

106 Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, 46.
107 Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, 149.

attempting to understand the logical roots of such historically unordinary religions.[108] It is within this framework that we will examine the potential relationship between Jewish monotheism and the religion of the Israelites.

Of the things which can be concretely stated about the religion of the Israelites, the significance of the deity Yahweh is key.[109] In order to understand the magnitude of this significance in the religion, we must note, as Smith writes:

> In reconstructing the history of Israelite religion, it is important to neither overemphasize the importance of deities other than Yahweh nor diminish their significance. On the one hand, it would appear that each stage of Israelite religion knew relatively few deities....On the other hand, the Israelite evidence should be neither minimized nor ignored. The data indicates a significant range of religious practice within ancient Israel.[110]

Smith's comments suggest a middle path which considers that the deity who would become the singular divinity (Yahweh), and other deities, are contextualized within the religion. For our purposes it is important to understand how, like the religion of the Indo-Iranians, the worship of multiple deities does not preclude a monotheistic worldview which could be refined into the sort of monotheistic religious system we can recognize today.[111] Assmann identifies a distinction between interpretations of biblical monotheism: 'exclusivity of belonging' and 'exclusivity of existence'.[112] It is the former which was particularly emphasized in the Israelite religion (and which may lead to the latter) as exemplified by the development of the idea of a covenantal relationship between the deity and the people. It is within an examination of this specifically

108 Hornung, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, 94.
109 Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, 1.
110 Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 146.
111 Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, 5.
112 Assmann, *Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism*, 3–4.

concept of the ‘Covenant’ that we can begin to understand the relationship between Israelite religion and Judaism.

Assmann emphasizes the significance of 'exclusivity of belonging' and suggests that the presence of other deities does not detract from the significance of Yahweh – rather their existence bolsters the importance of this belonging.[113] In short order he draws a parallel between the ideas of 'one God' and 'chosen people':

> Paradoxically, the implied existence of other gods is of fundamental importance to the basic idea of biblical monotheism. The opposition of 'God' and 'gods' reflects the opposition of Israel and the nations (*goyim*, or gentiles), and the difference of uniqueness that sets 'God' apart from the 'gods' reflects the difference of being among the chosen or choseness and of belonging within the *b'rît* ('covenant') that sets Israel apart from the nations. In the same sense that the idea of the chosen people presupposes the existence of other peoples, the idea of the 'one God' (*YHWH aechad*) presupposes the existence of other gods.[114]

Assman suggests that the oppositional position of the Israelite deity in relation to other deities does not organically detract from the significance of Yahweh. It is possible that Assmann's implication is accurate and the 'exclusivity of belonging' informed the development of the concept of 'exclusivity of existence' which, while giving up the acknowledgment of other deities retained the conception of a 'chosen people' in the face of political opposition. Smith contextualizes this sort of henotheistic relationship within variations of worship:

> As the interaction of Baal worship and Yahwistic cult attests, Yahwism could vary from coexistence or identification with other deities to outright rejection of them. In this case, polytheistic Yahwism is indicated. The assimilation of El and the asherah symbol into the cult of Yahweh points to Yahwism's Canaanite heritage. At some early point, Israel perhaps knew a stage of ditheism in addition to its devotion to Yahweh.[115]

113 Ibid., 4.
114 Ibid., 3.
115 Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, 146.

This is important to our understanding of the development of the sense of 'exclusivity of belonging' not as a religious development born of a polytheistic system like others in the Near East, but instead as natural product of a monotheistic worldview (within a proto-monotheistic religious structure) from which an idea such as the Covenant[116] might logically emerge.

The use of terms such as 'natural product' and 'logically emerge' might appear to some as ignorant of the propagandistic push toward the strict monotheism that is associated with post-exilic Judaism.[117] Our inquiry into 'whence' came such a type of religion must address not merely the clear connections between the recognizably monotheistic Zoroastrianism and Judaism and their respective proto-monotheistic antecedents, but also the processes by which such change could have occurred. It is clear from the presence of aspects of ancient Iranian religion in Zoroastrianism that such roots are strong enough to suppose an organic development from the former to the latter. This could plausibly be considered a refinement of a monotheistic worldview from within proto-monotheistic system, rather than the throwing off of an established polytheistic structure. But what of the Israelites? Was the transition into Jewish monotheism the product of a revolution which overthrew an established polytheistic religion (which up to that point had been integral to the identity of a people)? In order to answer these questions, we must examine the rhetorical movement which could be argued to have driven such a revolution.

One of the issues that arises in attempting to address the movement from the Israelite religion to something resembling Judaism as understood today is the question of timing. Smith observes that many scholars mark the Exile of the Judean elite to Babylon as an appropriate date for this shift, for it accompanied and catalyzed various social and cultural changes thus making

116 After common usage of 'the Temple' and 'the Exile' to denote the specific 'Covenant of God' described in the Hebrew scripture.

117 Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, 154.

logical an assumption that such religious innovation would follow as well.[118] Smith quotes biblical historian Baruch Halpern regarding this date:

> B. Halpern rightly suggests that it is unlikely that Second Isaiah was an innovator of monotheistic discourse: 'Had Second Isaiah, Cyrus' Judahite spin-doctor, not had Jeremiah's (and Deuteronomy's) voice crying on his own arrival from the steppe, his explicit monotheistic claims would have fallen on deaf ears, and probably set them ringing to boot.' Monotheistic rhetoric probably emerged shortly before the exile.[119]

While Smith's conclusion to Halpern's comments does not minimize the power of an event such as the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians to catalyze religious change it does suggest that the shift within the Israelite religion did not begin as a result of the Exile. It is also worth noting that while there is little doubt that the Exile and Babylonian period probably had a strong effect on the development of early Judaism, it is difficult to conceive of that effect as facilitating radical change away from the established religion of the Israelites. Given the catastrophic loss, it is more reasonable to assume that, in seeking the grounding of normalcy, familiarity, and identity which is natural in the grief process[120] Israelites in exile would be more likely to embrace those elements of their religion that had long been integral to their religious culture and social identification.[121] Biblical scholar Carleen Mandolfo identifies this effect as underlying the utilization of the prophetic marriage metaphor in the Hebrew Bible: "...the marriage metaphor tapped into Israelite men's deepest anxieties. Concomitantly, it spoke to a need to establish a stable national identity...It makes sense that the social chaos Judah was experiencing prior to 587 B.C.E. would result in a metaphor that reflects the need to control chaos on the national level by

118 Ibid., 165.
119 Ibid., 153–154.
120 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia,"* ed. Leticia Glocer Fiorini et al., Contemporary Freud : Turning Points and Critical Issues (London: Karnac, 2009), 19–20.
121 Interestingly, many of these elements probably have roots in the mobile society of the Israelites before the development of Temple-centered worship. This may have played a key role in providing a sense of religious identity among the exiled Israelites and may be similar to the function of Judaism in the later Jewish diaspora.

appealing to the personal."[122] This idea is important to identifying the motivation for why Israelites in exile might embrace a shift to Jewish monotheism: even a modest understanding of human modes of grieving suggests support for a notion that the Israelites faced with such loss would not be moving away from the familiar, but toward it.

It is tempting to imagine, given the traditional Christian narratives of conversion and revelation, that a prophet like Zarathushtra, for example, could bring religious change, based on divinely inspired truth, to any people regardless of historical situation. In reality, successful revolutions require popular support and even the most compelling argument must find ready minds open to its message in order to take root and blossom. Smith explains the significance of rhetorical pushes toward Jewish monotheism and its context in a populace for which it is a natural development within familiar bounds:

> Monotheistic statements do not herald a new age of religion but explain Yahwistic monolatry in absolute terms. As rhetoric, monotheism reinforced Israel's exclusive relationship with its deity. Monotheism is a kind of inner community discourse establishing a distance from outsiders; it uses the language of Yahweh's exceptional divine status beyond and in all reality ('there are no other deities but the Lord') to absolutize Yahweh's claim on Israel and to express Israel's ultimate fidelity to Yahweh. Monotheism is therefore not a new cultural step but expresses Israel's relationship with Yahweh.[123]

This final thought is integral to our discussion: "Monotheism is therefore not a new cultural step"; it supports a notion of proto-monotheism as a direct antecedent to more familiar monotheism. It is reasonably clear that, like the Indo-Iranian and ancient Iranian religions, the beliefs and practices of the Israelites directly informed and facilitated the development of monotheistic Judaism. The point is made and the evidence supports the suggestion, but it is

122 Carleen Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations*, Semeia Studies ; No. 58 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 31.
123 Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*, 154.

important to our discussion to consider one additional case. In order to emphasize this final notion that such religious developments must find a ready and willing reception to take hold, we must examine the case of the so-called 'Heretic King' of Egypt: Akhenaten.

The case of Akhenaten is a clear example of a situation in which even the overwhelming social, political, religious, economic, and military powers of a divine monarch could not sustain the change brought by the sort of grand religious revolution that would 'overthrow' an established polytheistic system in favor of monotheism. Erik Hornung describes the unique position of the Pharaoh among other religious figures:

> Indeed, Akhenaten was the only founder of a religion to have all the instruments of state power at his disposal, and we should assume that he employed them ruthlessly to realize his ideas. Only underground opposition was possible, and 'lamentations' gave expression to a widespread sentiment among the common people and the former elite.[124]

Vital to our discussion is the fact that despite the overwhelming power of Akhenaten, including his divine status within the established religion of Egypt[125], his monotheistic 'revolution' died with him. There are two specific features of this religious project which could offer light on our understanding of the development of monotheism: the first is the process by which Akhenaten executed his revolution; the second is the religious response after its collapse.

A casual survey of ancient Egyptian history reveals the immense power of the state and the Pharaohs who ruled it. It is the exercise of this power, in the form of monumental building projects, which has characterized western conceptions of the ancient empire.[126] Hornung explains that "...in the case of Akhenaten, we note curiously little activity aside from his building project at Karnak. One senses that he was expending all his energy on the formulation of his

124 Hornung, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, 49–50.
125 Ibid., 26.
126 Ibid., 34.

'teaching,' his attempt to remodel the world."[127] While the process by which the Pharaoh developed his religion on a personal level is lost to history[128] we do have some sense of the official processes by which he elevated the Aten to a monotheistic status foreign to the long-established Egyptian religion.[129] Archaeologist Donald B. Redford summarizes results of these processes:

> Even the casual observer will be struck first and foremost by the negative thrust of Akhenaten's reform of the cultus. He excised from the traditional religion much more than he added...The sun god Akhenaten championed, of course, enjoyed no mythology; after the early months of the reign he was not even permitted an anthropomorphic depiction...The marvelously complex world of the Beyond is banished from the minds of men. No truth can come from anyone but the king, and his truth is entirely apodictic: no gods but the sun, no processional temples, no cultic acts but the rudimentary offering, no cult images, no anthropomorphisms, no myths, no concept of the ever-changing manifestation of a divine world.[130]

This is important to our understanding of how narratives of abandoning established polytheism for a new monotheistic religion would have played out. It is unlikely that such radical change would be tolerated from the likes of a Zarathushtra and in this case were only possible because of the uniqueness of the Pharaoh's powerful situation. The lack of strength which caused the monotheism imposed by Akhenaten to fail to outlive its founder proves true enough the saying 'you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink'.

The response of Egyptians to the religion of Akhenaten after his death was not violent revolution but a 'return' to the religious state that had been established long before the 'Heretic Pharaoh'.[131] E. O. James attempts to explain this response, writing that "...in spite of its being in

127 Ibid.
128 Donald B. Redford, *Akhenaten, the Heretic King* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 172.
129 Hornung, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, 94.
130 Redford, *Akhenaten, the Heretic King*, 169–170.
131 Hornung, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, 5.

line with the expanding imperial power of the State, it made no permanent impression on the nation as a whole. The Aton was too remote to have a popular appeal."[132] James' focus on the nature of the deity blinds him to the situation of drastic change described by Hornung which made the religion too far removed from what the populace had known for so long. This must be taken into consideration when examining the cases of the Israelites and ancient Iranians. It is tempting to focus solely on the nature of the deity, as removed from the context of a living religion, and lose sight of the significance of the systems and worldviews which have structured the framework of that deity's existence for innumerable generations.

It is also important to acknowledge that just as the Babylonian Exile had a catalyzing effect on the development of Jewish monotheism, so too did the institutionalization of Akhenaten's religion affect 'traditional' Egyptian beliefs. Hornung explains that although the reign and religion of Akhenaten would be forgotten,

> ...[They] were not just transitory phenomena, as they are so often made out to be. The challenge he posed compelled succeeding generations to rethink questions that had seemed resolved, just as are received new impulses from this debate. As Jan Assmann has put it, "The effect of Amarna religion was to clarify, not to reform. The traditional religion became only ever more self-conscious as a result of this confrontation with its antithesis."[133]

Though it might be an oversimplification, the analogy of individual strangers meeting seems appropriate to describe this effect: among 'our own' we are not aware of the boundaries and character of certain identities but in articulating them to the 'Other' with whom we do not share such identities, we are offered the novel opportunity of self-conscious reflection which might reinforce or clarify our comprehension of edges those identities. It is reasonable to assume that this clarifying effect vis-à-vis an encounter with the 'Other' would have, in the case of post-exilic

132 James, *The Worship of the Sky-God.*, 15.
133 Hornung, *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*, 122.

Israel, like Egypt, crystallized traditional beliefs rather than facilitating a departure from familiar religious systems.[134]

In *Why I am Not a Christian*, Bertrand Russell, argues against the suggestion of God as 'First Cause', writing: "It is exactly of the same nature as the Hindu's view, that the world rested upon an elephant and the elephant rested upon a tortoise; and when they said 'How about the tortoise?' the Indian said, 'Suppose we change the subject.'"[135] It may seem to some that what has been established within argument of this chapter is merely like the re-positioning of Russell's elephant from atop his tortoise onto a different type of elephant. It is clear that the monotheisms we can recognize in Zoroastrianism and Judaism must have their roots in proto-monotheistic religious systems to which monotheistic worldviews would have been central. While it seems implausible that Zoroastrianism and Judaism could be the products of the sorts of grand religious revolutions which would throw off the framework of long established polytheisms, the question remains: "'How about the tortoise?'" The present discussion has operated under Theophile James Meek's question of 'whence came monotheism?' but we have arrived at a point where, having addressed this inquiry, we must ask: whence came the monotheistic worldview? Or: whence came proto-monotheism? It is important to acknowledge that this question, however difficult to answer, is set along a more accurate direction in which to seek the fundamental origins of the historically curious monotheistic religions of the Jews and Zoroastrians. If our answer to the question of whence came monotheism is any indication of how to approach the same inquiry of proto-monotheism, we may find Dorothy Gale's conclusion appropriate advice for such an effort: "'If I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than

134 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 62.
135 Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian: And Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 7.

my own backyard.'"[136] In the next chapter, then, we must look to the ecological 'backyards' of the ancient Iranians and Israelites to find not just 'whence came proto-monotheism' but what effect the landscapes of those 'backyards' might have had on the development of such religious systems.

136 Fleming, *The Wizard of Oz*.

Chapter 3

On the Significance of the Agriculturally Marginal Landscape on the Development of a Monotheistic Worldview

"The geography and history of Central Eurasia are inseparable."[137]

In the last chapter, I argued that expressions of monotheism in religions such as Zoroastrianism and Judaism must have originated as a refinement of monotheistic worldviews situated in previously proto-monotheistic religious framework. This framework might have included the worship of a number of deities, but could be differentiated from neighboring polytheistic systems in specific ways that could directly facilitate the development of a more recognizable monotheism. The question of this chapter concerns the development of these proto-monotheistic religions. I suggest that there is a substantial correlation between the natural environment and the development of most ancient religions. It is in the natural landscapes, which were home to the ancient Iranians and Israelites, that we can trace 'whence came' their proto-monotheism, and consequent monotheism. In this final chapter, I will argue that the religion, like the mobile pastoralist roots of these two ancient religious communities developed as pragmatic responses to specific geographic and ecological circumstances.

From Feuerbach to Frazer, there have been a number of scholars who cite natural phenomena as the inspiration for religious symbols, rituals, and mythologies.[138] What appears to be lacking in scholarship, however, is work concerning the influences of the natural environment

137 Michael D. Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 1.

138 Ake Hultkrantz, "An Ecological Approach to Religion," *Ethnos* 31, no. 1–4 (1966): 132–133.

on the psychology of a people such that they develop religious beliefs or praxis. In his article "An Ecological Approach to Religion" Swedish anthropologist Åke Hultkrantz explains that he "…as a result of his own field research…became convinced of the fundamental importance of natural (environmental) conditions to religious development."[139] By engaging with Hultkrantz and Mircea Eliade, I will propose a theoretical framework for the study of religions which underlies this research and has implications beyond the discussion of the origins and development of different expressions of monotheism. Although my work considers the human animal, in an environmental context, to be functioning at-effect in relation to Nature, this framework is suggested, in the words of anthropologist Michael D. Frachetti's, not as "environmental determinism but rather [as] environmental pragmatism."[140]

In order to understand this connection between landscapes and religion, we must examine the situation of the societies of the ancient Iranians and Israelites in their respective ecological contexts. It is important to consider the mobile pastoralism that likely characterized these societies before they moved into, and established, settled communities. For it is the same landscape that allowed for the socio-economic construction of mobile pastoralism which would influence the development of religious culture. This is concisely summarized in Frachetti's observation that the "geography and history of Central Eurasia are inseparable."[141] Before we can examine the possible mobile pastoralist roots of ancient Iranian and Israelite societies, it is important to explore the defining traits that characterize mobile pastoralist systems.

Whether called 'semi-nomadic', 'nomadic', or 'mobile pastoralists', many different terms have been used to describe what Frachetti explains is "most commonly understood as a social

139 Ibid., 133.
140 Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*, 22.
141 Ibid., 1.

and economic strategy predominantly based in routine (such as seasonal) migratory management of domesticated herd animals."[142] I use the term 'mobile pastoralism', after Frachetti, in an attempt to include, in this study, the various societies which have been constructed around the "management of domesticated herd animals" in response to agriculturally marginal landscapes and acknowledge the range of modes of mobility which might have characterized each of these at different periods of time.[143] Anthropologist Roger Cribb notes the way in which terms such as 'semi-nomadic pastoralism' are often used without addressing the two different concepts which have been merged into one:

> Nomadic pastoralism is a dual concept comprising two logically independent dimensions – nomadism and pastoralism. Within each of these dimensions dualisms such as nomadic/sedentary, agricultural/pastoral, the desert and the sown, perpetrate gross distortions of our ability to understand the relationship between the two. Each dimension may be viewed as a continuum, and the relationship between them is best represented in terms of a probability space in which groups or individuals are uniquely located with respect to each axis.[144]

Cribb's suggestion that these two 'dimensions', which constitute the concept of mobile pastoralism, might be viewed as continua is valuable to our understanding of these societies. With the nuances of these dimensions acknowledged, we can examine ways in which the earliest societies of the ancient Iranians and Israelites have been characterized as mobile and pastoralist.

It is difficult to establish, beyond a doubt, that the earliest forms of ancient Iranian, Indo-Iranian, and Israelite societies can be called mobile pastoralism. Although, as with many ancient peoples, the specific developmental 'homelands' of these societies are difficult to ascertain, this has not stopped scholars from supposing reconstructions of such places, some more probable

142 Ibid., 15.
143 Katherine. Homewood, *Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies* (Oxford: James Currey, 2008), 1.
144 Roger Cribb, *Nomads in Archaeology*, New Studies in Archaeology (Cambridge [England] ; Cambridge University Press, 1991), 16.

than others. One of the major sources which lends credibility, to the idea that the ancient Iranians and Israelites lived in societies characterized by mobile pastoralism prior to becoming the settled peoples recognized by history, is the body of references, to mobile pastoral life, in each scriptural canon. Mary Boyce notes the comparison of symbology, in her introduction to one of the Gathas ('song') ascribed to Zarathushtra, Yasna 33: "*The symbolism of the pastor or herdsman...appears to be that of the man who nurtures good purpose, since Vohu Manah, Good Purpose, is guardian of cattle. Evidently the symbols of cattle and herdsman were as powerful for the ancient Iranians as those of sheep and shepherd have been for Jews and Christians.*"[145] Boyce's comments highlight the significance of comparing these religions: independent of one another, such references might easily be lost in their respective geo-political contexts, but when viewed together, they suggest similar histories and begin to form a semblance of analogous developmental contexts which are more like one another than their respective 'neighbors'. Although a number of theories regarding the likelihood of mobile pastoralism in the respective histories of these societies utilize other evidence[146], it is the value of this comparison which centers the respective scriptural references to mobile pastoralism as the focus for our present discussion.

There are three important types of scriptural references to mobile pastoralism which we must briefly examine in order to consider the likelihood of this form of society in the respective histories of the ancient Iranians and Israelites: setting, symbolism, and sayings. The first of these three is easily understood in even the most superficial reading of the Zoroastrian *Gathas* or Hebrew Bible; in the former, it is clearly identified by Jenny Rose: "The setting for the *Gathas*

145 Boyce, *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*, 37.
146 K. L. Sparks, "Religion, Identity and the Origins of Ancient Israel," *Religion Compass* 1, no. 6 (2007): 587–614.

is presented as that of mobile pastoralism."[147] Rose's statement could easily applied to the patriarchal and exodus narratives in the *Torah* and references to a history of mobile society can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible. It is worth noting that, particularly in biblical narratives, the setting of mobile pastoralism is not consistently presented in a positive light. This suggests that, however settled or mobile the authors might have been situated, they didn't universally elevate or vilify such a society.[148]

Returning to Boyce's observation, we can see that the symbol of what Frachetti called "domesticated herd animals"[149] is present in both texts. Boyce writes:

> In his *Gāthās* Zoroaster himself used it [symbol of the cow] with a range and complexity of meaning which for long baffled modern interpreters; and it is a striking fact that whereas cattle imagery recurs again and again in his verses, there is not a single simile there drawn from tilling the soil—no mention of plough or corn, seedtime or harvest, though such things are much spoken of in the Younger Avesta, gradually, indeed, replacing cattle in the religious symbolism.[150]

The last line is particularly cogent to our discussion as it suggests that the dominance of the symbol of the cow, of mobile pastoralism, predated symbols of settled agriculture in the Zoroastrian texts. In a similar fashion, the Hebrew Bible contains metaphors which make use of imagery that clearly indicates a familiarity with mobile pastoralism. Archaeologist Roland de Vaux writes:

> Death, for example, is the cut tent-rope, or the peg which is pulled out, or the tent itself which is carried off. Desolation is represented by the broken ropes, the tent blown down, whereas security is the tent with tight ropes and firm pegs. A nation whose numbers are increasing is a tent being extended. Lastly, there are countless

147 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 11.
148 Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 1st McGraw-Hill paperback ed., vol. 1, McGraw-Hill Paperbacks (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1965), 13–14.
149 Ibid., 15.
150 Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:14.

> allusions to the pastoral life, and Yahweh or his Messiah are frequently represented as the Good Shepherd.[151]

Understanding the use of symbolism and imagery (associated with mobile pastoralism) in the textual traditions of both Zoroastrianism and Judaism allows us to suppose, among the audience receiving such language, a certain familiarity with the world of a mobile pastoralist society.

A final type of textual reference must be acknowledged and is directly connected to symbolism: sayings. Such idiomatic references to mobile pastoralism are even more specifically dependent on, and revealing of, an intimate knowledge of the authors and audience with the life of a mobile pastoralist society. Roland de Vaux describes the usefulness of language in revealing history in this way:

> Language is more conservative than custom, and Hebrew retained several traces of that [semi-nomadic] life of years gone by. For example, generations after the conquest, a house was called a 'tent', and not only in poetry (where it is frequent) but also in everyday speech. Disbanded soldiers return 'every man to his own tent'...Again, to express 'leaving early in the morning', a verb is often used which means 'to load the beasts of burden'; nomads use the word to say 'striking camp at dawn'.[152]

Like jokes, which are often culturally relative, one must be familiar both with the language and referent social context in order to 'get' the expressions which de Vaux describes. Similarly, Rose explains, in relation to the Old Avesta:

> The struggle for sustenance and growth is expressed in poetic idiom, so that the so that the beleaguered ‘soul of the cow’ (*geush urvan*) can also be understood as the ‘soul of the world'. Just as the cow, under the good husbandry of the cowherd, yields beneficent by-products of butter and milk, so clarity of vision and integrity of word and action promote that which is ‘really real’ (*haithya*), bringing nourishment and increase to the world, rather than injury and decrease.[153]

151 de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 1:13.
152 Ibid.
153 Rose, *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*, 11.

Comparing the utilization of references to mobile pastoralism between these two religions reveals each to have had familiarity with that type of society which cannot be easily attributed to poetic creativity or propagandistic invention. It is reasonable to assume that both ancient Iranian and Israelite societies existed in some form of mobile pastoralism in their respective early histories. What implications does this assumption have for our understanding of the potential connections between mobile societies and monotheism? It is to this question which we must next turn.

Frachetti describes various theories concerning the origins or motivations for a people to develop mobility instead of settlement: "Ethnographers have long recognized that mobile pastoralism is largely an ecologically strategic way of life..."[154] He acknowledges various considerations which may factor into the construction of such a society beyond the natural environment, but concludes: "Regardless of the other significant motivations that contribute to their social and economic practices, pastoralists attentively monitor environmental conditions such as seasonal rainfall and pasture and water resources and adjust their schedules of mobility, settlement, and socialization to accommodate these rhythms."[155] If social and economic practices are characteristically responsive to the ecological context, why not culture, specifically religion?

In explanation of his 'religio-ecological' method, Hultkrantz suggests that "...by establishing *types of religion* instead of tracing religious complexes and historically delimited religions, we may arrive at both a fuller understanding of religious facts in their interactions with Nature and a more comprehensive knowledge of the religious past of pre-literate societies."[156]. His approach considers the idea that religions, like economic and social constructs, might be

154 Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*, 73.
155 Ibid., 73.
156 Hultkrantz, "An Ecological Approach to Religion," 131.

influenced by the ecological context of development.[157] Hultkrantz compares his approach to others, in his time, which borrowed the concept of ecology from the natural sciences.[158] Hultkrantz suggests that this approach "...leads to the recognition of 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."[159] This is an important consideration in framing the potential for connections between the natural environment and religion. If we approach the subject with too strict a suggestion of environmental determinism, Hultkrantz' 'regularities as law', we fail to consider the differences between communities of human beings and their effect, in turn, on an environmental context which cannot be described as completely inert.[160] Similarly, it is beyond reason to deny that humans, as biological beings, would be molded by the natural environments in which they develop, live, and continue to interact. It would be even more irrational to assert that the development of all major areas of society *except* religion might be affected by the specific ecological context of a group of people.

Another scholar has suggested, though less directly, a theory of religion which is in line with Hultkrantz. Writing on conceptions of the 'sacred' across human history, historian of religion Mircea Eliade theorizes that 'hierophanies' (revelatory epiphanies) of the sacred/transcendent natural world give rise religious experience.[161] Eliade interpreted the results of his comparative work as suggesting correlations between natural phenomena and religious

157 Ibid., 132.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*, 73–74.
161 William E. Paden, "The Concept of World Habitation: Eliadean Linkages with a New Comparativism," in *Changing Religious Worlds: The Meaning and End of Mircea Eliade*, ed. Bryan S. Rennie, SUNY Series, Issues in the Study of Religion (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), 250.

experience.[162] Cogent to our discussion are his observations regarding environmental contexts, not unlike the ecological 'backyards' of the ancient Iranians and Israelites, which are dominated by the skyscape. He writes: "Simple contemplation of the celestial vault already provokes a religious experience. The sky shows itself to be infinite, transcendent"[163] and "For the sky, *by its own mode of being*, reveals transcendence, force, eternity. It *exists absolutely* because it is *high, eternal, powerful*."[164] Eliade's suggestion of the hierophanic interaction between humans and the natural world seems to go deeper than the simple inspiration of religious concepts by natural phenomena. He specifically argues: "There is no question of naturism here. The celestial god is not identified with the sky, for he is the same god who, creating the entire cosmos, created the sky too. This is why he is called Creator, All-powerful, Lord, Chief, Father, and the like."[165] To Eliade it is clear that human beings find, in (natural) environmental contexts, experiences of both the mundane and transcendent world.[166] What is unclear, however, is whether or not Eliade views the latter as a human construct.

A major criticism of Mircea Eliade's work is his apparent vacillation between theological and secular academic perspectives. Comparative religion scholar William E. Paden describes the result of this back-and-forth in Eliade's work:

> ...two matrices [can be] distinguished in Eliade's writings, both of them linked with the concept of the sacred. The first is one most commonly associated with Eliade, where 'the sacred' refers to hierophanies of the transcendent, manifest through some part of the ordinary...In this model, religion begins with the revelation of the sacred....there is a second Eliade, a second voice, employing another model...about the human capacity to constitute multiple worlds, where the

162 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask, [1st American edition]., Harvest Book ; HB 144 (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959), 116.
163 Ibid., 118.
164 Ibid., 119.
165 Ibid., 121.
166 Ibid., 116.

> concept 'world' is clearly pluralistic and relativistic...Here Eliade is not theological at all, but postfoundationalist and to some extent postmodern. Here sacrality is a human value, not an epithet for divinity.[167]

Paden's interpretation finds this "second Eliade" incorporating notes from Durkheim in his conception of the world-building power of human experiences of the natural world. Given this plurality of voices in Eliade's work, and the well established history of criticism it has since fueled[168], Paden questions the position of such a theoretical framework as Eliade's in more recent comparative efforts. Paden writes: "I do think that the relevant Eliadean discourse for our present secular, comparativist generation is not Eliade-the-monist for whom a monolithic religious reality termed 'the sacred' grounds all and manifests through all, but rather Eliade-the-pluralist interested in the myriad ways religious worlds are formed as cultural creations."[169] To Paden, the effects of the natural world on the religious experiences of human individuals and communities functions within the innate conceptual world-building activities which are also responsible for producing, among others, economic, social, and cultural constructs. He writes:

> Humans create their worlds, inhabit them, and assume responsibility for them...Sacrality is therefore not just something that manifests or shines through worlds or through the symbolic structures...but also the factor that gives a world its standing against the forces of chaos. In the basic sense Eliade is linking religious worldmaking with the process of human worldmaking itself.[170]

This is important to our discussion, for among the variables which influence the "process of human worldmaking" surely the ecological environment must be acknowledged as having been a dominant factor for the majority of human history.

---

167 Paden, "The Concept of World Habitation: Eliadean Linkages with a New Comparativism," 250.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., 252.
170 Ibid., 253.

Paden provides an interesting excavation of Eliade's theoretical framework. His interpretation of "Eliade-the-pluralist" as a theorist of religious worldmaking requires some clearing away of the theological language which has driven so much criticism. But it is important to note that Paden's efforts do not seem aimed at redeeming Eliade's complex interweaving of perspectives, but appear, rather, to be revealing a secular framework of which Eliade himself may not have been cognizant:

> I am not grounding this chapter on the analytic force of proving different historical or linguistic levels of Eliadean thought, and then maintaining that one of them is the 'real' Eliade. Nor am I even certain that Eliade himself would have understood these distinctions. But I do find a constructivist, humanistic strain in his work that coexists with and often underlies his rhetoric about 'the manifestations of the sacred.'[171]

Paden's efforts allow for the inclusion of Eliade in the development of the theory which lies at the core of my argument. It is Paden's neo-Durkheimian Eliade who can offer support for a powerful and relevant theory of religion which has yet to be explored in any depth.[172] When read with Åke Hultkrantz we can begin to see the foundation for a framework of understanding the influence of natural ecological contexts on religious development.

To be sure, the theory for which I argue, that the development of monotheism ultimately correlates to agriculturally marginal landscapes, does not resolve the tension between Eliade's two perspectives. This argument does not (and should not) seek to alleviate Hultkrantz and Eliade of the burdens of their methodologies or conclusions, entrenched so in Eurocentric elitism. Each of these theorists does not distance their work enough from the colonialist ancestry of religious scholarship by the likes of Tylor and Frazer to be taken without a grain (or bowl) of

171 Ibid., 252.

172 William E. Paden, "Before 'The Sacred' Became Theological: Rereading the Durkheimian Legacy," in *Mircea Eliade: A Critical Reader*, ed. Bryan S. Rennie, Critical Categories in the Study of Religion (London ; Equinox Pub., 2006), 69.

salt. A student of Mircea Eliade, scholar of Indo-European religion, Bruce Lincoln approaches his work in *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions* differently than either Hultkrantz or Eliade, stating at the end of his introduction: "At all costs, reasoning such as 'In East Africa..,therefore among the Indo-Iranians...' will be avoided. Such a statement proves nothing and only serves to confuse the issue. Similarity between the two religious systems is that which is to be proven, and to do this we must first study each system in its own right."[173] Lincoln's statement serves, here, as an example of what Eliade and Hultkrantz failed to consider in their conclusions "on the religious history of primitive peoples."[174]

If we are to apply the theory presented in this argument beyond the agriculturally marginal landscapes which contextualized the development of the earliest ancient Iranians and Israelites, then it is vital to situate its genesis and applicability against the support provided by these theorists. Rather than picking up where they might have left off, it is important to consider the quality of the contexts from which we are plucking the germ of the theoretical framework functioning within our present discussion. Anthropologist Alice B. Kehoe offers a critique of Eliade and Hultkrantz which fits our purpose and clarifies the problematic nature of blindly theorizing in their vein:

> Two Europeans, Mircea Eliade and Ake Hultkrantz, have inspired a generation of academics and the public fascinated by the field of comparative religions. Intellectual brilliance, passion, vision-in short, charisma-mark these savants. So, too, does an arrogant cultural imperialism that denies full humanity to the first nations of the Americas. Eliade, and to a much lesser extent Hultkrantz, have fed the romantic demiurge presenting American Indians as primal survivals husbanding an archaic ecstasy that may yet save the White millions who suffer, in Hultkrantz's words, an 'inability to lead authentic lives'.[175]

173 Bruce. Lincoln, *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions*, Hermeneutics, Studies in the History of Religions; v. 10 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 12.
174 Hultkrantz, "An Ecological Approach to Religion," 132.

Kehoe's comments recall the long-established history of Western comparativism which privileges and normalizes Christianity as the benchmark against which all other religions are 'compared'. Having argued for the importance of ecological context to the development of religions, we next must examine three cases in which this theory might be applied. With Kehoe's critique in mind, it is vital that the application of this concept be aimed at further broadening our knowledge of monotheism and mobile (often pastoralist) societies, rather than, as so many have done before, attempting to (re-)define other religions to fit a biblical framework.

There are three cases which will be examined in the application of this theory: the Maasai and Kikuyu in East Africa and the Lakota in the Great Plains of North America. In the way of further contextualizing this effort, it must be acknowledged that there is a great need for modern scholarship (particularly from indigenous perspectives) on these peoples. Many of the most 'authoritative' sources available on the subject of Native American or African indigenous religions are outdated and specifically European colonial in perspective. Sadly, it is all too frequent to find tomes of descriptions of religion on either continent lumped together as though the religious beliefs of all African societies or all Native American nations belong to a respective single 'traditional' religion.

The survival of the mobile pastoralist societies of Maasai and Kikuyu, despite specific efforts on the part of colonial powers to both settle and depopulate (a historically sanitized way of describing genocide) East African 'nomads' reveals, by itself, both the historical situation of the land and these societies. Human-ecology scholar Katherine Homewood describes the context in which mobile societies in Africa function: "African pastoralist groups have generally been

175 Alice B. Kehoe, "Eliade and Hultkrantz: The European Primitivism Tradition.," *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 3/4 (1996): 377.

mobile peoples, commonly exploiting lands that are marginal for agriculture, often operating outside formal administrative networks and maintaining few records."[176] Both Katherine Homewood and Bruce Lincoln confirm that the economic foundation of the herding societies of this region is primarily possession of cattle.[177] Frachetti directly connects the variable ecotones of agriculturally marginal landscapes, such as those found in East Africa, with the strategic opportunities exploited by mobile pastoralists.[178]

Famed paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey authored a voluminous study of the Kikuyu in 'British East Africa', a mobile pastoralist society, the religion of whom he describes as being centered around one god: *Ngai*.[179] In a fascinating lack of interest in the apparent monotheism of a culture, which anthropologists William and Katherine Routledge described as belonging to a "prehistoric people,"[180] Leakey's description of the traditional religion of the Kikuyu seems to hardly gloss the conception of the deity while offering sections on subjects such as "Departed Spirits...Dreams...Ghosts...Animistic Beliefs...[and] The Spirits of Trees."[181] It is clear that, from an anthropological view, Leakey was not concerned with the development of monotheism in this society. It is hard to dissociate this lack of interest from the Eurocentric racism so prevalent in the British Empire.

Important to our discussion is the connection between the religion of the Kikuyu and the Maasai: according to both the Routledges and Leakey, the "term usually employed [by the

176 Homewood, *Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies*, 2.
177 Lincoln, *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions*, 3.
178 Frachetti, *Pastoralist Landscapes and Social Interaction in Bronze Age Eurasia*, 16–17.
179 L. S. B. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903 v.1*, vol. 1 (London: Academic Press, 1977), 16.
180 W. Scoresby. Routledge and Katherine. Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People: The Akikuyu of British East Africa* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1968).
181 L. S. B. Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903 v.3*, vol. 3 (London: Academic Press, 1977), xviii (TOC).

Kikuyu] in speaking of the Deity (N'gaí) is of Masaí origin."[182] Most curiously, by whatever source, the monotheism of the Maasai even finds its way into a children's book by Russian author Sonia Bleeker: "Actually, the Masai believe in only one god, Enkai [i.e. N'gai] Enkai is spoken of as the Black God when he answers his people's prayers by sending them rain and tall grass."[183] It is worth noting that there are too many references to the monotheistic beliefs of these societies, in various odd sources, to deny the need for in-depth scholarship on traditional religions of the Maasai and Kikuyu.[184]

It is clear that further research is required to understand how monotheism is expressed in these cultures and how that information might affect theoretical models of religious systems across the globe. Additionally, it seems that the mobile societies of the Maasai and the Kikuyu, with their respective indigenous monotheisms appear to validate the theory presented in this chapter. It is not enough to simply check a box of 'validated', however, for there can be no question that the gaps in scholarship on these peoples are numerous and more research, specifically from non-European perspectives, is vital to understanding the complex reality of these religions. Having found preliminary support for the connection between agriculturally marginal landscapes, mobile societies, and monotheism within these two cases, we next must turn to the Great Plains of North America to explore the applicability of this theory to the religion of the Lakota.

182 Routledge and Routledge, *With a Prehistoric People: The Akikuyu of British East Africa*, 226; Leakey, *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903 v.3*, 3:1075.

183 Sonia. Bleeker, *The Masai: Herders of East Africa.* (Dennis Hobson, 1963).

184 Compared with plethora of scholarship on the colonial and modern histories of various peoples across the continent, we find an unfortunate dearth of academic research on the subject of specific pre-colonial African religions.

Like so many Native American and First Nations peoples of North America, the name by which the Lakota are known to Westerners, the *Sioux*, comes from European colonists. The name was used by French and British imperial powers to describe a number of peoples within the Great Plains region. Anthropologist Guy E. Gibbon explains the mobile economic system of Dakota, another *Sioux* nation:

> Several early writers describe the seasonal settlement and subsistence round of the Dakota. They were described as mobile hunter-gatherers, who exploited resources seasonally in widely different localities...Their basic seasonal round consisted of hunting bison on the prairies to the south and west in the summer and residence in the northern forests in the fall, winter, and spring, where they harvested wild rice and hunted deer, elk, and beaver. [185]

Gibbon identifies descriptions of mobility without the characteristics of an economic system of pastoralism, a connection which seem to have present in nearly all of the previous cases presented in this writing. For purposes of our inquiry, it would seem appropriate to put emphasis on mobility, rather than pastoralism, as a strategy which more accurately opposes what Frachetti calls the "sedentary strategy" of settled peoples: it reflects a most dramatic and notable example of environmental pragmatism of human beings in a specific ecological context.

The situation of unearthing pre-colonial information regarding indigenous nations in North American is not so different from the effort in Africa. European imperialism wrought its destruction on both living nations and their respective histories, and as we have discussed, too often the efforts of Westerners to document the cultures of non-European (specifically colonized) peoples seem to distort rather than preserve. Gibbon describes the difficult situation of extricating knowledge of locations historically populated by the different societies called *Sioux* from colonial narratives:

185 Guy E. Gibbon, *The Sioux: The Dakota and Lakota Nations*, The Peoples of America; Peoples of America. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003), 54.

> As should be obvious, the early location of the Sioux as a people remains cloudy. One conclusion that we can draw is that movements and distributions of proto-historic peoples should not be proposed without confirming archaeological evidence. The earliest written records in this area were on occasion based on hearsay, intentionally exaggerated, or distorted for other reasons.[186]

Gibbon's comments point to an important consideration in our examination of this society: if we are to understand the role of the landscape in the development of social, economic, and religious systems, then we must seek the 'original' landscape out of which a society grew. It is important to recall that the landscape which contextualized the development of the ancient Iranian people, the Eurasian steppe, is characteristically broad, like the Great Plains. While we may not be able to pinpoint the specific 'original' homeland of either societies, it is very likely that each inhabited some area(s) within their respective regions. For our purposes, it is these regions, those agriculturally marginal landscapes which are ecologically significant to the facilitation of the development of mobile (often pastoralist) societies, as opposed to settled agriculture, which appear to concomitantly inspire the development of religious systems which are (proto-)monotheistic.

The religion of the *Sioux*, specifically the Lakota, is characterized by a worldview of unity, which is understood by scholars to be summarized in the concept of *wakan*.[187] Anthropologists Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks write:

> *Wakan...*designated 'anything that was hard to understand'. It was the animating force of the universe, the common denominator of its oneness. The totality of these life-giving forces was called *Wakan Tanka*, 'great incomprehensibility.' *Wakan Tanka* was the sum of all that was considered mysterious, powerful, or sacred – equivalent to the basic meaning of the English word 'holy.'[188]

186 Ibid., 51.
187 Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks, *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 28.
188 Ibid.

The collective *Wakan Tanka* specifically complicates our discussion of (proto-)monotheism. Not surprisingly, it seems to have proven a difficult task for Western scholars to understand the system as it was understood by the religious culture in which it developed. Whereas DeMallie and Parks liken *Wakan Tanka* to "the English word 'holy,'" anthropologist William K. Powers suggests a more specifically theistic association: "...*Wakantanka*, [is] traditionally glossed as 'Great Spirit' or 'Great Mystery' (*wakan* 'sacred' and *tanka* 'great, large, big). This term has become the conventional gloss for 'God.' Although singular in form, *Wakantanka* is collective in meaning. *Wakantanka* is not personified, but aspects of it are."[189] Powers' explanation points to the complexity of religious constructions which cannot be so simply reduced to numeric mono- or polytheistic systems and their implicitly associated worldviews.

To characterize *Wakan Tanka* or Lakota religion, more broadly, as monotheistic or proto-monotheistic, is difficult, particularly given the overwhelming dominance of biblical monotheism on scholarly conceptions of this type of religious system. DeMallie and Parks argue, specifically, against the deifying associations of *Wakan Tanka* with the Christian 'God': "Rather than a single being, *Wakan Tanka* embodied the totality of existence; not until Christian influences began to affect Lakota belief did *Wakan Tanka* become personified."[190] Does that personification speak to the natural familiarity of a proto-monotheistic system with a recognizable form of monotheism? Or does it point to the aggressive assimilationist colonialism of European Christianity? Perhaps both?

189 William K. Powers, *Oglala Religion* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 45.
190 DeMallie and Parks, *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation*, 28.

Pine Ridge Reservation physician James R. Walker reports the words of Little Wound on the nature of *Wakan Tanka*: "'*Wakan Tanka* are many. But they are all the same as one.'"[191] This is, perhaps, the useful summary of *Wakan Tanka* for our present discussion as we cannot properly form a conclusion regarding the potentially theistic nature of this concept. But like the Maasai Ngai, it cannot be so easily dismissed in discussions or scholarship regarding monotheism. The seemingly incomprehensible nature of the "'great incomprehensibility,'"[192] in Western scholarship, cannot qualify the concept for dismissal. Rather than disregarding the concept for failing the 'biblical monotheism test', as has too often been done in the past, those theorists concerned with that complex effort of categorizing religions must ask how *Wakan Tanka* informs our understanding of both mono- and polytheistic systems.

Considering the case of the Lakota (and *Sioux*) it seems clear that rather than affirming outright the theory proposed in this paper, we find inconclusive information that calls for more research to be conducted. It must be acknowledged though that, in attempting to apply this theory to the Great Plains of North America, we have found mobile societies whose religious systems are far from well-established polytheisms known elsewhere in the world (and continent). The case of the Lakota provides both an example of mobility as an economic strategy in response to the natural environment which did not develop pastoralism and a religious system in which, according to DeMallie and Parks, "...the world was characterized by its oneness, its unity."[193] Rather than negating or invalidating the theoretical framework which underlies my argument, the

191 J. R. Walker, *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, ed. Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine Jahner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), 70.
192 DeMallie and Parks, *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation*, 28.
193 Ibid., 27.

case of the Lakota provides ample evidence to call for further investigation of the influence of the natural environment on the development of religion.

The theory for which I have argued, regarding the correlation between (proto-)monotheism and ecological landscapes which offer humans economic opportunities best exploited in mobile (often pastoralist) societies, requires further study. And while further investigation is required, it is not just to confirm or deny such a theory, but to understand its deeper implications. This research and argument makes a compelling case for comprehending the situation of human beings vis-à-vis the natural world beyond the development of specific types of societies or religions. In the modern world questions of relevance are regularly put to traditional religious beliefs, scriptures, and practices and as scholarship continues to examine the factors contributing to the origins of religious thought these questions must be regularly asked anew. If the minds of humans are affected or inspired in certain ways by natural phenomena such that they comprehend a particular religious idea or belief, then what does it mean to have that belief taken out of its environmental context? There is enough evidence to correlate mobile society with monotheistic worldviews that the impact of the ecological context must be considered and discussed.

Furthermore, it is important to realize that despite our built environments and technologically advanced civilizations, human beings are still biological animals living within a natural world. If our ancestors were affected by their ecological cradles in a way that resulted in the development of religious beliefs that continue to be relevant to humans today, in what other ways might our minds and thus religious beliefs be informed by natural influences that are so easily forgotten in air-conditioned apartments and traffic filled highways?

Bibliography

Anthony, David W. *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.

Assmann, Jan. *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.

Bleeker, Sonia. *The Masai: Herders of East Africa.* Dennis Hobson, 1963.

Boyce, Mary. *A History of Zoroastrianism*. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1975.

———. *Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism*. Textual Sources for the Study of Religion. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Cohen, Shaye J.D., and Harvard University. *Lecture 16: Saul, Samuel, David, Solomon*. Podcast Audio. The Hebrew Bible. Accessed November 20, 2015. https://itunes.apple.com/us/course/the-hebrew-bible/id819616149?ign-mpt=uo%3D8.

Cribb, Roger. *Nomads in Archaeology*. New Studies in Archaeology. Cambridge [England] ; Cambridge University Press, 1991.

DeMallie, Raymond J., and Douglas R. Parks. *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987.

de Vaux, Roland. *Ancient Israel*. 1st McGraw-Hill paperback ed. Vol. 1. 2 vols. McGraw-Hill Paperbacks. New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1965.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. [1st American edition]. Harvest Book ; HB 144. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959.

Fairservis, Walter Ashlin. *The Roots of Ancient India: The Archaeology of Early Indian Civilization*. New York: Macmillan, 1971.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Religion*. Translated by Alexander. Loos. Great Books in Philosophy. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004.

Fisher, W. B., Ilya. Gershevitch, Ehsan Yarshater, Richard N. Frye, John Andrew. Boyle, Peter Jackson, Laurence. Lockhart, Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and C. P. Melville. *The Cambridge History of Iran.* Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968.

Fleming, Victor. *The Wizard of Oz*. Warner Home Video [distributor], 2005.

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

Freud, Sigmund. "Mourning and Melancholia." In *On Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia,"* edited by Leticia Glocer Fiorini, Thierry Bokanowski, Sergio Lewkowicz, and Ethel Spector Person, 19–34. Contemporary Freud : Turning Points and Critical Issues. London: Karnac, 2009.

Gates, Charles, and Neslihan. Yılmaz. *Ancient Cities: The Archaeology of Urban Life in the Ancient Near East and Egypt, Greece, and Rome*. 2nd ed. Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2011.

Gibbon, Guy E. *The Sioux: The Dakota and Lakota Nations*. The Peoples of America; Peoples of America. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2003.
Haran, Menahem. *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School*. Oxford [England]: Clarendon Press, 1977.
Herodotus. *The Ancient History of Herodotus*. Translated by William Beloe. Derby & Jackson, 1859.
Holland, Glenn Stanfield. *Gods in the Desert: Religions of the Ancient Near East*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.
Homewood, Katherine. *Ecology of African Pastoralist Societies*. Oxford: James Currey, 2008.
Hornung, Erik. *Akhenaten and the Religion of Light*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.
Hultkrantz, Ake. "An Ecological Approach to Religion." *Ethnos* 31, no. 1–4 (1966): 131–50.
James, E. O. *The Worship of the Sky-God.* Jordan Lectures in Comparative Religion, 00006. London: Athlone Press, 1963.
Jong, A.F. de. *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 133)*. Brill, Leiden, 1997.
Kehoe, Alice B. "Eliade and Hultkrantz: The European Primitivism Tradition." *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 3/4 (1996).
Leakey, L. S. B. *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903 v.1*. Vol. 1. 3 vols. London: Academic Press, 1977.
———. *The Southern Kikuyu before 1903 v.3*. Vol. 3. 3 vols. London: Academic Press, 1977.
Lincoln, Bruce. *Priests, Warriors, and Cattle: A Study in the Ecology of Religions*. Hermeneutics, Studies in the History of Religions; v. 10. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
Lloyd, Seton. *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.
Mandolfo, Carleen. *Daughter Zion Talks back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations*. Semeia Studies ; No. 58. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007.
Mazar, Amihai. *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*. 1st ed. The Anchor Bible Reference Library. New York: Doubleday, 1990.
Meek, Theophile James. *Hebrew Origins.* Rev. ed. New York,: Harper, 1950.
Miller, Patrick D. *The Religion of Ancient Israel*. Library of Ancient Israel. London: SPCK ;, 2000.
Moeller, Nadine. *The Archaeology of Urbanism in Ancient Egypt: From the Predynastic Period to the End of the Middle Kingdom*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
Moortgat, Anton. *The Art of Ancient Mesopotamia; the Classical Art of the Near East.* London,: Phaidon, 1969.
Paden, William E. "Before 'The Sacred' Became Theological: Rereading the Durkheimian Legacy." In *Mircea Eliade: A Critical Reader*, edited by Bryan S. Rennie, 68–80. Critical Categories in the Study of Religion. London ; Equinox Pub., 2006.
———. "The Concept of World Habitation: Eliadean Linkages with a New Comparativism." In *Changing Religious Worlds: The Meaning and End of Mircea Eliade*, edited by Bryan S.

Rennie, 249–59. SUNY Series, Issues in the Study of Religion. Albany: SUNY Press, 2000.
Pals, Daniel L. *Eight Theories of Religion*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
Powers, William K. *Oglala Religion*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977.
Redford, Donald B. *Akhenaten, the Heretic King*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987.
Rose, Jenny. *Zoroastrianism: An Introduction*. Introductions to Religion; I.B. Tauris Introductions to Religion. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.
Routledge, W. Scoresby., and Katherine. Routledge. *With a Prehistoric People: The Akikuyu of British East Africa*. London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1968.
Russell, Bertrand. *Why I Am Not a Christian: And Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957.
Schneider, Tammi J. *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011.
Shenkar, Michael. "Temple Architecture in the Iranian World before the Macedonian Conquest." *Iran & the Caucasus* 11, no. 2 (2007): 169–94.
Smith, Jonathan Z. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*. Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990.
———. *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
Sparks, K. L. "Religion, Identity and the Origins of Ancient Israel." *Religion Compass* 1, no. 6 (2007): 587–614.
Thieme, Paul. "Mithra in the Avesta." In *Etudes Mithriaques: Actes Du 2e Congrès International, Téhéran, Du 1er Au 8 Septembre 1975.*, 501–10. Première Série, Actes de Congrès ; v. 4; Acta Iranica ; 17. Téhéran: Bibliothèque Pahlavi, 1978.
Van de Mieroop, Marc. *A History of Ancient Egypt*. Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
Van de Mieroop, Marc. *A History of the Ancient Near East, Ca. 3000-323 B.C.* Blackwell History of the Ancient World. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004.
Van de Mieroop, Marc. *The Ancient Mesopotamian City*. Oxford: Clarendon Press ;, 1997.
Walker, J. R. *Lakota Belief and Ritual*. Edited by Raymond J. DeMallie and Elaine Jahner. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980.
Whitley, James. *The Archaeology of Ancient Greece*. Cambridge World Archaeology. Cambridge, U.K. ; Cambridge University Press, 2001.
Wright, G. R. H. *Ancient Building in South Syria and Palestine*. Handbuch Der Orientalistik. Siebente Abteilung, Kunst Und Archäologie. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985.