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Cognitively Optimal and Costly Aspects of Ancient Israelite Religion

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Cognitively Optimal and Costly Aspects of Ancient Israelite Religion

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
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Abstract

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By Brett E. Maiden

This dissertation employs theoretical tools, findings, and theories from the cognitive and brain sciences in order to explore diverse expressions of religious thought and behavior in ancient Iron Age Israel. Specifically, current issues in the study of Israelite religion and the Hebrew Bible are examined in a series of case studies, all of which center on a key set of distinctions between intuitive and reflective types of cognitive processing, implicit and explicit concepts, and cognitively optimal and costly religious traditions.

   The first case study reframes the traditional dichotomy between popular and official religion and argues that ritual practices in both official and domestic settings were informed by intuitive conceptualizations of supernatural agency. The second examines Deuteronomic theology as an example of a highly literate, reflective, and costly religious tradition with complex doctrines, such as iconoclasm, cult centralization, and the name theology of divine presence, which radically depart from prevailing cultural expectations. The third examines religious beliefs as articulated through material objects and iconography. Specifically, it sheds light on the popularity of hybrid monsters in ancient Syro-Palestinian and Near Eastern art and the role of material culture in enhancing memory and expanding the ordinary boundaries of the religious imagination. Similarly, the fourth draws heavily on visual culture and addresses the worship of divine cult statues in Mesopotamia, the anti-idol polemics in the Bible, and the power of images and ritual activities in the construction of religious beliefs. The final case study offers a sustained textual analysis of the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16 and theorizes the effects of ritualized behavior upon ancient participants and audiences.

   The contribution of this dissertation is twofold. It demonstrates how an informed cognitive perspective can illuminate ancient texts, art, and religion in ancient Israel. The case studies also afford a unique opportunity to utilize historical materials, such as texts and artifacts, to critically test and refine recent proposals advanced by cognitive researchers. Therefore, in addition to yielding new insights into how pan-cultural cognitive proclivities shaped local expressions of Israelite culture and religion, this research fosters a dialogue between biblical scholars and cognitive researchers.

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CHAPTER 1:
INTUITIVE AND REFLECTIVE COGNITION, OPTIMAL AND COSTLY RELIGION

1.1. COGNITIVE AVENUES IN THE STUDY OF ISRAELITE RELIGION

This dissertation is about minds and religion—ancient Israelite minds and religion, to be more precise. In the past thirty years or so, a wave of research in the cognitive science of religion (CSR) has yielded deep insights into the cognitive foundations of religious belief and behavior.[1] This body of research suggests that religion is not *sui generis*, but is instead rooted in ordinary features of human cognitive architecture. That is, religion tends to rely upon evolved cognitive mechanisms and, as a result, emerges as a by-product of the way normal minds operate in general.[2] In this sense, religion is therefore "natural."[3] This dissertation extends these insights by employing current cognitive approaches in order to explore expressions of religious thought and behavior in ancient Iron Age Israel. Although scholarship on Israelite religion has become increasingly interdisciplinary in recent years—insofar as it makes use of both textual and archaeological data, as well as various social science methodologies—cognitive tools have been conspicuously underutilized or lacking altogether.[4] The timing is right, then, for redressing this

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[1] For overviews, see Ilkka Pyysiäinen, "Cognitive Science of Religion: State-of-the-Art," *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* 1 (2012): 5-28; Justin L. Barrett, "Cognitive Science of Religion: Looking Back, Looking Forward," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50 (2011): 229-39; Jesper Sørensen, "Religion in Mind: A Review Article of the Cognitive Science of Religion," *Numen* 52 (2005): 465-94; Pascal Boyer and Brian Bergstrom, "Evolutionary Perspectives on Religion," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (2008): 111-30.

[2] Pascal Boyer, "Religious Thought and Behavior as By-products of Brain Function," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2003): 119-24. See also Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

[3] Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Justin L. Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2000): 29-34; Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Paul Bloom, "Religion is Natural," *Developmental Science* 10 (2007): 147-51.

[4] For recent applications and assessment of social-scientific theories in the study of Israelite religion, see Saul M. Olyan, ed., *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012). The emerging cognitive turn within biblical studies was signaled by István Czachesz and Risto Uro, *Mind, Morality and Magic: Cognitive Science Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Durham: Acumen, 2013). The majority of cognitive work within biblical studies so far, however, relates to the New Testament and early Christian origins, whereas the Hebrew Bible and ancient Israel have received little to no extended treatment.

imbalance and demonstrating the value of the cognitive and brain sciences for illuminating ancient Israelite religious cognition.

CSR was developed, in part, by anthropologists and religion scholars who wanted to apply scientific principles to the study of religion and culture. As with the cognitive sciences more broadly, the umbrella field of CSR is a multi-disciplinary enterprise that draws upon findings and research methods from a variety of fields, including cognitive, developmental, and evolutionary psychology, cognitive and cultural anthropology, and neuroscience, among others. Instead of interpreting local culturally-specific religious traditions, CSR has mostly been interested in investigating cross-cultural and recurrent patterns of religious thought and behavior, and the mental systems that shape and constrain them. In contrast to the traditional hermeneutical methods within biblical scholarship and the study of religion, cognitive approaches produce theoretical paradigms for explaining the universality of religious phenomena. Interpretive and explanatory endeavors need not be in tension, however, and can play mutually reinforcing roles in what Lawson and McCauley propose as a kind of "explanatory pluralism."[5] Thus, in addition to the careful reading and interpretation of texts, which has always been the *sine qua non* of biblical studies, general cognitive theorizing offers a new set of tools for studying the religious phenomena reflected in those texts.

As the twenty-first century pushes on, cognitive approaches to religion have started to catch on and become popular tools among not just anthropologists but also historians.[6] Notwithstanding claims that social scientists and historians of religion "missed" the cognitive

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[5] E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[6] See, for example, Harvey Whitehouse and James Laidlaw, eds., *Religion, Anthropology, and Cognitive Science* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007); Harvey Whitehouse and James Laidlaw, eds., *Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004); Harvey Whitehouse and Luther H. Martin, *Theorizing Religions Past: Archaeology, History, and Cognition* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004); Jennifer Larson, *Understanding Greek Religion: A Cognitive Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

and evolutionary revolution,[7] current work under the rubric of "cognitive historiography" signals an auspicious swelling of the tide.[8] Because historians, and perhaps especially historians of religion, are arguably in the business of studying human minds—via their ideas—an informed understanding of how the mind works is indispensable to this task. As the historian Chester Starr observed, in order to understand "any era of the past, one must be able to penetrate into the minds of its inhabitants."[9] Of course, this undertaking is easier said than done, not least because many scholars of ancient Near Eastern and Israelite religion have argued (or more often assumed) that ancient and modern cognition are fundamentally different in nature.[10] The great Assyriologist A. Leo Oppenheim, for example, went so far as to declare that an account of ancient Mesopotamian religion cannot and should not be written, due in large part to the insuperable "conceptual barrier" involved in understanding a religion so far removed both geographically and temporally: "It is open to serious doubt whether we will ever be able to cross the gap caused by the differences in 'dimensions.'"[11] A similar sentiment is echoed by John Collins, who writes of the need to acknowledge the degree to which the biblical texts are "informed by the assumptions of an ancient culture remote from our own," adding that to

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[7] Jerome H. Barkow, ed., *Missing the Revolution: Darwinism for Social Scientists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[8] See Luther H. Martin and Jesper Sørensen, *Past Minds: Studies in Cognitive Historiography* (London: Equinox, 2011); Luther H. Martin, "The Future of the Past: The History of Religions and Cognitive Historiography," *Religio* 20 (2012): 155-71; Dimitris Xygalatas, "On the Way Towards a Cognitive Historiography: Are We There Yet?" *Journal of Cognitive Historiography* 1 (2014): 193-200.

[9] Chester G. Starr, *A History of the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 27.

[10] Such an assumption informs the essays in Henri Franfort, H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, and William A. Irwin, *The Intellectual Adventures of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946). The introductory and concluding essays, in particular, claim that ancient thought was characterized by a unique "mode of cognition" referred to as "mythopoeic thought," a mentality common to ancient and "modern savages" alike according to which they lacked any notion of an inanimate world. The authors, for example, endorse the following quote (p. 5), "Primitive man has only one mode of thought, one mode of expression, one part of speech—the personal."

[11] A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (rev. ed. By Erica Reiner; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 172-83 (182).

understand the Bible "is first of all to appreciate what an alien book it is."[12] Without dismissing the prudence of these observations, scholars are slowly starting to realize that CSR may offer a fruitful path forward. For instance, if we step back and consider the course of human history and evolution, the past few thousand years is too short a time for human cognitive architecture to have undergone substantial change, and therefore contemporary cognitive findings and theoretical insights offer not just cross-cultural but also trans-historical relevance.[13] An up-to-date view of the mind may, then, help bridge the gap between ancient and modern minds and thus render ancient religious texts and phenomena a little less distant, a little less alien.

There are at least two notable ways in which cognitive perspectives are potentially valuable to historians and biblical scholars. First, CSR research methods and tools can illuminate historical data in general and enhance our understanding of Israelite religion in particular. New methodological lenses shed fresh light on old issues, prompt new questions and avenues of inquiry, help reassess longstanding assumptions, and even resolve longstanding issues in the study of Israelite religion. Despite CSR's focus on religion as a general human phenomenon, biblical scholars can contribute to ongoing research at the intersection of cognition and culture by, for example, investigating the ways in which pan-cultural cognitive proclivities shaped local expressions of Israelite religion and culture in unique ways, and conversely how Israelite cultural factors exploited, modified, or outweighed natural cognitive tendencies. In this way, cognitive

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[12] John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 20.

[13] See Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, and Jerome H. Barkow, "Introduction: Evolutionary Psychology and Conceptual Integration," in *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (ed. J. H. Barkow, L. Cosmides, and J. Tooby; New York: Oxford University Press), 3-15: "The few thousand years since the scattered appearance of agriculture is only a small stretch in evolutionary terms, less than 1% of the two million years our ancestors spent as Pleistocene hunter-gatherers. For this reason, it is unlikely that new complex designs— ones requiring the coordinated assembly of many novel, functionally integrated features—could evolve in so few generations." For extensive discussion see John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "The Psychological Foundations of Culture," in *The Adapted Mind*, 19-136. Cf. Jaime C. Confer et al., "Evolutionary Psychology: Controversies, Questions, Prospects, and Limitations," *American Psychologist* 65 (2010): 110-26.

approaches can illuminate the general cognitive mechanisms underlying ancient religious belief, while also helping to understand the specific cultural differences across different groups.

But the relationship between cognitive science and biblical studies can flow in the other direction as well: just as ancient religious life can be enriched by scientific insights, historical data are needed to "test" or evaluate the theoretical proposals of cognitive researchers.[14] Much like anthropologists and historians, biblical scholars possess expertise in particular sets of data—whether textual, archaeological, iconographic—that can serve as valuable "fact checks" on cognitive theories. To date, CSR has primarily turned to ethnographic and experimental methods to examine its hypotheses and predictions. Historical materials, however, also provide a valuable body of evidence that can be used to critically assess leading CSR theories. The relationship between biblical studies and cognitive science of religion is therefore a two-way avenue, with ample opportunity for a genuine interdisciplinary dialogue. Rather than leaving the theory-testing to the scientists, biblical scholars are called to contribute their own unique expertise to this part of the dialogue. In the chapters that follow, both of these approaches—the illumination of Israelite religion by means of cognitive approaches, and the testing of cognitive theories by means of historical data—are pursued in various ways in the course of each analysis.

Theoretical musings about the benefit of CSR to biblical scholarship, and vice versa, have limitations, however, and eventually one must roll up their sleeves and get down to the business of actually applying these new methods to concrete historical issues and problems. As the old saying goes, "By their fruits ye shall know them," and this is ultimately how CSR will earn a seat at the methodological table in biblical studies. To this end, the subsequent chapters of

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[14] See, for example, the essays in Whitehouse and Martin, *Theorizing Religions Past*. Note also the University of British Columbia's project, "The Database of Religious History" (DRH): https://religiondatabase.org. It is described as the "world's first comprehensive online quantitative and qualitative encyclopedia of religious cultural history."

this dissertation consist of five distinct case studies, or probes, that utilize different cognitive science approaches to explore specific issues in the study of ancient Israelite religion. More specifically, these case studies all center on a key distinction in the cognitive sciences between intuitive and reflective mental processes, which in turn give rise to what may be called cognitively optimal and costly types of religion. These selective case studies do not intend to be comprehensive; there are of course many other areas of Israelite religion worthy of future study. Rather, they aim to show that although we cannot access the mental lives of ancient Israelites by scanning their brains with fMRI machines or by inviting them into the lab for clever psychological experiments, CSR approaches—in conjunction with contemporary textual and archaeological data—nevertheless offer a fruitful avenue for penetrating the ancient religious imagination.

1.2. DUAL-PROCESSING MODELS OF HUMAN COGNITION

A wealth of research from different areas of cognitive and social psychology suggests that two distinct cognitive mechanisms, or processing modes, underlie human thinking and reasoning. Schneider and Shiffrin first distinguished between "controlled" and "automatic" modes of human perception, and since then researchers have studied dual-processing systems with regard to logic, reasoning, decision-making, and moral and social judgments.[15] In each of these areas, humans appear to possess "two minds in one brain."[16] So-called dual-processing theories of human cognition thus distinguish two different modes of thought: (1) implicit, intuitive, and non-

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[15] See Walter Schneider and Richard M. Shiffrin, "Controlled and Automatic Human Information Processing I: Detection, Search, and Attention," *Psychological Review* 84 (1977): 1-66; and Richard M. Shiffrin and Walter Schneider, "Controlled and Automatic Human Information Processing II: Perceptual Learning, Automatic Attending, and a General Theory," *Psychological Review* 84 (1977): 127-90.

[16] J. St. B. T. Evans, "In Two Minds: Dual Process Accounts of Reasoning," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2003): 454-59 (454).

conscious cognition on the one hand, and (2) explicit, reflective, and conscious cognition on the other.[17] These processing modes are sometimes described in terms of implicit and explicit systems, respectively, or alternately using the more neutral terms System 1 and System 2.[18] Intuitive System 1 cognition is fast and automatic, akin to instincts, while reflective System 2 cognitive activity involves slow, deliberate thinking.[19] This is a distinction neatly captured in the title of Daniel Kahneman's book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.[20]

	System 1	**System 2**
Computation/Processing	Fast Reflexive Non-conscious/automatic Low effort	Slow Reflective Conscious High effort
Representation	Implicit Intuitive Inferentially rich Cognitively optimal	Explicit Analytical Abstract Cognitively costly

Figure 1. Dual-Processing Systems Contrasted.

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[17] The literature on this subject is vast but see Jonathan St. B. T. Evans, "Dual-Processing Accounts of Reasoning, Judgment and Social Cognition," *Annual Review of Psychology* 59 (2008): 255-78; idem, "Intuition and Reasoning: A Dual-Process Perspective," *Psychological Inquiry* 21 (2010): 313-26; idem, "In Two Minds,"; J. St. B. T. Evans and K. Frankish, eds., *In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Gideon Keren and Yaacov Schul, "Two is Not Always Better than One: A Critical Evaluation of Two-Systems Theories," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 4 (2009): 533-50; Arie W. Kruglansk and Gerd Gigerenzer, "Intuitive and Deliberate Judgments Are Based on Common Principles," *Psychological Review* 118 (2011): 97-109; Dan Sperber, "Intuitive and Reflective Beliefs," *Mind & Language* 12 (1997): 67-83; Dan Sperber and Hugo Mercier, "Intuitive and Reflective Inferences," in *In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond* (ed. Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith Frankish; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 149-170. For a recent defense of dual-processing accounts, broadly speaking, consult Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith E. Stanovich, "Dual-Process Theories of Higher Cognition: Advancing the Debate," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 8 (2013): 223-41.

[18] See Keith E. Stanovich and Richard F. West, "Individual Differences in Reasoning: Implications for the Rationality Debate," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 23 (2000): 645-726; Daniel Kahneman and Shane Frederick, "A Model of Heuristic Judgment," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Thinking and Reasoning* (ed. Keith J. Holyoak and Robert G. Morrison; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 267-94. For a list of different terms used to describe these systems see Evans, "Dual-Processing Accounts," 257.

[19] Emotions and emotional processing fall under System 1.

[20] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2011).

Each processing system is believed to have its own unique evolutionary history. System 1 is thought to be evolutionarily old and represent a universal mental ability common to humans and some non-human animals, whereas System 2 cognition developed more recently and allows for unique human capacities such as abstract thought, hypothetical mental simulation about future scenarios, and conscious decision-making. Regardless of their origins, however, the key idea is that thinking and reasoning is governed by distinct types of mental processing, or what can be thought of as alternate modes of reasoning or computational strategies.[21] Although our intuitive mode of thinking is fast and generally good at dealing with familiar situations, it is also prone to biases and errors, which can only be corrected through reflective reasoning. According to Kahneman, however, overall the mental "division of labor" between the two systems is highly efficient insofar as it "minimizes effort and optimizes performance."[22]

For our purposes, one crucial difference between intuitive and reflective processing concerns not just the speed, but also the differential amount of cognitive effort or ease required by each mode.[23] Intuitive cognitive processes are automatic and operate outside of our conscious awareness, and yet are responsible for guiding a significant portion of our behavior and mental life.[24] As a result, it does not require controlled attention and does not place a heavy load on

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[21] It is preferable to speak about different types or modes of mental processing, rather than two systems, because in fact each type or mode of processing relies on many distinct domain-specific systems. The terminology of "dual-processing" systems is therefore potentially misleading, since it implies only two systems (fast and slow), when in reality each type is comprised of numerous autonomous systems. As Evans and Stanovich ("Dual-Process Theories," 226) clarify, dual systems indicate "qualitatively distinct forms of processing but allow that multiple cognitive or neural systems may underlie them."

[22] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 25.

[23] Kahneman writes about the degree of "cognitive ease" and a range of processing between "easy" and "strained," according to which certain ideas or situations place relatively different amounts of strain on cog processing

[24] See Evans ("Dual-Processing Accounts," 258): "Many researchers have emphasized the fact that unconscious processes may control our behavior without us being aware of them doing so, and that conscious reasoning in System 2 is often used for the confabulation of explanations for these behaviors." On this general point, see also Timothy D. Wilson, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* (Camridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Leonard Mlodinow, *Subliminal: How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior* (New York: Pantheon, 2012). On the role of intuitions in moral reasoning, see Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog

working memory or central processing capacity; this mode of thinking comes naturally and automatically, since it comes free of charge as a result of our species-specific cognitive endowment. Reflective thinking and reasoning, by contrast, is a deliberate activity that is more costly in terms of the mental effort and resources entailed. Therefore, the more intuitive a given belief or concept, the more natural, effortless, and optimal from the perspective of the mind. The more reflective a belief, the more effort it entails, rendering it costly in terms of cognitive resources needed to process, sustain, remember, and transmit.

Building on these proposals, McCauley distinguishes between natural and unnatural cognition (corresponding to intuitive and reflective cognition, respectively), but further proposes two types of natural cognition: (1) maturationally natural cognition, which emerges in the course of normal maturation, and (2) practiced naturalness, which is achieved through practice, experience, and expertise in a particular domain.[25] According to McCauley, maturationally natural cognition emerges early in the course of normal childhood development, does not rely on artifacts, explicit instruction and teaching, or particular cultural inputs.[26] This type of cognition includes actions like walking or chewing. Yet, with enough practice and training, certain cultural ideas and activities may become natural in much the same sense.[27] In contrast to the maturational naturalness of walking and chewing, practiced naturalness includes familiar learned activities such as writing, reading, driving a car, or riding a horse. Practiced naturalness can also extend, in varying degrees, to more complex areas of professional experience such as theological and scientific thinking. With intensive study and sufficient practice, such endeavors can become

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and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment," *Psychological Review* 108 (2001): 814-34.

[25] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not*, 11-30.

[26] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not*, 22.

[27] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not*, 29: "With cognition and perception as with skilled actions, cultural materials can come to feel natural after repeated practice and intensive study, but the maturational naturalness (of action, cognition, and perception) is the more fundamental form, because maturational knowledge arises in human minds regardless of the peculiarities of cultures."

"second nature" to their practitioners. The notion of practiced naturalness thus offers a useful category for analyzing complex writings produced by specialized elites.[28]

It is important to clarify, however, that the difference in processing types is not tantamount to a difference in intelligence; instead, each processing strategy is available to any individual at different times depending on the task and context at hand. As Ilkka Pyysiäinen notes, "the distinction between intuitive and reflective reasoning does not reduce to a difference in intelligence or between types of minds; it is instead a difference in contexts and motivations."[29] Consider a simple example: although the sun's movement through the sky appears intuitive to us in everyday life, and in the way we speak colloquially about it "rising" and "setting," we are capable of overriding this powerful but mistaken intuition through sober reflective consideration. Context matters, and certain situations are bound to exert greater cognitive demands and thus require fast "online" processing, reasoning, or decision-making, while others may instead allow for more careful, slow "offline" deliberation. (In this context, "online" processing is a metaphor to describe the usual default mode of thinking in response to immediate inputs from the world around us, in contrast to the slower, more careful thinking that results when one disconnects from this default mode through "offline" processing.) Thus, even the same individual will move through life switching back and forth between intuitive and reflective types of thinking, depending on their context or motivation. In ancient Israel, for

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[28] Yet I would add that even the practiced naturalness of experts may be imperfect and subject to lapses, depending on the task in question and its accompanying context. The naturalness of writing and mastering theological doctrine are qualitatively different, being acquired at different life stages and requiring different cognitive demands. Moreover, as we will see below, the situation or context in which a particular idea or action is deployed is crucially relevant. Note here the remark by Justin Barrett, "Coding and Quantifying Counterintuitiveness in Religious Concepts: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008): 308-338 (330): "It may be that an idea with great inferential potential in off-line processing (e.g., relativity theory for a physicist in the lab) may have rather poor on-line inferential potential (e.g., relativity theory for a physicist driving in rush hour traffic)."

[29] Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

example, the reflective act of composing theological texts represents a process that enlists slow deliberate mental processing, as opposed to, say, ritual contexts that may involve quick online interaction with superhuman agents in real time.

Now, when it comes to religious concepts in particular, Boyer and Baumard propose a modified dual-processing model. They argue, in short, that "religious representations lie in post hoc explicit elaborations on common intuitions."[30] According to this view, religious concepts are explicit statements that build on the intuitive knowledge provided by our evolved cognitive architecture. As we will see in more detail in Chapter 2, supernatural agent concepts like ghosts and gods, for example, are rooted in our intuitive assumptions about social agents more generally. Similarly, cultural notions about "impurity" and "pollution" are based in the biological experience of disgust and intuitions about contact-contagion.[31] In these instances, intuitions come first and reflections second, with explicit religious concepts serving to "justify, comment on, and explain prior intuitions."[32] Religious concepts are therefore regarded as "reflective" representations, what Dan Sperber and others refer to as "metarepresentations."[33] Yet, despite this characterization, optimal religious concepts tend to be tied more closely to our basic intuitive expectations and inferences. Therefore, while many religious representations involve explicit reflective statements about the supernatural, they are in fact mostly intuitive in terms of the conceptual structure and implicit inferences involved.[34] Overall, this dual-processing framework

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[30] Nicolas Baumard and Pascal Boyer, "Religious Beliefs as Reflective Elaborations on Intuitions: A Modified Dual-Process Model," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22 (2013): 295-300. See also Ilkka Pyysiäinen, "Intuitive and Explicit in Religious Thought" *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 4 (2004): 123-50. Dual-processing accounts are also discussed from a CSR perspective in Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 172-82.

[31] For the role of the emotion of disgust in biblical impurity laws, see Thomas Kazen, *Emotions in Biblical Law: A Cognitive Science Approach* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 9-94.

[32] Baumard and Boyer, "Religious Beliefs," 295.

[33] Dan Sperber, "Intuitive and Reflective Beliefs," *Mind & Language* 12 (1997): 67-83.

[34] Moreover, reflections are not just parallel to intuitions—"Reflections are triggered and constrained by the specific content of intuitions." (Boyer and Baumard, "Religious Beliefs," 3).

offers a nuanced perspective for considering the mental processes whereby ancient Israelite religious concepts and practices were generated, sustained, and transmitted.[35]

Before proceeding, a quick note on terminology is in order. The two processing modes discussed above produce what one might describe as "intuitive beliefs" and "reflective beliefs." These labels would make conceptual sense, provided that one recognized the multivalent nature of the term "belief"—in particular that there are qualitatively different types of beliefs that arise through distinct cognitive processes.[36] However, in order to avoid any potential confusion regarding the term "belief," throughout this dissertation we will refer to the products of the two processing systems using the labels "intuition" or "intuitive knowledge" and, conversely, "reflection" or "reflective concepts" or "reflective statements."[37]

Since the type of mental processing directly affects the cognitive effort or ease of generating, sustaining, communicating, and ultimately transmitting a given concept, we may characterize religious representations in terms of their cognitive optimality or costliness. In other words, intuitive and reflective mental processes give rise, in turn, to cognitively optimal and costly religious expressions. Although some theorists critique the distinction between intuitive and reflective beliefs on the grounds that the distinction is dichotomous and does not admit of degrees,[38] there is no reason why this must be the case. Indeed, it is preferable to envision a continuum of intuitive and reflective knowledge, allowing that some beliefs may be more or less intuitive or reflective than others. That it may not always be easy to quantify these degrees along

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[35] More specific than standard dual processing models. No need to assume that cognition comprises two large systems—both intuitions and reflections are probably produced by large numbers of domain-specific systems

[36] See further Boyer, "Why Belief?" in *Religion Explained*, 297-330.

[37] Since reflective concepts more closely resemble what we tend to think of as a "belief," we can also speak about "reflective beliefs."

[38] Helen de Cruz and Johan De Smedt, *A Natural History of Natural Theology: The Cognitive Science of Theology and Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015), 36.

the continuum does not mean that particular beliefs must be regarded as either wholly intuitive or reflective.[39]

1.3. COGNITIVELY OPTIMAL AND COSTLY RELIGION

Intuitive and reflective mental processes give rise to what may be called cognitively optimal and costly religious expressions, whether in the form of beliefs or behaviors, or at the level of individual concepts, actions, or larger traditions.[40] In short, the closer a religious belief or behavior sticks to intuitive expectations, the more "optimal," whereas the farther they stray from and challenge these intuitive expectations through reflective cognitive activity, the more "costly" they become.

Intuitive System 1 mental processing crucially shapes and informs religious concepts. As discussed above, much of this cognitive activity operates outside of conscious awareness, in the cognitive "unconscious," or what Boyer calls the "mental basement."[41] According to the cognitive by-product view, religious concepts piggyback on everyday psychological systems and intuitions. As a result of the way human minds process information, religious concepts are therefore cognitively cheap and easy to acquire, remember, and transmit.[42] Specifically,

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[39] We do not have direct access to ancient intuitions in the same way modern researchers do with regard to modern minds. However, building on the robust hypothesis, supported by cross-cultural work, that intuitive knowledge is quite similar the world over, CSR theories offer a default baseline for attempting to evaluate the counterintuitiveness (or lack thereof) of certain religious concepts.

[40] Alternately, one could refer to the cognitively "costly" and "cheap" representations. However, since there is precedent in the CSR literature for the cognitive optimum of religious concepts, I continue the use of the adjective "optimal" to refer to this end of the spectrum.

[41] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 18, 21, 95, 98, etc. McCauley refers to the "subterranean" parts of our mental lives (*Why Religion is Natural*, 4).

[42] See Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), esp. 51-91; idem, "Religious Thought and Behavior as By-products of Brain Function," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2003): 119-24; idem, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory or Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); idem, "Cognitive Tracks of Cultural Inheritance: How Evolved Intuitive Ontology Governs Cultural Transmission," *American Anthropologist* 100 (1998): 876-889; idem, "Cognitive Constraints on Cultural Representations: Natural Ontologies and Religious Ideas," in *Mapping the Mind*, 391-411.

supernatural concepts are regarded as "minimally counterintuitive" (MCI) because they violate, in only a limited way, ordinary intuitive expectations about objects in the world. As we will demonstrate in greater detail in Chapter 4, people across cultures reliably classify their environment into distinct ontological categories or domains—such as *humans*, *animals*, *plants*, *artifacts*, and *natural objects*—and thereafter spontaneously develop strong expectations about these domains.[43] Unlike ordinary objects, however, supernatural concepts minimally violate the rules of this intuitive ontological system. For example, a ghost is a person without a material body, a virgin birth involves an individual with special biology, and a talking snake is an animal with special psychology. Crucially, these concepts have two important cognitive effects. On the one hand, they confound our intuitive expectations (to a limited degree) and as a result, are salient and attention-grabbing. At the same time, they stick close enough to the default ontological domain, which allows them to remain coherent and intelligible enough to remember and communicate.[44] As Boyer writes, "Religious representations are particular combinations of mental representations that satisfy two conditions. First, the religious concepts *violate* certain expectations from ontological categories. Second, they *preserve* other expectations."[45] Religious concepts thus strike a careful balance between being attention-grabbing and memorable, and this in turn confers an advantage in terms of cultural transmission.[46]

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[43] See Elizabeth S. Spelke and Katherine D. Kinzler, "Core Knowledge," *Developmental Science* 10 (2007): 89-96; and the essays in Lawrence A. Hirschfeld and Susan A. Gelman, eds., *Mapping the Mind: Domain Specificity in Cognition and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[44] Cf. Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 21: "It is the intuitive aspects of religious representations that makes them understandable and learnable, but it is the counter-intuitive aspect that makes them religious."

[45] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 62 (emphasis original).

[46] There is robust empirical support for enhanced recall of MCI concepts. See Boyer and Ramble, "Cognitive Templates"; Justin L. Barrett, "Cognitive Constraints on Hindu Concepts of the Divine," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 608-19; Justin L. Barrett and Melanie A. Nyhof, "Spreading Non-natural Concepts: The Role of Intuitive Conceptual Structures in Memory and Transmission of Cultural Materials," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1 (2001): 69-100; M. Azfal Upal et al, "Contextualizing Counterintuitiveness: How Context Affects Comprehension and Memorability of Counterintuitive Concepts," *Cognitive Science* 31 (2007): 1-25; Benjamin Grant Purzycki, "Cognitive Architecture, Humor and Counterintuitiveness: Retention and Recall of

MCI concepts therefore approximate what is called a "cognitive optimum" and represent a subset of cognitively optimal religion more broadly, which also includes religious ritual practices and behaviors.[47] Harvey Whitehouse summarizes the general idea as follows:

> The cognitive optimum position constitutes a set of conditions favoring the selection of certain kinds of concepts found in all religious traditions, past and present. The cognitive optimum is essentially a universal attractor position around which many cultural concepts, including religious ones, will be liable to congregate in the absence of countervailing tendencies.[48]

In contrast to this cognitive optimum, characterized by minimal counterintuitiveness, concepts that incorporate too many domain violations have the opposite effect, resulting instead in a kind of "conceptual overload."[49] While a talking snake is minimally counterintuitive, a talking snake that is invisible, made of cashmere, exists in all places at once, and gives birth to zebras, is too difficult to process, recall, or communicate successfully. For this reason Boyer writes that "a combination of *one* violation with preserved expectations is probably a cognitive optimum."[50] This is the conceptual "goldilocks zone" around which religious concepts tend to cluster.

The most optimal religious concepts are those that involve the postulation of supernatural *agents* and *agency*—from gods and goddesses to demons, spirits, ancestors, and so on.[51] While

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MCIs," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 10 (2010): 189-204. A recent study obtained similar results with seven- to nine-year old children. See Konika Banerjee, Omar S. Haque, and Elizabeth S. Spelke, "Melting Lizards and Crying Mailboxes: Children's Preferential Recall of Minimally Counterintuitive Concepts," *Cognitive Science* 37 (2013): 1251-1289.

[47] In this framework, then, Boyer's cognitive optimum is a subset of cognitively optimal religion more broadly.

[48] Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004), 29-30.

[49] Boyer and Ramble, "Cognitive Templates," 546-50. Cf. Barrett and Keil, "Conceptualizing a Nonnatural Entity," 119, who write that too many violations exert "enormous processing strain."

[50] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 86 (emphasis original).

[51] This is a point long-recognized in the history of religions, evinced by Edward Tylor's "minimal" definition of religion. See also Melford Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (ed. M. Banton; London: Tavistock, 1966), 85-126.

deities are separated from mere mortals by their counterintuitiveness, they are mentally represented much like persons: as intentional agents.[52] The same mental machinery used to interact with fellow human agents is likewise recruited in religious systems to represent *non-material* divine agents. Indeed, so powerful is the disposition to detect and posit agency in one's environment that Justin Barrett argues that evolution equipped human minds with a Hyperactice Agency Detection System (HADD), a mental system that is predisposed to detect agency in one's environment, even to the point of *overdetection*.[53] In short, the gods are indeed made in our image. Across cultures past and present, supernatural beings are often understood in human terms and depicted anthropomorphically in religious art and literature, including the biblical narratives.[54] But far more important than human bodies, divine agents are characterized by *psychological* anthropomorphism as well: gods and spirits have *minds*. By assuming that a deity is an agent with a mind, a whole suite of inferences and expectations follow—automatically and at no extra cognitive cost, then one knows that Yahweh has beliefs, desires, preferences, hopes, and values, all of which influence his judgments and decisions.[55] The following quote from Todd Tremlin summarizes the general idea discussed to this point:

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[52] Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). On agency in general, see Alan Leslie, "ToMM, ToBY, and Agency: Core Architecture and Domain Specificity," in *Mapping the Mind* (ed. L. Hirschfeld and S. A. Gelman; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119-48.

[53] Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion,"

[54] Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*; Anne Katherine Knafl, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

[55] Biblical scholars often emphasize the anthropomorphic qualities of deities and demons in the ancient Near East and Hebrew Bible, especially their human-like bodily forms and actions. Mark Smith, for example, poses the question "what is an *ilu*?" with reference to the Ugaritic texts, and examines four features of deities found in this literature: strength and size; body and gender; holiness; and immortality. Yet surprisingly, there is no discussion of minds or mental capacities. See Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5, 83-93. Similarly, Benjamin Sommer's innovative study, *The Bodies of God*, approaches Israelite and biblical religion by focusing on different conceptions of god's "bodies," but devotes no space to the deity's mind. Finally, while rich in interesting insights, the topic of God's mental life receives no explicit discussion in Jaco Gericke's philosophical analysis of "godhood" in the Hebrew Bible. See Gericke, "What is an אֵל? A Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Generic Godhood in the Hebrew Bible," *OTE* 22 (2009): 21-46.

Supernatural beings…are also naturally represented as agents with whom one can interact. Gods think and know. They have beliefs, feelings, and concerns. They see, hear, and communicate. They act in ways that cause effects in the world. In short, supernatural agents are understood to be social agents, members of the human social network, residents of the cognitive niche. This is the only reason why religious activities like prayer, sacrifice, rituals, and good behavior make sense. Gods and humans interact as humans interact, and human interaction takes the form of social exchange. Not surprisingly, then, the interactions between gods and people are characterized by giving and receiving, by promises and protection, by reward and punishment, by activities of entreaty and supplication, and by attention to the inner workings of status, relationships, and reciprocity.[56]

Therefore, there are several ways in which a given religious belief or practice may be regarded as cognitively optimal. First, optimal supernatural concepts are minimally counterintuitive, sticking close to intuitive ontological expectations. Second, optimal concepts stick close to intuitive senses of agency. Note also that the *size* of the agent is orthogonal to its optimality or costliness—that is, even "big gods" like Yahweh, that appear only with the advent of large complex societies, are not guaranteed to be costly in terms of their conceptual ingredients.[57] In other words, even reflective theological thinking may be employed to generate mostly cognitively optimal religious concepts and doctrines. Thus, as Figure 2 illustrates below,

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[56] Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 112-13. In CSR literature, the chief example of minimally counterintuitive agents is ghosts. As we have seen, ghosts fit squarely into the person category, but violate physical expectations about persons by moving freely through solid objects and barriers. However, it should be noted that some researchers have argued against viewing ghosts, other disembodied entities like souls, as counterintuitive at all. The developmental psychologist Paul Bloom, for example, argues that from a very early age, children are natural born dualists who experience the sense of self in terms of bodies and immaterial minds, and that this feeling persists into adulthood. Paul Bloom, *Descartes' Baby: How the Science of Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (New York: Basic, 2004). See also Bloom, "Religion is Natural," *Developmental Science* 10 (2007): 147-51. His experimental work suggests that our tendency to attribute minds to invisible and immaterial persons is in fact utterly natural and intuitive. It is possible, then, that the notion of mentality without materiality is not counterintuitive at all. No matter which side one takes on this question, popular concepts of disembodied souls, spirits, or ghosts are prevalent cross-culturally and seem to be an ordinary product of folk psychology.

[57] Explored further in Chapter 2 in connection with state religion in ancient Israel.

cognitively optimal religion can emerge through either everyday intuitive cognition or else through more deliberate, reflective thought.
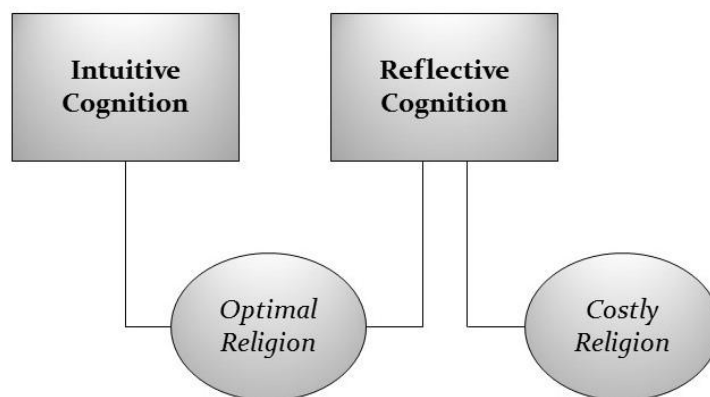
**Figure 2. Pathways from Intuitive and Reflective Processing
to Cognitively Optimal and Costly Religious Expressions.**

In contrast to intuitive, cognitively optimal religious representations of the divine, cognitively costly religious expressions are less intuitive and less natural.[58] Costly theological formulations almost invariably develop out of reflective cognitive processing, which entails more effort and cognitive demand. As illustrated in Figure 2, reflective cognition is necessary to generate costly theological representations, but it is not necessarily sufficient. As a result of this reflective processing, costly religious concepts break free from the cognitive optimum and snowball into formulations that are more abstract and often not just minimally, but maximally or radically counterintuitive.[59] Rather than conforming to our entrenched intuitions, costly concepts fundamentally thwart them. They must therefore be created through, and sustained by, different

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[58] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 49-59.

[59] Modern examples of costly religious concepts include the complex Christian doctrine of the Trinity, or the Western notion of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent deity. Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*: "Highly abstract supernatural agent concepts and beliefs tend to appear in religious traditions only after a long historical process or reflection, made possible by external memory stores and social institutions such as monasteries and universities" (98), and "cognitively costly elaboration of the idea of God takes place as a refinement and expansion of more intuitive ideas that historically precede the more costly ones" (98).

avenues of mental processing. Additionally, special cultural supports such as literacy, texts, rituals, and institutions are usually required to provide the necessary "scaffolding" to prop up and support these costly systems. This is not to discount the possibility that highly complex religious ideas may arise in non-literate settings. However, given that cultural transmission depends on memory and communication, and given that such concepts are inherently difficult and therefore fragile, literate societies offer significantly more fertile soil for this type of theological speculation and elaboration.[60] In this sense, religious guilds are not entirely dissimilar from scientific communities and traditions, both of which rely on the same mode of cognitive processing and many of the same cultural and institutional supports.[61]

At bottom, however, costly religious ideas necessarily build upon the groundwork laid by lower level processes and intuitions, and "even the most abstract theological conceptualizations are elaborations of folk-psychological notions."[62] Or as Robert McCauley puts it, "Theology, like Lot's wife, cannot avoid the persistent temptation to look back—to look back to popular religious forms."[63] This is most evident in theology's appeal to divine agent causality, even if, as

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[60] Note, however, that this does not guarantee that literate theology or official religion *must* generate only (or even primarily) costly representations. First, as we have seen, even costly concepts, at their core, rely on optimal intuitive knowledge. Second, many state-based official religions are content to promote grand, larger-than-life versions of otherwise optimal religion, without any additional conceptual complexity of cost involved. The deities of the state are often just *bigger* or *more* powerful. As we will explore in Chapters 2 and 3, much of ancient Israelite official state religion relied on optimal representations of Yahweh, which, from a cognitive perspective in terms of folk psychology and theory of mind, look very much like the ordinary representations of ancestors within Israelite households. By contrast, we encounter more costly representations in the literate sphere of the Deuteronomic theology.

[61] Note McCauley's remarks on the comparison of science and theology (*Why Religion is Natural*, 153-4): "On the contrary, the elaborated religious representations employed by theological and ecclesiastical elites in *some* religious systems can be every bit as counterintuitive as the most radically counterintuitive scientific representations are…In the course of refining religious formulations to increase their consistency and coherence, theologians avail themselves of many of the same tools that scientists use…Like science, these conscious, thought-full, theological activities can spawn cognitive representations that depart substantially from the deliverances of our maturationally natural cognitive systems, and, like science, all the evidence suggests that such activities do not occur in any prolonged, widespread, or systematic fashion without literacy."

[62] Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, viii. Cf. p. 8: "Historically, the costly prescribed ideas seem to develop on the basis of more intuitive ones" (8).

[63] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural*, 228.

we will see, the type of agency ends up being far more abstract and costly.[64] As Whitehouse notes, many cultures "postulate very much more complex otherworldly forces … that are hard to understand and demand enormous cognitive resources to manage and transmit."[65] Because such representations are more difficult to acquire and transmit, they require special mnemonic aids and cultural supports to ensure their survival.

As an illustration, Whitehouse provides ethnographic examples of both optimal and costly religious ideas from his fieldwork among the Mali Baining peoples of Papua New Guinea. The Mali Baining posit the regular presence of spirits called *sega*, which are represented as human-like agents with whom one can interact through simple rituals. People do not contemplate their existence and there is no effort to systematize a body of religious knowledge about them. As Whitehouse puts it, "They were just sega, and that was that."[66] On the other end of the spectrum, the Mali Baining also developed more complex supernatural concepts with elaborate cosmologies and rituals. Ritual experts employed abstract ideas such as "power" (or "heaviness") rather than supernatural agents, while a religious splinter group called the Pomio Kivung took the traditional religious ideas to greater lengths and represented ancestors as "morally perfected

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[64] Boyer mentions a number of hypothetical supernatural concepts that would fit this description, including the concept of an omnipotent god that exists only on Wednesdays Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 52, 56. Such a concept is strange, but does not afford the same inferential potential as those that resemble more predictable agents.

[65] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 51. Cf. 58-9: "Transmitting a religion also requires the development of forms of mnemonic support that are costly to maintain in terms of the most basic human resources: labor, time, and energy." In addition to these practical demands or costs mentioned by Whitehouse, this chapter focuses on the mental or cognitive costs of certain religious ideas, notably in terms of demands placed on processing, memory, and transmission.

[66] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 52. This description is reminiscent of Karel van der Toorn's speculative ethnographic account of everyday Israelite religious life Iron Age Palestine. See Karel van der Toorn, "Nine Months Among the Peasants in the Palestinian Highlands: An Anthropological Perspective on Local Religion in the Early Iron Age," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past* (ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 393-410. See also the response by Brent A. Strawn, "What Would (or Should) Old Testament Theology Look Like if Recent Reconstructions of Israelite Religion Were True?" in *Between Israelite Religion and Old Testament Theology: Essays on Archaeology, History, and Hermeneutics* (ed. Robert D. Miller; CBET 80; Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 129-66.

beings," which, according to Whitehouse, were "intrinsically difficult to conceptualize."[67] These beliefs were sustained through weekly (and time-consuming) religious meetings, sermons, and special forms of mnemonic support that involved "routinized narrative rehearsal."[68] The fieldwork illustrates that costly forms of religion are far from impossible, but require cultural supports, especially literacy and institutions in order to transmit such religious knowledge, since the concepts and practices stray farther from more intuitive forms.[69]

The costliness of a religious concept is thus determined, in part, by its fit with the way human minds work, and in particular with implicit ontological knowledge. While minimal violations of intuitive ontology render a concept salient and memorable, excessive violations are too costly to process, remember, and communicate. Furthermore, when it comes to supernatural beings more narrowly, a god-concept can become cognitively costly by departing too far from our intuitive sense of agency.[70] Highly abstract conceptions and theories—whether scientific or theological—are simply not as easy to conceptualize as agent concepts.[71] Thus, we can determine the potential costliness of a religious concept based on its fit with our intuitive ontological knowledge, as well as the degree to which it activates our mental systems that deal with intentional agency. If a concept fails to adequately satisfy these criteria, *mutatis mutandis*, it exerts a greater cognitive burden and will be more difficult to process. Lastly, in addition to measuring a concept's fit with intuitive knowledge, there is another potentially fruitful metric for

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[67] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 54.

[68] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 55.

[69] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 163: "Individual imagination may expand beyond this catalogue but concepts that do not correspond to one of our templates are usually found in marginal beliefs rather than mainstream ideologies, and in obscure theological scholarship rather than in popular representations."

[70] And since minds are crucial to the representation of superhuman agents, concepts such as zombies (persons without minds), which may be MCI and prone to success in cultural transmission, may not be good candidates for supernatural agents with whom people can interact or worship.

[71] Alternatively, concepts might be considered costly if they do not stimulate rich inferences. Thus, Boyer gives the hypothetical examples of a god that is almighty, but who only exists on Wednesdays. See Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 164-65 on downsides of what he calls "Full Aquinas Agents."

assessing the costliness of a given concept. That is, we can ask not only how a religious belief violates intuitive cognitive expectations, but also how the same concept violates prevailing *cultural* norms and expectations.[72] This alternative approach moves beyond the universal features of human cognition and considers the proximate cultural and historical context. As with MCI concepts, minimal deviation from established conceptual categories is optimal; concepts that violate cultural knowledge (to a minimal degree) tap into the same sweet spot in terms of memory and recall. At the same time, however, it stands to reason that concepts that depart too far from cultural norms and expectations will not enjoy this advantage. The logic is the same: a little perplexity is memorable, but too much becomes a burden on memory.[73]

In summary, representations or practices can be (more or less) optimal or (more or less) costly based on different factors: (1) conceptual fit with intuitive ontological expectations; (2) degree of appeal to agency; and (3) fit with prevailing cultural expectations.[74] CSR therefore posits two very different dimensions to religion, each of which operates according to different cognitive systems and processes, which, in turn, are responsible for generating and transmitting religious concepts. Cognitively optimal religion involves simple and sometimes vague concepts (and rituals) that are tied closely to intuitive understandings of agents and the world. Cognitively costly religion, by contrast, consists of more "weighty," conceptually complex concepts (and rituals), often accompanied by elaborate meanings and doctrines, which depend on reflective

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[72] The aim of introducing this second metric is not to affirm the oft-postulated but erroneous distinction between "culture" and "cognition." Rather, cultural expectations (while deeply influenced by cognitive mechanisms) are just locally specific forms, or what is often called culturally embedded cognition. See Michaela Porubanova-Norquist, Daniel Joel Shaw, and Dimitris Xygalatas, "Minimal-Counterintuitiveness Revisited: Effects of Cultural and Ontological Violations on Concept Memorability," *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* 1 (2013): 181-92. They also refer to such concepts as "minimally counter-schematic" or involving "cultural intuition-violations." See also Michaela Porubanova, Daniel Joel Shaw, Ryan McKay, and Dimitris Xygalatas, "Memory for Expectation-Violating Concepts: The Effects of Agents and Cultural Familiarity," *PLoS One* 9 (2014): 1-7.

[73] This criterion is explored in more detail in Chapter 3 on Deuteronomic theology.

[74] As the case studies will argue, the cognitive optimum/MCI includes invisible household ancestors, most non-D and non-P conceptions of Yahweh in narrative, prayer, and presumably ritual offerings, most *Mischwesen* or hybrid creatures. More costly concepts include radically CI hybrids including seraphim, cherubim, and some demons, as wel as the Deuteronomic representation of Yahweh.

cognitive activity.[75] The distinction between intuitive and reflective beliefs, and the resulting distinction between cognitively optimal and costly religious representations, allow us to discern a diversity of religious ideas and practices within a population. As with the intuitive-reflective spectrum, optimal and costly religion too falls along a continuum.[76]

1.4. THE PROBLEM OF THEOLOGICAL INCORRECTNESS

When it comes to religion, as with human cognition more generally, the two mental processing systems are often in conflict with each other. As we have seen, the downside of highly complex concepts is that they exert greater cognitive demands and, consequently, are difficult to remember and communicate in their present form. The further a concept strays from intuitive knowledge and expectations, the more likely it will be forgotten or transformed into a more cognitively optimal version. Moreover, the cognitive demands of a particular situation or context can further attenuate use of cognitively costly representations.

The two processing strategies clash in the phenomenon knowns as "theological incorrectness," in which the culturally-accepted explicit belief in God is pitted against people's implicit understandings of the deity.[77] In a series of experiments, Justin Barrett and Frank Keil

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[75] This distinction between optimal and costly types of religion does not, however, correlate to traditional comparisons of popular and elite religion. Rather, it refers to the type of mental processing that likely underlies certain religious beliefs or behaviors, regardless of whose minds (peasants or elites) they may be found. There is no magic law that demands that elites must produce costly types of religion. Reflective activity is necessary but not sufficient for the development of costly doctrines.

[76] Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 7-8: "There thus seems to be two different cognitive strategies based on different kinds of cognitive mechanisms with a more or less distinct neural realization. Reasoning about supernatural agents can be *more of less* intuitive or reflective, not simply intuitive or reflective. The two systems can contribute in differing degrees to inferences made. The relative cheapness or costliness of mental representations thus is based on the relative amount of reflective (B-system) versus intuitive (A-system) processing. Consequently, representations are more or less cheap or costly in terms of the cognitive resources needed."

[77] See Jason Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Justin L. Barrett, "Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraint and the Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999): 325-39. See also the discussions in Tremlin, *Minds and Gods*, 172-82; Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 87-89; and McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural*, 207-21, 237-44.

constructed such a scenario by examining how people represented supernatural beings.[78] They first asked people to describe what God is like and gave them ample time to reply. Unsurprisingly, participants consistently responded by describing God in a manner than conformed to the standard views of their religious tradition. So, for example, people said God is all-powerful, can read minds and knows everything, and can be in multiple locations at once. This is the explicit, theologically "correct" conceptualization of God. Next, the same people were presented with various narrative stories in which God was a character, and they were subsequently asked to recount and paraphrase them. In doing so, they described God in ways that were fundamentally inconsistent with their theologically correct beliefs stated earlier. For example, despite stating that God can exist in many places and is not constrained by space or time, they described God as solving crises in different locations in sequential order, one after the other, rather than simultaneously. Subjects wrote, for instance, that God responded to the prayers of a drowning boy and saved him, but only after attending to another prayer in another part of the world. This spontaneous distortion suggests, according to Barrett, that "in contexts that demand using a god concept for rapid generation of inferences or predications, the abstract, theological properties of gods that characterize reflective discourse disappear."[79] In this example, people tended to resort to a more anthropomorphic conception of God when recounting stories that detailed his actions.

In another set of studies examining petitionary prayer, individuals again tended to describe God in human-like terms, with ordinary physical and psychological constraints.[80] Barrett found that even when God is routinely believed to be all-powerful, most petitionary

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[78] Justin L. Barrett and Frank C. Keil, "Conceptualizing a Non-Natural Entity: Anthropomorphism in God Concepts," *Cognitive Psychology* 31 (1996): 219-47.

[79] Barrett, "Theological Correctness," 328.

[80] Justin L. Barrett, "How Ordinary Cognition Informs Petitionary Prayer," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1 (2001): 259-69.

prayers appeal to God's mental agency to bring about some change in the world. As an example, when asked to imagine themselves on a sinking ship, subjects were much more likely to pray for God to ensure that people would hear their radio message for help, rather than to pray for the hole in the ship to stop leaking. Barrett concludes that it is more intuitive/natural to expect God, as a person-like agent, to change someone else's mind, as opposed to manipulate physical or biological processes in a manner that ordinary agents are unable to do. Once again, in tasks that require quick online System 1 reasoning, people are more likely to spontaneously employ the theologically "incorrect" but cognitively optimal, anthropomorphic concept of God to solve a problem. Boyer summarizes as follows:

> When the task allows for conscious monitoring, we get the theological version; when the task requires fast access, we get the anthropomorphic version. This not only shows that the theological concept has not displaced the spontaneous one but also that it is not stored in the same way. Very likely the theological concept is stored in the form of explicit, sentence-like propositions ("God is omniscient; God is everywhere"). In contrast, the spontaneous concept is stored in the format of direct instructions to intuitive psychology, which would explain why it is accessed much faster.[81]

This susceptibility to theologically incorrectness supports what we have covered so far—that people utilize two different computational strategies that in turn produce two quite different conceptualizations of God: an explicit, reflective concept that aligns with inherited theological knowledge on the one hand, and a more intuitive, anthropomorphic concept that arises automatically on the other. There is thus an interesting "coexistence of multiple representations of religious concepts," which often reside in human minds on "multiple levels of cognition."[82] Barrett calls these dual levels of conceptualization the "theoretical level" and the "basic level," which are described respectively as "the level used in formal discourse and careful reflection,

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[81] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 89.
[82] Barrett, "Theological Correctness," 325.

and the level used on-the-fly to solve problems quickly."[83] These correspond to the relative

levels of costly and optimal representation. While abstract, theological formulations of the divine

may exist in a particular culture, insofar as these are cognitively costly in terms of the mental

processing involved, they are unlikely to be identical to those that most religious adherents have,

most of the time, in "actual religious reasoning."[84] These dual representations appear in different

contexts and result from the two distinct cognitive systems. Barrett argues in favor of thinking

about religious representation as lying on a continuum of relative cognitive complexity (see

Figure 3 below), or what we will refer to as costliness.
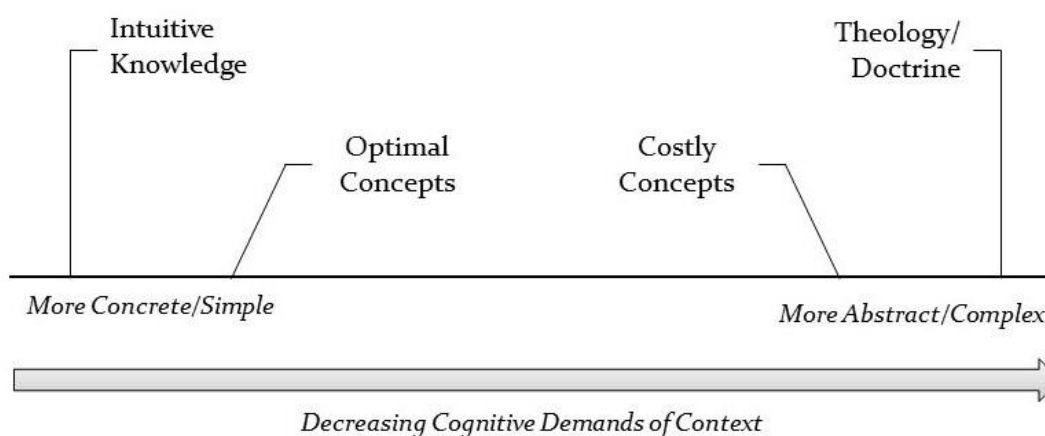
Figure 3. Cognitive continuum of intuitive vs. reflective knowledge and optimal vs. costly religious concepts. Modified after Barrett, "Theological Correctness," 327.

Barrett writes that "Orthodox theological dogma of a tradition or culture (typically) anchors the

complex end of the continuum. On the simple or concrete end is naïve intuitive knowledge about

things in the world and causal relationships that govern them. In between these endpoints lie

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[83] Barrett, "Theological Correctness," 326. "In on-line thinking tasks requiring quick, efficient solutions to an immediate problem, the basic concept rooted in intuitive knowledge is employed" (173). I would argue that ritual settings involving offerings to the deity fit this description more than the alternative. See ch. 2.

[84] Pyysiäinen, *How Religion Works*, ch. 2. Cf. Barrett takeaway: "it seems important when making claims about God concepts to differentiate between the theological concept and the concept used in everyday life."

religious concepts as actually represented by individuals and groups of individuals."[85] To this we may add and reiterate that cognitively optimal concepts lie much closer to the intuitive end of the spectrum. Figure 2 also highlights the importance of context. Whereas everyday life (usually) involves tasks that require time-intensive processing based on intuitive knowledge to generate efficient solutions, theological concepts are often employed in settings that allow for slower, more reflective reasoning. When it comes to ancient Israelite religion, then, we must attempt to clarify two interrelated issues: first, we must identify the conceptual ingredients of a particular concept or practice in order to determine its costliness or optimality; and second, we must seek to determine (or theorize) insofar as possible, the level of processing demands exerted by specific contexts.[86]

A few final caveats are in order. It must be stressed that not all heresies, beliefs, or practices that deviate from prescribed religious orthodoxy represent cases of theological incorrectness. Equally, not all heresies are cognitively optimal in the sense discussed above, since many illicit beliefs may be every bit as complex or costly as their sanctioned counterparts. By the same token, as we will see in the next chapter, we should not expect all official or elite "theology" to be necessarily cognitively costly. It is entirely possible, that is, for state-sponsored religious systems to rely almost exclusively on cognitively optimal rituals and representations of the divine.[87] In other words, although reflective cognition is necessary to generate cognitively

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[85] Barrett, "Theological Correctness," 326.

[86] Barrett ("Theological Correctness, 332) writes, "Along this dimension, the differences are quantitative. Different cognitive tasks have graded differences in demand; demand produced by the nature of the task and by context factors such as physiological states of persons, distractions, urgency of situation, and having to perform multiple tasks at the same time. Thus, the line between theological concepts and basic concepts is hazy."

[87] It would be tempting to interpret Israel's history, according to the biblical authors, as one prolonged bout of theological incorrectness. After all, the Israelites are a stubborn and crooked people who repeatedly fail to obey God's will. And the kings and people of Israel throughout the monarchic period do what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, bowing down and worshipping other gods and engaging in illicit worship practices. However, these heresies (from the point of the view of the biblical authors who objected them) are not necessarily theologically incorrect in the technical sense outline above. That is, they are not necessarily distinguished from the theological

costly religion, it is not sufficient to do so in all cases. Lastly, even in cases where there exist substantially costly doctrines that are likely to elicit spontaneous reactions of theological incorrectness, we must note that the susceptibility may exist not only among the populace of non-elite people, but also potentially among the elites themselves. McCauley writes,

> Ordinary participants in religious systems may dutifully learn and even memorize theologians' radically counterintuitive formulations that their leaders codify and insist upon. My claim, however, is that those formulations will prove unstable in participants' online religious thinking, including their understandings of their day-to-day religious activities. No matter how much effort religious authorities put into standardizing, inculcating, and regulating religious representations, participants will re-construe them, mostly unconsciously, in their online cognition in ways that are theologically incorrect.[88]

This sentiment is on point, but we can take it one step further and suggest that substantially counterintuitive, abstract, or costly representations will be subject to theologically incorrect alteration, in some situations, *even in the minds of the religious experts*. That is, even religious experts who have acquired a degree of practiced naturalness and familiarity with their own theological doctrines, may *still* succumb involuntarily to the power of theological incorrectness under some circumstances (e.g., wherein cognitive demands are higher and the situation calls for faster online processing).

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concepts of the Bible by their different type of processing. In many cases, these heretical beliefs are deemed illicit not based on the conceptual complexity of the god-concept involved, but more simply because it involves the *wrong* deity (e.g., Baal or Asherah versus the theologically correct deity, Yahweh).

[88] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural*, 242. And further 243: "For anyone other than experts, though, their hard-won, often radically counterintuitive, theologically correct representations are, by contrast, difficult to deploy in much more than the social and intellectual contexts in which they are well practiced. Those reflective theological notions demand a great deal more work to acquire and sustain; as with any cognitive product, though, they can acquire a practiced naturalness in the minds of experts, who work with them on a regular basis, that is, professional theologians."

1.5. COGNITIVELY OPTIMAL AND COSTLY ASPECTS OF ANCIENT ISRAELITE RELIGION: A ROAD MAP

The five case studies that make up the body of this dissertation all center on these important set of distinctions between intuitive and reflective types of cognitive processing, implicit and explicit types of beliefs or representations, and more broadly between cognitively optimal and costly religious expressions and traditions. The first chapter begins with a foray into widespread cognitively optimal Israelite religious ideas and practices. As an entry point into this discussion, the first case study reframes the traditional dichotomy between popular and official religion in ancient Israel and argues that ritual practices in both official and domestic settings are informed by intuitive representations of supernatural agency. Against efforts to erect an opposition between state and local religions, the analysis examines the underlying mental processes that inform and constrain beliefs and practices at both levels. Specifically, it is argued that family religion is a kind of official religion in miniature, or alternately, that official religion is a kind of family religion writ large. This framework challenges conventional thinking about the relation of these two socio-religious spheres and suggests instead that the difference between the home and temple, ancestors and the national deity, was not as great as it is sometimes imagined.

The second case study can be regarded as a companion chapter to the first, in that it focuses on the other side of the optimal-costly continuum by considering an example of cognitively costly religion: elite literate theology in the book of Deuteronomy. Unlike the implicit ideas about divine agency characteristic of cognitively optimal religion, the Deuteronomic theology has complex doctrines such as iconoclasm and the so-called Name Theology of divine presence—where it is God's name rather than the deity himself who dwells in the temple in Jerusalem. These doctrines radically challenged prevailing cultural expectations

and therefore exerted substantial demands on memory and cognitive processing, which in turn helps account for the book's emphasis on teaching, recitation, and memorization of doctrine.

The third and fourth case studies explore the ideas of cognitively optimal and costly religion by considering a different type of data set: ancient material art and iconography. Chapter 3 sheds light on the cognitive appeal and cultural popularity of hybrid creatures in ancient Syro-Palestinian and Near Eastern art, as well as several cases within the biblical corpus. Building on the famous remark by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss that animals are "good to think" and demonstrates that *hybrid* animals are also good, if not better, to think. In this analysis, a wide range of hybrid representations are considered in terms of their counterintuitive features displayed in visual or textual form. While many of these representations seem to approximate what has been called a cognitive optimum, in that they are only modestly counterintuitive, other hybrid depictions are considerably more costly and complex. These visual data therefore raise important questions regarding the difference in the ways in which these concepts were represented in material art as opposed to how they might have been mentally represented in ancient cognition and memory. The chapter also explores the role of visual iconography and material artifacts as mnemonic aids to memory, which allow for the generation of costly religious representations that would otherwise be difficult to maintain and transmit.

Chapter 4 also deals with material imagery and analyzes the worship of divine cult statues in Mesopotamia, the ritual "mouth-washing" ceremony for animating these objects, and the polemical response of the biblical authors. In doing so, it highlights both the intuitive and non-intuitive, or costly, aspects of the belief in divine cult statues, examining the cognitive process and cultural mechanisms that contribute to the belief that an inanimate statue *is* or *becomes* the deity.

The fifth and final case study offers a focused analysis of Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement ritual, theorizing the effects of ritualized behavior and the cognitive and material costs associated with this ritual ceremony.

Although the topics addressed in these case studies are far from exhaustive when it comes to ancient Israelite religion, they offer various diverse probes into various different aspects of religion in ancient Israel, at the textual, archaeological, and visual levels. By clarifying the cognitive mechanisms that informed ancient Israelite religious beliefs and practices, we are in a better position to appreciate the cognitive processes involved in generating these religious expressions, as well as how they would have been received by ancient audiences, sustained by religious communities, and transmitted over time.

CHAPTER 2:
RETHINKING THE POPULAR/OFFICIAL RELIGION DICHOTOMY

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter proposes new frameworks and categories for understanding the diversity of religion in ancient Israel. In particular, recent theoretical approaches from the cognitive science of religion (CSR) are employed in order to reframe the traditional dichotomy between "popular" and "official" religion. Rather than viewing these spheres of life as antagonistic and mutually exclusive, a cognitive perspective highlights the continuity and overlap across these domains in terms of underlying mental processes and beliefs. The main argument of the chapter is this: from the standpoint of human cognition, ritual offerings performed in both popular and official contexts share deep structural features in common—whether in households, villages, local shrines, or state-sponsored temples. More precisely, religious representations and actions in these settings were performed based on the logic of social exchange and interaction with superhuman agents and, accordingly, were informed by intuitive mental processes rooted in cognitively optimal representation of these agencies.

The argument is presented in three sections. The first section surveys the popular religion paradigm and identifies some longstanding problems with this category and the nature of its relationship to official religion. The second section introduces recent insights from the cognitive study of religion, with focus on cognitively optimal religious representations and the notion of optimal supernatural agency. As an alternative to "popular" and "official" religion, the categories "cognitively optimal" and "cognitively costly" religion are proposed as a fruitful framework for understanding the gamut of religious expression in ancient Israel, one that cuts across socio-economic class boundaries. Finally, the third section evaluates the recent shift to the study of

family or household religion in ancient Israel. As we will see, despite its strengths as an analytical category, some conceptions of household religion face the same problems that vitiated the earlier popular religion paradigm. An analysis of material artifacts and religious ritual practices in domestic and official contexts reveals interesting points of continuity across these domains. At the level of religious cognition, continuity is most evident in the mental representation of supernatural beings, as well as in the ritual activities directed toward them, in a variety of settings, both domestic and official.

2.2. A TALE OF TWO RELIGIONS: POPULAR VS. OFFICIAL

The religious landscape in ancient Israel and Judah was characterized by a diversity of beliefs and behaviors. Indeed, scholars now prefer to speak about ancient Israelite *religions*, in the plural.[1] Israelite religion is no longer viewed as distinct from so-called Canaanite religion, but rather as but one manifestation of Canaanite, Levantine, or Syro-Palestinian religion. In an effort to further make sense of the religious diversity in this region, scholars have long posited a fundamental distinction between "popular" and "official" types of Israelite religion.[2] Within

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[1] Several recent titles illustrate this shift: Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001); and Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Diana V. Edelman (ed.), *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). Rainer Albertz prefers to discusses religious diversity in Israel in terms of what he calls "internal religious pluralism" (*religionsinterner Pluralismus*). See Rainer Albertz, *Persönliche Frömmigkeit und Offizielle Religion: Religionsinterner Pluralismus in Israel und Babylon* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag: 1978). Although Albertz critiques the notion of popular religion, he ultimately maintains that what he instead calls "personal piety" (or more recently, family religion) was set apart and distinct from official religion. This view is addressed further below.

[2] On the categories, see Peter Hendrik Vrijhof and Jean-Jacques Waardenburg, eds., *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979); Ellen Badone, ed., *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); David Hempton, "'Popular Religion' 1800-1986," in *The British: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices, 1800-1986* (ed. Terence Thomas; London: Routledge, 1988), 181-210. Within biblical studies, Julius Wellhausen, already in his seminal *Prolegomena*, made frequent albeit vague references to popular Israelite religious practices. See Julius Wellhausen, *The Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies, with preface by William Robertson Smith; 2d. ed.; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003): "popular recollection" (17), "popular heathenish elements" (36), "popular worship" (47, 98, 325, 341), "popular

biblical scholarship, the study of popular religion in many ways represented an attempt to recover the voices of the have-nots—those who were marginalized or derided by the biblical authors.[3] As scholars have pointed out, however, the popular religion paradigm faces several critical problems.[4] At a conceptual level, there has been little agreement over how to define or identify popular religious practices in the first place. This led the sociologist Robert Trowler to conclude that, "The term 'popular religion' is really too vague to signify anything at all."[5] Others have argued that the category popular religion is too anachronistic to apply to ancient societies at all, since the idea of popular religion was developed to describe the much later setting of medieval Christianity. Lastly, in traditional histories of ancient Israel the idea of popular religion was commonly tainted by negative value judgments by being equated with the perverse and inferior polytheistic religion of those boogeymen, the Canaanites. Each of these issues will be addressed in the subsections to follow.

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cultus" (189), "popular legends" (265, 336), "popular faith" (461, 471), "old popular religion" (485), and "popular belief" (489).

[3] This trend is part and parcel of the broader interest in the lives of everyday Israelites, on which see William G. Dever, *The Lives of Ordinary People: Where Archaeology and the Bible Intersect* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Oded Borowski, *Daily Life in Biblical Times* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). On the connection of this trend to modern sentiments regarding multiculturalism see Christoph Uehlinger, "Commonalities and Differences: Religion(s) or Iron Age II Israel and Judah in Context," *HeBAI* 4 (2015): 1-24.

[4] Trenchant critiques include Jacques Berlinerblau, "The 'Popular Religion' Paradigm in Old Testament Research: A Sociological Critique," *JSOT* 60 (1993): 3-26; idem, *The Vow and the "Popular Religious Groups" of Ancient Israel: A Philological and Sociological Inquiry* (JSOTSup 210; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), esp. 1-45; Ziony Zevit, "False Dichotomies in Descriptions of Israelite Religion: A Problem, Its Origin, and a Proposed Solution," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palestina* (ed. William G. Dever and Seymour Gitin; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 223-35; Francesca Stavrakopoulou, "'Popular' Religion and 'Official' Religion: Practice, Perception, Portrayal," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 37-58; Brent A. Strawn, "The History of Israelite Religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament* (ed. Stephen B. Chapman and Marvin A. Sweeney; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 86-107.

[5] Robert Trowler, *Homo Religiosus: Sociological Problems in the Study of Religion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978), 148. On the terminology see Terence Thomas, "Popular Religion," in *A New Dictionary of Religions* (ed. John R. Hinnells; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 386-88; Albertz, *History of Israelite Religion*, 1:248 n. 80. For alternate terms used in non-biblical research see the references in Berlinerblau, "'Popular Religion' Paradigm," 5.

2.2.1. Religion of the Teeming Masses

In the history of biblical interpretation, especially during the middle of the twentieth century, a not-so-subtle bias imbued the study of popular religion. In the consideration of ancient Israel, popular religion has been described variously as "the religion of the teeming masses, the uneducated, the lower classes, the rustics, the unsophisticated, the simple, or the *Volk*."[6] There was a marked tendency among an earlier generation of scholars, in particular, to equate religious practices condemned by the Bible with "Canaanite religion."[7] Canaanite religion was said to stand in sharp opposition to pure monotheistic Yahwism, the latter viewed as intellectually, spiritually, morally, and perhaps even hygienically superior.[8] John Bright, for example, viewed Canaanite religion as an "extraordinarily debasing form of paganism," which could "never in good conscience make peace" with the religion of Israel.[9] Martin Noth stated that the "moral laxity" of Canaanite culture was "contemptible and shocking" to the Israelite tribes,[10] while William F. Albright described Canaanite religious practices as "repulsive," "gross," "debased," "crude," "primitive," "depraved," "evil," "unholy," and "grotesque."[11]

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[6] Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 1.

[7] Such views are critiqued by Delbert Hillers, "Analyzing the Abominable: Our Understanding of Canaanite Religion," *JQR* (1985): 253-69. See also Jo Ann Hackett, "Can a Sexist Model Liberate Us? Ancient Near Eastern 'Fertility' Goddesses," *Journal for Feminist Studies in Religion* 5 (1989): 65-76; Elizabeth C. LaRocca-Pitts, *"Of Wood and Stone": The Significance of Israelite Cultic Items in the Bible and Its Early Interpreters* (HSM 61; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns), ch. 1.

[8] See Herbert Niehr, "'Israelite' Religion and 'Canaanite' Religion," in *Religious Diversity in Ancient Israel and Judah* (ed. Francesca Stavrakopoulou and John Barton; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 23-36; Lester L. Grabbe, "'Canaanite': Some Methodological Observations in Relation to Biblical Study," in *Ugarit and the Bible: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Ugarit and the Bible* (ed. George J. Brooke, A. H. W. Curtis and J. F. Healey; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), 113-22.

[9] John Bright, *A History of Israel* (4th ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 118-19; cf. 260.

[10] Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (2d ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 143.

[11] See, e.g., William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (2d. ed.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 230-31, 281; and idem, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1968), 199. For a critical discussion of Albright's position, see further J. Edward Wright, "W. F. Albright's Vision of Israelite Religion," *NEA* 65 (2002): 63-68. Such remarks are baseless and gratuitous, and do not reflect objective historical analysis.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, such pejorative views against popular "Canaanite" religion derive largely from the polemics of the Hebrew Bible itself. That is, such sentiments expressed by modern biblical scholars echo the pejorative views of the ancient biblical authors themselves, who aimed to establish a distinction between what they regarded as legitimate and illegitimate religious expressions.[12] Beyond being subjective and unscientific, such negative confessional biases against popular religion also seem to presume a kind of cognitive gap that permanently, and inherently, divides popular and official religion into *sui generis* cognitive categories. In Berlinerblau's characterization, this is the view that the "psychological constitution of the laity stands in rigorous contrast to that of the litterateur."[13] Albright, for instance, thought that Yahwistic religion "was far ahead of the popular level in its abstract approach to theology, and at the same time far too intolerant of objectionable pagan practices to be an easy faith to follow."[14] Yehezkel Kauffman likewise believed that the Israelites occupied entirely different epistemological worlds from their polytheistic neighbors—each with its own "distinct and mutually incomprehensible" worldview.[15] These evaluations of popular religion in ancient Israel tend to reify the notion that it constituted an entirely different cognitive domain from official religion. While such value judgments have mostly disappeared from critical scholarship today, the underlying assumption of a cognitive gap persists, implicitly, in the popular/official religion binary. And, as we will see, insofar as the gap is thought to reflect the cognitive

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[12] This sharp in-group/out-group thinking is evident, for example, in the contest in 1 Kings 18 between Elijah and the prophets of Baal atop Mount Carmel. There the prophet confronts the Israelites with a choice: "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). For both the ancient biblical authors and modern proponents of the popular/official binary alike, there is no middle ground. Note also the covenant ceremonies at the end of Deuteronomy and the covenant renewal in Joshua 24.

[13] Berlinerblau, "'Popular Religion' Paradigm," 8.

[14] Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 199.

[15] Yehezkel Kaufmann, "The Bible and Mythological Polytheism," *JBL* 70 (1951): 179-97 (195).

capacities of individuals involved, such a view must be regarded as dubious in light of recent research.

2.2.2. The Popular/Official Religion Paradigm

The study of popular religion in both biblical and non-biblical research tends to operate with one of two views. According to Jacques Berlinerblau, scholars adopt either a "praxis" approach or a "social/economic" approach.[16] The praxis approach defines popular religion based on particular beliefs and practices. Drawing on the work of Max Weber, these are usually said to include magical (i.e., "non-rational") practices, with a focus on this-worldly concerns. In this view, popular religion is the opposite of rational and spiritual elite religion. In biblical research, Albertz and Schmitt adopt this approach when they associate family religion or "personal piety" with everyday concerns related to the human life-cycle (e.g., circumcision, marriage, burial rites) and with threats such as illness, disease, death, childbirth, famine, and war.[17] Erhard Gerstenberger expresses a similar position when he writes that the "theology of the family" is characterized by the "necessities of life."[18]

One problem with this approach, however, is that religious practices for dealing with such worldly matters are *not* unique to popular religion, but play an equally important role in official spheres of life as well.[19] After all, elites had families too, and therefore faced comparable threats to everyday life and survival. Indeed, as the sociologist Stephen Sharot observes regarding religion in medieval Christianity, "the higher strata may have been less concerned with

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[16] Jacques Berlinerblau, "Max Weber's Useful Ambiguities and the Problem of Defining "Popular Religion,'" *JAAR* 69 (2001): 605-26.

[17] Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012), ch. 6: "Rites of Family and Household Religion," esp. p. 426.

[18] Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Theologien im Alten Testament: Pluralität und Synkretismus alttestamentlichen Gottesglaubens* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 27.

[19] Likewise, so-called "magical" practices are not exclusive to popular religion, but are often utilized, and at times monopolized, by the official states and/or churches.

food and shelter, but they could hardly have been less fearful of illness, plague, murderous attacks, and an early death."[20] Or as Theodore Lewis writes of religion at ancient Ugarit:

> Kings, high-ranking officials, elite merchants, and priests certainly shared certain familial concerns with commoners. All alike petitioned the gods for personal health and prosperity, for safe births, fit children and sturdy livestock, for snakebite remedies and sexual potency, for good weather, adequate water, and abundant crops. The overlap between elite and non-elite religious concerns was likely quite large.[21]

The same picture holds true for ancient Israel and the religious inclinations found therein. Indeed, according to the biblical texts, misfortune impacted not just the commoner in the street, but also the royal sphere, where it was attributed to the divine wrath of the national deity Yahweh. For instance, Yahweh inflicts death upon all the first-born of Egypt in the plagues narrative in the book of Exodus (Exodus 12), and brings pestilence and famine upon David and the royal house of Israel that is said to kill 70,000 people (2 Samuel 24). The notion that Yahweh was responsible for calamity lies behind the prophet Amos' rhetorical question, "Does misfortune befall a city unless Yahweh has caused it?" (Amos 3:6). Thus, this-worldly concerns about death, disease, and destruction affected people at all strata of ancient Israelite society and, accordingly, shaped both popular and religious beliefs and expectations about the divine.

The alternative to the praxis view is what can be called the social/economic approach, which defines popular religion as the type of religiosity associated with particular groups, usually those with socially or economically disadvantaged status. In ancient Israel, these are often said to include Baal worshippers, polytheists, and otherwise heterodox Yahwists, but are most

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[20] Stephen Sharot, *A Comparative Sociology of World Religions: Virtuosos, Priests, and Popular Religion* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 18.

[21] Theodore J. Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion at Late Bronze Age Ugarit," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul Olyan; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 60-88 (63).

frequently identified with women and the poor.[22] William Dever, for example, locates popular "folk" religion among the agriculturalists of ancient Israel, involving practices that were "adequate for the needs of a simply agrarian society."[23]

There are several problems with this second approach as well. First, socially disadvantaged groups may often exercise a type of religion that is more idiosyncratic than popular, characterized by local traditions that may not enjoy widespread popularity outside a particular village, community, or family. But perhaps more significantly, it is also the case that socially privileged groups do not necessarily represent official state religion.[24] It seems probable that elite literate circles that produced some biblical texts, for example, often did not enjoy royal patronage and favor; they may have been advantaged in terms of literacy and education, but disadvantaged in terms of actual political power. We must be careful, then, not to equate biblical religion with the official state religion of ancient Israel. Next, we may question the applicability of post-industrial socioeconomic categories to pre-industrial Iron Age societies. As Brent Strawn notes,

> To be sure, the disparity between an average farmer and the Israelite monarch would have been considerable; however, outside the king's immediate circle, it is likely that the majority of people had more in common than not, especially socioeconomically. Undoubtedly, socioeconomic differences did exist and would have been even more

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[22] However, since the official religion of Israel changed depending on the regime in power, it is worth noting that non-Yahwistic Israelites would only be considered disadvantaged at times when the official religion of Israel was exclusively and monotheistically Yahwistic. This fact further underscores how popular religion is not a static category.

[23] William G. Dever, *Did God Have A Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 274. See also Dever, "The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Canaanite and Early Israelite Religion," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). See also Enzo Pace, "New Paradigms of Popular Religion," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 64 (1987): 7-14; Vittorio Lanternari, "La Religion populaire: Prospective historique et anthropologique," *Achives de sciences sociales de religions* 53 (1982): 121-43.

[24] Indeed, some texts were written precisely in opposition to the royal powers and their leadership. The clearest example is some of the prophetic literature, produced by individuals and/or social circles that operated on the periphery, outside of state control.

apparent to natives on the ground, but fantastic disparity, even in religious practices, seems unlikely, especially in later periods when the society became increasingly economically interrelated.[25]

Building on this observation, we may add that an inequality in socioeconomic or material conditions does not necessarily lead to predictable differences in religious beliefs and practices. Again, this is especially true in pre-industrial agrarian societies like ancient Israel, where basic religious intuitions were likely shared by kings and peasants, clergy and laypeople alike.[26] As discussed in the introduction, these intuitions depend upon the way human minds work in general, rather than on particular cultural or economic disparities. In ancient Israel, as in other Iron Age societies, elites and commoners not only faced many of the same environmental threats related to survival, but they also had brains equipped with similar cognitive capacities for dealing with them in religious terms. From the standpoint of religious cognition, then, we should expect genuinely "popular" religious ideas and practices to transcend socioeconomic boundaries and instead appeal to the minds of the elites and the masses alike.

While there is overlap in the two approaches discussed above, each defines popular religion by placing it in opposition to its counterpart, referred to as either official, state, or elite religion. The method, then, is to start with what popular religion allegedly is *not*. Susan Ackerman, for example, writes that popular religion is "not the religion usually presented to us as normative in the Bible." [27] Specifically, she discusses certain sixth century practices condemned by the priests, prophets, and Deuteronomistic school, including baking cakes for the

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[25] Strawn, "History of Israelite Religion," xxx.

[26] See Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 18-21; William Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 178-79; Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 216; Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God* (trans. T. H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 329 n. 54.

[27] Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 1.

Queen of Heaven, the temple abominations described in Ezekiel, and cultic rites associated with *bāmôt*, or high places. Ackerman therefore attempts to discern traces of popular religious practice in Israel indirectly, by focusing on what the biblical writers *condemn*.[28] As mentioned above, however, we must not automatically assume that the biblical authors and official state religion of ancient Israel were one and the same, or to assume that the biblical texts represent a normative view of Israelite religion. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible does not endorse a single, normative religious worldview, but instead contains multiple voices and opinions. In light of the plurality of voices found in the biblical texts, it would appear that the elite biblical authors "did a rather poor job 'norm-ing' their normative religious text."[29] Moreover, many of these ancient texts do not describe the religious reality of the day, but instead express a vision for how things *should have been*, had their authors enjoyed more power, privilege, or political sway. It is also important to recognize that much of the legal and prophetic literature often supports the interests of local farmers and peasants, rather than the wealthy landowners or royal elites.[30] In fact, the prophets and Deuteronomists reserve their harshest attacks not for the populace or masses, but for the monarchy. The Deuteronomistic History, for example, describes the monarchic period as a tale about all those kings who "did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh." The types of syncretistic or polytheistic beliefs, denounced by the biblical authors, found their primary home in the elite religion of the monarchy (e.g., Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 16:31-21:29; Manasseh

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[28] See also Ackerman, "At Home with the Goddess," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palestina* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 455-68; eadem, "Women and the Worship of Yahweh in Ancient Israel," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* (ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J. P. Dessel; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 189-97.

[29] Strawn, "History of Israelite Religion," XXX.

[30] See William H. Propp, "Monotheism and 'Moses': The Problem of Early Israelite Religion," *UF* (1999): 537-75 (548).

in 2 Kings 21).[31] The biblical texts, by contrast, represent what Berlinerblau describes as the "impassioned voice of a minority group, one that was at odds with the official religion of its time."[32] For these reasons, then, we must be skeptical about equating the biblical texts with the official state religion of ancient Israel.[33]

We return to our initial question: how shall we differentiate so-called popular religion from the religion of the state? That is, how do the two relate to one another? With regard to the character of official state religion, the details will of course depend on the ideological aims of whichever particular regime is in power.[34] Although Stanley Brandes claims that official religious ideas are "systematized and codified into some internally consistent, all-encompassing cosmology,"[35] this may not be true in all cases. Many ruling regimes, for example, are more likely to invest substantial resources into economic and military endeavors, rather than the systematization of religious doctrine. Alternately, Berlinerblau writes that, "the *sine qua non* of 'official religion' lies in its ability to make its *particular* theological agenda assume the status of 'orthodoxy' within a given territory."[36] However, even this criterion may be complicated by the evidence from ancient Israel. For example, it is not at all clear that the state-sponsored "Yahweh-alone" party, despite its best efforts, actually achieved much success in imposing its exclusive monotheistic worship upon the people of Israel.

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[31] See Gösta W. Ahlström, *Aspects of Syncretism in Israelite Religion* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1663); and William M. Schniedewind, "History and Interpretation: The Religion of Ahab and Manasseh in the Book of Kings," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 649-61.

[32] Jacques Berlinerblau, "Official Religion and Popular Religion in Pre-exilic Ancient Israel," 17.

[33] Of course, neither should we equate biblical religion or "Yahwism" with popular religion.

[34] This is further complicated by the fact that we have little direct knowledge of the official state religion of ancient Israel, which must be accessed through the biblical authors, many of whom seek to disparage or critique the ruling regimes. A good discussion can be found in Gösta W. Ahlström, *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine* (Leiden: Brill, 1982). See also J. J. M. Roberts, "In Defense of the Monarchy: The Contribution of Israelite Kingship to Biblical Theology," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), 377-96.

[35] Stanley Brandes, "Conclusion: Reflections on the Study of Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in Europe," in *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society* (ed. E. Badone; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 185.

[36] Berlinerblau, *The Vow*, 27.

Therefore, without attempting to resolve all the issues raised above, we may for the time being proceed with the following working categories:

- *Popular Religion*: the religious beliefs and practices found among the majority of the population in ancient Israel.
- *Official Religion*: the religious beliefs and practices endorsed and enacted by the state and ruling political administration.
- *Biblical Religion*: the religious beliefs and practices prescribed by the biblical authors, whether reality or imagined.

This understanding of popular religion is reasonable, *provided that* the word "majority" in this definition may include elites in the official sphere and the religion found therein.[37] In this sense, popular religion simply denotes whatever most ancient Israelites—whether poor or rich—thought and did in religious terms. This notion of popular religion shares more in common with the praxis approach discussed above, in that it aims to bypass social and economic distinctions and instead focus on the content of religious beliefs and behaviors, regardless of socio-economic status of the brains in which they are found. At the same time, it parts ways with the praxis approach in suggesting that many religious practices are not exclusive to popular religion, but may be found among official circles as well.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the popular/official religion paradigm has been critiqued for being anachronistic when applied to the ancient world, since these categories were developed to address different social and historical contexts. Specifically, the terms were first used to describe religious diversity within Western Christendom, a milieu characterized by the establishment of

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[37] Compare the broad definition offered by Hermann Vorländer, "Aspects of Popular Religion in the Old Testament," *Concilium* (1986): 63-70: "the popular ideas entertained by the Israelites concerning God's action in the life of the individual" (63). Yet, unlike Vorländer, I emphasize here that such ideas may be, and indeed were, entertained by Israelites at all levels of society.

institutionalized churches, doctrines, and dogma.[38] Historians in this area used the term "popular religion" to denote religious views and practices that stood at odds with the codified doctrines of ecclesiastical authorities. According to Ziony Zevit, however, this historical and religious context is utterly foreign to non-Western religions in general, and to the socio-cultural setting of ancient Israel in particular.[39] He therefore deems the binary framework to be inappropriate and anachronistic when applied to Israel, writing,

> There was no state or elite or official or popular religion in ancient Israel. There was a political body that we may label "state"; there were social and economic elites; there were sacerdotal and royal officials; there was a populace; and there was the so-called "man in the street." But data do not support the proposition that a particular type of pattern of credo or praxis may be associated with them.[40]

For his part, Zevit prefers to speak about different nested social groupings, each with its own religious practices, obligations, and cultic celebrations, in which Israelite individuals could participate at different times.[41] Such an approach offers a more nuanced and flexible means for interpreting the dynamic socio-religious world in which ancient Israelites were embedded. Zevit is thus correct to raise cautions about imposing inappropriate sociological models onto the religious world of ancient Israel.[42] At the same time, however, we should not underestimate the efforts of certain ancient regimes to promulgate and implement what can be considered a

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[38] See Peter Hendrik Vrijhof, "Conclusion," in *Official and Popular Religion: Analysis of a Theme for Religious Studies* (ed. P. H. Vrijhof and J. Waardenburg; The Hague: Mouton, 1979), 668-99; Michael N. Ebertz and Frank Schultheis, eds., *Volksfrömmigkeit in Europa* (München: Kaiser, 1986), 11–52.

[39] See Zevit, "False Dichotomies," 226-30. See also idem, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 658-64.

[40] Zevit, "False Dichotomies," 232.

[41] These "nested" groupings correspond closely to the social levels traditionally proposed for ancient Israelite society: (1) individual; (2) father's house (*bêt 'āb*); (3) clan (*mišpāḥā*); (4) tribe (*šēbeṭ/maṭṭeh*); (5) people/public (*'ām*). For a detailed discussion of these social units, see Norman Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 245-91. See also Patrick D. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 62-105.

[42] It must be said, however, that Zevit's point is hardly the final say on this matter. Scholarly constructs, like the terms "popular" and "official" religion need not forever be tainted simply because of the academic contexts in which they originated.

religious "credo" or "praxis." Indeed, much like modern organized religious establishments, in the ancient Near East and cross-culturally, guilds of religious specialists often market themselves as a brand name, rely on literacy and texts to create theological doctrines, and owe their very existence to the ability to provide uniform religious services.[43] Consider, for example, the religious stipulations in the book of Deuteronomy, which promote innovative cultic reforms such as cultic centralization and aggressive monotheistic worship.[44] The reforms attributed to the Israelite kings Hezekiah and Josiah represent an attempt to enforce a religious set of doctrines— that is, in Zevit's words, a "state-sanctioned" body of religious teachings.[45] The doctrinal nature of Deuteronomic theology will be discussed in the next chapter, but at present we may simply note that the Deuteronomic ideas and reform measures share notable features in common with the doctrinal positions of Western Christian churches studied by historians. We should therefore not be too quick to discount the possibility that some official Israelite state religions attempted to formulate a theological credo or system.

2.2.3. Non-Overlapping Magisteria?

In addition to the critiques highlighted above, the most significant weakness of the popular/official religion dichotomy is that it bifurcates Israelite religion into two utterly separate,

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[43] See Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 276-78. Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 273-81.

[44] The Deuteronomic authors can be regarded as an organized political party, given the title of the "Yahweh-Alone" movement, in Morton Smith, *Palestinian Parties and the Politics that Shaped the Old Testament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971). The Yahweh-Alone movement is even given the following slogan: "One God, One Cult, One Nation."

[45] Zevit ("False Dichotomies," 228 n. 10) proposes three conditions that are necessary for an official, centralized religion to develop. First, a religious body must attempt not only to exist in the world, but to actively change it. Second, an official religious body requires vertical organization. Lastly, official religion must be accompanied by a practical missionary tendency. In my view, these conditions seem arbitrary and hardly sufficient. For example, I see no reason why a "practical missionary tendency" should be a necessary criterion for "official" religion. As for the other proposed criteria, it is reasonable to think that the religious reforms under Josiah would qualify in part. Alternately, Stavrakapoulou ("'Popular Religion," 48-50), critiques Zevit's model for being overly confident in the portrayal of socio-religious stratification found in the biblical texts.

non-overlapping spheres. Moreover, these spheres are often pitted against one another as direct opposites—incompatible, antagonistic, and worlds apart. To borrow a phrase from the late paleontologist Stephen J. Gould, popular and official religion are often imagined as two "non-overlapping magisteria."[46]
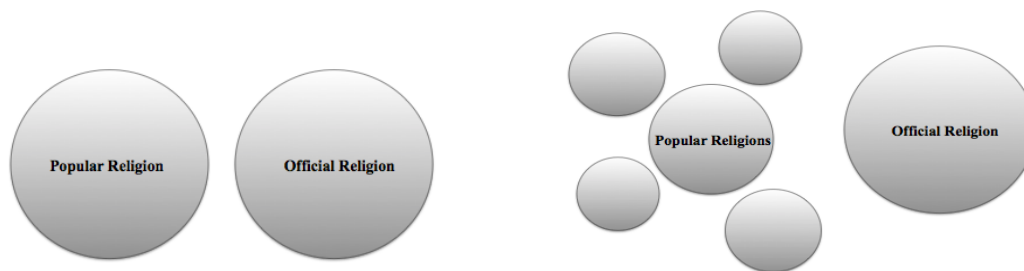
Figure 1. Popular and Official Religion as "Non-Overlapping Magisteria."

Such an understanding of popular and official religion leads to two theoretical difficulties. First, it tends to encourage the idea that each religious sphere is monolithic and internally homogeneous.[47] At a socio-cultural level of analysis, however, it would be mistaken to assume that social groups constitute homogeneous entities.[48] This is apparent from the diversity of modern religious traditions that fall under the umbrella labels Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and so on.[49] Similarly, with respect to ancient Israel, there is no compelling reason to

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[46] See Stephen J. Gould, *Rocks of Ages: Science and Religion in the Fullness of Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1999). Gould argues that science and religion represent separate domains, or magisteria, of knowledge about the world. In short, Gould repackages a long-standing view and argued that science deals with physical and empirical truths, while religion deals with values and meaning. In his view, each domain is separate and therefore there is no inherent conflict between science and religion. They are thus "non-overlapping magisteria," also know by the acronym NOMA for short. For a critique of this idea, see Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 226-30.

[47] Berlinerblau, *The Vow*, 21; idem, "'Popular Religion,'" 7-9; Sharot, *Comparative Sociology*, 13.

[48] Such a view is not dissimilar to a long-standing anthropological tradition of viewing entire cultures as largely bounded, homogenous, and coherent entities.

[49] In his treatment of "popular" religious groups in Europe, the anthropologist Stanley Brandes similarly writes: "No matter where we go in Europe, no matter how large or small out unit of analysis, we inevitably discover the coexistence of several competing, mutually derivative systems of religious beliefs and practices." See Brandes, "Conclusion: Reflections on the Study of Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in Europe," in *Religious*

imagine a single "popular" Israelite religion with a unified credo or praxis. Rather than one popular Israelite religion, many different social and religious groupings existed alongside one another. As Berlinerblau rhetorically asks, "what basis do we have for supposing that Baal worshippers, devotees of the Queen of Heaven, those who worshipped under trees and the rest, were part of a consolidated anti-Yahweh coalition?"[50] Conversely, neither were official religions necessarily homogeneous, since the religion of the state evolved over time in tandem with ebbs and flows of changing political structures. Indeed, throughout the tumultuous histories of ancient Israel and Judah, different ruling parties occupied seats of power at different moments in time, led by kings and officials that had different religious interests. After all, the biblical account of Israel's monarchic history is a grand tale of good kings and bad kings, alongside competing priestly and prophetic circles.[51]

Yet, even if one acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of both popular and official religions in ancient Israel, we are still left with the question of what distinguishes these religious expressions from more "official" or "popular" types, respectively. Within biblical scholarship, there remains a tendency to formulate the dichotomy between popular and official religion as fixed and rigid. This suggests that the problem lies not so much with the terms themselves, but with the way the categories are constructed—in terms of non-overlapping domains that preclude overlap.

While the non-overlapping approach is implicit in many scholarly treatments of Israelite religion, it is also explicit in some cases. J. B. Segal, for instance, identifies "two levels of

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Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society (ed. E. Badone; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 185-200 (185).

[50] Berlinerblau, "'Popular Religion' Paradigm," 88. Of course, as we shall see below, the fact that marginalized religious groups did not form a unified coalition or union based around common credos or praxes does *not* mean that the beliefs and practices among even the most disparate groups did not share deep commonalities.

[51] See Lester L. Grabbe, ed., *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (LHBOTS 393; London: T&T Clark, 2005).

Israelite religion," which are described as wholly distinct and even hostile to one another.[52] In ancient Israel, according to Segal, there was the religion of formal and established sanctuaries on the one hand, and the "shadowy religion of popular superstition" on the other; predictably, the latter is characterized by "vague, half-conscious feelings of fear and anticipation."[53] More recently, the dichotomy appears in William Dever's discussion of "folk religion" in ancient Israel.[54] While Dever has done perhaps more than anyone to shine a much-needed light on the religious lives of everyday Israelites, his theory ends up reaffirming the traditional dichotomy.[55] Specifically, he proposes a theory of "religion in two dimensions," each with its own features neatly distilled into two parallel columns:

State Religion	**Folk Religion**
Literate	Popular
Texts	Artifacts
Canon	Improvisation
Belief	Practice
Mythology	Magic
Verbal	Symbolic
Theology	Cult
Ideology	Action
Intellectual	Emotive
Dogma	Praxis
Rational	Mystical
Ceremonial	Ritual
Public	Private

[52] J. B. Segal, "Popular Religion in Ancient Israel," *JJS* 27 (1976): 1-22. Cf. Theodore Vriezen, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (trans. H. Hoskins; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967).

[53] Segal, "Popular Religion," 1.

[54] William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

[55] Dever singles out Patrick D. Miller for special criticism (*Did God Have a Wife?* 43-44). For the other side of the debate, see the review of Dever's book by Miller in Review of Biblical Literature (2007): www.bookreviews.org/pdf/4910_6305.pdf. Note also the apt remark by Strawn: "To be sure, earlier scholarship often privileged the viewpoint of the haves, but a simple reversal of the imbalance is unlikely to get us any nearer to reality. Indeed, the fact that in one scholarly generation one group has been favored, whereas, more recently, another group has been the focus of scholarly attention indicates that the schema is ultimately less helpful than would appear at first blush."

Social	Individual
National	Local
State	Family
Ethics	Piety
Political order	Right relations
"Sacred"	"Profane"
Orthodoxy	Customary practice[56]

There are numerous assumptions and many under-defined terms embedded in this chart. What is most striking about this presentation, however, is the total lack of overlap between the two columns. While the model of "folk versus state religion" does capture some important generalizations, it also obscures potential areas of overlap.[57] For example, some of these binaries imply that state religion did not value religious practices, and that folk religion was devoid of religious beliefs or concepts.[58] Yet in Israel, temple-based religion incorporated many ritual practices, including state-sponsored festivals and sacrifices. Kings David and Solomon performed royal ritual duties, and biblical texts like the Priestly cultic legislation in Leviticus emphasize proper ritual performance as much as anything. Alternately, folk religion centers on the belief in local deities, even if these beliefs were not accompanied by elaborate theological doctrines or ideologies. When it comes to religious practices, we must not neglect the underlying cognitive processes that operate during those practices. Therefore, Dever is only partially correct in describing folk or popular religion when he states that, "religion is essentially what people

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[56] Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 6.

[57] Dever goes on to offer some qualifying remarks, stating that the "categories are not rigid, of course," and that "they may be useful as theoretical antitheses." I recognize that it is always difficult to achieve subtlety when dealing with charts or tables, and Dever's subsequent discussion offers a more nuanced perspective on the issues (see esp. p. 7). In my opinion, however, the qualifying remarks do little to alleviate the sharp dichotomy implied by the chart, which remains open to simplistic interpretation.

[58] At present, I set aside the question of whether or not is anachronistic to speak about "belief" in the ancient world. At the very least, the term requires clarification. For discussion see Donald S. Lopez, Jr., "Belief," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (ed. Mark C. Taylor; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 21-35; Pascal Boyer, "Why Belief?" in idem, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic, 2001), 297-330.

do."[59] Instead, it would be more accurate to state that official religion is *also* what people *do*, and folk religion is *also* what people *think*.

In our view, then, the rigid popular/official religion dichotomy has in some cases prevented scholars from appreciating potential points of overlap in thought and behavior at state and popular levels. In terms of religious practices, we briefly mention two notable areas of overlap across official and non-official spheres: (1) goddess worship, and (2) death rituals. Francesca Stavrakopoulou argues that biblical scholars have "popularized" the worship of Asherah by consigning it solely to the realm of popular religion.[60] However, she points out that goddess veneration was integrated into the state cult at various times. The clearest case is, of course, the introduction of Asherah under king Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 16). But the biblical texts also locate cultic weaving rites, and objects associated with the goddess, within the Jerusalem temple (2 Kings 21:7; 23:6-7), and the prophet Jeremiah scolds kings and officials for worshipping the Queen of Heaven (Jeremiah 44:17, 21). A similar overlap exists with funerary rites and cults of the dead. Despite biblical condemnations (Leviticus 19:31; 20:6; Deuteronomy 18:10-11), there is evidence that cults of the dead and ancestor veneration occurred at all levels of society. Within the official monarchy, Saul summoned the ghost of Samuel through the medium at Endor (1 Kings 28), while king David performs burial rites with Saul's bones in order to secure Yahweh's blessing (2 Sam 21:10-14).[61] These examples of overlap show that, as Susan

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[59] Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?*, 61.

[60] Stavrakopoulou, "'Popular' Religion," 42-7, and also recognized by Dever, *Did God Have a Wife?* xiv.

[61] Discussed by Stavrakopoulou, "'Popular' Religion," 45-6. On cults of the dead in ancient Israel, see also Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns: 1996); Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs About the Dead* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

Ackerman writes, "Beliefs and rituals which are part of the religion of the king may just as easily be 'popular' as those which belong to the cult of the commoner."[62]

Therefore, at a socio-cultural level of analysis, the categories that scholars call "popular" and "official" religion are not mutually exclusive; rather, they overlap in both their practices and practitioners, and share many features in common. As Zevit and others have noted, Israelite society comprised nested social groupings, and these groupings interacted in the practice of religious worship. Lay Israelites participated in state-sponsored religious rituals and ceremonies, while elite Israelites engaged in religious practices found among the larger population. As John Holladay observes with regard to religion in Iron Age Israel and Judah:

> Nor should we imagine that dissenting groups were entirely divorced from the domain of state religion. It is more reasonable to suppose that a great many people took care to propitiate and supplicate the powers of the universe on more than one level, convening with their fellow citizens at the great national festivals, offering their tithes at the local "Establishment" sanctuaries, and, in some other forum, ensuring that matters overlooked or downplayed by the official cultus were not neglected by them and their families."[63]

A similar picture of social and religious integration emerges in recent studies of ancient neighboring cultures as well. Stanley Stowers, for instance, notes that in classical Athens, "There were many and constantly changing ways that the religion of the household and family would reach outside into the *polis* and many ways that the religion of the temple and *polis* would reach into the household."[64] Similarly, Daniel Fleming writes that in ancient Emar, "The religion of the

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[62] Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*, 1.
[63] John S. Holladay, "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 267. Holladay distinguishes between cult sites of "established worship" and other types of "tolerated nonconformist worship."
[64] Stanley K. Stowers, "Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Families," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul Olyan; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 5-19 (14). He follows the

household and family appears to have been integrated profoundly into the religious life of the larger community."[65] Theodore Lewis likewise describes family religion and community religion as being intertwined at ancient Ugarit, with "porous boundaries" between elite and non-elite religion.[66] Finally, Carolyn Routledge has highlighted the integration of Egyptian society and religious practice during the public celebration of cultic festivals within the temple and its precincts, based on what she describes as instances of "parallel worship" in domestic and temple settings.[67] In addition to overlap in ritual practices, this chapter argues that we can detect overlap at the psychological level as well, in terms of how people imagined and interacted with divine powers. A cognitive perspective cuts across socio-economic boundaries and focuses instead on the conceptual structure of certain religious ideas and the mental processes that support them. It also places us in a better position to address an issue that is rarely posed in biblical studies, namely *why* so-called popular religious ideas were popular in the first place.

2.3. A NEW FRAMEWORK: OPTIMAL AND COSTLY RELIGIONS

While cognitive researchers, like biblical scholars, recognize that religion manifests itself in different forms, they tend to categorize these forms based instead on the mental processes that underpin different religious ideas and practices. To this end, the categories cognitively optimal and cognitively costly offer a fruitful alternative framework for understanding ancient Israelite

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work of Cynthia B. Patterson, *The Family in Greek History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), who argues for a dynamic and mutually positive relationship between the Athenian city and household.

[65] Daniel E. Fleming, "The Integration of Household and Community Religion in Ancient Syria," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul Olyan; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 37-59 (37).

[66] Theodore J. Lewis, "Family, Household, and Local Religion at Late Bronze Age Ugarit," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul Olyan; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 60-88 (80).

[67] Carolyn Routledge, "Parallelism and Official Religion in Ancient Egypt," in *Text, Artifact, Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. G. Beckman and T. J. Lewis; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006), 223-38.

religion. As discussed in the introduction, these categories are convenient labels that hinge on a more fundamental distinction between different *modes* of cognition.

2.3.1. Gods, Ghosts, and Intuitions

Dual-processing theories of human cognition distinguish two distinct modes of thinking: (1) implicit, intuitive, mostly non-conscious cognition on the one hand, and (2) explicit, reflective, and mostly conscious cognition on the other.[68] These systems produce, in turn, what can be called "intuitive" and "reflective" beliefs, or what we will refer to as intuitions or intuitive knowledge on the one hand, and reflective concepts or statements on the other.[69] Known also as System 1 and System 2, intuitive System 1 cognition is fast and automatic, akin to instincts, whereas reflective System 2 processing involves slow, deliberate thinking.[70] Robert McCauley similarly contrasts what he calls "natural" and "unnatural" types of cognition, but further distinguishes two types of natural cognition: maturational naturalness, which develops in the course of normal development, and practiced naturalness, which is achieved through extensive training and experience in a particular domain.[71] Walking and speaking emerge as maturationally natural capacities, whereas reading and writing become natural, or "second nature," only through repeated cultivation and practice with the help of cultural tools and support. In the ancient world,

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[68] See Jonathan St. B. T. Evans, "Dual-Processing Accounts of Reasoning, Judgment and Social Cognition," *Annual Review of Psychology* 59 (2008): 255-78; idem, "Intuition and Reasoning: A Dual-Process Perspective," *Psychological Inquiry* 21 (2010): 313-26; idem, "In Two Minds: Dual Process Accounts of Reasoning," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2003): 454-59; J. St. B. T. Evans and K. Frankish, eds., *In Two Minds: Dual Processes and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); G. Keren and Y. Schul, "Two is Not Always Better than One: A Critical Evaluation of Two-Systems Theories," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 4 (2009): 533-50; A. W. Kruglanski, G. Gigerenzer, "Intuitive and Deliberate Judgments Are Based on Common Principles," *Psychological Review* 118 (2011): 97-109; Jonathan St. B. T. Evans and Keith E. Stanovich, "Dual-Process Theories of Higher Cognition: Advancing the Debate," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 8 (2013): 223-41.

[69] Dan Sperber, "Intuitive and Reflective Beliefs," *Mind & Language* 12 (1997): 67-83.

[70] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Straus and Giroux, 2011).

[71] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not*.

practiced naturalness is relevant to thinking about the cultural productions of priests, scribes, and religious specialists who operated in literate theological guilds.[72]

Despite operating outside of conscious awareness, intuitive System 1 mental processes crucially shape and inform religious concepts, giving rise to "cognitively optimal" religious expressions. According to the prevailing by-product account of religion, ideas about the supernatural piggyback on everyday psychological intuitions and systems.[73] In this view, "religious representations lie in post hoc explicit elaborations on common intuitions."[74] Explicit religious concepts "serve to justify, comment on, and explain prior intuitions."[75] For example, beliefs about invisible gods and spirits arise from systems designed for dealing with persons and agency more generally. Religious concepts that stick close to our intuitive systems require little mental effort and as a result can be regarded as cognitively optimal.

In terms of the conceptual structure of recurring cognitively optimal religious representations, Boyer argues that there is a "limited catalogue of the supernatural" that follows a simple recipe.[76] Religious concepts introduce surprising violations of our intuitive ontology, namely in our folk understandings of physics, biology, and psychology. For instance, a ghost is a person who lacks a material body and can walk through walls, a virgin birth concerns a person with special biology, and a talking snake is an animal with special psychology. These "minimally

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[72] Yet the recognition of the power of System 1 processing gives reasons to be suspicious of any scholarly interpretation that draws an easy link between textual productions, in particular, and any reality in terms of behavior. As Lanman puts it, one cannot infer behavior from explicit texts. See Jonathan A. Lanman, "How 'Natives' Don't Think: The Apotheosis of Overinterpretation," in *Religion, Anthropology, and Cognitive Science* (ed. H. Whitehouse and J. Laidlaw. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 105-32.

[73] Pascal Boyer, "Religious Thought and Behavior as By-products of Brain Function," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2003): 119-24.

[74] Nicolas Baumard and Pascal Boyer, "Religious Beliefs as Reflective Elaborations on Intuitions: A Modified Dual-Process Model," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22 (2013): 295-300. See also Ilkka Pyysiainen, "Intuitive and Explicit in Religious Thought" *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 4 (2004): 123-50. Dual-processing accounts are also discussed from a CSR perspective in Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 172-82.

[75] Baumard and Boyer, "Religious Beliefs," 295.

[76] Boyer, "Religious Thought and Behavior."

counterintuitive" concepts strike a balance between being attention-grabbing but also coherent and memorable, and as a result are easier to acquire, remember, and transmit.[77] In other words, such MCI concepts approximate a "cognitive optimum."

By way of contrast, cognitively costly religion develops out of a reflective mode of cognitive processing, which generates not just minimally but radically counterintuitive concepts, the type often found in literate theological systems.[78] These formulations place high demands on human thought and memory, and therefore require greater cognitive resources to generate and sustain. Cultural supports such as literacy, texts, rituals, and institutions are usually required to prop up these costly systems and ensure their survival through successful transmission.

Harvey Whitehouse provides ethnographic examples of both optimal and costly religious ideas from his fieldwork among the Mali Baining peoples of Papua New Guinea. The Mali Baining posit the regular presence of spirits called sega, which are represented as human-like agents with whom one can interact through simple rituals. People do not contemplate their existence and there is no effort to systematize a body of religious knowledge about them. As Whitehouse puts it, "They were just sega, and that was that."[79] On the other end of the spectrum, the Mali Baining also developed more complex supernatural concepts with elaborate cosmologies and rituals. Ritual experts employed abstract ideas such as "power" (or "heaviness") rather than supernatural agents, while a religious splinter group called the Pomio Kivung took

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[77] Boyer, *Religion Explained*. See also See also Justin L. Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2000): 29-34; Ilkka Pyysiainen, *How Religion Works* (Leiden: Brill, 2001). For experimental evidence in support of the theory, see Pascal Boyer and Charles Ramble, "Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Cross-Cultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-Intuitive Representations," *Cognitive Science* 25 (2001): 535-564; Justin L. Barrett and Melanie A. Nyhof, "Spreading Non-natural Concepts: The Role of Intuitive Conceptual Structures in Memory and Transmission of Cultural Materials," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1 (2001): 69-100; Konika Banerjee, Omar S. Haque, and Elizabeth S. Spelke, "Melting Lizards and Crying Mailboxes: Children's Preferential Recall of Minimally Counterintuitive Concepts," *Cognitive Science* 37 (2013): 1251-1289.

[78] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 49-59.

[79] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 52.

the traditional religious ideas to greater lengths and represented ancestors as "morally perfected beings," which, according to Whitehouse, were "intrinsically difficult to conceptualize."[80] These beliefs were sustained through weekly (and time-consuming) religious meetings, sermons, and special forms of mnemonic support that involved "routinized narrative rehearsal."[81] The fieldwork illustrates that costly forms of religion are far from impossible, but require cultural supports, especially literacy and institutions in order to transmit such religious knowledge, since the concepts and practices stray farther from more intuitive forms.[82]

There are, then, two very different dimensions to religion, each of which operates according to different cognitive systems and processes, which, in turn, are responsible for generating and transmitting different types of religious concepts. Cognitively optimal religion involves simple and sometimes vague concepts (and rituals) that are tied closely to intuitive understandings of agents and the world. In particular, the most cognitively optimal concepts are MCI in the sense that they are memorable and inferentially rich. Cognitively costly religion, by contrast, consists of more "weighty," conceptually complex concepts (and rituals), often accompanied by elaborate meanings and doctrines, which depend on reflective cognitive activity. These may be excessively counterintuitive and therefore difficult to process and remember, or else they may be too abstract to permit one to draw important inferences. Moreover, as the findings of theological correctness suggest, more costly theological representations of God tend to be spontaneously discarded in favor of more optimal agentive representations during real-time thinking.[83] The context or situation in which a particular concept is activated therefore also plays

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[80] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 54.

[81] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 55.

[82] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 163: "Individual imagination may expand beyond this catalogue but concepts that do not correspond to one of our templates are usually found in marginal beliefs rather than mainstream ideologies, and in obscure theological scholarship rather than in popular representations."

[83] See Jason Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Justin L. Barrett, "Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraint and the

an important role in the cognitive ease or cost with which that concept is employed. Cognitively optimal MCI concepts are more intuitive, natural, and likely to pop into mind during real-time religious thinking and reasoning.

2.3.2. The Naturalness of Supernatural Agency

At the heart of cognitively optimal religion (and by extension, cognitively costly religion) is the postulation of superhuman beings—from gods and goddesses to demons, spirits, ancestors, and so on.[84] While gods are distinguished from mere mortals by their counterintuitiveness, they are mentally represented much like persons: as intentional agents.[85] According to the psychologist Alan Leslie, agents are characterized by several features.[86] They are *self-propelled* by some internal force or energy; they act *teleologically* in pursuit of goals; and they have *cognitive capacities* such as thinking, perceiving, knowing, and remembering. Humans as well as non-human animals and certain forms of artificial intelligence share these features.[87] However, human agents also have the ability to recognize and attribute mental states to other agents, a unique capacity known as Theory of Mind or mentalizing, which enables humans to thrive in

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Study of Religion," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999): 325-39; Justin L. Barrett and Frank C. Keil, "Conceptualizing a Non-Natural Entity: Anthropomorphism in God Concepts," *Cognitive Psychology* 31 (1996): 219-47; Justin L. Barrett, "How Ordinary Cognition Informs Petitionary Prayer," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1 (2001): 259-69.

[84] This is a point long-recognized in the history of religions, evinced by Edward Tylor's "minimal" definition of religion. See also Melford Spiro, "Religion: Problems of Definition and Explanation," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* (ed. Michael Banton; London: Tavistock, 1966), 85-126.

[85] Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[86] Alan Leslie, "ToMM, ToBY, and Agency: Core Architecture and Domain Specificity," in *Mapping the Mind* (ed. Lawrence A. Hirschfeld and Susan A. Gelman; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 119-48.

[87] Thus Boyer's remark that "it is quite likely that concepts of gods and spirits are mostly organized by our intuitive notions of *agency in general* (the abstract quality that is present in animals, persons, and anything that appears to move of its own accord, in pursuance of its own goals) rather than just human agency" (*Religion Explained*, 144; emphasis original).

complex social networks occupied by other individuals with minds.[88] Because humans evolved

as social animals, they come equipped with a host of psychological systems designed for

interacting with other agents in their environment. When an object displays the above markers of

agency, these systems are activated and produce relevant inferences and expectations about these

agentive objects.

In religion, this cognitive machinery is recruited to represent *non-material* divine agents.

In short, the gods are indeed made in our image.[89] Across time and space, supernatural beings are

often depicted anthropomorphically in iconography and literature, including the biblical

narratives.[90] But far more important than human bodies, divine agents are characterized by

psychological anthropomorphism as well: gods and spirits have *minds*.[91] Boyer notes that "gods

and spirits are not represented as having *human* features in general but as having *minds*," for

"anthropologists know that the *only* feature of humans that is *always* projected onto supernatural

beings is the mind."[92] By assuming that a deity is an agent with a mind, a whole suite of

inferences and expectations follow—automatically and at no extra cognitive cost, one knows that

Yahweh has beliefs, desires, preferences, hopes, and values, all of which influence his judgments

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[88] Alan Leslie, "Pretense and Representation: The Origins of 'Theory of Mind,'" *Psychological Review* 94 (1987): 412-426.

[89] The non-observable quality of the gods is not intended as an epistemological truth claim, but rather in many cases reflects native conceptions about such superhuman beings, who are typically conceived as not publically visible most of the time.

[90] Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*; Anne Katherine Knafl, *Forming God: Divine Anthropomorphism in the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014).

[91] Recent biblical scholarship has emphasized the physical forms and actions of deities in ancient Israel and the Hebrew Bible, while neglecting the mentality of the gods. Mark Smith, for example, poses the question "what is an *ilu*?" with reference to the Ugaritic texts, and examines four features of deities found in this literature: strength and size; body and gender; holiness; and immortality. Yet surprisingly, there is no discussion of minds or mental capacities. See Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5, 83-93. Similarly, Benjamin Sommer's innovative study, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), approaches Israelite and biblical religion by focusing on different conceptions of god's "bodies," but devotes no space to the deity's mind or brain. Finally, while rich in interesting insights, the topic of God's mental life receives no explicit discussion in Jaco Gericke's philosophical analysis of "godhood" in the Hebrew Bible. See Gericke, "What is an אֵל? A Philosophical Analysis of the Concept of Generic Godhood in the Hebrew Bible," *OTE* 22 (2009): 21-46.

[92] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 144. Cf. Pyysiainen, *How Religion Works*, x.

and decisions. Consequently, gods are members of the social network and therefore keenly interested in human affairs. Yet, unlike humans with imperfect knowledge, gods have unrestricted access to any and all relevant social information and gossip—they are what Boyer calls "full access strategic agents."[93] As he writes, "The point is not that they know *better* but more simply that they often seem to know *more*."[94]

A vast number of agents abound in world religions. Ilkka Pyysiäinen examines a range of supernatural agents, including souls, ghosts, shamans, gods, buddhas, and bodhisatvas, and argues that what unites all these beings is their representation as agents, that is, "in the sense of animated organisms that have a mentality or mind."[95] Thus, in line with Leslie's features of agency, it is possible to distinguish two components of divine agency: animacy and mentality. In terms of animacy, Barrett coined the idea of a Hyper-active Agency Detection Device (HADD) to describe the tendency to (over)detect animate agency in one's immediate environment. In terms of cost-benefit from detecting vs. failing to detect predators or prey, such a tendency makes sense from an evolutionary perspective and confers a selective advantage. The idea of HADD extended Guthrie's observations about anthropomorphism by suggesting that human see not just faces in the clouds but more importantly, traces in the grass. Scholars have noted, however, that such a system cannot, in itself, explain the persistence of religious concepts, since simple false alarms are quickly abandoned. At any rate, Pyysiäinen focuses specifically on Theory of Mind and suggests that similar systems are responsible for detecting agency in this

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[93] Boyer, *Religion Explained*. See also Barrett's six principles of gods. "The point is not that they know *better* but more simply that they often seem to know *more*." Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 156.

[94] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 156. Boyer contrasts these with what he dubs "Full Aquinas agents," which are theologically abstract concepts of supernatural agents as thoroughly omniscient beings. The problem with such concepts, argues Boyer, is that figuring out what they know is too costly. In the next chapter, we will see that reasoning about supernatural agents occurs on a spectrum: ideas can be more or less intuitive or reflective, not one or the other. Barrett ("Theological Correctness," 325) talks about religious ideas "lying on a continuum of abstractness or cognitive complexity."

[95] Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, vii.

domain as well. He discusses the equivalent tendency towards hyperactive understanding of intentionality (HUI) and hyper teleological reasoning (HTR).[96] And this type of mental reasoning about disembodied minds are shared by all humans, being "the type of reasoning that *everybody* uses when not engaged in scientific or philosophical reflection."[97] Todd Tremlin unpacks the significance of representing superhuman beings as intentional agents:

> Supernatural beings…are also naturally represented as agents with whom one can interact. Gods think and know. They have beliefs, feelings, and concerns. They see, hear, and communicate. They act in ways that cause effects in the world. In short, supernatural agents are understood to be social agents, members of the human social network, residents of the cognitive niche. This is the only reason why religious activities like prayer, sacrifice, rituals, and good behavior make sense. Gods and humans interact as humans interact, and human interaction takes the form of social exchange. Not surprisingly, then, the interactions between gods and people are characterized by giving and receiving, by promises and protection, by reward and punishment, by activities of entreaty and supplication, and by attention to the inner workings of status, relationships, and reciprocity.[98]

Ghost concepts are classic examples of a MCI supernatural agents, but some researchers have suggested instead that ghosts, as well as other disembodied entities like souls, are in fact not counterintuitive at all. The developmental psychologist Paul Bloom argues, for example, that children appear to be what he calls natural born dualists, who experience the sense of self in terms of bodies and immaterial minds, a feeling that persists into adulthood.[99] His experimental work suggests that our tendency to attribute minds to invisible and immaterial persons may be wholly natural and intuitive. It is possible, then, that the notion of mentality without materiality

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[96] Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 20-22.
[97] Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 66.
[98] Todd Tremlin, *Minds and Gods: The Cognitive Foundations of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 112-13.
[99] Paul Bloom, *Descartes' Baby: How the Science of Child Development Explains What Makes Us Human* (New York: Basic, 2004). See also Bloom, "Religion is Natural," *Developmental Science* 10 (2007): 147-51.

is not counterintuitive at all. In any event, popular concepts of disembodied souls, spirits, or ghosts are prevalent cross-culturally and seem to be an ordinary product of folk psychology. Such concepts, however, are not confined to the illiterate, teeming masses, but are rather a result of universal cognitive tendencies that are part of the cognitive endowment of all humans, that is, shared among elite and poor alike. Many ghost, ancestor, and soul concepts can therefore be regarded as natural, "culturally specific ways of conceptualizing panhuman intuitions about agency," a category of religious representation that involves "the type of reasoning that *everybody* uses when not engaged in scientific or philosophical reflection."[100]

2.3.3. Theoretical Implications for Israelite Religion

The proposal of this chapter is that the majority of representations of the divine in ancient Israel and the Bible follow this cognitively optimal recipe of supernatural agency. This is true not only for what scholars identify as "popular religion" in ancient Israel, but also for what they call official religion as well. It also holds true for most (though not all) biblical conceptions of the Israelite deity Yawheh. A cognitive framework therefore helps to further problematize the traditional popular/official religion dichotomy, and offers a new framework for rethinking the diversity of religion in ancient Israel. The distinction between intuitive and reflective beliefs, and optimal and costly religion, are presented in the following chart, which is slightly modified after Robert McCauley's work on the cognitive foundations of religion and science.[101]

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[100] Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 66.
[101] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural*, 236. McCauley adds the note that "Although the discrete cells seem to imply difference in kind, the differences are merely in degree. The table captures the comparative priority each venture places on these cognitive variables."

	Appeals to Agent Causality	
	Unrestricted	**Restricted**
Reflective	1 Costly Religion/ Theology	3 Science
Intuitive	2 Optimal Religion	4 Commonsense explanations

(left axis label: Cognitive Processing)

Figure 2. Cognitive Processing Modes and Types of Religion

Although McCauley aims to clarify the cognitive underpinnings of religion and science, his theoretical remarks have serious implications for our understanding of ancient Israelite religion. For his part, he distinguishes four different endeavors: science, commonsense explanations of the world, theology, and what he terms "popular religion." The latter two correspond roughly to what we have called in this chapter "costly" and "optimal" religion, respectively. These four endeavors are distinguished based on two main criteria: (1) the type of cognitive processing—intuitive vs. reflective, and (2) the appeal of each to agentive explanations or causality. As we have seen, theology develops through offline, reflective cognitive activity, whereas popular or "optimal" religion arises naturally through intuitive cognition. This means that theological modes of thought and science are similar insofar as they depend on reflective cognitive reasoning and deliberation, which as a result need to be supported by cultural aids, specialists, and social institutions. What theology and popular religion tend to share in common is their appeal to

agency to explain the world (*divine* agency in this case).[102] However, is still important to differentiate between different *types* of agency. Specifically, cognitively optimal religion, informed by intuitive mental process, produces relatively straightforward person-like conceptions of divine agency that follow our general intuitions about intentional agency. By contrast, as we will explore in the next chapter, theological systems, such as the Deuteronomic theology, put forward more radical, abstract, and cognitively costly conceptions of divine agency, which downplayed the usual markers of agency discussed above.

To return to the chart above, for our purposes Boxes 1 and 2 are the relevant ones. Within this framework, the meaningful distinction is not between popular and official religion, as many biblical scholars have proposed, but rather between intuitive and reflective modes of religious cognition. Now, one might be tempted to simply map the above boxes onto the categories "popular" and "official" religion, equating "popular religion" with the "optimal religion" in Box 2 above, and "official religion" with "theology" in Box 1. This would be a mistake, however, because these cognitive categories are based on cognitive criteria and there is little reason to expect them to map onto categories that were formulated based on an analysis of religion at the socio-cultural level. This distinction is crucial, since it means that there is no *a priori* reason to assume that so-called official religion is synonymous with highly reflective theology, also known as cognitively costly religion. Indeed, we have seen that even at the socio-cultural level, many religious beliefs and practices were shared among different strata of ancient Israelite society, among both elite a lay practitioners, including the veneration of goddesses and deceased ancestors. The overlap is equally evident at the cognitive level, in the form of basic intuitions about supernatural agents. Therefore, while literacy, texts, and institutions are necessary

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[102] As McCauley writes, "Theology, like Lot's wife, cannot avoid the persistent temptation to look back— to look back to popular religious forms." McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural*, 228.

conditions for generating, maintaining, and transmitting costly religious doctrines (as we shall see in the next chapter with the Deuteronomic theology), they are not *sufficient* conditions for doing so; it is not inevitable that literate guilds of religious specialists will produce costly systems of religious thought and many may opt instead to cultivate a religious operation that is more grandiose yet cognitively optimal.

In ancient Israel, there are examples of what can be considered "official" or "state" religion that *also* fit this cognitively optimal category. The various pentateuchal narratives, for example, notably the Yahwist and Elohist sources, but also the Priestly and Deuteronomic sources as well, represent the deity as a person-like character in the unfolding drama. He has needs and desires, and experiences emotions such as joy and rage. But even if we set aside these mythical literary narratives and focus instead on texts that likely reflect more "on-the-ground" religious reality, we encounter similarly optimal representations of Yahweh. The Psalms, for instance, are filled with petitionary prayers in which Yahweh is invoked as the divine agent capable of receiving requests and acting upon them. In the so-called royal psalms (Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144), Yahweh appears as a mighty warrior and father figure who sanctions and protects the Israelite king. The image of Yahweh as divine warrior king, modeled on earthly typologies of kingship, is given full expression in the Zion-Sabaoth theology.[103] In texts that give voice to this theology, Yahweh is permanently present in the Jerusalem temple on Mount Zion, where he sits enthroned as the divine warrior king. This model of Yahweh's agency incorporates elements from earlier neighboring deities such as El and Baal,

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[103] See Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (Lund: Almqvists Wiksell, 1982), 15-36, 81-113. See also Miller, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 11-12, 88-89, 196-97; and on Yahweh as divine warrior Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 91-111.

and served as the dominant royal ideology for a long part of Israel's pre-exilic history.[104] In many ways, this image of Yahweh as the mighty patron deity of the nation of Israel is an example of what Ara Norenzayan calls "Big Gods"—representations of deities who oversee large groups of people and monitor their behavior.[105] Notwithstanding the "size" of these official Israelite conceptions of Yahweh, however, the deity is still represented in largely optimal, anthropomorphic terms, as an intentional agent who fights, rules, judges, and presides in much the same way as other ancient Near Eastern gods and kings.

The available evidence therefore suggests that the majority of Israelite religious beliefs and practices—both popular and official, domestic and temple-based—correspond to the cognitively optimal religion in Box 2. In this view, cognitively optimal religion was the rule in ancient Israel, while costly theology was a rare exception. But importantly, this conflict does not lie at the intersection of what scholars have bifurcated as popular and official religion. Rather, from a cognitive view, the conflict centers on the differential types of cognitive processing involved in each venture, and the nature of the their respective appeals to agentive explanations or causality. In other words, big gods like Yahweh and local household divinities were more often than not mentally conceptualized in much the same way, relying on similar intuitive modes of processing and similar expectations about social exchange and interaction. The remainder of this chapter further explores this theoretical claim by examining some parallels between material artifacts in Israelite domestic and temple settings.

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[104] See Mark S. Smith *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

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

2.4. GODS AND ANCESTORS: CONTINUITY ACROSS OFFICIAL AND DOMESTIC SETTINGS

Archaeological and textual evidence indicate that domestic religious cults flourished in Iron Age Israel, Judah, and the wider Levant. Once described as an example of popular religion, in recent years scholars have started to discuss this evidence under the rubric of family or household religion. Marked by a series of important publications, this research represents a fruitful (and for my money, one of the most exciting) new avenues of inquiry in the study of Israelite religion.[106] By highlighting specific social arrangements (the family) or loci (the household), these categories are more analytically precise. Yet one of the issues that remains, much as with the study of popular religion, concerns the relationship of family or household religion to the official cult. This is especially true since so-called popular practices, like the worship of goddesses and deceased ancestors, figure so prominently within the religion of the home. Saul Olyan writes, for example, that, "the nature of the relationship of family religion to the official cult demands clarification." [107] Of course, the relationship can (and should) be clarified from different perspectives and, indeed, scholarship on family religion integrates a variety of interdisciplinary approaches, including textual, epigraphic, archaeological, and social-scientific. Here we suggest that an approach grounded in the study of human cognition provides a helpful supplement to this important work.

There is a wealth of archaeological evidence for domestic cults in Iron Age Israel-Palestine and Jordan, from sites like Tell en-Nasbeh, Beth-Shemesh, Beersheba, and Tell el-

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[106] See especially John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan, eds., *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008); Rainer Albertz and Rüdiger Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012); Rainer Albertz, Beth Alpert Nakhai, Saul M. Olyan, and Rüdiger Scmitt, eds., *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014); Karel van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Carol Meyers, *Households and Holiness: The Religious Culture of Israelite Women* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005).

[107] Saul M. Olyan, "Family Religion in Israel and the Wider Levant of the First Millennium BCE," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 113.

Far'ah North, among others.[108] These sites reveal a range of cultic objects and paraphernalia, including: anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines; cults stands; offering benches and alcoves; model chairs and shrines; portable altars; and cultic vessels, utensils, and lamps. They are found both within traditional four-room houses and also in larger community areas that Beth Alpert Nakhai refers to as "shrines of the family elders."[109] Although we do not have direct, unmediated access to ancient Israelite religious intuitions, we can use the cognitive insights above in order to theorize their likely mental representations of household ancestors based on these material remains, and, moreover, their points of convergence with official state-sponsored religion.

In terms of religious practice and function, these objects were used in ritual behaviors involving interactions and offerings with supernatural beings. According to Karel van der Toorn, family religion in ancient Israel and the wider Near East was characterized by two key features: (1) the veneration of the family god, and (2) the maintenance of the cult of family ancestors.[110] These ritual activities included supplication of the household patron deities or spirits, ritual meals, and offerings for deceased ancestors. Household religion is also distinguished by its location, occupying a distinct space remote from the temple or local sanctuary. As Stowers notes,

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[108] According to Holladay, over 50% of houses in ancient Israel-Palestine display signs of religious cultic activity, reaching its peak in last half of 8th century B.C.E. The archaeological evidence is discussed in Holladay, "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy," and more extensively in Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*; Beth Alpert Nakhai, *Archaeology and the Religions of Canaan and Israel* (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001). For an exhaustive discussion of cult objects, assemblages, and sites, see Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion*, ch. 3.

[109] Beth Alpert Nakhai, "The Household as Sacred Space," in *Family and Household Religion: Toward a Synthesis of Old Testament Studies, Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Cultural Studies* (ed. Rainer Albertz, Beth Alpert Nakhai, Saul M. Olyan, and Rüdiger Schmitt; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 53-72.

[110] Karel Van der Toorn, "Family Religion in Second Millennium West Asia (Mesopotamia, Emar, Nuzi)," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 20-36. According to van der Toorn, in contrast to Mesopotamia, West Semitic family religion fused these worship practices and worshipped both family deities and ancestors in the same ritual space.

"the religion of household and family, located primarily in the home and at the family tomb, is the ultimate religion of place."[111]

Within the Hebrew Bible, there are hints of private religious devotional practices. Some of these include ancestor rites that incorporate miniature figurines (*teraphim*) within the home (Genesis 31:19, 35; 1 Samuel 19:13, 16). There is no reason, however, to restrict the use of figurines to popular or household religion, since they played a role in the official cult too, whether as deities or votive offerings.[112] Other local or domestic rites centered on the family tomb and burial of the dead, with the obligation and authority for this religious observance falling to the head of household (Genesis 35:29; 50:5, 12, 14; Numbers 19:14; Amos 6:10). Continual care for the deceased could take the form of food offerings (Deuteronomy 26:14; Sirach 30:18) and the erection of memorial stones or pillars (2 Samuel 18:18).[113]

Yet we may ask just how unique these features are to the realm of family/household religion and whether or not similar, even identical, beliefs and behaviors are to be found among the state-sponsored or civic temple cults. If so, there would seem to be little basis for identifying family and household religion as a *sui generis* domain. On the question of the relationship of the domestic cult and the religion of the state, there are differing opinions. Some scholars, such as Rainer Albertz, argue that pre-exilic Israel was characterized by religious *discontinuity* between family religion and official religion.[114] He maintains that ancient families had their own distinct beliefs and practices, which "differed considerably from those of contemporary official Israelite

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[111] Stowers, "Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households," 10.

[112] See Karel van der Toorn, "Israelite Figurines: A View from the Texts," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (ed. Barry M. Gitteln; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 45-62.

[113] See further Olyan, "Family Religion," 113-26; van der Toorn, "Israelite Figurines."

[114] Rainer Albertz, "Family Religion in Ancient Israel and Its Surroundings," in *Household and Family Religion in Antiquity* (ed. John Bodel and Saul M. Olyan; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 89-112.

religion."[115] He notes that bloody animal sacrifice was a central ritual act at local sanctuaries and temples, whereas there is no material evidence for such practice within domestic settings.[116] He also states that family religion was marked by the intimate relationship between an individual and the divine, a personal piety reflected in the petitions found in individual psalms of lament. By contrast, the communal laments of official religion petition the deity by referencing his historical acts on behalf of his people—events such as the exodus and the election of the Davidic kingdom.

However, in light of our cognitive considerations, it is not so clear that domestic beliefs and ritual offerings differed considerably from official ones. For starters, even in the priestly laws of Leviticus, a number of *non-bloody* offerings are prescribed alongside the meatier animal sacrifices. But at a more fundamental level, both types of offerings center on social interactions and transactions between gods and humans, and operate according to the logic of gift exchange wherein both parties have reciprocal duties and obligations towards one another.[117] Shared assumptions about supernatural agency underlie the logic of gift offerings—whether bloody sacrifices or otherwise. Deceased ancestors, family gods, or the national deity: all were represented as counterintuitive immaterial agents capable of perceiving and receiving offerings, recognizing and remembering the offerer, and accepting or rejecting gifts or requests based on

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[115] Albertz, "Family Religion in Ancient Israel," 102. He argues for three levels of religion under the idea of internal religious pluralism (family, local, official), and argues that these levels differ regarding the target group, its supporters, ideas and practices, functions, and degree of institutionalization. As we have seen, all but perhaps the last of these can be challenged.

[116] Albertz, "Family Religion in Ancient Israel," 97.

[117] The classic treatment is Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (trans. W. D. Halls; New York: W. W. Norton, 2000). Stowers ("Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Family") discusses different modes of religious activity with regard to ancient Greek society. He differentiates the mode of "everyday social exchange," which involves individuals and families interacting with deities in a manner that was common throughout the ancient Mediterranean, with a more theological abstract "civic religion," which makes use of the everyday social exchange model but extends it into different directions. For a fuller development of this theoretical approach, see Stowers, "The Religion of Plant and Animal Offerings Versus the Religion of Meanings, Essences, and Textual Mysteries," in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice* (ed. Jennifer Wright Kunst and Zsuzsanna Varhelyi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35-56.

preferences and intentions. [118] Without the assumption that these beings had minds, such offerings would make no sense at all. As David Wright observes with regard to ancient conceptualizations of god broadly, "The form and mind of the gods were suited to the method of their worship and how humans communicated with them."[119] It may be more accurate and apt, then, to speak not just of a deity's anthropomorphic qualities, but more precisely about their anthopo*nousic* qualities. Similarly, even though the content of individual and communal laments may have differed, both religious petitions are directed towards divine agencies with the expectation that they will intercede and act favorably on one's behalf.[120] It is no surprise, then, that much like family ancestors and household gods, Yahweh is often described in familial terms as Israel's father (*'āb*), who resides in a house or temple (*bēt*). The national deity is thus conceptualized in near-identical terms to ancestral spirits or patron deities at the family/household level.[121]

The same continuity exists with the use of model shrines and other miniature vessels and utensils found in domestic contexts.[122] Such shrines mimic their full-scale, real-life counterparts, and suggest an orientation towards the central temple and its rituals.[123] "Why else," asks Saul Olyan, "would one have a model of a sanctuary in the home if not to recall the modeled sanctuary during domestic cultic rites?"[124] Although temples were massive, extraordinary structures compared to the ordinariness of the average Israelite four-room house, both are made

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[118] Some warn against conflating or confusing gods with ancestors. E.g., van der Toorn, "Family Religion," 430. However, in my view, gods and ancestors are similarly represented at a cognitive level as invisible agents with minds.

[119] David P. Wright, "Syro-Canaanite Religions," in *The Cambridge History of Religions in the Ancient World. Volume 1: From the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic Age* (ed. M.R. Salzman and M.A. Sweeney; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 129-50 (148).

[120] See also Moshe Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer as a Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[121] See further J. David Schloen, *The House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001).

[122] On shrines, see Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 328-43.

[123] Olyan, "Family Religion," 116. Cf. Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 340.

[124] Olyan, "Family Religion," 116.

of materials such as wood and stone, and both serve above all to designate sacred space.[125] The same applies to miniature cooking pots, lamps, and incense altars, all of which replicate in minor form the cultic objects housed in official sanctuaries. Following Olyan, the presence of model shrines and cultic miniatures in domestic contexts indicates a "significant degree of continuity with sanctuary practice and ideology."[126] We can extend this observation and conclude that such practices also reflect significant *cognitive* continuity as well, in terms of the underlying mental representation of the divine. And moreover, this mental content manifests itself in similar ritual forms of gift offering. The supernatural entity may change depending on context, but crucially the behavior directed toward that entity remains the same.[127]

By way of conclusion, then, we observe continuity and overlap across domestic and official settings with regard to (1) the form of the material objects themselves, (2) the form of the ritual practices associated with them, and (3) the mental representation and role of divine beings within those rituals. Although the first two points have been observed by biblical scholars, the third consideration is the crucial insight of our cognitive approach, because it helps make sense of the parallels identified in (1) and (2). In other words, the nature of the mental representation of divine beings in different social settings helps explain *why* we observe similarities in the associated material artifacts and ritual practices. From this perspective, we might reasonably regard family religion as official religion writ small, or if one prefers, official religion as family

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[125] Cf. Stowers, "Theorizing the Religion of Ancient Households and Family," 11. Stowers observes that the religion of the temple borrowed from everyday practices, but elaborated them to make them "non-ordinary." I think this is generally true, but it assumes that ancient Israelites expressed domestic ritual practices as "ordinary," which is a debatable assumption.

[126] Olyan, "Family Religion," 117.

[127] Interestingly, this is recognized at by Albertz and Schmitt (*Family and Household Religion*, 173), who write, "The material found at these sites suggests that ritual actions that were likely to have been conducted in the shrines would have differed from domestic rituals in scale only."

religion writ large. In either case, the difference between the home and temple, ancestors and the

national deity, were not nearly as great as often imagined.

CHAPTER 3:
DEUTERONOMIC THEOLOGY AS COGNITIVELY COSTLY RELIGION

3.1. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to the cognitively optimal nature of Israelite religion found in both official and domestic spheres, the present chapter examines the rarefied Deuteronomic theology as a salient example of cognitively costly religion. Whereas ritual procedures in the home and temple often involved intuitive representations of supernatural agency—whether of Yahweh or household ancestors—the Deuteronomic texts develop theological doctrines that are more abstract, counterintuitive, and costly. As Ronald Clements observes, "The Deuteronomists were undoubtedly the most theologically self-conscious and ideologically aware of any of the major schools of writers who have contributed to the Old Testament...[they] show every sign of having arrived at their doctrine of God after prolonged and careful reflection."[1] This chapter explores the cognitive cost of this reflective theological movement, as well as the external cultural tools and strategies, such as literacy and textualization, which were used to sustain it.

We shall examine three fundamental doctrines of the Deuteronomic theology, in particular, that reveal its cognitively costly character: (1) the so-called Name Theology, (2) cult centralization, and (3) programmatic iconoclasm. These elements are interrelated pieces of the larger theological program and mutually inform each other in various ways. This chapter argues that not only is each element conceptually costly on its own, but the overall cognitive cost is amplified when these elements are taken together as part of the same theological system. The present chapter aims to supplement previous scholarship that has illuminated the innovative nature of the Deuteronomic program, notably at the level of textual revision and socio-religious

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[1] Ronald E. Clements, *Deuteronomy* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 49-50; cf. 60.

reform, by clarifying instead the cognitive demands entailed by the above-mentioned doctrines, as well as their likely impact on ancient Israelite audiences.

The Deuteronomic program involved significant practical and material reforms, but above all it was a reform of ideas, a thoroughgoing theological movement.[2] It is therefore a prime candidate for a cognitive avenue of inquiry. In addition to illuminating the core concepts at the heart of the Deuteronomic theology, consideration of the cognitive demands places us in a better position to address certain textual and historical issues as well. Framing Deuteronomic theology as a form of cognitively costly religion, for instance, helps to account for the strong emphasis on teaching, repetition, and doctrinal nature found in the book of Deuteronomy. It also helps to explain the seeming failure of the Deuteronomic reforms allegedly carried out under kings Hezekiah and Josiah.[3] While previous scholarship has only partially explored the questions of *why* Deuteronomy stresses redundancy and repetition and *why* the reform movements were ultimately unsuccessful, a cognitive perspective offers tools for addressing both of these issues. Therefore, after examining the key tenets of the Deuteronomic theology in some detail, and illustrating the costly nature of these doctrines, the chapter concludes by exploring the role of certain cultural devices that Deuteronomy used to prop up its costly theological system.[4]

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[2] Moshe Weinfeld's comment (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], 190) regarding the scholarly focus of the Josianic reforms is still relevant: "But unfortunately up to the present the various works devoted to the subject have confined themselves to the problem of the cultic significance of the reform, without giving due attention to its theological implications."

[3] Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree: Popular Religion in Sixth-Century Judah* (HSM 46; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 213, writes, for example, that the available data "make clear that the materials claiming widespread efficacy for the Josianic reform are patent fabrications. The reform was instead limited in scope, temporary in effect, and clearly failed in its goal of impressing a monolithic description of Yahwism on all of Yahweh's devotees." This is not to say, however, that the reforms are a wholly later invention without historical basis, on which see further below.

[4] The label "Deuteronomic" is used in this chapter to refer collectively to the school of authors and editors that produced the book of Deuteronomy (D) and the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH). Despite much debate over the dating, layers, and relation of these texts, both D and DtrH reflective an interpretive community with a fairly consistent theological worldview. On the composition of D, see Alexander Rofé, *Deuteronomy: Issues and Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), who writes (p. 9) that "[d]espite its various compositional layers, D is one of the most consistent documents," with a "clearly theological orientation." See also the remark in Joel S.

3.2. CRITERIA FOR COGNITIVELY COSTLY RELIGION

Before examining the key themes found in the Deuteronomic theology, we must first spend some time unpacking the question of what constitutes "cognitively costly religion." How might the costliness of particular theological doctrines or tenets be determined? By laying this theoretical groundwork and establishing some heuristic criteria for determining cognitively costly religion, we will be in a better position to assess the relative level of costliness with regard to the doctrines of Name Theology, cult centralization, and iconoclasm.

One difficult with identifying cognitively costly religious phenomena, however, is that the majority of CSR research to date concerns the intuitive side of religion. In fact, CSR has largely eschewed the study of sophisticated theology and dogma and instead focused its energy on popular, recurrent patterns of religious belief and behavior, and the implicit cognitive underpinnings that operate outside of conscious awareness. Overall, then, costly theology remains a somewhat vague and underdeveloped category within the cognitive study of religion.[5] Nevertheless, we can gain further clarity on the notion of cognitive costliness by contrasting it with its conceptual counterpart, cognitive optimality, which we spent some time considering in the previous chapter.

Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 138: "Despite its evident stratification, the D document is a cohesive and coherent whole, with a defined agenda, consistent themes and language, and a recognizable structure. On the textual development see further James Robson, "The Literary Composition of Deuteronomy," in *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches* (ed. David G. Firth and Philip S. Johnston; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012), 19-59; and the proposed reconstruction in Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 143-72. On DtrH, the classic discussions are Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (2d. ed.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); and Frank Moore Cross, "The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," in idem, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 274-89. See also Richard D. Nelson, "The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History: The Case is Still Compelling," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 319-37; Raymond F. Person, Jr. *The Deuteronomistic School: History, Social Setting, and Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); and Thomas C. Römer, *The So-Called Deuteronomistic History: A Sociological, Historical, and Literary Introduction* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

[5] A notable exception is found in Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004), 49-59. See also Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Sciences is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 237-44.

Recall that cognitively optimal religion is characterized by several features. It arises naturally from ordinary mental processes that operate automatically and without effort. Optimal religious concepts that result from this fast processing mode stick close to intuitive expectations delivered by domain-specific cognitive systems, in particular our deeply embedded intuitive ontology. Religious ideas are, in this sense, derivative byproducts of the way normal minds work. Supernatural concepts that minimally violate the rules of our intuitive ontology are the most compelling and memorable in terms of cultural selection—in other words, they approximate a cognitive optimum. Within this class of MCI concepts, the most optimal tend to be supernatural *agent* concepts, which piggyback on our ordinary folk psychology for dealing with agents in general. Because representing other minds is natural and effortless for people, supernatural agent concepts are rich in inferential potential; they allow us to make stable inferences about the actions and mental states of these agents and make possible religious interaction with them.

In contrast to this outline of optimal representations, cognitively costly concepts are less intuitive and less natural. The develop only through the slow, deliberate reasoning that is characteristic of reflective System 2 mental processing and tend to flourish in environments that are capable of sustaining and transmitting these complex bodies of knowledge. At a fundamental level, costly religious representations are rooted in lower level mental processes and psychological intuitions. As Ilkka Pyysiäinen remarks, "even the most abstract theological conceptualizations are elaborations of folk-psychological notions."[6] Indeed, it is for this reason that people tend to abandon theologically complex notions about God in favor more optimal,

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[6] Ilkka Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), viii. See also Helen de Cruz, *A Natural History of Natural Theology: The Cognitive Science of Theology and Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2015); Nicolas Baumard and Pascal Boyer, "Religious Beliefs as Reflective Elaborations on Intuitions: A Modified Dual-Process Model," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22 (2013): 295-300.

theologically "incorrect" representations during real-time thinking. As Robert McCauley puts it, "Theology, like Lot's wife, cannot avoid the persistent temptation to look back—to look back to popular religious forms."[7] This is most evident in theology's appeal to divine agent causality. After all, even highly sophisticated religious systems are founded on the postulation of divine agent(s) and ritual actions directed toward them. As we shall see, however, some *types* of representations of agency are far more costly in terms of their level of abstractness and inferential potential.

In terms of conceptual structure, costly religious representations are those that depart from the cognitive optimum attractor position and snowball into formulations that are abstract and beyond just minimally counterintuitive: costly concepts are *radically* or *substantially* counterintuitive. Rather than incorporating a single conceptual violation against a backdrop of preserved intuitive expectations, costly concepts pile on violations of our intuitive ontology. While minimally counterintuitive concepts render a concept salient and memorable, excessive violations have the opposite effect, resulting instead in a kind of conceptual overload. In their experimental work with supernatural concepts, for example, Boyer and Ramble discovered that concepts with too many domain violations, or a combination of different types of violations, tended to have a detrimental effect in terms of memory and recall.[8]

Similarly, god-concepts can become costly by departing too far from our intuitive sense of agency, in particular. Highly abstract concepts and theories are not as easy to conceptualize as

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[7] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural*, 228.

[8] Pascal Boyer and Charles Ramble, "Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Cross-Cultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-Intuitive Representations," *Cognitive Science* 25 (2001): 535-64 (546-60). Note also Barrett and Keil, "Conceptualizing a Nonnatural Entity," 119, who write that too many violations exert "enormous processing strain." See also Konika Banerjee, Omar S. Haque, and Elizabeth S. Spelke, "Melting Lizards and Crying Mailboxes: Children's Preferential Recall of Minimally Counterintuitive Concepts," *Cognitive Science* 37 (2013): 1251-89. On measuring levels of CI-ness see further Justin L. Barrett, "Coding and Quantifying Counterintuitiveness in Religious Concepts: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008): 308-338 (330):

familiar human-like agent concepts, a fact that holds true not just for theology but also scientific theories.[9] Concepts that incorporate the representations of minds and agency allow for one to draw robust inferences about those agents, whereas a lack of mind and agency prevent such inferential potential. Boyer mentions, for example, god-concepts that are what he calls "Full Aquinas Agents," whose minds represent every single fact about the world.[10] Although such concepts emerge in official theologies, they entail a great amount of (often unnecessary) cognitive effort to draw relevant inferences from these agents.[11] Or consider the common cultural concept of zombies, brain-dead agents characterized by animacy but a lack of mental agency; although zombies may be MCI and advantageous in cultural transmission, they are not good candidates for religious systems that require agents with whom worshippers can interact. Thus, we can determine the potential costliness of a religious concept based on its fit with our intuitive ontological knowledge, and more specifically the degree to which it activates our mental systems specializing in dealing with intentional agency. Insofar as a representation fails to adequately satisfy these basic criteria, we should expect it to exert a greater burden on cognitive processing, all things being equal. Such costly concepts do not emerge naturally, but rather are generated through different modes of thinking and cognitive processing. Whitehouse writes, in this regard, that many cultures "postulate very much more complex otherworldly forces … that are hard to understand and demand enormous cognitive resources to manage and transmit." [12] Such

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[9] Alternatively, concepts might be considered costly or non-optimal if they do not stimulate rich inferences. Thus, Boyer gives the hypothetical examples of a god that is almighty, but who only exists on Wednesdays. Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 52.

[10] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 164-65.

[11] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 165, notes that "For every aspect of every situation, you would have to imagine that the Aquinas agent represents it, derives conclusions from it, etc. Very few of these imagined thoughts would be of any consequence. (If a god knows that my toothpaste contains peroxide, what follows?)".

[12] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 51. Cf. 58-9: "Transmitting a religion also requires the development of forms of mnemonic support that are costly to maintain in terms of the most basic human resources: labor, time, and energy." In addition to these practical resources mentioned by Whitehouse, the analysis in this chapter focuses

representations are more difficult to acquire, sustain, and transmit, and therefore if they ever hope to become part of the established cultural currency, they require special cultural support and mnemonic aids to facilitate their survival.

Some familiar examples of costly religious concepts include the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, or the Western notion of a simultaneously omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent deity. Less familiarly, Whitehouse provides ethnographic examples of both optimal and costly concepts. Traditional religion among the Mali Baining of Papua New Guinea, for example, centers on spirits called *sega*, who are regarded as human-like agents that one can interact with through simple rituals. People do not contemplate their existence and there is no effort to systematize religious knowledge about them. As Whitehouse puts it, "They were just *sega*, and that was that."[13] By contrast, on the other end of the spectrum, the Pomio Kivung, a new religious movement that emerged as a result of exposure to missionary Christianity, developed complex supernatural concepts with elaborate cosmologies and rituals. Their ideas about the divine were highly abstract and, according to Whitehouse, "intrinsically difficult to conceptualize."[14] These costly beliefs were learned through regular meetings, sermons, and rehearsal. This example indicates that while costly religious concepts are far from impossible, they require cultural supports in order to survive. In the case of the Baining and Kivung, ritual performances play much the same mnemonic role as literacy and institutions in other societies.

Research on the phenomenon of theological incorrectness illustrates the inherently fragile nature of officially sanctioned, cognitively costly religious doctrines, which are often

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on the mental or cognitive costs of certain religious ideas, notably in terms of demands placed on processing, memory, and transmission.

[13] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 52.

[14] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 54.

spontaneously simplified into more manageable forms during real-time thinking.[15] Barrett's experimental work, for example, reveals the ease with which intuitive understandings of God can trump explicit religious teachings. Thus, even after people endorse the normative description of God as omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, infinite, nonmaterial, and so on, they resort to more intuitive person-like understandings of God during recall tasks. Outside of the Western context, Theravada Buddhists in Southeast Asia profess the common belief that Buddha is a nontheistic entity who transcended existence upon achieving Nirvana. Yet as Jason Slone observes, there is a difference between this text-based Buddhist theology and the ways in which people represent the Buddha during everyday life, where in most situations the Buddha is treated as a divine agent who is present and should be worshipped.[16] Official doctrines and theologically "correct" religious ideas, therefore, are only part of the story; the farther they stray from our intuitive sense of the world, the greater likelihood that people will lapse back into more optimal "folk" understandings.[17]

When it comes to religious traditions, given the costly, and therefore inherently fragile, nature of these types of religious representations, they usually require cultural supports in order to survive and get passed. The most common cultural supports take the form of literacy, ritual activities, guilds of religious experts, and established institutional structures. They may also require generations to become solidified into a stable tradition. As Pyysiäinen writes, "Highly abstract supernatural agent concept and beliefs tend to appear in religious traditions only after a

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[15] Justin L. Barrett and Frank C. Keil, "Conceptualizing a Nonnatural Entity: Anthropomorphism in God Concepts," *Cognitive Psychology* 31 (1996): 219-247; Justin L. Barrett, "Theological Correctness: Cognitive Constraint and the Study of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 11 (1999): 325-39; Jason Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[16] Slone, *Theological Incorrectness*, 68-84. See also Justin L. Barrett, "Cognitive Constraints on Hindu Concepts of the Divine," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 608-19.

[17] While this holds true for most people, most of the time, it also applies to the elite minds responsible for creating costly religious doctrines in the first place.

long historical process of reflection, made possible by external memory stores and social institutions such as monasteries and universities."[18] This is not to say, however, that complex ideas about the supernatural cannot arise in smaller, non-literate settings.[19] But in order for such ideas to become stable within a society, they must be transmitted, and in order for them to be successfully transmitted, they must be able to be remembered and communicated. Without the appropriate tools for aiding memory and transmission, such costly concepts are unlikely to persist. In this regard, then, literate societies with textual and visual media offer significantly more fertile ground not only for the theological speculation that generates costly religious ideas, but also for the transmission of these ideas both synchronically throughout the population and diachronically over time. In this sense, religious guilds are not unlike scientific communities, which likewise rely on the same type of reflective cognitive processing and many of the same types of cultural and institutional support.[20]

Now, in addition to measuring a concept's agreement with intuitive knowledge, we can utilize a related metric for assessing the costliness of a given concept. Specifically, we can ask not only how a religious belief violates intuitive cognitive expectations, but also how the same concept violates prevailing *cultural* norms and expectations.[21] The logic here is the same: the

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[18] Pyysiäinen, *Supernatural Agents*, 98.

[19] On the maintenance and stability of cultural systems in non-literate societies, see Fredrik Barth, *Cosmologies in the Making: A Generative Approach to Cultural Variation in Inner New Guinea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[20] See McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural*, 153-54: "On the contrary, the elaborated religious representations employed by theological and ecclesiastical elites in *some* religious systems can be every bit as counterintuitive as the most radically counterintuitive scientific representations are…In the course of refining religious formulations to increase their consistency and coherence, theologians avail themselves of many of the same tools that scientists use…Like science, these conscious, thought-full, theological activities can spawn cognitive representations that depart substantially from the deliverances of our maturationally natural cognitive systems, and, like science, all the evidence suggests that such activities do not occur in any prolonged, widespread, or systematic fashion without literacy."

[21] The aim of introducing this second metric is not to erect the common but erroneous distinction between "culture" and "cognition." Rather, cultural expectations are also deeply influenced by cognitive mechanisms, being locally specific forms, or what is called culturally embedded cognition. See Armin W. Geertz, "Brain, Body and Culture: A Biocultural Theory of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2010): 304-21.

further a concept conflicts with existing cultural knowledge, the less likely it is to stick among a population. This alternative metric thus moves beyond our species-specific evolved cognitive architecture and instead relates to the proximate cultural and historical context. In taking this approach, however, we are still probing the psychological demands of certain concepts. In this case, we are simply changing the baseline for comparison, from intuitive cognitive knowledge to familiar cultural knowledge. Along these lines, recent studies by Dimitris Xygalatas and colleagues tested people's memory for concepts that were quantitatively similar to MCI concepts (in that they entail no great cognitive demands), but which involved "violations of cultural conceptual knowledge" (as opposed to ontological knowledge).[22] They found that concepts that went against cultural or learned expectations were remembered better than more mundane, everyday ones. For example, an illiterate teacher is more memorable than a humdrum plastic telephone. This resembles the findings with MCI concepts, namely that minimal deviation from established conceptual categories is optimal—concepts that violate cultural knowledge tap into the same sweet spot in terms of memory and recall. But crucially, the rest of the story applies here too: concepts that depart too far from prevailing cultural norms and expectations are costly and do not enjoy this advantage. The logic is the same: a little counterintuitiveness is optimal, but too much places a costly burden on memory and processing.[23]

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[22] Michaela Porubanova-Norquist, Daniel Joel Shaw, and Dimitris Xygalatas, "Minimal-Counterintuitiveness Revisited: Effects of Cultural and Ontological Violations on Concept Memorability," *Journal for the Cognitive Science of Religion* 1 (2013): 181-92. They also refer to such concepts as "minimally counter-schematic" or involving "cultural intuition-violations." See also Michaela Porubanova, Daniel Joel Shaw, Ryan McKay, and Dimitris Xygalatas, "Memory for Expectation-Violating Concepts: The Effects of Agents and Cultural Familiarity," *PLoS One* 9 (2014): 1-7.

[23] While Xygalatas et al. suggest that on their own, violations of cultural expectations increase memory for concepts (much as for MCI concepts), I argue below that Deuteronomic conceptions of Yahweh (1) go beyond what might be considered simple cultural violations, and (2) also include cognitive category violations as well. It is the combination of both types of violations that render costly the Deuteronomic ideas about name theology, centralization, and aniconism.

Therefore, we have two basic metrics for assessing the costliness of the Deuteronomic theology and its potentially costly nature. First, we can examine how its conception of the deity fits with universal cognitive expectations, specifically intuitive ontological knowledge and intuitive sense of agency. Second, we can ask how a concept fits with prevailing religio-cultural expectations. The former criterion focuses on psychological conceptual knowledge, while the latter demands a familiarity with the specific socio-cultural context in which religious concepts circulate. This is an area where historical data and expertise offer a critical lens for penetrating ancient religious cognition. Each of the following sections, then, proceeds according to the same methodology: first we identify and analyze the theological doctrine in question, and second we seek to determine the extent to which it aligns or departs with the cognitive and cultural expectations.

3.3. HISTORY, HISTORICITY, AND THE DEUTERONOMIC REFORMS

In order to analyze the book of Deuteronomy (D) and the broader Deuteronomic school of thought, we must first briefly address a few issues regarding the historical and literary contexts of these texts. These issues include the distinction between Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History found in the books of Judges through 2 Kings, the relation of these literary strands, the dating of these texts, their connection to the Josianic cult reforms in the seventh century B.C.E., and the historicity of these reforms.[24]

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[24] For scholars who uphold the historicity of the reforms, to varying degrees, see Rainer Albertz, "Why a Reform Like Josiah's Must Have Happened," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings* (ed. L. L. Grabbe; LHBOTS 393; New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 27-46; and Norbert Lohfink, "The Cult Reform of Josiah of Judah: 2 Kings 22-23 as a Source for the History of Israelite Religion," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 459- 75. For a more cautious view in defense of Josiah's reforms, see Christoph Uehlinger, "Was There a Cult Reform Under King Josiah? The Case for a Well- Grounded Minimum," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, 279-316. For minimalist views on the historicity of Josiah's reforms see Juha Pakkala, "Why the Cult Reforms in Judah Probably Did Not Happen," in *One God, One Cult, One Nation* (ed. R. Kratz and H. Spieckermann; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 201-35; Niels

As is the case with most biblical texts, there is some disagreement over the dating of the book of Deuteronomy.[25] The traditional view follows W. M. L. de Wette's proposal at the end of the 18th century, which identified some form of Deuteronomy, usually the legal core in Deuteronomy 12-26 (also known as *Urdeuteronomium*) with the so called "book of the law" allegedly discovered in the temple in 621 B.C.E. during the reign of king Josiah of Judah. This event is recounted in 2 Kings 22-23. In this view, the book was used as a religio-political tool— what scholars have called a "pious fraud"—that was used to legitimate a sweeping set of cultic reforms in Jerusalem at the ends of the seventh century B.C.E.[26] Others have argued, however, that the book is in fact more antique, having originated in the northern Kingdom and subsequently brought south to Jerusalem in the wake of the destruction of the north by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E., where it was used to spark the reforms under the Judean kings Hezekiah and Josiah. In either scenario, Deuteronomy is usually dated to the end of the seventh century around the year 620 B.C.E.

This standard view has been challenged in recent years, however, by scholars who argue that the book of Deuteronomy is a later product of the exilic or post-exilic period. Philip Davies, for example, dismisses the account in 2 Kings 22-23 as historically unreliable on the grounds that it lacks extra-biblical corroborating evidence and its terminology betrays a post-exilic setting in which the centralization of the cult presupposes the rivalry between Jerusalem and Bethel during

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Peter Lemche, "Did a Reform Like Josiah's Happen?" in *The Historian and the Bible: Essays in Honour of Lester L. Grabbe* (ed. P. R. Davies and D. V. Edelman; LHBOTS 530; New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 11-19; Christoph Levin, "Joschija im deuteronomistischen Geschichtwerk," *ZAW* 96 (1984): 351-71.

[25] For a balanced discussion of the dating of D, see Norbert Lohfink, "Zur neueren Diskussion über 2 Kön 22-23," in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft* (ed. N. Lohfink; BETL 68; Leuven: Peeters, 1985), 24-48.

[26] The account of the finding of the book of the law in 2 Chronicles 34-35 differs in several ways from that in 2 Kings 22-23. In 2 Kings, the finding of the book initiated the reforms, whereas in 2 Chronicles the book was found in the course of carrying out some of the reforms.

the Persian period.[27] More recently, Juha Pakkala has made a forceful case for the late dating of D, arguing that even the earliest *Urdeuteronomium* derives from a much later period.[28] Like others, he points out that the core of D lacks references to a king, Judah, and the temple, all things one might expect had it actually been written under the monarchy.[29] It must be noted, however, that this type of argumentation amounts to an argument from silence. Moreover, it fails to take seriously the fictional narrative setting that frames the entire book of Deuteronomy—namely, as Moses's farewell speech on the plains of Moab that he delivered in the distant past. In this mythic literary setting, monarchic references would be ill-placed and anachronistic, betraying the real-life setting of the Deuteronomic authors.[30]

Despite recent objections, many scholars therefore continue to defend the traditional dating of Deuteronomy.[31] Rainer Albertz, in particular, has written a detailed and cogent rebuttal to the so-called "minimalist" views mentioned above.[32] In addition to his specific textual arguments, he points out that the book makes better sense in a pre-exilic setting; the references to the "law of the King" in Deuteronomy 17, for instance, make little sense in a post-exilic setting, where there was no king, because they affirm the monarchy and the eternal legitimacy of the

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[27] Philip R. Davies, "Josiah and the Law Book," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, 65-77. See also John Van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[28] Juha Pakkala, "The Date of the Oldest Edition of Deuteronomy," *ZAW* 121 (2009): 388-401. See also counterargument by Nathan MacDonald, "Issues and Questions in the Dating of Deuteronomy: A Response to Juha Pakkala," *ZAW* 122 (2010): 431-35, and the follow-up by Pakkala, "The Dating of Deuteronomy: A Response to Nathan MacDonald," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 431-36.

[29] Notwithstanding the so-called "law of the King" in Deuteronomy 17, which regulates the power of the King and, according to Pakkala, is so deeply anti-monarchical in tone, that it could never be the product of a monarchic regime.

[30] Brent A. Strawn, "Deuteronomy," in *Theological Bible Commentary* (ed. Gail R. O'Day and David L. Petersen; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 63-76, helpfully differentiates three levels of reading: (1) the literary level of Moses; (2) the monarchic audience ca. Josiah's time; and (3) the exilic audience reflected in Deut 4, 28-30.

[31] See, e.g., Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 9-10; and the early arguments made by L. B. Paton, "The Case for the Post-Exilic Origins of Deuteronomy," *JBL* 47 (1928): 322-57. See also Eckart Otto's review of van Seters, *A Law Book for the Diaspora*, *Biblica* 85 (2004): 273-77.

[32] Albertz, "Why a Reform Like Josiah's Must Have Happened," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*.

Davidic kingship. Overall, the traditional pre-exilic dating of Deuteronomy remains the most compelling. Yet rather than pinning down a specific date, we prefer to heed the prudent remarks of Benjamin Sommer regarding the "perils of pseudo-historicism" and the dating of biblical texts, and instead understand Deuteronomy as an expression of Israelite religion from sometime during the pre-exilic period.[33] Accordingly, this is the historical, social, and religious context in which we will evaluate the potentially costly nature of the reform measures proposed in the book.

There is also debate when we turn to the dating of the Deuteronomistic History (DtrH). Martin Noth made the case for the exilic dating of DtrH, as the product of a theological genius who stitched together a variety of source documents, including the book of Deuteronomy, and situated them within a narrative framework and chronology. The Cross school updated this theory and proposed a double redaction model, with the bulk of the DtrH coming from the pre-exilic period and then later redacted a second time during the exile. Bernard Levinson concludes that "the narrative core of 2 Kings 22-23 is the work of a pre-exilic editor who sought to legitimate the introduction of a new set of laws and to sanction Josiah's cultic and political initiatives."[34]Albertz notes that even an exilic dating for the whole narrative complex would still place it relatively close to the time of the events which it describes (i.e., Josiah's reign).[35] As such, it is implausible for them to lie about the historical record and make things up whole cloth, even if they did embellish parts of their history. He also argues for the historicity of the Josianic reforms on the grounds that they actually do not fit the agenda of DtrH that well; rather than ushering in a glorious future, even the piety of Josiah ultimately failed to avert disaster and

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[33] See Benjamin D. Sommer, "Dating Pentateuchal Texts and the Perils of Pseudo-Historicism," in *The Pentateuch: International Perspectives on Current Research* (FAT 78; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 85-108.

[34] Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 10. He goes on to add that the account was likely supplemented in the exilic and postexilic periods.

[35] Albertz, ""Why a Reform Like Josiah's Must Have Happened," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*.

destruction. This required them to invent the apostasy of Manasseh as an explanation for this strange reality. For Albertz, this suggests that Josiah's reform must have been such an important event that the DtrH could not have denied it.

We must also address the relation of Deuteronomy to the cultic reforms allegedly carried out under King Josiah near the end of the seventh century. There is again little consensus, since this issue is interrelated with the question of dating. To oversimplify matters, the usual players can be split once again into so-called "maximalist" and "minimalist" camps. If the legal core of D is to be dated to the pre-exilic period, then it is at least plausible that such a document is to be identified with the "book of law" mentioned in 2 Kings 22-23, which then served as the inspiration for the ensuing reforms. It is also possible that the document was written *post facto* as a legitimation of the reforms that came first. Even Davies admits that from the perspective of the DtrH authors of 2 Kings account, the identification of Deuteronomy with the Josianic law book is exactly what the authors intended; thus there is little doubt about the identity of the law book in the story. For him, however, the more crucial question is whether or not the story of its discovery is true.

What then can we say about the historical reliability of the account of the Josianic reforms? We may start by noting that unlike other Kings in the history of Israel and Judah, we have no extrabiblical evidence for the reign of King Josiah. This is not to cast doubt on his existence, since he is recorded in the sequence of kings in the biblical text, but only to admit the limits of our knowledge regarding his reign. Scholars have pointed out that no contemporary biblical texts, above all Jeremiah, make reference or allusion to the alleged reforms, a strange omission if they in fact occurred. Yet, others have identified texts that do reference the reforms.

In the end, there is no rule that requires the reforms to be mentioned explicitly for them to be somehow "real" or "historical."

A more serious issue concerns the historical context in which the reforms would have occurred and whether or not such a movement would have been possible. The starting point for this is Nadav Na'aman's detailed analysis of the historical, social, and political landscape of Judah during the seventh century B.C.E., especially as it relates the hegemony of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.[36] Most scholars who defend the Josianic reforms as historical events locate them in a setting of waning Assyrian power when there would have been a window for Josiah to unify the Kingdom, expand its territory, and assert its political independence. Contrary to this assumption, Na'aman argues that there was no opportunity for Josiah to have asserted his religio-political agenda because control of Palestine passed quite seamlessly and immediately from Assyrian to the Egyptians. Therefore, according to Na'aman, there was no such power vacuum and as a result, it is unlikely that any such reforms could have been carried out. As Davies says, this suggests not only that no such reform occurred under the reign of Josiah, but that no such reform *could* have occurred.

This is not really the end of the story, however. For starters, it should also be noted that the Egyptians were not equally concerned with and involved in all the territories of Israel-Palestine and Levant, but instead were mostly interested in asserting their presence in the coastal highlands. Moreover, even if we accept Na'aman's argument about the prompt ceding of power from Assyria to Egypt, the alleged power vacuum is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for such reforms to occur. Indeed, Josiah nevertheless might have *attempted* his reform

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[36] See Nadav Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah Under Josiah," *TA* 18 (1991): 3-71; and idem, "Josiah and the Kingdom of Judah," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, 189-247. For an optimistic account of Josiah's reign and kingdom during this period see Israel Finkelstein and N. A. Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 275-95, 347-53.

measures, despite the ongoing transfer of power. Thus, unfavorable conditions for the reforms only speak to the unlikelihood that they were ever *successfully executed*, and not to whether or not they were *ever attempted*. For these reasons, then, it is helpful to disentangle two related issues here. The first is whether Josiah ever *attempted* or *intended* to execute such reforms, regardless of how feasible or realistic they were at the time, and despite whether or not they were ever brought to fruition. Indeed, as Na'aman himself points out, Josiah likely had the desire to expand Judah, even if it is likely that such an expansion never occurred. The second issue concerns whether Josiah as a matter of historical fact *succeeded* in carrying out a series of reform measures, whatever their actual scope and content. In this view, Na'aman's observations do not rule out the reforms, only their full execution.[37]

One final issue concerns the motivation behind the cult reforms. On this front, scholars tend to argue that they were either motivated by military and political reasons having to do with the encroaching Assyrian army (in the time of Hezekiah) or later Assyrian hegemony at the time of Josiah. Other scholars argue that the Deuteronomic authors were motivated by the theological goal of establishing their monotheistic ideology. The clean separation of political and religious spheres of life in the ancient world, however, is not so easy. Uehlinger remarks that it is inappropriate to search for "a cult reform driven by 'purely religious' interests, with no economic motives and consequences. To interpret Josiah's reform in such a way would result in a gross anachronism."[38] At the same time, it would also make little sense to downplay or dismiss the theological interests of the Deuteronomic authors, who clearly viewed their work as a religious project. The fact is that all aspects of life were intimately intertwined in ancient Israel, and

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[37] Uehlinger also weighs in on the debate over the Josianic reforms ("Was There a Cult Reform Under King Josiah?"), arguing for a kind of middle ground, or what he calls a "well-grounded minimum." While eschewing de facto minimalist positions for their tendency to discount historical evidence as a rule—namely, the biblical texts as "secondary" sources—he also takes a fairly skeptical view of the reforms.

[38] Uehlinger, "Was There a Cult Reform Under King Josiah?" 281 n. 18.

arguably all filtered through the lens of religious attitudes. Uehlinger writes, "The measures described or implied by Deuteronomy, for instance, liberalizing domestic meat consumption while at the same time diverting taxes to the central shrine, demonstrate how deeply political, economic and religious issues were interrelated in antiquity." Thus, it makes little sense to insist that "religious" motivations played no part in motivating or mobilizing reform measures under Hezekiah or Josiah.

Perhaps more to the point, it is important to make a distinction between real or potential motivations or causes for the cultic reforms such as centralization on the one hand, and the real or potential *effects* of *impact* of such reforms measures and/or ideas. These are two distinct phenomena. Thus, for example, even if the centralization of the cult was carried out (or proposed) for largely economic and political reasons (i.e. out of a concern to consolidate power in Jerusalem and funnel taxes, revenue, and resources there), this act is still capable of having an effect or impact on other domains (e.g. theologically in the way people conceptualize the deity, his earthly presence, and their interaction with him). Therefore, for the purposes of our analysis below, whether the reforms were carried out in exactly the way described in 2 Kings 22-23 is not the driving question. Of more importance are the ideas themselves and the potential cognitive effect or impact they might have had on ancient Israelite audiences. In what follows, then, we will attempt to isolate each relevant theological concept and its conceptual features, and then proceed to examine each in terms of the cognitive content according to the criteria specified earlier.

3.4. THE COST OF THE DEUTERONOMIC NAME THEOLOGY

The Deuteronomic school formulates a distinct conceptualization of the Israelite deity Yahweh and his divine presence vis-à-vis the Jerusalem temple. Specifically, Deuteronomic texts state that God dwells exclusively in heaven, while only his divine name (Hebrew *shem*) is located in the temple. The texts therefore posit a fundamental theological distinction between the deity and his name. Based on these texts, biblical scholars refer to this theological doctrine as the so-called Deuteronomic "Name Theology."[39] As we shall see, the Name Theology represents a radical violation of the conventional expectation in Israel and throughout the ancient Near East that gods dwell in temples.[40] The Deuteronomic school instead boldly declares that only Yahweh's *name* can be found in the earthly sanctuary.

3.4.1. The Texts

The Name Theology is articulated in several texts and occupies an important place in the larger Deuteronomic program. In the Book of Deuteronomy, references to the divine name are embedded in the book's centralization formulae, which describe Yahweh's appointment of a central place of worship. In these passages, Yahweh's name is described using the idiomatic phrase, *hammāqôm ʾăšer-yibḥar Yhwh ʾĕlōhêkem bô lĕšakkēn šĕmô šām*, traditionally translated

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[39] Classic treatments of the Name Theology include Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (trans. David Stalker; London: SCM, 1953), 37-44; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 191-209; Tryggve Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies*, 38-79; McBride, "The Deuteronomic Name Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1969), 67-118. See also the recent discussion by Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 62-68; and the overviews in Sandra L. Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology: lĕšakkēn šĕmô šām in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (BZAW 318; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 26-36; and Ian Wilson, *Out of the Midst of Fire: Divine Presence in Deuteronomy* (SBLDS 151; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 3-9. Critiques of the traditional interpretation of the Name Theology, including those of Richter and Wilson, are discussed below in more detail.

[40] See Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013).

as, "the place in which Yahweh your God will choose to cause his name to dwell."[41] Thus, in Deuteronomy the Israelites are told to present ritual offerings to Yahweh at the chosen site: "You shall bring all that I command you to the place in which Yahweh your God will choose to place his name" (Deut 12:11). The related phrases *lāsûm šĕmô šām* ("to put/place his name there") and *lihyôt šĕmô šām* ("his name to be/exist there") are also used interchangeably in D and DtrH and can be regarded as "synonymous reflexes."[42] Overall, these technical formulae convey the idea that Yahweh elects to put, place, or cause his name to reside in the temple.

The idea behind the Name Theology is further developed in the Deuteronomistic History. In 2 Samuel 7, for example, Yahweh rejects King David's proposal to build a temple for the deity. Rather, he declares that David's royal heir will "build a house for my name (*bayit lišmî*), and I will establish his royal throne forever" (2 Sam 7:13). Here the text clearly states that the temple is constructed for the divine *shem*, implying that God himself does not dwell there.[43]

The most extended exposition on Yahweh's name is found in Solomon's temple dedication speech in 1 Kings 8, where the text repeatedly emphasizes that God dwells in heaven and his name in the Jerusalem temple.[44] As it stands, most modern interpreters recognize the chapter as a multi-layered composition and agree that vv. 14-66 belong to the hand of DtrH, vv.

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[41] Deut 12:11; 14:23; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2. Cf. Ezra 6:12; Neh 1:9; Jer 7:12.

[42] Deut 12:5, 21; 14:24; 1 Kgs 8:16, 29; 9:3; 11:36; 14:21; 21:4, 7; 23:27. Some scholars have attempted to identify textual layers based on the different iterations of the name formula. However, such diachronic reconstructions, while possible, tend to overlook the very real possibility of simple authorial variation, whether intentional or not. See Richter, *Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 43-52.

[43] Moreover, as McCarter notes, the parallel passage in Chronicles is consistent with the LXX and may preserve the original reading that omits reference to God's *shem*. 1 Chr 17:12 has David build the Jerusalem temple *for God*, while in 2 Sam 7:13 David is said to build the temple *for God's name*. See P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), pp. 194, 206, on this point. If so, this points to a deliberate Deuteronomic scribal interpolation the aim of which is to obviate any potential misunderstanding that God dwells in a house. In terms of textual priority, however, it is also possible that the account in Chronicles corrects the earlier Deuteronomic formulation in the direction of a more traditional and intuitive understanding of God's full presence in the temple.

[44] 1 Kgs 8:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 29, 33, 35, 41, 42, 43, 44, 48. While DtrH identifies the chosen place with the temple in Jerusalem, the book of Deuteronomy never makes any such positive identification. See von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 38: Unlike DtrH (1 Kgs 11:36; 14:21; 2 Kgs 21:4, 7) D never speaks of the city of Jerusalem, only of the *māqôm* at which the name will dwell.

8-11 reflect a distinctly priestly source (suggested by the distinct use of the term *kābôd*), and vv. 12-13 contain yet a different, older poetic fragment.[45] The Deuteronomic layer centers on the construction of a temple for Yahweh's name. It recounts how Yahweh, after rescuing his people from Egypt, initially refrained from choosing a place for his name (*lihyôt šěmî šām*), and refused David's offer to build a temple for his name (*libnôt bayît lěšēm Yhwh*). Eventually, however, the task was appointed to David's son, Solomon (1 Kgs 8:16-19). There are six references in the text to a house/temple being built for Yahweh's name. In the course of Solomon's speech, there are also numerous references to God's heavenly abode. Indeed, as Weinfeld observes, every mention of Yahweh's dwelling place (*měkon/měqôm šibtekā*) includes the phrase "in heaven" (*haššāmayîm*).[46] That Yahweh is expected to listen to prayers and supplications from above is also indicated by the petitioner's statement, "Oh, hear in heaven!" (*wěʾattâ tišmaʿ haššāmayîm*).[47] Solomon's speech thus makes clear that God's agency is spatially conceptualized as being in heaven, while the temple houses a separate entity, divine name. The Name Theology doctrine in 1 Kings 8 is highlighted when compared with the old poetic lines in vv. 12-13. In these verses, Solomon makes an announcement that explicitly describes God himself dwelling in the temple: "Yahweh has chosen to dwell in a thick cloud. I have built for you an exalted house, a place where you may dwell forever" (8:12-13). This idea that God dwells in the temple stands in sharp contrast to the Name Theology. Indeed, the Deuteronomic authors attempt to refute this

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[45] On 1 Kgs 8:8-11, see Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 204. On 1 Kgs 8:12-13, see Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 26. For discussions of the literary structure of the chapter as a whole, see Jon D. Levenson, "From Temple to Synagogue: 1 Kings 8," in *Traditions in Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith* (ed. B. Halpern and J. Levenson; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 143-66.

[46] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, 195. Cf. vv. 30, 39, 43, 49. v. 32: "hear in heaven" (*tišmaʿ haššāmayîm*, other manuscripts have *min haššāmayîm*, cf. also for v. 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49). v. 39: mentions Yahweh's dwelling place (*měkôn šibtěkā*) prefaced with *haššāmayîm* (*haššāmayim měkôn šibtěkā*): "your heavenly abode" or more woodenly "hear/listen in/from heaven, (in/from) the place of your dwelling" (note also that some manuscripts put *min-* in front of *měkôn*). For "your heavenly abode, see in total: vv. 30, 39, 43, 49 and see Deut 26:15.

[47] 1 Kgs 8:32, 34, 36, 39, 43, 45, 49. 1 Kgs 8:28-53 asserts that God, truly present in heaven, resides only symbolically on earth in the temple, but that nevertheless, prayer should be directed to the temple (vv. 29, 31, 35, 38, 42). These verses are considered in more detail below.

idea in 1 Kgs 8:27 by posing the rhetorical question, "But will God really dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their uttermost reaches cannot contain you, how much less this house that I have built!" (8:27). This appears to be an overt response to the older idea of God's temple-presence found in vv. 12-13 (or else more generally to the ideas reflected therein).[48] According to the Deuteronomic view, people travel from far and wide for the sake of the *shem* (1 Kgs 8:41). Contrast this with the common expectation found in the Psalms, wherein people hope to encounter God's actual presence in the temple.[49] In Psalm 63:3, for example, the psalmist writes, "I shall behold You in the sanctuary, and see Your might and Your glory (*kābôd*)." Similarly, Psalm 27:4 states, "One thing I ask of Yahweh, only that do I seek: to live in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life, to gaze upon Yahweh's beauty."

The removal of God's presence from the earth is also reflected in Deuteronomy 4-5, which insists that God speaks to the people from heaven (Deut 4:36).[50] This view again stands in contrast to the earlier account of the Sinai revelation found in Exodus 19-20, 24, wherein the people are permitted to see Yahweh as he addresses them from earth. We will return to this passage later in connection with Deuteronomy's iconoclastic tendency, but at present we may note that unlike the alternative J and P accounts of the Sinai revelation in Exodus, Deuteronomy 4-5 insists that the Israelites did not see Yahweh and that the deity instead addressed the people "from heaven" (*min-haššāmayîm*; Deut 4:36).[51]

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[48] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 195. See also M. Metzger, "Himmlische und irdische Wohnstatt Jahwes," *UF* 2 (1970): 139-58 (149-51).

[49] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 63

[50] See Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 63-4. But for an alternative view that sees Yahweh as present on earth, speaking out of the fire in Deuteronomy 4-5, see Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 45-104.

[51] See also Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy's Theological Revolution," *BR* 12/1 (1996): 38; and Victor Hurowitz, "From Storm God to Abstract Being: How the Deity Became More Abstract from Exodus to Deuteronomy," *BR* 14 (1998): 40-47. We can perhaps rephrase his title more accurately: "how the *explicit representation* of the deity became more abstract," which is not to say that the majority of people's mental representation changed accordingly.

To summarize: the Deuteronomic Name Theology therefore includes two interrelated claims: (1) Yahweh's name resides in the temple, and (2) the deity himself dwells in heaven. These are two sides of the same theological coin. For the Deuteronomists, Yahweh's *shem* replaces his presence on earth, and the deity is relocated to the heavenly realm. Accordingly, when the Israelites bring the initial yield of their harvest to the central sanctuary as an offering to Yahweh, they are instructed to petition the deity with the following prayer: "Look down from your holy dwelling place (*mimmĕʿôn qodšĕkā*) in heaven (*min-haššāmayîm*), and bless your people Israel" (Deut 26:15). Together, this collection of Deuteronomic texts reflect an innovative doctrine and worldview, marked by a concerted effort to relocate God's presence to heaven. Moshe Weinfeld thus described the Deuteronomic view as a "theology of transcendence."[52] Or as Stephen Geller put it, "That God shuns the earth to remain forever enthroned in His heavenly abode is the universal belief of the Deuteronomic thinkers."[53]

3.3.2. Interpreting the Name Theology

Biblical scholars have traditionally interpreted these Name texts in much the same way as they have been presented above: as an explicit attempt on the part of the Deuteronmists to introduce a novel theological understanding of God's presence. In this view, the Name Theology represented an overt attempt to revise rebut other contemporary Israelite proposals about the divine. As von Rad expressed,

> The Deuteronomic theologoumenon of the name of Jahweh clearly holds a polemical element, or, to put it better, is a theological corrective. It is not Jahweh himself who is

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[52] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*. Note, however, that such transcendence does not correlate with an outright denial of anthropomorphism or embodiment. See Sommer, *Bodies of God*, who argues that god is transcendent but *also* embodied in heaven.

[53] Stephen Geller, *Sacred Enigmas: Literary Religion in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Routledge, 1996), 39.

present at the shrine, but only his name as the guarantee of his will to save; to it and it only Israel has to hold fast as the sufficient form in which Jahweh reveals himself. Deuteronomy is replacing the old crude idea of Jahweh's presence and dwelling at the shrine by a theologically sublimated idea.[54]

Many scholars have followed von Rad in this understanding of the Name Theology. Weinfeld, for example, contrasts the Deuteronomic Name Theology with the more anthropomorphic conception of Yahweh found in the priestly literature. [55] For his part, Tryggve Mettinger highlights the difference between the Name Theology on the one hand and the long-standing Zion-Sabaoth theology on the other. In the Zion-Sabaoth texts, God is decpicted as a mighty warrior who is present and enthroned in the Jerusalem sanctuary.[56] According to Mettinger, the Name Theology represents "a grandiose attempt by the Deuteronomistic theologians to expel the pre-exilic doctrine of the presence."[57] As a result, "the ancient conceptions of the divine presence are made obsolete by the idea of the 'Name' in the Temple."[58] Despite subtle differences, these scholars agree that the Deuteronomic authors put forward a new theological doctrine based on the distinction between God, his name, and the mutual spatial exclusivity of the two: God dwells in heaven, his name on earth.

Others have expressed a different interpretation of what the Deuteronomic school was trying to achieve and instead adopted a kind of middle-ground position. These scholars agree on

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[54] Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 38-39. Cf. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001 [1962-65]), 1:184, where he draws a distinction between Yahweh and his name, but also states that D replaces the "older and more popular idea" that God lives in the temple with the idea that he is hypostatically present in the temple. See also Clements, *Deuteronomy*, 52: "the Deuteronomic authors have sought to avoid too crude a notion of the idea that God's presence…could, in some mysterious way, be located at the sanctuary. They have sought to emphasize the fact that God's true place of habitation could only be in heaven."

[55] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 191-209.

[56] Mettinger, *Dethronement of Sabaoth*, 19-37, 38-79. Mettinger regards the Deuteronomic Name Theology as a product of the exilic period, as a response to a situation when there was no temple and earlier ideas about God had been shattered. For a critical discussion, see further Sommer, "Dating Pentateuchal Texts and the Perils of Pseudo-Historicism."

[57] Mettinger, *Dethronement of Sabaoth*, 48.

[58] Mettinger, *Dethronement of Sabaoth*, 49.

the innovative nature of the Deuteronomic view of divine presence, but maintain that Yahweh's *shem* in the temple still entails some sort of divine presence there. In this view, the true innovation is not the utter separation of name and deity, but the notion that divine presence is *embodied in* the name. S. Dean McBride, for example, argues that while "the various formulations of the Name Theology connoted a mode of divine immanence at least in part distinct from God himself," the *shem* is still equivalent to Yahweh's cultic presence in the Jerusalem temple, a kind of "hypostasis" of the deity himself.[59] The hypostasis view therefore understands Yahweh's name as an extension of the deity himself, rather than totally distinct, and therefore maintains that divine presence of some kind remains in the temple.[60]

The traditional interpretation of the Name Theology has come under even greater scrutiny in more recent years. Most notably, Sandra Richter argues that the Deuteronomic idiom *lᵉšakkēn šᵉmô šām* ("to place the name there") has nothing to do with divine presence at all, but instead is meant to convey Yahweh's ownership and hegemony over the temple and his land.[61] According to Richter, the modern understanding of a Name Theology has been misled by two (mistaken) interpretive assumptions. First, she argues that the Name Theology is based on the theory of "nominal realism," which is the "supposed perception on the part of the ancient Semite that the name of an item or person, as a symbol of the thing or person named, was in fact real, having

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[59] McBride, "Deuteronomic Name Theology," 3. McCarter (*II Samuel*, 206) also says the "assertion of a King's sovereignty through his 'name,' a surrogate presence…" So there exists some variety on this front. More recently, Hundley offers a modified and interesting idea about the divine presence of God's name in the temple, arguing that the Deuteronomists leave the nature of the presence mysterious and intentionally ambiguous. His proposal is discussed further below.

[60] Many scholars would disagree, however, that the texts suggest any overlap between the deity and his name in terms of presence in the temple.

[61] Richter, *Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*. See also Richter, "Placing the Name, Pushing the Paradigm: A Decade with the Deuteronomistic Name Formula," in *Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch, Hexateuch, and the Deuteronomistic History* (FAT 56; ed. Konrad Schmid and Raymond F. Person, Jr.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 64-78.

consubstantial existence with the name-bearer." [62] This is an idea from developmental psychology that is used to describe pre-abstract thought in children. In her critique of this idea, she targets McBride, who first introduced the notion of nominal realism in relation to Deuteronomic texts. According to McBride, ancient Near Eastern thought assumed a "concrete, ontological relationship . . . between words and the things and actions which the words describe."[63] As mentioned above, McBride viewed Yahweh's *shem* as a hypostatic presence that was both distinct yet also the same as the deity himself. The second mistaken assumption that informs scholarly reconstructions of the Name Theology, according to Richter, is Wellhausen's evolutionary theory of Israelite religion. In this view, religion in ancient Israel developed from the primitive, anthropomorphic, and immanent conceptions of God found in the Yahwist and Elohist sources of the Pentateuch, to the more enlightened, abstract, and transcendent religion found in the Deuteronomic texts. Richter writes, "Wellhausen's now disused framework has served as the invisible scaffolding upon which the Name Theology of modern Deuteronomistic studies has been constructed."[64] Thus, Richter argues that the standard interpretation of the Deuteronomic name texts is problematic because it rests on the shaky foundations of McBride's nominal realism and Wellhausen's evolutionary schema.

We will respond to these criticisms presently, but first we consider Richter's own proposal about the meaning of the name texts. In her writings, Richter offers her own exhaustive and careful analysis of Akkadian and West Semitic linguistic parallels to the Hebrew name formulae. She notes that the Hebrew phrase *lᵉšakkēn šᵉmô šām* is a loan-idiom from Akkadian *šuma šakānu*, a phrase used by Mesopotamian kings when engraving their name on a monument in order to signify ownership and hegemony. From this observation, she argues that the cognate

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[62] Richter, *Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 15.

[63] McBride, "Deuteronomic Name Theology," 67. See below on the implausibility of this claim.

[64] Richter, *Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 24.

Hebrew name formulae in D and DtrH carry the same meaning.[65] Therefore, the Hebrew phrase *lᵉšakkēn šᵉmô šām*, along with its variants, should not be translated as "to cause his name to dwell," but rather as "to place his name" in the sense of being inscribing a literal name upon a monument. Richter argues that by utilizing this idiomatic phrase, the Deuteronomic writers were fully aware that their statements about Yahweh's chosen site of worship "had nothing to do with hypostasized deities and everything to do with the Kingly act of installing an inscription."[66] Therefore, according to Richter, the Hebrew name formulae, which once served as the foundation for modern reconstructions of the Name Theology doctrine, merely express the same non-theological meaning as their Akkadian counterpart, and do not intend to communicate anything about God's presence in the temple. Rather, when it comes to the temple-building account in 1 Kings 8, it is clear that "the majority of name idioms used in this text have nothing to do with divine presence."[67] As a result of this conclusion, the Deuteronomic name passages were not intended as a corrective to earlier views about God's presence found in other biblical texts.

While Richter's thesis is provocative, methodical, and compelling in many respects, in the end it does little to invalidate the traditional interpretation of the Name Theology, which for several reasons still offers the best explanation of the textual evidence. Indeed, Richter's primary critiques, while spot on, are of little consequence for the traditional view. For example, despite her lucid critique of nominal realism, the theory of nominal realism does not appear in the

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[65] She argues against the understanding of *šuma šakānu* as D factitive, and thus against the traditional translation "to cause to dwell," and says it means "to place."

[66] Richter, "Placing the Name," 70.

[67] Richter, *Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 90. Cf. the concluding statement regarding 2 Sam 7: "not only is the Deuteronomic idiom absent from this text, but it is clear that the *šēm* idioms of 2 Samuel 7 are idioms of reputation, not hypostasis." (p. 75), and: "Contrary to the tenets of the Name Theology … the reflexes of the Deuteronomic idiom used in Deuteronomy and the DH, outside of 1 Kings 8 and 2 Kings 23:27, can be proven to have nothing to do with a reinterpretation of the mode of divine presence at the cult site" (216). However, as we will see, the central idea of the Name Theology does not require hypostasis, and in fact several traditional reconstructions, like those of Weinfeld and von Rad, reject it.

traditional interpretation of the Name Theology. While it is true that McBride's hypostasis view does posit a (dubious) ontological connection between Yahweh and his name, the standard Name Theology does not require such an assumption. Indeed, traditional interpretations of the Name Theology do not propose an essential equation between the *shem* and the deity, as nominal realism demands, but rather they require the opposite: a sharp *distinction* between Yahweh and his name as distinct entities with distinct spatial domains. Therefore, although Richter's critique of nominal realism is compelling, it does not apply to all versions of the Name Theology, but only to the hypostasis view espoused by McBride and others.[68]

Second, Richter's critique of Wellhausen's evolutionary schema is also somewhat orthogonal to the question of the Name Theology. Notwithstanding the problematic nature of Wellhausen's reconstruction of Israelite religion, the Name Theology is perfectly coherent without it; the traditional interpretation of the Name Theology need not presuppose or depend on any such evolutionary model.[69] Against Richter's critique, it is not necessary to invoke a grand

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[68] See, e.g., the position of Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 65-66. But note that the issue of nominal realism is more complex than Sommer allows. With regard to nominal realism, there are a few different issues to untangle. First, it is necessary to iterate a basic point: to the extent that ancient texts explicitly posit a quasi-similarity between names and objects, these reflective statements do not offer a reliable guide to ancient intuitive beliefs (about either names or people). In his own critique of Richter's critique of nominal realism, Sommer writes (p. 190 n. 101): "...but [Richter] does not address the bountiful evidence for the existence of nominal realism in ancient Near Eastern texts themselves (and in particular the texts in which 'name' and 'thing named' are clearly identical to each other.'" Note, however, that in these cases the ancient texts make an explicit connection between only *some* names, in this case *divine* names, and their supernatural name-bearers. Contra Sommer, this not the same as claiming a universal mentality of nominal realism in general, nor a "concept of *šēm*" in ancient Near Eastern thought. Rather, all that is required is to recognize that ancient people viewed *some* names as being special in some way, but not *all* names. Indeed, this is one of the points of sacred objects or people in general, namely that they are special by virtue (at least in part) of being *rare*. This is emphatically not unique to ancient or "primitive" people, and does not require positing a cognitive disposition, such as nominal realism, that is said to pervade ancient thought more generally. The idea is just that some names are special, in the same way that some religious sites are sacred, or some humans are "divine." None of these beliefs requires that ancient people had general theories that all names are special and consubstantial with objects, or that all sites are "sacred" or all humans "divine." On these points, I am sympathetic with Richter's general skepticism of attributing nominal realism to ancient cognition.

[69] Indeed, Weinfeld and Mettinger arrived at near-identical views about the aim of the Deuteronomic name texts, despite the fact that they both eschewed the traditional J-E-D-P dating and thought that P pre-dated D. As mentioned above, Mettinger contrasted the D Name Theology with the Zion-Sabaoth Theology, while Weinfeld juxtaposed it against the P Kabod theology. Weinfeld viewed P as being prior to, or contemporaneous with, D. See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 179-83.

evolutionary framework in order to accept the novelty of the central ideas of the Deuteronomic Name Theology.[70] In any case, for our purposes the important issue concerns the textual and theological content of the Deuteronomic theology over and against other biblical speculations about God's presence.

Third and most importantly, Richter's position is ultimately compatible with traditional interpretations of the Name Theology. She holds, for example, that the name formulae refer to physical inscriptions of Yahweh's name, which signify his ownership and power but not his literal earthly presence. Nowhere in the biblical name passages, however, is there any mention of such an inscription, and it is conspicuously absent in the account of the temple's construction in 1 Kings 5-9. There are reasons to be skeptical, then, about inferring the existence of name inscriptions from these so-called name formulae alone. Nevertheless, the implication of Richter's view looks much like the core idea behind the traditional Name Theology: "nothing remains of YHWH's presence in the temple."[71] Yet this conclusion is, of course, fully consistent with traditional interpretations of the Name Theology. Let us recall that in standard view, the Deuteronomists re-appropriated a common Semitic phrase in order to purge God's divine presence from the temple. Indeed, Weinfeld already recognized that the Akkadian idiom originally had nothing to do with religion or abstract theology, but that the Deuteronomists adopted it and "endowed it with a specific theological meaning."[72] In this sense, the name replaced God's actual presence on earth, for as Sommer writes, "The deuteronomists used the

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[70] It is possible that it is responding to specific earlier texts, offering its own theological corrective. But it is also possible that it advancing its own theology with an eye toward either contemporary cultural ideas that were had become widespread among the populace, or else against proposals of competing scribal or priestly schools. See, e.g., Lauren A. S. Monroe, *Josiah's Reform and the Dynamics of Defilement*, who sees the D and H schools as being in close dialogue with one another.

[71] Victor Hurowitz, review of Sandra L. Richter, *The Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology:* lešakkēn šemô šām *in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 5 (2004-2005).

[72] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 193.

term *shem* not to endorse or even modify its more common theological use but to deflate it."[73]

Therefore, we agree with Richter that the Deuteronomists removed Yahweh's localized presence from the temple. But then we are still left with the other half of the doctrine: a large collection of texts that insist that Yahweh himself dwells in heaven. In light of these passages, Richter's political inscription interpretation overlooks the theological dimension of the name texts.[74] In short, her thesis that the biblical name formulae do not indicate any form of divine presence in the temple is actually quite compatible with the bold form of the Name Theology argued by von Rad, Weinfeld, Mettinger, and others. Overall, then, the traditional interpretation of the Name Theology is supported by numerous passages and therefore remains the most compelling explanation of the evidence. In upholding the standard view, this means that the Deuteronomic school really did aim to craft a new theological doctrine according to which Yahweh's divine presence is removed spatially and conceptually from the earthly temple.

There are others who have critiqued the Name Theology on different grounds, arguing instead that the Deuteronomic texts do not actually envision the total elimination of divine presence from the temple. Ian Wilson, for example, argues that divine presence is imagined at every turn in Deuteronomic texts, most clearly in passages that appear to explicitly allude to Yahweh's presence on earth. [75] More recently, Michael Hundley has written that the Deuteronomic innovation lies not in the outright removal of God's presence from the temple, but

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[73] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 66.

[74] Note also Mettinger's critique of DeVaux's understanding of the name formulae in D (*Dethronement of Sabaoth*, 43). Without denying a political dimension, perhaps even as Richter notes, it does not follow that the text does *not* also at the same time reflect unique theological messages and concerns. Therefore, I disagree with Richter's conclusion that the Deuteronomists did not intend the Name Theology as a commentary about Yahweh's divine presence. In short, Richter makes a strong point about the political dimensions of the Name texts, but this does not preclude theological aspects to these texts. Nor would a political statement about the deity guarantee that people receiving the text would not themselves interpret the name formulae as theological statements.

[75] See, Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*; Gordon J. Wenham, "Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary," *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971): 103-118; and A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 57-60.

in leaving the nature of the *shem*'s presence ambiguous and mysterious.[76] We shall return to these arguments in more detail below, but at present we may simply note that while these scholars are correct to point to textual instances that seem to indicate Yahweh's earthly presence, it is possible to account for these passages in a different way, namely as examples of inadvertent theological incorrectness. As such, these textual references to God's earthly presence within the Deuteronomic corpus are in fact *inconsistent with* the Name Theology doctrine, rather than supplement it. After analyzing the conceptual features of the name theology, we will return to this matter in more detail.

3.4.3. Name Theology and Cognition

From a cognitive point of view, the Name Theology is more costly than other ancient representations of divine presence in Iron Age Israel and the Bible. Indeed, the sheer disagreement among modern commentators about its nature and meaning indicates that it is a complex concept that defies easy interpretation.

First, the concept of a *name* (as subject) does not easily fit within the usual list of ontological domains (e.g., persons, animals, plants, artifacts, natural objects). Accordingly, it is difficult to speak about human intuitions regarding a non-material linguistic item such as a name. More recently, however, in his discussion of counterintuitive items, Barrett offers a revised list of categories, which includes Spatial Entities, Solid Objects, Living Things, Animates, and Persons.[77] These categories in turn correspond to what Barrett calls intuitive expectation sets,

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[76] Michael B. Hundley, "To Be or Not to Be: A Reexamination of the Name Language in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History" *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009): 533-55. Hundley critiques Richter and Wilson for minimizing the innovative nature of D name texts, but ultimately grants that the texts to which Wilson points intend to preserve divine presence in the temple.

[77] Justin L. Barrett, "Coding and Quantifying Counterintuitiveness in Religious Concepts: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008): 308-38.

including Spatiality, Physicality, Biology, Animacy, and Mentality. Based on these conceptual domains, the *shem* of the Deuteronomic Name Theology is perhaps best understood as a Spatial Entity, since it is described in literal terms as occupying a specific location in the Jerusalem temple. We have expressed skepticism with Richter's view that the name formulae refer to inscriptions of the divine name, but even if they did, it would not preclude additional theological meanings of the divine name as something distinct from any inscription. The theological concept of the name as a spatial entity is similar, then, to things such as clouds, shadows, and flames—objects that are expected to occupy space but which are not represented as having physical properties.[78]

As a more abstract kind of entity, then, the divine *shem* does not afford the inferential potential associated with the other ontological domains, especially persons. For this reason alone, it can be considered a more costly concept. Indeed, the very notion of the Deuteronomic divine name raises questions about what it means for a name, as a linguistic word, to "dwell" anywhere. In terms of ontological breaches and transfers, the idea of a dwelling name involves the transfer of what is otherwise a folk-biological property of dwelling to a spatial entity.[79] But this property is absent from the alternate Hebrew verbal expressions *lāsûm* ("to put/place") and *lihyôt* ("to be"), which are used for merely physical entities more broadly, rather than animate persons or animals with biology. And crucially, no psychological properties are ever attributed to the divine name in Deuteronomic texts. With this apparent lack of agency, this points to a less optimal

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[78] Richter argues that the name would have been inscribed on a stela similar to ancient Near Eastern practices. The temple dedication ceremony in 1 Kings 8, however, makes no such mention of either a stela or inscription, so her hypothesis remains speculative. Moreover, as Hurowitz and Hundley both note, there is no example of a *deity* "placing his name"; it is always a king who performs this action. Though I disagree with Hundley's objection based on the idea that this would liken Yahweh to a mortal king; there is already much that is human and kingly about the Yahweh-concept in ancient Israel.

[79] Despite Richter's argument that the Hebrew Name formula should not be rendered "to cause the name to dwell," this does not rule out the potential dwelling connotations of the Name. In fact, Richter arguably downplays the intention of the D authors to replace the dwelling deity with the dwelling name. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to discern ontological claims from metaphors, especially at the literary level.

understanding of the divine name. Now, we do have plenty of examples of more cognitively optimal representations of divine names in ancient Israel, examples that fit more closely with the person domain and its sense of agency. As we have seen, the Zion-Sabaoth tradition equated Yahweh with his name, and endowed the latter with all the person-like qualities of the deity himself. We find a similar equation of God and his name within the Psalms, where the two are often placed in parallel lines indicating their equivalence. In the artistic sphere, fascinating iconographic evidence from Egypt shows the pharaoh's name personified as an anthropomorphic cartouche engaged in battle.[80] In contrast to all these examples, however, Yahweh's *shem* in the Deuteronomic texts is never described in such a way as having biology, animacy, or mentality. Therefore, unlike the fighting divine name of Egyptian iconography, the Deuteronomic name conception does not activate any expectations associated with these ontological domains. Yahweh's *shem* never moves, grows, self-propels, or otherwise displays thoughts, feelings, or emotions characteristic of persons. Rather, it is represented by the Deuteronomists as a spatial entity that is distinct from the deity himself, insofar as it is said to be placed and located within the temple. This is a theological claim about Yahweh's divine name as an abstract concept, rather than a reference to any physical engraving or inscription of his name.

Therefore, the divine *shem* is a merely spatial entity. The cognitive cost of this concept concerns not so much what it includes, but rather what it *excludes*—specifically, any semblance of divine agency. We are thus on firmer ground in suggesting that the name in the Name Theology, as the surrogate of God's divine presence, is largely stripped of the agency that makes supernatural concepts so salient. This is especially true when compared with alternative

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[80] See Thomas Staubli, "Den Namen setzen:' Namens- und Göttinnenstandarten in der Südlevante während der 18. ägyptischen Dynastie," in *Iconography and Biblical Studies: Proceedings of the Iconography Sessions at the Joint EABS / SBL Conference, 22–26 July 2007, Vienna, Austria* (AOAT 361; ed. Izaak J. de Hulster and Rüdiger Schmitt; Münster: Ugarit, 2009), 93-112.

traditions in which the deity himself is thought to dwell in the temple in one form or another, whether invisibly, as a cult statue, or both. Indeed, an overarching purpose of the Name Theology is to remove all markers of agency from the earthly temple and to relocate them to the heavenly realm. Thus, while agency is still attributed to Yahweh in heaven, it is severed from its most direct manifestation on earth, the temple. So, for example, amidst all the references to Yahweh's name residing in the temple in 1 Kings 8, the term *šēm* is never the subject of an active verb.[81] As we have seen, it is difficult to determine just how costly this new conception is in terms of ontological categories. However, what we can say is that rather than providing an intuitive and straightforward understanding of the deity's presence in the temple, the Name Theology is not amenable to easy cognitive processing, and instead arguably raises more questions than it answers.

The Name Theology is also costly when contrasted with prevailing cultural categories and expectations.[82] In this regard, as numerous commentators have recognized, the Deuteronomic name concept departs considerably from alternative views about God's divine presence. Richter herself writes, "The use of the *name* in the Book of Deuteronomy in association with the central cult site marks a transition in Israelite thought in which previous perceptions of divine presence are being cast off in favor of a new theology."[83] The Psalms and prophetic traditions freely equate God with his name and speak interchangeably about both dwelling in the temple (e.g., Ps 76:2-3).[84] More broadly, Mettinger showed how the Zion-

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[81] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 63.

[82] Richter (*Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 7) describes the traditional characterization of the name theology in the following terms: "This unique designation has long been understood by biblical scholarship as evidence of a paradigm shift within the Israelite theology of divine presence."

[83] Richter, *Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*, 53.

[84] This text is discussed by Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 198; and Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 48. On the use of metonymy more broadly in biblical poetry, see Travis Bott, "Praise and Metonymy in the Psalms: A Cognitive-Semantic Study" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2014).

Sabaoth theology places God squarely in the temple as the divine King.[85] Even the priestly literature's own *kābôd* theology—which is in some respects equally abstract and costly—imagines God dwelling in the midst of the Israelite people on earth.[86] It is no surprise, then, that G. E. Wright thus described the Name Theology as a "clear rejection of the whole attempt to localize God or to consider his temple as a dwelling. The temple instead is simply a place where God's name abides."[87] By evacuating the deity from the temple, the Deuteronomic theology subverted the widespread assumption that deities are supernatural agents that live in earthly dwellings.[88] As Thorkild Jacobsen put it, "Like a human dwelling, the temple was the place where the owner could be found. Its presence among the houses of the human community was a visible assurance that the god was present and available."[89] Against the backdrop of these traditions wherein the deity is expected to dwell on earth, the Deuteronomic Name Theology appears all the more striking, innovative, and, as a result, cognitively costly.

More recently, Sommer has drawn attention to this contrast and discussed Deuteronomic Name Theology as an explicit rejection of what he calls the "model of divine fluidity" in ancient Israel and the wider Levant and Near East. According to this idea, deities were thought to exist simultaneously on heaven and earth and could be present in multiple locations. By relocating Yahweh to heaven, the Deuteronomists disputed this model of divine fluidity and immanence,

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[85] Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 19-37.

[86] See Mettinger, *Dethronement*, 80-115; Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 68-78.

[87] G. E. Wright, "God Amidst His People: The Story of the Temple," in *The Rule of God: Essays in Biblical Theology* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960), 70. Cf. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, who writes that the new Deuteronomic theological conception of the deity "intended to combat the ancient popular belief that the Deity actually dwelled within the sanctuary." Note also von Rad (*Studies in Deuteronomy*, 37), who saw the Name Theology as a polemical response and a "theological corrective" to alternative views; and Clements, *God and Temple: The Idea of Divine Presence in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 91.

[88] This assumption is extensively explored by Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*.

[89] Thorkild Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 14-16.

and instead proposed a doctrine characterized by divine unity and transcendence.[90] By removing God's anthropomorphic agency to the heavens, the non-agentive *shem* on earth clashes with the cultural expectation that the supernatural agent himself is found in the temple.

3.4.4. Textual Tensions as Theological Incorrectness

Many commentators attempt to uphold the traditional interpretation of the name theology as a fully consistent doctrine. Weinfeld, for instance, maintains that D's name theology is entirely consistent and never makes "the slightest digression from it," adding that, "There is not one example in the Deuteronomic literature of God's 'dwelling in the temple' or the building of a 'house for God.' The temple is always the 'dwelling of his name,' and the house is always built 'for his name.'"[91]

Contrary to these statements, however, there are in fact passages in the Deuteronomic corpus that stand in tension with the Name Theology doctrine. Specifically, there are references to God's presence in the temple that are, on the face of it, inconsistent with the idea that God dwells exclusively in heaven. Based on the textual references, Ian Wilson concludes that although God is said to dwell in heaven, this does not undermine the deity's presence on earth.[92] He highlights several examples that allude to Yahweh's earthly presence. Consider, for instance, the common phrase *lipnê Yhwh*, "before Yahweh," in Deut 12-26, where it is used to describe ritual activities that are to be carried out, ostensibly, in the presence of the deity—that is, "before

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[90] Sommer (*Bodies of God*, 64) notes that while the Deuteronomic worldview is a theology of transcendence, this is not the same things as rejecting anthropomorphism altogether: "Deuteronomy's emphasis on transcendence remains quite literal: God transcends this world in the spatial sense that He sits enthroned up there, while we are down here. Consequently, there is no reason to suspect that the book's conception of God is anything but anthropomorphic."

[91] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and The Deuteronomic School*, 37.

[92] Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*; Wenham, "Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary,"; Roland de Vaux, "Le lieu que Yahvé a choisi pour y établir son nom," in *Das ferne und nahe Wort* (ed. F. Maass; BZAW 105; Berlin: Töpelmann), 219-228 (esp. 227-28).

Yahweh."[93] These occurrences, according to Wilson, indicate "the localized presence of the Deity at the 'chosen place.'"[94] He therefore argues that there is "no support for the view that Deuteronomy…has eliminated the Deity from the earthly sphere."[95] A. D. H. Mayes also critiques the bold version of the Name Theology, arguing that Deuteronomy stresses both the immanence and the transcendence of God.[96] He cites explicit references to Yahweh's presence (e.g., Deut 23:14) and concludes that, "Yahweh is no spectator watching from a distance."[97] According to these scholars, the traditional understanding of the Name Theology implies a false distinction between Yahweh and his name, and in lights of these textual examples it seems that the Name Theology is not as internally self-consistent as it is sometimes believed.

For his part, Sommer follows Weinfeld and attempts to explain away these logically inconsistent references to actions that take place "before Yahweh." He draws attention to Deuteronomy 16:16, which requires Israelites to appear with offerings "in the presence of Yahweh" (*'et pĕnê-Yhwh*), and characterizes this verse as an "apparent exception" to the notion that God does not dwell in the Jerusalem temple.[98] However, Sommer claims that this phrase does not imply Yahweh's literal presence at the temple, but instead represents only an "apparent contradiction" since the passage in question was adopted by Deuteronomy as a verbatim quotation from its base text (Exod 23:17).[99] Yet, even though this is the case, the contradiction with the Name Theology doctrine still remains in the final Deuteronomic text. After all, in rewriting the Covenant Code in Exodus, the Deuteronomic authors could have easily modified

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[93] The phrase *lipnê Yhwh* occurs sixteen times in Deut 12-26. For a discussion of these instances, see Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 161-97.

[94] Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 204.

[95] Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 213.

[96] Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 57-60.

[97] Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 59.

[98] Sommer does not, however, acknowledge the references to *lipnê Yhwh* in Deut 12-26, or engage with the arguments of Wilson, among others.

[99] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 241 n. 73. Similar arguments are made at other points, e.g., *Bodies of God*, 216 n. 24 and 217 n. 40.

the phrase to remove the implication of earthly presence that was at odds with their own theology. This could be done by any number of means—for example, by modifying the text to read *lipnê šĕmô*, "before his name."[100] Indeed, the Deuteronomists were far from shy in their hermeneutical rewriting, having made such textual alterations elsewhere (e.g., 2 Sam 7:13 above). Sommer's position is therefore difficult to accept.

The observations of Wilson and others add important nuance to our understanding of the Name Theology. They illustrate that the tensions and exceptions in the text are real, rather than merely "apparent" (in Sommer's words). At the same time, however, these scholars downplay the innovative nature of the Deuteronomic theology and the passages that locate God only in heaven. Indeed, some scholars deny the possibility of the elimination of God's earthly presence as *a priori* impossible. Hundley concludes, for example, that "the Deuteronomists cannot have been committed to a solely transcendent God," adding that the "total abandonment of divine presence in the earthly sphere seems to be too extreme a departure from earlier theories."[101] Similarly, Hurowitz poses the rhetorical question: "Is it reasonable to assume that even reformers such as the Deuteronomists could deviate so far from the ancient near eastern norm as to devoid the highly esteemed place or worship of all vestiges of its original essence as a house of God?"[102] Such sentiments, however, amount to arguments from personal incredulity, and perhaps reveal more about one's subjective notion of what is reasonable for ancient thinkers, and less about what the Deuteronomists actually intended.

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[100] Note that the text in Deut 26:4 is more careful in this regard, stating that "The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down *in front of the altar of Yahweh your God*" (*lipnê mizbaḥ Yhwh ʾĕlōhêkā*).

[101] Michael B. Hundley, "To Be or Not to Be: A Reexamination of Name Language in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History," *Vetus Testamentum* 59 (2009): 533-55 (537 and 551). Cf. 553: "Dtr seems unwilling to entirely abandon God's presence on earth and the reassurance it provides or to allow for misunderstanding of any limitations of the God who is present. By placing the name in the temple Dtr is able to strike a balance."

[102] Victor Hurowitz, review of Richter, *Deuteronomistic History and the Name Theology*.

We are left with the issue, then, of how to make sense of the textual passages that stand in tension to the Name Theology of divine presence. As an alternative to the two options discussed above, here I would like to propose a third possibility that accounts for both the Name Theology doctrine as it is explicitly formulated in the texts (*God dwells in heaven alone*), as well as the textual references that are logically inconsistent with it (*God dwells on earth*). In particular, I would like to suggest that the latter textual tensions can be understood as inadvertent examples of theological incorrectness. When viewed in this light, the expression *lipnê Yhwh* ("in the presence of Yahweh") represents an unintentional contradiction of the Name Theology, rather than a statement intended to somehow supplement, or mitigate, that doctrine. By recognizing the cognitively costly nature of the Deuteronomic Name Theology, it is possible to interpret these textual inconsistencies as unintentional deviations from the explicit doctrine. As such, these variations in the text, no matter whence they originate, represent examples where the costly concept underlying the Name Theology has been simplified—again, spontaneously and unintentionally—to a more intuitive, familiar, and cognitively palatable understanding of God's presence. Moreover, this would make sense given the types of textual statements we are dealing with. The doctrine of the Name Theology, for instance, is articulated in the form of explicit, formulaic expressions that originate through reflective theological reasoning. The inconsistent references to God's presence, by contrast, appear in more implicit constructions and take the form of oft-used idiomatic prepositional phrases (*lipnê Yhwh*). Mettinger admits, for example, that the phrase *lipnê Yhwh*, "before Yahweh," "may well be a sort of linguistic fossil, bearing no semantic cargo of importance."[103] Therefore, we should perhaps not read too much theological content into these implicit references to divine presence, which likely represent stock linguistic

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[103] Mettinger, *Dethronement of Sabaoth*, 53. But he goes on to add, "taken at face value this expression makes it difficult to speak of a Name Theology in Deuteronomy." From the above, one sees that this conclusion is not strictly necessary.

phrases that escaped the eye of the otherwise careful editors despite their logical tension with the Name doctrine.

Recall that costly theological concepts are fragile by nature, susceptible to being reduced spontaneously to more optimal forms. In this framework, the bold version of the Name Theology represents a reflective proposition-like statement such as *God dwells in heaven, only his name dwells on earth*. Textual passages that stand in tension with this overriding idea are not necessarily intended as *part of* the Name Theology, but arise instead as unintended lapses into theological incorrect ways of thinking. [104] The fact that there remain a handful of textual exceptions to the otherwise nearly systematic Name doctrine does not necessarily mean that the Deuteronomists aimed to "strike a balance" by deliberately preserving an inkling of earthly divine presence. Rather, despite their best efforts and practiced naturalism in dealing with their own theology, the existing inconsistencies indicate that even the expert Deuteronomists did not manage to achieve a fully consistent doctrine in all places. [105]

If even the Deuteronomic experts were not immune to the effects of theologically incorrect thinking, then we should expect the majority of ancient Israelites to have unconsciously ditched the Name Theology in favor of a more intuitive view of Yahweh's presence on earth. [106] While we cannot know for sure, cognitively-informed theorizing can help fill in this gap by suggesting that people's intuitions and cultural expectations would override the costly Name

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[104] This would also include cases where an earlier text evincing a more intuitive, theologically *incorrect* position is incorporated into the work of the D or DtrH, and allowed to remain as such.

[105] As a general observation, there is in my estimation a tendency among biblical and textual scholars to expect the texts of the Hebrew Bible to contain a fully systematic and self-consistent theological system. But even learned scribes are susceptible to the effects of theological incorrectness, and this might offer an alternative to reframe the sometimes internally inconsistent textual evidence.

[106] Consistent with the remark by Terrien on the failure of the Name Theology: "Josiah's Reform of the cult of Yahweh in the temple of Jerusalem under the influence of the Deuteronomic theology of the name was short-lived…A longingrained theology of glory in Zion had prevailed ever since the foundation of the temple." See Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 203.

doctrine. The following remark by Mayes, although it was not intended so, is perhaps a more accurate description of how the majority of everyday Israelites would have actually represented God's presence in the temple, *in spite of* the intended meaning of the highfalutin Name Theology: "The name and the reality signified thereby are not distinguishable; when Yahweh is said to have caused his name to dwell at a sanctuary the intention is to indicate the *real and effective presence of Yahweh himself* at that sanctuary."[107]

In summary: the Deuteronomic Name Theology represents a significant departure from both ordinary cognitive intuitions about divine agency, and from prevailing cultural expectations about divine presence. Together, this confluence of cognitive and cultural violations renders the Name Theology costly as a whole. This assessment shares some common ground with that of Hundley, who opts for a kind of compromise position wherein the divine presence is left intentionally ambiguous, shrouded in mystery: "The Deuteronomist's principal contribution lies not in moving God to heaven but in leaving undefined God's presence on earth."[108] There is much about this view with which I agree, but I would only add that, from a cognitive perspective, such an ambiguous god-concept renders the notion of divine presence not only more mysterious, but also inferentially poor and mentally costly. Indeed, in response to Hundley's idea of a preserved divine presence, albeit in some mysterious form, we may ask: what, precisely, is "divine" about the Deuteronomic name at all? As we have seen, the *shem* lacks mind and agency, the crucial markers of divinity. Without any attributes of (divine) agency, the *shem* cannot really be said to represent divine presence in any obvious sense. As a result, many ancient reader-listeners would have resolved this ambiguity and continued to represent a more intuitive type of presence and agency to which they were accustomed. In other words, I suspect that to most lay

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[107] Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 59-60 (emphasis mine).
[108] Hundley, "To Be or Not to Be," 552.

Israelites, the theological distinction between Yahweh and his name would have been a distinction without a difference. The costly nature of the Name doctrine might also account for why the texts are so insistent, and go to such lengths to drive home the deeply counterintuitive Name Theology in the first place. It suggests that the Deuteronomists were not just asserting their theological worldview over and against competing alternatives, but also that they were attempting to offset the costly nature of their own theological system.[109]

3.5. THE COST OF CULT CENTRALIZATION

The next key doctrine of Deuteronomic theology is the centralization of the religious cult.[110] Just as the book of Deuteronomy tolerates only one god and one chosen people, it similarly permits only one religious sanctuary. Nicholson thus writes that, "The total demand which Deuteronomy makes has often been summed up in the apt German phrase *ein Gott, ein Volk, ein Kult*."[111] Or as Wellhausen succinctly put it, "One God, one sanctuary—that is the idea."[112] The restriction of religious worship to a single, centralized site represents a major departure both from the biblical traditions of Israel's early history, and from customary religious practice in ancient Israel and the

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[109] Indeed, the Deuteronomic authors could not go so far as to eliminate all traces of agency, for as Sommer shows, that they still imagined God as having a body and clearly a mind. Nevertheless, the Name Theology, with its elimination of divine agency from the temple, must be considered more cognitively costly than more intuitive views.

[110] Nicholson regards cult centralization as "one of the fundamental demands of the book of Deuteronomy." See E. W. Nicholson, "The Centralisation of the Cult in Deuteronomy," *VT* 13 (1963): 380-89 (380). On cult centralization in D, see also Gordon J. Wenham, "Deuteronomy and the Central Sanctuary," *Tyndale Bulletin* 22 (1971): 103-18; J. Gordon McConville, "The Altar-Law and Centralization of the Cult," in *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984), 21-38; Jeffrey Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), Excursus 14; Pekka Pitkänen, *Central Sanctuary and Centralization of Worship in Ancient Israel: From the Settlement to the Building of Solomon's Temple* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2003); and, from a less historical perspective, Jeffrey G. Audirsch, *The Legislative Themes of Centralization: From Mandate to Demise* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).

[111] E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 55. Cf. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 57-58. See also Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, eds., *One God – One Cult – One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (BZAW 405; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010).

[112] "Ein Gott, ein Heiligtum—das ist ihre Meinung." Julius Wellhausen, *The Prolegomena to the History of Israel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 34. The quote refers to the Priestly writers, but Wellhausen emphasized that P was deeply indebted to the Deuteronomic idea of cult centralization. He writes, for example, that "In [Deuteronomy] the unity of the cultus is *commanded*; in the Priestly Code it is *presupposed*...the Priestly Code rests upon the result which is only the aim of Deuteronomy" (35).

Levant. The pentateuchal narratives describe the patriarchs erecting altars and worshipping Yahweh at numerous places along their travels (Gen 12, 13, 22, 26, 33, 35), with later kings following suit (1 Sam 7; 1 Kgs 3, 18), while archaeologically, there is abundant evidence of cultic sites throughout ancient Israel-Palestine and its environs.[113] In repudiation of these situations, the Deuteronomists limit all sacrificial proceedings and religious observance to the central sanctuary in Jerusalem.[114]

Scholars have long recognized the innovative nature of Deuteronomic cult centralization and its real-life consequences, including the practical costs associated with transporting large families and animals to the faraway temple. Here, however, we pursue a different track by examining the *cognitive* costs entailed by the theological idea of cult centralization. Even if the centralization reform was prompted in part by external geo-political factors such as the impending approach of the Assyrian army or their subsequent imperial occupation, there are theological aspects that played a role and should not be neglected. We can attempt to specify these theological factors and consider the conceptual impact of the idea of centralization. As in the previous section, the question under consideration is: how does the notion of cult centralization square with deeply entrenched intuitive thinking, and how did it fit with prevailing cultural expectations at that time?

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[113] For a discussion of these sites see John S. Holladay, "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy: An Explicitly Archaeological Approach," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 249-99; and Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 123-266.

[114] Although Deuteronomy never explicitly identifies "the site that Yahweh will choose," most scholars agree that the vague formula envisions the city of Jerusalem, where Solomon later builds the temple (1 Kings 6). By concealing the name of the site, the authors are able to maintain the book's fictional narrative setting as an antique Mosaic speech on the plains of Moab, before the founding of Jerusalem and its temple. For a literary analysis of the "place Yahweh will choose," see J. Gordon McConville and J. G. Millar, *Time and Place in Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

3.5.1. The Texts

The *locus classicus* for the notion of cult centralization is Deuteronomy 12.[115] In its literary context, this chapter signals the beginning of the D law code found in Deut 12-26, usually considered to be the oldest core of Deuteronomy (*Urdeuteronomium*).[116] As we have seen in connection with the Name formula, Deut 12 repeatedly demands that all religious sacrificial activity take place at one location—"the place that Yahweh your God will choose." Variations of this centralization formula occur throughout the chapter and the rest of the book (Deut 12:11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23, 24; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 26:2).[117] Deut 12:13-14 is clear on this point: "Take care not to sacrifice your burnt offerings in any place you like, but only in the place that Yahweh will choose in one of your tribal territories." Thus, after settling in the Promised Land, the Israelites are expected to bring everything—burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, contributions, votive offerings—to the central site in Jerusalem (12:11; cf. 12:6, 17).

In legislating its new theological position, Deuteronomy 12 radically transforms the Covenant Code legislation found in Exodus.[118] As Bernard Levinson has shown, Deuteronomy is modeled on this earlier legal collection, but textually repackages the laws in order to formulate its own doctrine of cult centralization. Thus, the Deuteronomists benefited from the authority of the older Covenant Code, while at the same time altering it. As part of this meticulous process,

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[115] In its current form, the chapter is a multi-layered composition marked by redundancy. However, there is still debate about the details of the text's literary strata and diachronic development. Most scholars identify vv. 13-19 as the earliest core unit, with differing opinions about the surrounding verses. See Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 24-27, 39-46; and Thomas Römer, "Cult Centralization," in *Das Deuteronomium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistischem Geschichtswerk* (ed. Eckart Otto and Reinhard Achenbach; FRLANT 206; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 168-80; idem, *So-Called Deuteronomistic History*, 56-65.

[116] These chapters make up the legal core of D, which is most often identified with the "Book of the Law" discovered in the temple archives, narrated in 2 Kings 22.

[117] See Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 28-36.

[118] See Levinson, *Deuteronomy*; Reinhard G. Kratz, *The Composition of the Narrative Books of the Old Testament* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 114-33. It is worth noting that this type of textual rewriting assumes a high literary proficiency in the ancient world, which would have itself been a costly undertaking in terms of time and education. These practical costs matter and are tied together with cognitive costs. My aim is to focus on the cognitive/conceptual level, but they are admittedly difficult to separate.

the authors of Deuteronomy worked at the micro level of the text as a means to advance their own larger multi-faceted agenda. According to Levinson, they aimed "to effect a major transformation of all spheres of Judaean life—cultically, politically, theologically, judicially, ethically, and economically."[119] As far as religious practice goes, prior to Deuteronomy all slaughter of domestic animals, even for food, was regarded as a ritual activity. That is, the killing was accompanied by prescribed ritual procedures and the animal was offered to the deity upon an altar. Exodus 20:21 describes this process: "You shall make for me an earthen altar and you shall sacrifice upon it your burnt offerings and your well-being offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place in which I cause my name to be mentioned I shall come to you and bless you." This law states that sacrifice must occur at an altar, but it envisions more than one potential locus of sacrifice ("in every place"). This describes the view of sacrificial procedure found in the other pentateuchal sources and plausibly reflects normative religious practice in pre-exilic Israel.[120] Indeed, this situation is assumed in the Josianic reform account in 2 Kings 23, where illicit religious practices are banned and local shrines (*bāmôt*) demolished.

Deuteronomy thus legitimizes the central sanctuary in Jerusalem while delegitimizing all other local shrines countrywide. In doing so, however, it created something of a problem. By forbidding sacrificial activity other than at the Jerusalem temple, the new law risked depriving people of their only sanctioned means (according to the Deuteronomists) for killing and consuming meat. In anticipation of this concern, the Deuteronomists invented a distinction between ritual sacrifice, which is permitted only at the central temple and must occur at an altar,

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[119] Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 16.
[120] Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 33. Sacrifice at altar is also presupposed in 1 Sam 14:31-35 where Saul's troops are rebuked for improper sacrifice. Even Lev 17:1-9, which has a version of centralization, stipulates that all slaughter must take place at an altar. See further Baruch A. Levine, "Ritual as Symbol: Modes of Sacrifice in Israelite Religion," in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (ed. Barry M. Gittlen; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 125-35.

and what scholars have called the "secular slaughter" of domestic animals for food. Thus, as a concession for people living at a distance from Jerusalem, Deuteronomy writes: "But whenever you desire, you may slaughter and eat meat in any of your settlements, according to the blessing that Yahweh your God has granted you" (Deut 12:15).[121] By creating the idea of non-cultic slaughter, Deuteronomy allows an option for Israelites to enjoy meat.[122] It shall be argued below, however, that this innovation divested the local sphere of its familiar ritual and religious potency. It was not the legal provision for secular slaughter that was new and costly, but rather the centralization of all ritual religious sacrifice to Jerusalem. Overall, then, the Deuteronomic centralization of the cult was a radical innovation and marked a significant development—what Welluasen called an "aggressive novelty"—in the history of Israelite religion.[123]

3.5.2. Centralization and Cognition

In addition to the social and political dimensions of cult centralization, this reform falls squarely in the territory of religious cognition since it makes tacit claims about the Israelite deity. In many ways, cult centralization is tantamount to *deity* centralization. It is therefore possible to explore the cognitive costs associated with the idea of a centrally located supernatural agent. (We must bear in mind, too, that the cognitive costs would be amplified in light of the Name Theology doctrine, which states that only Yahweh's name is to be found at the temple.) As discussed in the previous section on the Name Theology, the Deuteronomists sought to remove Yahweh's agency from the temple and relocate it to the heavenly realm. In similar fashion, the centralization of the religious cult sets far-reaching limitations on divine agency. In its effort to redefine cultic

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[121] Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 28-36.
[122] This legal allowance can also be understood as a concession for meat eating without the religious valence that is often associated with it. The Deuteronomists sought to abolish all local altars, but also wanted to assure people that they would still be able to consume meat locally.
[123] Wellhausen, *Prolegommena*, 33.

worship, Deuteronomy restricts access to the deity and, consequently, erases one of the stable features of cognitively optimal religion, namely, that the deity is always and everywhere available.

Cult centralization, then, is not only a practical law about where animal sacrifices may be legitimately offered, but is also, crucially, a conceptual innovation that concerns how and where worshippers interact with the deity. In ancient Israel, the Levant, and the wider Near East, sacrifice functioned as an indispensable mode of interaction with the divine.[124] Indeed, in nearly all societies past and present, gift offerings serve as a means for influencing the divine powers in one's environment. As we saw in the previous chapter on cognitively optimal religion, this was a hallmark of ancient Israelite religious activity within both households and sanctuaries alike. Therefore, by centralizing the sacrificial cult to the temple in Jerusalem, the Deuteronomists curtailed a fundamental avenue of communication and interaction with the deity. So, the biggest reason why the concept of cult centralization should be regarded as cognitively costly is that it radically reconceptualizes, and thus effectively removes (1) access to supernatural agency in the local sphere, and accordingly (2) a culturally familiar ritual mode of communication and interaction with the supernatural agent.

A centrally located deity can be regarded as more cognitively costly than a deity who is present whenever and wherever one has need of him, or whose presence resembles more closely that of a human agent. This latter notion is not to be confused with the theological (and arguably costly) idea of omnipresence, according to which God is *simultaneously* located everywhere at once. It is mentally costly to represent the omnipresence of God, whereas representing the deity

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[124] See the recent collection of essays in Jennifer Wright Kunst and Zsuzsanna Varhelyi, eds., *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

in specific religious interactions is not.[125] We may briefly recall Barrett's proposal about a universal Hyper Active Agency Detection system, which for good evolutionary reasons is predisposed to overdetect traces of agency in one's environment.[126] It is reasonable to expect that the tendency to detect agency in general correlates, all things being equal, with a practical tendency to detect supernatural agents in multiple places.[127] This hypothesis fits with the archaeological and textual evidence on the ground in ancient Israel, where Yahweh could be accessed in a variety of locations and manifestations.[128] Indeed, this may be precisely the situation against which the monotheistic Deuteronomic *shema* in Deuteronomy 6:4 attempts to reject when it declares: "Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one (*'eḥad*)."[129] That is, this text affirms the singular and indivisible nature of Yahweh, rather than fragmented into more regionally limited local versions of Yahweh (Yahweh of Teman, Yahweh of Samaria, etc.). If so, the Deuteronomic centralized deity would challenge this commonplace intuition about the ubiquitous availability of Yahweh's supernatural agency.

Now, some scholars maintain that Deuteronomy seeks to preserve traces of the divine presence in the local sphere outside of Jerusalem proper. Levinson argues, for example, that despite the radical nature of cult centralization, Deuteronomy manages to keep Yahweh locally present by carefully rewriting the Covenant Code laws so that Yahweh continues to bless the people in their settlements and cities. He points to the allowance of secular slaughter, which states that people may slaughter and eat meat "according to the blessing of Yahweh your God in

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[125] Recall the experiments on theological correctness conducted by Barrett and Keil, in which participants spontaneously transformed the theologically correct notion of God's omnipresence into a more person-like understanding of God as being limited to one location at a time.

[126] Justin L. Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 4 (2000): 29-34.

[127] It may even be the case that HADD is biased in favor of detecting multiple agencies or agents as well, giving rise to personalized deities with names and character profiles.

[128] See Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 38-57.

[129] For discussion of this complex issue, see Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 143-47; Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 220-21.

each of your city-gates" (Deut 12:15). According to Levinson, the deity's local presence is reflected in his continual blessing, and therefore, "Deuteronomy thus deftly manages to restrict the divine cultic presence to the central sanctuary and to maintain a mediated divine presence in the local secular sphere: the land and its produce constitute divine gifts."[130] Levinson goes on to add,

> In face of the dismantling of the countryside cultus begun by Hezekiah and intensified by Josiah, it was crucial for the Deuteronomic authors to establish for the citizens of Judah that the loss of the local altars did not entail complete loss of local access to God, or more seriously, that God had abandoned the local sphere. They went out of their way to provide the local sphere with its own integrity. Yahweh continues to be active and to grant his blessing there.[131]

This suggestion is reasonable, but it ultimately hangs on a weak textual basis and in fact runs counter to the main thrust of the cult centralization reform. As Levinson observes, Deut 12:15 mentions the practice of local non-cultic slaughter in tandem with Yahweh's blessing; secular slaughter is permitted "according to the blessing of Yahweh" (*kĕ-birkat Yhwh*). It seems unlikely, however, that this short offhand phrase can be used to support the larger idea of God's divine presence. Rather, the phrase *kĕ-birkat Yhwh* merely expresses the idea that meat for food is regarded as a gift from the deity, without any indication at all of his presence. The fact remains that the phrase does not explicitly state (or even imply, for that matter) that the deity is imagined to be "present" during any part of the process of food preparation and consumption. To derive from the simple Hebrew preposition *ke-* the notion of God's continual presence is a semantic load that the word cannot bear. Lastly, such an idea would undermine the innovativeness of the

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[130] Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 36.
[131] Levinson, *Deuteronomy*, 49-50.

Deuteronomic emphasis on the centralization of the cult, deity, and the uniqueness of the Jerusalem temple.

Still further, even if the Deuteronomic authors did attempt to preserve traces of Yahweh's presence throughout the land—by means of *kě-birkat Yhwh* or otherwise—it remains the case that the nature of this presence is radically different as a result of the centralized cult. According to Levinson, the centralization of the cult gives rise to a distinction between "divine cultic presence" at the Jerusalem temple, and what he calls the "mediated local presence" everywhere else. Once again, it is not quite clear that Deuteronomy intends to grant divine presence at the local level, since such an idea rests on a particular interpretation of a single ambiguous phrase. Yet, even if such a distinction was intended by the Deuteronomists, the characterization of both situations—in Jerusalem and locally—as examples of divine "presence" obscures the fundamental differences between them.[132] In particular, receiving God's blessing locally is a far cry from the supplication of the deity through formalized ritual sacrifice. Since sacrificial activity was the *sine qua non* for petitioning deities in antiquity, the removal of this ritual mechanism profoundly transforms the nature of human-deity interaction. In terms of the daily, lived reality of ancient Israelites who accessed the deity through regular ritual offerings, it is not at all clear that God's ordinary "blessing" would have been considered an adequate replacement. The prospect of not being able to interact with or influence the deity in a formalized, ritualized, and legitimized setting would have been potentially devastating to ancient Israelites in need of such services.

In sum, Deuteronomy either removes outright or radically reconceptualizes divine presence in the local sphere. If the Deuteronomists thought the deity was present at the local

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[132] I am not convinced that ancient people would have distinguished between cultic presence and "mediated local presence," even if D intended to make such a fine-grained distinction. Rather, I view the master category as divine presence in general, with the possibility of residing in different locations (which D, of course, rejects).

level, it was in a radically different sense, one that strains the more straightforward notion of divine "presence" that obtained prior to D.[133] In the face of the costly doctrine of cult (and deity) centralization, we would predict that most Israelites would have simply persisted with the long-standing assumption that Yahweh was fully present whenever they needed him and that he could be manipulated through ritual means in different settings. Indeed, we have ample evidence that this is precisely what they did! Specifically, there is both archaeological and textual evidence that local and regional sanctuaries continued to thrive even after the reigns of kings Hezekiah and Josiah and their alleged reforms.[134] Overall, then, we should be careful to distinguish between these very different understandings of divine presence in the local and central spheres.[135]

The cognitive costliness of cult centralization becomes even more apparent when we contrast it with the broader religio-cultural milieu of the Near East. Ancient cultures entertained the long-standing view that deities were accessible in multiple shrines at multiple locations. This is evident within the biblical tradition itself, which, as we have seen, describes the patriarchs constructing altars, sacrificing, and worshipping Yahweh throughout the land. The religious status quo found in the pentateuchal stories is that offerings to the deity can be made whenever and wherever an individual wishes. The underlying assumption governing these practices is that God is accessible in different locations. This general assumption governs what Sommer refers to

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[133] Indeed, as Levinson notes (*Deuteronomy*, 51), "the authors of Deuteronomy work systematically to drain the local sphere of any connection with cultic action" The same, I argue, is true of Yahweh's presence, as a matter of practical religious experience.

[134] See, e.g., Susan Ackerman, *Under Every Green Tree*; See, e.g., Holladay, "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy," in *Ancient Israelite Religion* (1987); and Albertz and Schmitt, *Family and Household Religion in Ancient Israel and the Levant* (2012).

[135] On this point, Weinfeld's remark is apposite, "The elimination of the provincial cult permitted the transformation of Israel's religion into a more abstract religion." Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 37. Cf. also Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 193; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, xiii.

as the fluidity model of divine presence in the ancient world.[136] In this view, divine selfhood in the ancient Near East and Israel was not limited to a single body or location, but rather was fluid and could manifest itself in different objects and locations. Deities had heavenly and earthly bodies, and they could take the form of various object such as statues or stelae. In Israel, Yahweh appeared in different regional manifestations known both from archaeological evidence (e.g., Yahweh of Samaria, Yahweh of Teman), as well as the biblical texts (Yahweh at Hebron [2 Samuel 15:7], Yahweh at Zion [Psalm 99:2]). Whereas this conception of divine agency was commonplace in ancient religious thought, according to Sommer the Deuteronomic school rejected the fluidity model and insisted that God dwells exclusively in heaven and was accessible only through the centralized sanctuary. For these reasons, the Deuteronomic ideas of cult centralization was, in the words of Reinhard Kratz, "special and singular in the world of the ancient Near East."[137] Or as Hanspeter Schaudig notes, "in Babylonia 'a cult reform' like those undertaken by Hezekiah and Josiah would seem incompatible with major concepts of the divine."[138] But even within its more proximate literary and cultural contexts—the Bible and Israel-Palestine—the Deuteronomic doctrine of centralization stood at odds with prevailing religious worship practices.

The innovative nature of Deuteronomy's cult centralization has been recognized for some time now—at the social, religious, political, and even textual levels. As Moshe Weinfeld aptly put it, "The centralization of the cult was in itself a sweeping innovation in this history of the Israelite cult, but its consequences were…decisively more revolutionary in nature, in that they

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[136] Sommer, *Bodies of God*.

[137] Reinhard G. Kratz, "The Idea of Cult Centralization and Its Supposed Ancient Near Eastern Analogies," in *One God, One Cult, One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (BZAW 405; ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 121-44 (136)

[138] Hanspeter Schaudig, "Cult Centralization in the Ancient Near East? Conceptions of the Ideal Capital in the Ancient Near East," in *One God, One Cult, One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (BZAW 405; ed. Reinhard G. Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 145-68 (152).

involved the collapse of an entire system of concepts which for centuries had been regarded as sacrosanct."[139] What our discussion adds to this statement is the recognition that on a cognitive and level, the centralization of the cult—and by extension the effective centralization of the deity himself—was equally innovative and costly. Thus, we can affirm the conclusion of Weinfeld and others regarding the revolutionary nature of D's centralization program. It may perhaps be more accurate, though, to note that although the Deuteronomists *aimed at* the collapse of traditional religious conceptions, in light of the costly nature of their theological program, and given what we know about the power of theological incorrectness, there is good reason to be skeptical about whether, or to what extent, they ever actually succeeded in this aim. That is, the Deuteronomic pioneers were waging a battle on two fronts against deeply-embedded cognitive and cultural expectations about the nature of divine agency. And as Ackerman and others have shown, many of the local practices against which the Deuteronomists directed their religious ire and legislation persisted well into the sixth century B.C.E. In particular, so-called apostate religious cults and practices continued to flourish, evident in the worship of the Queen of Heaven (Jeremiah 7 and 44) and the temple abominations (Ezekiel 8). A cognitive understanding of conceptual complexity and cognitive cost entailed by the doctrine of cult centralization helps make sense of the innovativeness of this idea as well as its lack of success among the populace of Israel.

3.6. THE COST OF ANICONIC WORSHIP

The third doctrine of Deuteronomic theology is aniconism, of iconoclasm, which is also a central topic in the study of ancient Israelite religion more broadly.[140] In the Hebrew Bible, the

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[139] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 190.
[140] For overviews, see Theodore Lewis, "Divine Images and Aniconism in Ancient Israel," *JAOS* 118 (1998): 36-53; Karel van der Toorn, "Currents in the Study of Israelite Religion," *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 6 (1998): 9-30; Brian B. Schmidt, "The Aniconic Tradition: On Reading Images and Viewing Texts," in *The*

prohibition against religious images is expressed in the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments (Exod 20; Deut 5), where it takes the form of apodictic law ("Thou shall not"). Despite its terseness, however, there are several issues that must be addressed before analyzing the notion of iconoclasm in terms of its cognitive costliness. Three issues that merit particular attention include the image ban's *content* (what images are prohibited), *origins* (when aniconism originated), and *rationale* (why images were prohibited in the first place). To address these questions, we consider the biblical texts along with the more general phenomenon of aniconism in ancient Israel.

3.6.1. The Texts

The second commandment exhorts the Israelites as follows: "You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them" (Exod 20:4-5a // Deut 5:8-9a).[141] This prohibition appears not only in parallel versions of the Decalogue, but is echoed in several other legal collections in the Hebrew Bible.[142] The aniconic position is found, for example, in the Covenant Code (Exod 20:20), the Holiness Code

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Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms (CBET 13; ed. Diana V. Edelman; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995), 75-105; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *No Graven Image?: Israelite Aniconism in its Ancient Near Eastern Context* (Stockholm: Alqvist and Wiksell, 1995); idem, "Israelite Aniconism: Developments and Origins," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; CBET 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 173-204; idem, "Aniconism—A West Semitic Context for the Israelite Phenomenon?" in *Ein Gott Allein? JHWH-Verehung und biblischer Monotheismus im Kontext der israelitischen und altorientalischen Religionsgeschichte* (OBO 139; ed. W. Dietrich and M. A. Klopfenstein. Fribourg: Academic Press, 1994), 159-78.

[141] It is possible that the original commandment only included the first part ("You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image") and was later elaborated upon with reference to things on earth, heaven, etc. See Miller, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 16. He points out, however, that in its present form it makes a sweeping exclusion of all images of deities. For a discussion of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy, see Lohfink, "The Decalogue in Deuteronomy 5," in idem, *Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy* (trans. Linda M. Maloney; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 248-64.

[142] For a discussion of its development see Christoph Dohmen, *Das Bilderverbot: Seine Entstehung und seine Entwicklung im Alten Testament* (Bonner biblische Beiträge 62; 2d ed.; Bonn: Athenäum, 1987).

(Lev 19:4; 26:1), the covenant curses in Deuteronomy (Deut 27:15), and the so-called Ritual Decalogue (Exod 34:17).[143] In Deuteronomy 5 (and Exodus 20), the prohibition against making images follows immediately after the commandment against worshipping other deities. In its present form, then, the prohibition of religious images is related to the exclusive worship of Yahweh. This suggests that the image prohibition pertains to any image, idol, or material artifact of another deity.[144] The two commandments are connected also by vv. 9-10, which justify the prohibition on the grounds that Yahweh is a jealous deity.[145]

The book of Deuteronomy goes further than Exodus, however, in its aniconic attitude. Deuteronomy 4, for instance, offers its own unique exposition of the second commandment.[146] This chapter recounts the revelation at Sinai/Horeb, but rewrites the earlier tradition with its own particular aims. After the Israelites witness God's presence made manifest in the great fire on the mountain, the text states, "Yahweh spoke to you out of the fire; you heard the sound of words but you saw no shape (*tĕmûnā*)—nothing but a voice" (4:12). This text then elaborates its position: "So take great care for your own sake—since you did not see any shape on the day Yahweh your God spoke to you out of the fire at Horeb—not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or woman, the form of any animal on earth, the form of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the form of anything that creeps on the ground, the form of any fish in the waters under the earth" (4:15-18). Thus, Deuteronomy joins

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[143] For a discussion of aniconism in the prophetic literature, see Jill Middlemas, *The Divine Image: Prophetic Aniconic Rhetoric and Its Contribution to the Aniconic Debate* (FAT 74; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

[144] The text does not distinguish between idols of Yahweh and idols of other gods. Tigay (*Deuteronomy*) says that in the Bible, any idol must be of another god, so god's jealousy applies to the second commandment, which explains its current location thereafter. Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), thinks that at an earlier time, the ban was specifically directed towards the exclusion of Yahweh images, citing Deuteronomy 4 in support. So also Mayes (*Deuteronomy*), based on lack of referent, and more fully that "them" in v. 5 goes back to "other gods" in v. 3.

[145] Levinson and others suggest that v. 9 originally directly continued after v. 7, and that it was later moved to cover both commandments. Miller remarks that as it stands, the commandment is a "sweeping exclusion of any image of any deity" (*Religion of Ancient Israel*, 16).

[146] For a detailed study of this chapter see Knut Holter, *Deuteronomy and the Second Commandment* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

other biblical texts in the rejection of deity images, but elaborates upon this aniconic position in greater detail.

It should be noted that some biblical texts mention the use of certain types of images within the Israelite religious cult. These include Moses' bronze serpent staff Nehushtan (Numbers 21; 2 Kings 18), Gideon's (Judges 8), and Micah's silver idol (Judges 17). Most infamously, there is the golden bull calves of Jeroboam, on which scholars are divided as to whether they depict the deity directly in anthropomorphic form or simply represent the platform upon which he is invisibly present. This evidence suggests that while the official cult was perhaps mostly or even fully aniconic, especially when it came to material representations of Yahweh, other objects were tolerated and deemed legitimate at one time or another. It was not until the Deuteronomic movement that images of all kinds—whether full-blown anthropomorphic cult statues, theriomorphic images, naturalized symbols, or simple monolith *massebot* stones—were actively proscribed and condemned.

3.6.2. Aniconism and Cognition

When we step outside the world of the texts, the archaeological and iconographic material offers several interesting clues regarding the phenomenon of aniconism in Israel. The first thing to say is that that contrary to popular belief, religious imagery was in fact ubiquitous in ancient Israel, a fact nicely demonstrated by Silvia Schroer's *In Israel gab es Bilder*.[147] The second thing to note is that, broadly speaking, there is a relative dearth of anthropomorphic imagery, specifically, in Iron Age Israel. During this time period, there is a general reticence to portray divinities in material form. In their seminal work on the development of religious imagery in Israel-Palestine,

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[147] Silvia Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder: Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament* (OBO 74: Freiburg: University Press, 1987).

Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger trace a recession in the use of anthropomorphic imagery to depict the deity throughout the Iron II period.[148] This shift is visible most prominently in the preference for divine symbols on glyptic art, but also appears in the relative decrease in anthropomorphic statuary compared to that of the Bronze Age. There is also a shift away from images and towards aniconism on Judean name seals during the 7th century BCE.[149] Beginning especially in the Iron IIA period, there is an absence of male god figurines, indicating that they were no longer being produced at that time.[150] Patrick Miller sums up the these data when he writes, for example, that "Male images of deity, that is, Yahweh images, are rare to nonexistent in excavated Iron Age Israelite sites." [151] A similar preference for non-anthropomorphic representations of deities occurs also in Mesopotamia over a period of time.[152]

Tryggve Mettinger picked up on this line of evidence in his highly influential study on aniconism titled, *No Graven Image?*[153] Mettinger uses the term aniconism to refer to "cults

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[148] See Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, chs. 5-9. We shall see below, however, that Uehlinger revised this conclusion in his later work on anthropomorphic cult statuary.

[149] See Benjamin Sass, "The Pre-Exilic Hebrew Seals: Iconism vs. Aniconism," in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals* (OBO 125; ed. B. Sass and C. Uehlinger; Fribourg: Academic Press, 1993), 194-256; and *GGG,* 354-67. Sass is careful not to connect the iconographic trends too tightly to the alleged Josianic reforms, especially since the aniconic tendency seems to be part of a more general phenomenon. It also could be connected to increased literacy rates, status, and/or stylistic preferences. In his survey of over 700 seals from Iron Age II Israel-Palestine, Sass observes that a significant number of them—over 500-are aniconic. Moreover, this trend occurs in the iconographic repertoires from neighboring regions such Aram, Ammon, and Moab. Therefore, while a causal link between this development and the Deuteronomic image ban might be possible, there are other factors involved. Indeed, Sass suggests that the shift to aniconic seals may reflect growing rates of literacy, as seal-owners used textually inscribed seals to communicate a higher form of social status than the traditional iconic images.

[150] See esp. *GGG*, 133-40; Holladay, "Religion in Israel and Judah Under the Monarchy," 295-99.

[151] Miller, *The Religion of Ancient Israel*, 225 n. 90.

[152] See Tally Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban* (OBO 213; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005). Ornan, traces a broad movement in Assyrian and Babylonia against representing deities anthropomorphically, both in glyptic and in monumental art. The iconographic record shows, instead, that anthropomorphic depictions are often substituted with the divine symbol or attributive animal in its place. Ornan argues that Judeans adopted this practice of non-anthropomorphic representation while in exile in Babylon, and subsequently extended it to include non-theriomorphic representations as well.

[153] Mettinger, *No Graven Image*. See also idem, "Israelite Aniconism: Developments and Origins," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; CBET 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 173-204; idem, "A Conversation with My Critics: Cultic Image or Aniconism in the First Temple," in *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context: A Tribute to*

where there is no iconic representation of the deity (anthropomorphic or theriomorphic) serving as the dominant or central cultic symbol, that is, where we are concerned with either (a) an aniconic symbol or (b) sacred emptiness."[154] Aniconic symbols include sacred stones, poles, and pillars. In ancient Israel, sites with standing stones (*massebot*) are common.[155] Alternately, sacred emptiness refers to a kind of empty-space aniconism wherein the deity is represented *invisibly* by his conspicuous absence on a material image.[156] Examples here include the Ta'anakh cult stand, with its empty opening where one would expect the deity to appear, as well as the gigantic footprints at the entrance of the 'Ain Dara temple in Syria. Based on this understanding of ancionism, Mettinger proceeds to introduce an important distinction between what he calls "de facto" aniconism on the one hand, and "programmatic aniconism" on the other.[157] The distinction turns on the difference between the mere absence of images as opposed to the explicit avoidance of images. He observes in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age a tendency to use non-iconic images (i.e., non-representational images in the form of humans or animals) in open-air sanctuaries to depict the deity in a less direct manner. Objects such as *maṣṣebot* and stela serve to symbolize the deity in question and work as indexical signs of the deity's presence. Such aniconic standing stones are prevalent throughout the Northwest Semitic world. In light of this picture, he concludes that "Israelite aniconism is just another case in point of the wider phenomenon traced in the previous parts of this study: ancient West Semitic aniconism in the

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Nadav Na'aman (ed. Yairah Amit, Ehud Ben-Zvi, Israel Finkelstein, and Oded Lipschits; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 273-96.

[154] Mettiner, *No Graven Image*, 19

[155] See Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, "Massebot Standing for Yhwh: The Fall of a Yhwistic Cult Symbol," in *Worship, Women, and War: Essays in Honor of Susan Niditch* (ed. J. J. Collins, T. M. Lemos, and S. M. Olyan; Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015), 99-115; eadem, "maṣṣēḇōṯ in the Israelite Cult: An Argument for Rendering Implicit Cultic Criteria Explicit," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (LHBOT 422; ed. J. Day; New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 28-39; Elizabeth Larocca-Pitts, *"Of Wood and Stone": The Significance of Israelite Cult Items in the Bible and Its Early Interpreters* (HSM 61; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001); Johannes C. de Moor, "Standing Stones and Ancestor Worship," *Ugaritische Forschungen* 27 (1995): 1-20.

[156] See Theodore Lewis, "Aniconism."

[157] In this Mettinger follows the earlier observation of Keel, who distinguished between "the mere absence of images and the conscious repudiation of such."

form of cults centred on standing stones."[158] At this stage of what Mettinger calls "de facto aniconism," the preference for non-iconic images was neither commanded nor enforced. It is only later that the full-blown "programmatic" aniconism emerged in the biblical texts. According to this idea, images of all types are strictly prohibited and forbidden under the auspices of strict Deuteronomic "Yahweh-alone" movement. Mettinger ultimately concludes that while the programmatic veto on images in the biblical texts is a late phenomenon, "Israelite aniconism is as old as Israel itself and not a late innovation. The express prohibition of images is just the logical conclusion of a very long development."[159]

In response to this proposal, Uehlinger has reinvestigated the question of Israelite aniconism by analyzing the distribution of cult statuary in the Bronze and Iron ages.[160] He notes that the apparent iconographic development towards aniconism in the pre-exilic period is based almost exclusively on the glyptic evidence, and therefore paints a misleading picture on its own. He argues that whereas glyptic art decreases in iconic representation, a different trend emerges with anthropomorphic cult statuary, which was more prevalent than scholars have assumed. And this type of cult statuary is arguably more valuable than are the minor glyptic arts for understanding ancient Israelite worship preferences. The impressive amount of evidence for iconic representation of deities in the form of statuettes, figurines, cult stands, incense altars, and model shrines, therefore problematizes claims about the pervasiveness of de facto aniconism in Iron Age Israel.[161] We shall return to the views of both scholars below in conjunction with our cognitive analysis.[162]

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[158] Mettinger, *No Graven Image*, 193-94.

[159] Mettinger, *No Graven Image*, 195; cf. 17.

[160] Christoph Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; CBET 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 97-155.

[161] Uehlinger goes so far as to suggest that like almost all other regional shrines and temples surrounding Israel, the temple in Jerusalem probably housed an anthropomorphic cultic statue of Yahweh, though it no longer

As for the meaning, function, or rationale of aniconism, various options that have been proposed.[163] In the end, the image prohibition appears to have had something to do with the worship of other deities. But for our purposes, not much hinges on this debate. No explicit rationale is ever provided for the image ban, other than being the (inscrutable or arbitrary) will of the deity. Nevertheless, it seems clear enough that the image ban was closely connected to the worship of foreign deities, at least in the minds of the biblical authors.

The conflicting reconstructions regarding the origins, nature, and scope of Israelite aniconism make it somewhat difficult to claim anything concrete in theorizing about the potentially costly nature of aniconism. In light of the debate between the Mettinger and Uehlinger schools of thought, let us first consider the fit of the biblical vision of aniconism with the cultural expectations of the time. If we follow Mettinger, we would conclude that the programmatic aniconism is a "logical extension" of the prevailing de facto aniconic situation that obtained in Israel for centuries. In this view, the Deuteronomic concept of aniconism is perhaps not so radical or costly, since it represents only a difference of degree, not kind. In light of the

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survives. Similar views are found in Niehr, and van der Toorn (in *Image and the Book*). While this suggestion resonates with biblical traditions that speak about Yahweh "dwelling" in the temple and worshippers "seeing his face," in my view it preferable to interpret these passages less literally; they need not imply a literal material image or figure. Uehlinger also goes on to suggest that scholars might profitably seek to investigate competing Yahweh iconographies. He himself cites one object in particular—the Munich statuette from Beth-Shean—which he argues depicts Yahweh in his chariot with his consort Asherah at his side, a sort of visual representation of the Kuntillet 'Ajrud inscription naming "Yahweh and his Asherah." I see no reason why this could not be correct, though the suggestion remains quite speculative, and so it cannot be assumed to be accurate.

[162] Uehlinger suggests that the Judean Pillar Figurines (or JPFs) and anthropomorphic statuary imply or suggest larger prototypes. Perhaps, but this remains to be proven. Rather, they may suggest a discontinuity between official and popular religion. The production of miniature cult statuary in the form of gods and goddesses (or better: CPS agents) could be a push-back against the aniconism of the official cult (some forms of it); a form of theological incorrectness. So we need not postulate the existence of actual Yahweh and Asherah statues in the Jerusalem temple in order to suggest that everyday religious practice involved the more optimal option of representing the deity in anthropomorphic or theriomorphic form, despite the preferences of the official cult and any other image prohibitions.

[163] See Robert P. Carroll, "The Aniconic God and the Cult of Images," *Studia Theologica* 31 (1977): 51-64 (esp. 54-56); Tigay, *Deuteronomy*.

evidence for anthropomorphic imagery adduced by Uehlinger, however, there is good reason to think that the ban on images was more radical and costly, at least to some degree.

While the ban on images is attested in nearly every legal collection of the Hebrew Bible, and in some non-legal texts, these passages allow for certain kinds of non-representational imagery. Hosea, for example, seems to condemn Jeroboam's bulls not on the ground that they are material images, but because they are representational images in theriomorphic form.[164] This general picture is mirrored on the ground by the de facto aniconism that we find in Israel and the wider West Semitic cultural milieu. In the broader ancient Near Eastern world, the idea of full-blown aniconism was quite rare. In general, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and other cultures regularly embodied their deities in the form of material, anthropomorphic cult statues that stood at the center of worship. These statues were clothed, fed, and generally treated as living beings.[165] Even during the middle of the first millennium B.C.E., when Mesopotamian religion shifted towards symbolic non-anthropomorphic representations, in what Tally Ornan describes as the triumph of the symbol, there was representational imagery at the heart of the cult. Against this backdrop, Israelite and Northwest Semitic aniconism is exceptional. As Miller writes, "The absence of images of the deity and the concomitant prohibition against representation of deity in any form of image is anomalous in the ancient Near East."[166] However, as we have seen, the neighboring cultures of the Northwest Semitic peoples provide a more geographically proximate point of comparison for understanding Israelite religion. And in this case, much hinges on whether we follow Mettinger's view on dominance of de facto aniconism, or Uehlinger on the prevalence of anthropomorphic imagery.

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[164] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 52-3.
[165] Michael Dick, ed., *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*. See also Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*.
[166] Miller, *Religion of Ancient Israel*, 15.

Despite the power of his argument, some of Mettinger's conclusions are open to different interpretation. He emphasizes, for example, the continuity from the de facto aniconism of ancient Israel and its environs, to the eventual programmatic aniconism espoused in the biblical texts. In doing so, he describes the latter as a natural outgrowth of the former—"the logical conclusion of a very long development."[167] However, one may question just how logical or natural such a development was. There are of course points of continuity, but there is also a fundamental difference with the Deuteronomic form of programmatic aniconism since this doctrine if iconoclasm explicitly prohibits many of the material artifacts that had previously been tolerated under de facto aniconism. After all, the world of de facto aniconism still allowed for material artifacts to represent the divine. We should be careful, then, not to downplay the *discontinuity* between the two types of religion. To be sure, Mettinger recognizes the extent to which the Deuteronomic program overturns previous religious norms, especially in its condemnation of *massebot* standing stones.[168] It remains the case that the world of de facto aniconism in Israel and its neighbors happily included other types of material representation of the divine—notably in the form of standing stones, pillars, poles, etc. Against this backdrop, then, the programmatic image ban is not simply an extension, but truly an outright ban—not just on the many images that were tolerated earlier, but also on many images that were actively used (*massebot*). Deuteronomy denies all such forms of material representation. Finally, although Mettinger is careful to note that Israelite aniconism does not exclude iconography in general (since pictorial imagery was ubiquitous in Israel as elsewhere), this conclusion applies only to the world of de

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[167] Mettinger, *No Graven Image*, 193-4.

[168] Yet difficulty arises with his definition of "image" or "icon" as only including representational images—that is, either anthropomorphic or theriomorphic figures. Specifically, he defines aniconism as "cults where there is no iconic representation of the deity (anthropomorphic or theriomorphic) serving as the dominant or central cultic symbol." See also the critique in Ryan Bonfiglio, "Reading Images, Seeing Texts: Towards a Visual Hermeneutics for Biblical Studies," Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2014.

facto aniconism. The programmatic aniconism found in Deuteronomy, by contrast, is defined by its categorical rejection of such imagery.[169] Thus, the radical position of Deuteronomy against images *of all kinds* clashes sharply with the cultural expectations and is likely to have been cognitively costly for this reason.[170]

Indeed, regarding open-air sanctuaries and standing stone cults as examples of "aniconic" cult worship at all is problematic. This description only makes sense if one defines "image" or "icon" as Mettinger does, as referring only to anthropomorphic or theriomorphic representation. In doing so, however, one must exclude certain artifacts as images or icons, which is odd since it appears that ancient people treated many artifacts—whether *massebot*, betyls, poles, pillars—in much the same way as their anthropomorphic or theriomorphic counterparts, namely as markers of divine agency towards which one can appear before and direct their actions. Indeed, Mettinger's definition and understanding of "image" and "aniconism" are at odds with the biblical aniconic prescriptions themselves. According to the Deuteronomists, "abstract" objects like *massebot* and *asherim* are explicitly targeted and condemned as illicit images in violation of the second commandment.

In light of these observations, we may therefore ask: what is "aniconic" about *massebot* aniconism? Or for that matter: what is "aniconic" about so-called empty-space aniconism? Just as material stones marked the presence of supernatural agents in the ancient world, so too did empty space aniconism directly imply the presence of the deity. Both forms of representation do so by specifying the point in space where the deity is located; it is therefore a tangible visual

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[169] Note the inclusivity of the biblical commandment, in the form of literary merism, concerning the total prohibition against the manufacture of images "in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters beneath the earth."

[170] For these and other reasons, Uehlinger has suggested it is more appropriate to speak about *anti-iconism*, rather than mere aniconism. See Christoph Uehlinger, "Israelite Aniconism in Context: Review Article on T. Mettinger, *No Graven Image* (1995)," *Biblica* 77 (1996): 540-49.

gesture that communicates the idea that the deity is there. And most importantly, such empty space objects also rely upon the use of visual material medium to do so. Despite the invisible nature of the deity, such artifacts still fall squarely within the visual realm, and thus they should not be considered as entirely divorced from visual imagery in the way that some tend to imagine, namely by describing them as "aniconic." In any event, where some choose to describe empty-space divine representations as "aniconic," it is just as reasonable to describe such artifacts as just another *visual* manner of representing the deity.[171]

Therefore, it is somewhat misleading, it seems, to say that the origin of programmatic aniconism lies in the earlier reality of de facto aniconism. Rather, the programmatic aniconism of the Deuteronomic theology emerged from the innovative theological and legal formulations of this school of Israelite religious experts, who built upon a cultural trend but codified it in a radical new way. In doing so, they went well beyond the earlier religious models they inherited. They were not simply *describing* the religious reality of worship, they were attempting to *prescribe* and *proscribe* it. Indeed, as Mettinger himself notes, it is only with the theological speculation of the Deuteronomists that the aniconic ideal is officially legislated: "prior to the programmatic aniconism promulgated in Deuteronomistic theology there was a much more relaxed attitude towards images in which aniconism existed as a tolerant *de facto* tradition void of specific theological reflection on the matter."[172] This observation fits well with our working distinction between intuitive and reflective cognitive processes and their ensuing religious products; Deuteronomic iconoclasm was a reflective (and radical) extension of earlier culturally-specific intuitions about the material representation (or lack thereof) of the divine.

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[171] Indeed, *everyone* would have agreed that deities are invisible (this is a native emic view, not an etic one), even if they have statues and material representations.

[172] Mettinger, *No Graven Image*, 25.

As such a significant departure from the earlier iconographic status quo, we should expect the Deuteronomic doctrine of iconoclasm to have clashed with cultural expectations concerning the proper means for depicting divinities. This, as a result, would entailed a certain cognitive cost. Unlike the de facto aniconic tendency, the Deuteronomic image ban is black and white, imposed by fiat, and prohibits many of the earlier material modes of representation that were permissible under de facto aniconism. Unlike *massebot* or empty space imagery, Deuteronomic iconoclasm eradicates the visual from the religious sphere. Deuteronomy dictates how God is *not* to be pictured. Indeed, according to Deuteronomy 4:12, the Israelites heard Yahweh but "witnessed no shape—nothing but a voice." But since humans are visual creatures for whom art is juicy material for cognition, it stands that it is good for religious cognition too.[173] Deuteronomy creates a gulf between its own prohibition and the various material means used for depicting divinity. Even in terms of cultural expectations, even though non-anthropomorphic and non-theriomorphic representations were available under de facto aniconism, the crucial point is that the overriding expectation was still that *deities are depicted materially*. Deuteronomy rejects this possibility and therefore radically eliminates a variety of otherwise acceptable material representations—whether material aniconism, empty space aniconism, or full-blown anthropomorphic or theriomorphic icons. The Deuteronomic position is one of radical iconoclasm, which would have likely clashed with cultural expectations, religious sensibilities, and cognitive inclinations.

From a more strictly cognitive perspective, full-blown programmatic iconoclasm of the type that rejects *all* religious imagery, either in the cult or to depict the deity, is quite costly. It may be helpful to think about preference for images as reflecting an impulse towards maximizing

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[173] See, more broadly, Mark Turner, ed., *The Artful Mind: Cognitive Science and the Riddle of Creativity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

the type of agency that comes so naturally to humans. While the most important part of the notion of agency is the representation of an agent's mind (psychological anthropomorphism), the representation of an agent's material form also plays a role. This is undoubtedly why material representations of deities were commonplace throughout the ancient Near East and flourished in Israel as well.

Without the representation of mind there is no agency, but removing the material marker of the body may also impact the attribution of agency as well. Or more precisely, the absence of visual images reduces the likelihood that mental systems designed for detecting agency will be triggered and engaged. This is not to say that the Deuteronomists do not represent Yahweh as a supernatural being with robust agency, but in its explicit doctrine of aniconism, an aspect of that agency is restricted. Visual images, and perhaps anthropomorphic images in particular, can be regarded a cognitively optimal expression our theory of mind systems.[174] For example, in a study that has potential bearing on the aniconism issue, Barrett and VanOrman find that subjects who are exposed to visual images of God during religious worship tend to hold a more anthropomorphic characterization of God.[175] We may theorize that the reverse holds true as well: that the psychological tendency to imagine supernatural beings as agents with minds leads to the cognitively optimal behavior of rendering the mental concept into tangible, material form. Such images serve as visual cues that fuel theory of mind processes and facilitate mentalizing inferences.[176] Thus, rather than relying solely on internal mental agency systems, visual artifacts

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[174] See Stewart Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds: A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[175] See Justin L. Barrett and Brant VanOrman, "The Effects of Image-Use in Worship on God Concepts," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 15 (1996): 38-45.

[176] In addition to the marking of agency that visual objects afford, visual media is also capable of affecting people's behavior. Norenzayan, for example, notes that many religious traditions employ artistic renderings of eyes, in particular, which serve as a kind of surrogate for supernatural watchers or monitors. These material artifacts are effective at triggering the idea that people are being watched, which in turn affects behavior in the presence of the eyes. See Ara Norenzayan, *Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton

representing the divine provide external stimuli that modulate people's qualitative perception of divine agency. Comparatively speaking, then, the prohibition of such images can be regarded as cognitively costly.

In general, it may be helpful to think about the different choices for representing supernatural agents on a sliding scale that correlates with the amount of inferable agency. This is illustrated schematically in the chart below.
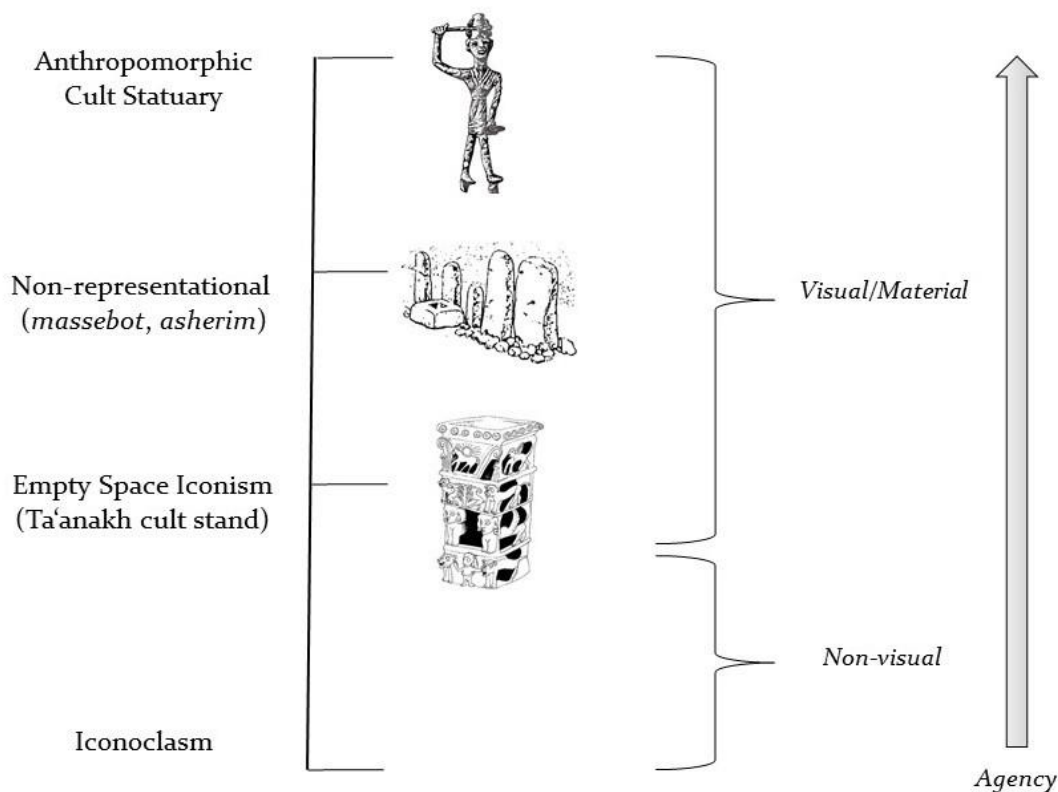
Figure 1. Modes of Material Representation and Aniconism Compared to Relative Degree of Agency

In this view, (1) anthropomorphic (and theriomorphic) representations of God supply maximum inferences of mind and agency, just as perception and encounters with person-like agents do; (2) non-representational objects (e.g., standing stones, divine symbols) represent as a midway point in terms of agency, since they still constitute material objects; (3) empty-space aniconic representations omit any material representation of deity, but require material substance in order to highlight the absence of the divine entity within the iconographic scene; and (4) total absence of any material depiction of the divine, as a result of iconoclastic prohibition of imagery, which eliminates important physical markers of agency and is therefore more costly by comparison.

Non-iconic or anti-iconic understandings of supernatural agents inhibit the agentive aspect of these beings. Although humans are capable of imagining minds (a core feature of agency) even in the absence of material bodies, nevertheless the proliferation of material representations of divine agency across the globe and throughout history (especially ancient Israel) would indicate that material art serves to enhance the intimation of agency. The strong tendency to represent deities in material form appears to be a cognitively natural extension of human agency detection systems (HADD).

In light of this discussion, the strict Deuteronomic iconoclasm should be regarded as cognitively costly. In terms of cognition, the prohibition on divine images removes (or at least attempts to remove) religious visual cues that trigger agency detection systems. This does not mean that the Deuteronomic school imagined an agent-less Yahweh or that Yahweh could not be represented as an agent even without material imagery of him. It does suggest, however, that the image-free theology of the Deuteronomists was costly by comparison, insofar as it omitted commonplace physical markers of that agency. In terms of cultural expectations, while there is some evidence that aniconic modes of representing the divine had a long history in Israel and

elsewhere, the de facto aniconism of the Deuteronomists marked a significant break with earlier traditions of depicting deities. There is every reason, then, to view the Deuteronomic image ban as a radical, and therefore costly, position in the context of Israelite religious worship.

3.7. DEUTERONOMIC THEOLOGY AND THE DOCTRINAL MODE OF RELIGIOSITY

If the above understanding of Deuteronomic theology as a form of cognitively costly religion is on the right track, then it becomes appropriate to ask how such a psychologically demanding type of religion could be successfully transmitted. In the game of cultural selection and transmission, the religious systems that triumph are those that can be remembered, communicated, and passed down through the generations. In chapter one, it was argued that most expressions of religion in ancient Israel achieved success by sticking close to cognitively natural intuitions informed by our evolved psychology. Costly religious traditions such as the Deuteronomic theology, on the other hand, forego the luxury of the cognitive optimum and venture into more elaborate and highfalutin theological territory. Deuteronomic theology therefore presents something of an anomaly: how could such a costly religious worldview be successfully transmitted, as it clearly was?

Here it is suggested that Deuteronomy attempts to counteract the cognitively costly nature of its theological program by invoking a number of cultural tools that are used to support its doctrines. These include above all the use of writing and texts, oral recitations, repetition, and other cultural mnemonic aids. Indeed, once Deuteronomic theology is understood as an inherently costly enterprise, we can then account for the presence in these texts of precisely the kinds of strategies needed to enhance memory and transmission, and therefore sustain such a costly body of religious knowledge.

One way of thinking about the Deuteronomic School is as a form of what Harvey Whitehouse calls the doctrinal mode of religiosity. Although many scholars have highlighted the problematic nature of Whitehouse's modes of religiosity theory, it is still possible to consider the costly Deuteronomic ideas discussed above in terms of the doctrinal dynamics outlined by the modes theory.[177] Whitehouse suggests that what we have to this point referred to as costly religious traditions tend to cluster into two dichotomous types—what he calls the "doctrinal" and "imagistic" modes of religiosity. [178] The modes theory seeks to clarify the psychological mechanisms related to memory and transmission that steer religious traditions towards these two modes. In principle, the theory is based on the simple premise that in order to transmit a body of religious knowledge or teachings, it is necessary to assimilate them into memory. The doctrinal and imagistic modes, according to Whitehouse, accomplish this task in their own unique ways.

According to Whitehouse, the doctrinal mode operates among uniform, large-scale, centralized groups, and is characterized by frequently repeated ritual practices with a low level of excitement of arousal. By contrast, the imagistic mode is found among small-scale communities and incorporates rituals that performed more rarely but that are highly arousing. Whitehouse argues that each mode activates a different system of memory in the process of motivation and transmission. The doctrinal mode of religiosity, for example, consists of highly routinized patterns of ritual performance and verbal transmission, the frequent repetition of which is

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[177] For application and critiques of the modes theory, see Harvey Whitehouse and Luther H. Martin, eds., *Theorizing Religions Past: Archaeology, History, and Cognition* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004). It should be noted that the brunt of the critiques leveled against the mode theory have centered on the proposed dichotomy and the imagistic mode of religiosity in particular. There appears to be less controversy concerning the doctrinal mode. For further critiques see Pascal Boyer, "Book Review Forum: Harvey Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity*," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 16 (2002): 4-43 (8-13).

[178] In addition to *Modes of Religiosity*, see also Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). The idea of binary types of religion is not new, but features in the works of several earlier scholars (e.g., Max Weber's distinction between virtuosos/masses or charismatic/traditional, Jack Goody's distinction between literate/nonliterate, or Claude Lévi-Strauss' distinction between hot/cold societies. What is new about Whitehouse's formulation is the emphasis on psychology and memory as keys to understanding transmission.

encoded in semantic memory. Semantic memory is responsible for the storage of general propositional and procedural knowledge, including conceptually complex religious teachings and exegesis. The features associated with each mode, however, are not limited to cognitive mechanisms related to memory, but also include a host of sociopolitical features as well. These features are contrasted in the table below.[179]

Variable	Doctrinal	Imagistic
Psychological Features		
1. Transmissive frequency	High	Low
2. Level of arousal	Low	High
3. Principal memory system	Semantic schemas and implicit scripts	Episodic/flashbulb memory
4. Ritual Meaning	Learned/acquired	Internally generated
5. Techniques of revelation	Rhetoric, logical integration narrative	Iconicity, multivocality and multivalence
Sociopolitical features		
6. Social cohesion	Diffuse	Intense
7. Leadership	Dynamic	Passive/absent
8. Inclusivity/exclusivity	Inclusive	Exclusive
9. Spread	Rapid, efficient	Slow, inefficient
10. Scale	Large Scale	Small scale
11. Degree of uniformity	High	Low
12. Structure	Centralized	Noncentralized

Table 1. Contrasing Modes of Religiosity (after Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 74.

The transmission of religious teachings in the doctrinal mode is highly routinized and involves frequent repetition. Consequently, such "repetitive sermonizing" makes it easier to encode and remember complex verbal doctrines in semantic memory.[180] Frequently repeated rituals and practices, however, in many cases can lead to reduced levels of motivation and even boredom, or what Whitehouse has called the "tedium effect."[181] To avoid this pitfall and ensure regular devotion, many religions operating in the doctrinal mode employ certain mechanisms, notably in

[179] After Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 74. Cf. the table in Whitehouse, *Inside the Cult*, 197.
[180] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 66.
[181] Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons*, 44-46; *Modes of Religiosity*, 66, 97-99, 130-135

the form of supernatural sanctions or incentives, such as the threat of eternal damnation or the promise of salvation. Yet, because such mechanisms are effective insofar as they are genuinely believed by adherents, the doctrines must be communicated by means of highly persuasive rhetorical techniques. According to Whitehouse, this may be achieved in part by "poignant narratives that can easily be related to personal experience."[182]

Whitehouse argues that in the doctrinal mode, where religious ideas are expressed through verbal oration or teaching, dynamic religious leaders are required to propound the authoritative doctrine. Moreover, it is the responsibility of religious leaders to perform "orthodoxy checks," that is, to ensure that the teachings are transmitted faithfully and in accordance with the tenets of the tradition. Frequent repetition serves to facilitate the standardization of religious knowledge. Whitehouse adds that "in literate traditions, the teachings might also be written down in sacred texts, and thereby fixed on paper (at least to some extent). But the crucial thing is that standardized versions of the religious teachings become widely shared and accepted through regular public rehearsal and reiteration." [183] Finally, the establishment of routinization goes hand in hand with the centralization of religious authority, usually in the form of a professional priesthood or other religious "experts."[184]

Broadly speaking, the Deuteronomic program fits well within Whitehouse's doctrinal mode of religiosity, in particular with its emphasis on literacy, textuality, memorization, and repetition. [185] In terms of sociopolitical structure, the centralization of religious cult in

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[182] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 67.

[183] Whitehosue, *Modes of Religiosity*, 67. Cf. McCauley on texts in science, *Why Religion is Natural*, 96-7: "Written symbols are not only critical aids to memory—they are also critical aids to thought."

[184] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 273-285, discusses such religious specialists under the category of professional literate guilds that offer particular services.

[185] On these features, see Jan Assman, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies* (trans. R. Livingstone; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 16-21; idem, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 175-205. With reference to Deuteronomy, specifically, see Brent A. Strawn, "Keep/Observe/Do—Carefully—Today! The Rhetoric of

Deuteronomy is consistent with the doctrinal mode. The Deuteronomic laws make up an elaborate and complex set of doctrines revealed to Moses atop Mount Sinai. The book is delivered in a marked homiletic style, which may suggest its origin in a cultic milieu.[186] A high degree of uniformity is expected with regard to its religious teachings; deviation from the commandments and stipulations in the book result in severe penalties, often in the form of capital punishment. Finally, to ensure proper practice and transmission of the contents of Deuteronomy, the laws are preceded by the following admonition: "You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take anything from it, but keep the commandments of Yahweh your God with which I am charging you" (Deut 4:2; cf. 12:32). In terms of memorization, this of course presumes a standard that is only possible with the aid of texts and literacy. The audience of Deuteronomy is repeatedly commanded not to stray from the correct path: "You shall not turn to the right or to the left."

Given that the book of Deuteronomy propounds a lengthy set of laws, commandments, and stipulations, the modes theory predicts that there should be an emphasis on teaching and frequent repetition of the doctrines, as well as various mnemonic aids to assist in memorization and recall. This is precisely what we find in Deuteronomy, which employs a variety of techniques to encode its teachings. The book begins with a recap of history, emphasizing Yahweh's liberating acts on behalf of the people of Israel, notably rescuing them from their bondage in Egypt as told in the exodus narrative. The text implores the people to remember God: "But take care (*hiššāmer lĕkā*) and watch yourselves closely (*šĕmōr napšĕkā mĕʾōd*), so as

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Repetition in Deuteronomy," in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller* (ed. Brent A. Strawn and N. R. Bowen; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 215-240.

[186] See Ernst W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967). For the book's instructional character see Patrick D. Miller, "Constitution or Instruction? The Purpose of Deuteronomy," in *Constituting the Community: Studies on the Polity of Ancient Israel in Honor of S. Dean McBride Jr.* (ed. J. T. Strong and S. S. Tuell; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 125-41.

neither to forget (*pen-tiškaḥ*) the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind (*pen-yāsûrû*) all the days of your life" (Deut 4:9). The first thing to note is that, to make the address more compelling, the book transports the audience into the past as the recipients of God's divine revelation through Moses. Second, the language of remembering and forgetting in this passage is one of the central themes of Deuteronomy and is found throughout the remainder of the book.

Though the people are enjoined to keep the divine commandments "in their heart and in their soul," the text institutes cultural mechanisms to ensure that this aim is achieved. With respect to transmission, there is strong emphasis on education and the oral teaching of the law: "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise" (6:6-7; cf. 4:9). In fact, the book attempts to guarantee regular observance and correct transmission by introducing written reminders: "Bind them [i.e. the words of the covenant] as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (6:8-9).[187] Similar visible markers of remembrance are employed when the Israelites are ordered to inscribe the words of the law on plastered stones before entering into the Promised Land (27:2-8). In this way, an emphasis on textual tradition and written word attempts to solidify the teachings into memory. Accordingly, ritual meaning does not derive from the individual, but instead is learned/acquired through teaching and religious education. The contents of the book of Deuteronomy, particularly the extensive legal injunctions and abstract theological formulations, are lengthy and complex. The teachings, therefore, require

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[187] See further Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book Within the Book: Writing in Deuteronomy* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

frequent recitation to ensure accurate transmission and observance, which are consistent with predictions of the doctrinal mode.

There are, however, several features in the book of Deuteronomy, and the theological program behind it, that seem to fit less neatly with Whitehouse's predictions. Specifically, while we have seen that the text demonstrates the relevant psychological features associated with the doctrinal mode, it is less clear that the same can be said for all of the expected sociopolitical features. For example, the doctrinal mode is supposed to be characterized by dynamic leadership, social inclusivity, and large-scale organization. However, it is not clear that the Judean king Josiah is best regarded as a "dynamic" ruler. While he is said to have fervently executed a sweeping religious reform, the book of Deuteronomy itself places severe restrictions on the power of the kingship and seems to accord no special significance to this rank. It is more likely that in the Deuteronomic regime, the priestly or scribal aristocracy assumed leadership functions and were considered the repository of wisdom and authority. This is all the more likely given the fact that Josiah is said to inherit the throne when he was only eight years of age (2 Kgs 22:1), entrusting religious and political leadership into the hands of those around him. Yet even in that case, one is left wondering in what sense the priestly/scribal class might be considered "dynamic." To the extent that this element is lacking from the schema in Deuteronomy, the figure of Moses serves as an adequate replacement. Indeed, as he is presented in the biblical narrative, Moses is a highly dynamic leader, acting as the intermediary between God and the people.

Next, while Deuteronomy does display signs of social inclusivity—namely, by extending the circle of Israelite membership to resident aliens (*gērîm*) living in the land—one could argue that the text is far more *exclusive* in its approach by making such strict demands for proper

observance and ostracizing apostates as a result. For instance, Deuteronomy goes out of its way to stamp out all illegitimate divination practitioners, such as mediums, witches, and necromancers (Deut 13; 18:9-22) who stray from the doctrinal brand and represent threats to the Deuteronomic guild. Insofar as Whitehouse's notion of "inclusivity" entails, rather, the notion that Yahweh is patron deity of a large population of people—the entire nation of Israel—it must be noted that this idea is found in all the other major biblical texts. Moreover, the modes theory predicts that doctrinal systems go hand in hand with, and arise out of, large-scale societies that witness an increase in population. It is not clear, however, that this was case for Judah during the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.E. Although Josiah's reforms were somewhat widespread (in that they allegedly extended into the regions of northern Israel) and rapid (occurring in a short time span), it seems that they were not particularly effective or long-lasting. After all, similar reforms under King Hezekiah (Josiah's grandfather) were short-lived, and by the time of the Babylonian invasion at the beginning of the sixth century, idolatrous and syncretistic forms of worship continued to thrive in Jerusalem and throughout Israel. In this sense, the Deuteronomic theology was in a very real sense a utopian image of what life should be like, rather than a straightforward window into what life was like. And the fact that its doctrinal reforms failed to stick may suggest that the Israelite group was not as large, literate, or unified as the texts seem to suggest.

Furthermore, Deuteronomy and Josiah's reform arguably evince certain features that instead find their home in the imagistic mode. While Deuteronomy depends largely on rhetoric and narrative, both are employed to address the readers/listeners as if they were receiving the revelation from God through Moses at Mount Sinai. Therefore, at the very least, the *intended* effect of the narrative is to (re-)create an emotionally-charged atmosphere located in the distant

past. If we turn to Josiah' violent destruction of cultic sites throughout the land, these actions might themselves be construed as "high-arousal" expressions of ritualized violence. Finally, the covenant renewal ceremony that is described in Deut 28-29, which contains an extensive list of blessings and curses that are to be shouted by different groups from the tops of opposite-facing mountains, might also represent a "high-arousal" ritual insofar as it is collective and performative (whether or not this ritual was ever practiced).

Setting aside these caveats, many biblical commentators have highlighted the unique rhetoric used in the book of Deuteronomy. Weinfeld, for example, describes the style of Deuteronomy as "preachy."[188] More recently, Brent Strawn has examined the use of repetition and exhortation as part of the book's larger goals, along with their rhetorical effects and theological functions.[189] He characterizes the Deuteronomic style as "prolix, redundant, even monotonous—especially in its repetition of certain key words and formulae."[190] While Strawn notes a number of items that Deuteronomy repeats, including calls for obedience and the avoidance of disobedience, we may add to this list the repetition of key doctrines, including the recurring Name and centralization formulae encountered earlier. The goal of this rhetoric is, of course, to persuade listeners and/or readers to adhere to the theological message on offer.[191] In order to do so, however, it is crucial that people remember the doctrines. Strawn thus writes, "Deuteronomy places a special—and repeated!—emphasis on *memory*."[192]

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[188] Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, 1.
[189] Brent A. Strawn, "Keep, Observe, Do—Carefully—Today! The Rhetoric of Repetition in Deuteronomy," in *A God So Near*, 215-40.
[190] Strawn, "Keep, Observe, Do," 215. The observation about D's monotony and repetition connects with Whitehouse's notion of the "tedium effect."
[191] Strawn, "Keep, Observe, Do," 231, writes: "In short, Deuteronomy seeks to *teach* and *persuade*" (emphasis original). For a good discussion of rhetoric and persuasion in biblical law, see James W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).
[192] Strawn, "Keep, Observe, Do," 232-3. On the theme of memory in D, see further Edward P. Blair, "An Appeal to Remembrance: The Memory Motif in Deuteronomy," *Interpretation* 15 (1961): 41-47.

Scholars have thus noted the emphasis that Deuteronomy places on repetition, memorization, and recitation. They have rightly observed this emphasis as an attempt on the part of the Deuteronomists to drive home key ideas and phrases, either to achieve a theological goal or to solidify a shared cultural memory. Building on these insights, the findings of cognitive research allow us to say a bit more. Specifically, it becomes possible to account for the variety of mnemonic devices in Deuteronomy as an attempt to ensure the successful transmission of its own costly theology. As such, the understanding of Deuteronomic religion as cognitively costly, helps us to make sense of the presence of these mnemonic devices. Indeed, as Strawn points out, although Deuteronomy is a literary text full of repetition, it is quite unique in this regard, and the use of repetition in literary works is neither required nor expected. Accordingly, he asks: "Why, then, is there so much repetition—verbatim and near-verbatim—in Deuteronomy, a literary text that could easily avoid such? Perhaps a better question, and a more answerable one, is *what is the function(s)* of this repetitive rhetoric?"[193] For Strawn, the theological function is to guarantee that people continue to learn the correct statutes and ordinances, and to motivate people to obey them. We may build on this observation and propose further that such repetition functions to ensure accurate transmission of doctrinal religious knowledge. And without the textual medium and its appeals for repetition, the Deuteronomic doctrines would likely never had survived the historical game of cultural transmission. The insistent nature of Deuteronomy's rhetoric of repetition serves, therefore, to illustrate what we have argued all along—namely, that its theological teachings are cognitively costly. Indeed, if they were not, there would be no need to go to such great lengths to promote memory and transmission.[194]

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[193] Strawn, "Keep, Observe, Do," 219-20.

[194] In many ways, Strawn ("Keep, Observe, Do," 239) anticipated the argument being made here when he notes in passing that "there is something about repetition that evidences a difficulty in the subject matter."

It comes as no surprise, then, that Deuteronomy's abstract form of worship is dominated by a book, by laws, and by a torah liturgy. In the words of Moshe Weinfeld, "[With Deuteronomy] Israelite religion thus underwent a profound transmutation: a cultic religion had been transformed into a religion of the book."[195] Indeed, as van der Toorn notes regarding the iconoclastic tendency of the Deuteronomic theology, "The ban on images and the emphasis on the Torah are complementary: the Torah was to take the place of the image."[196] There is every reason to believe that rates of literacy were extremely low in the ancient world, confined to the top few percent of the scribal and royal classes. The same is true of ancient Israel. Deuteronomy uses textualization to record its complex and lengthy doctrines. As of yet, no comparable codified bodies of literature have been discovered in connection with the many local sanctuaries in Iron Age Israel, a fact that further highlight the uniqueness of the Deuteronomic program. It restricts access to its own teachings, which in turn creates the demand for correct interpretation and promulgation—a task that naturally belonged to the priestly and scribal hierarchy. According to the text, every seven years they were to perform a public reading of the laws before all of Israel. In this way, they instituted a type of "orthodoxy check" to ensure that religious doctrine was both standardized and fixed, but also accessible only through the official priestly authorities.

Overall, it seems clear that Deuteronomic theology, and perhaps also the religious reforms carried out under king Josiah, correspond most closely with the doctrinal mode of religiosity. In some cases, the fit is imperfect and there may be traces of so-called imagistic elements as well. But the intention of Deuteronomy is certainly not to evoke high levels of arousal but to transmit an extensive body of costly religious doctrines and teachings—chief

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[195] Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy: The Present State of Inquiry," in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy* (ed. D. L. Christensen; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 30.

[196] Karel van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book: Analogies Between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Near East* (CBET 21; ed. Karel van der Toorn; Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 229-48 (241).

among them the doctrines of Name Theology, cult centralization, and aniconism—that its authors consider crucial for proper living in the land. Framing Deuteronomic theology as a type of cognitively costly religion helps to explain and account for its emphasis on repetition and other mnemonic devices, which are necessary to ensure the transmission of those doctrines. A cognitive perspective thus offers tools for understanding *why* these rhetorical elements exist in the texts, as well as the *function* they serve.

CHAPTER 4:
COUNTERINTUITIVE *MISCHWESEN*: HYBRID CREATURES IN
SYRO-PALESTINIAN ICONOGRAPHY AND COGNITION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss famously proposed that animals are not only good to eat (*bonnes à manger*) but also good to think (*bonnes à penser*).[1] That is, animals evoke something that makes them popular cultural and religious symbols. This chapter extends Lévi-Strauss's dictum and suggest that *hybrid* animals are also good, perhaps even better, to think. Indeed, not only are hybrid creatures common in cultures across the globe and throughout history,[2] they are especially prominent in the religious world of the ancient Near East—from the Mesopotamian demons Pazuzu to the Egyptian falcon-headed Horus.[3] The iconographic record of Israel-Palestine is also replete with hybrid imagery, while several biblical texts mention hybrid creatures, including the fiery seraphim in Isaiah 6, the winged cherubim in Ezekiel, and the composite beasts in Daniel 7. This chapter employs recent CSR tools and findings in order to account for why such concepts were so effective at capturing the ancient imagination.

In order to understand why cultural concepts become so widespread and popular within a population, it is necessary to identify the mechanisms that enable their successful transmission. In recent years, biblical scholars have increasingly turned to the ancient Near Eastern

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[1] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).

[2] See the extensive collection in Jorge Louis Borges and Margarita Guerrero, *Manual de Zoología Fantástica* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957). On Mesoamerican and Classical Greek hybrid figures, respectively, see Ulrich Köhler, "Olmeken und Jaguare Zur Deutung von Mischwesen in der präklassischen Kunst Mesoamerikas," *Anthropos* 80 (1985): 15-52; and Jeffrey M. Hurwitt, "Lizards, Lions, and the Uncanny in Early Greek Art," *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 75 (2006): 121-36; Emma Aston, *Mixanthrôpoi: Animal-Human Hybrid Deities in Greek Religion* (Liège: Centre International d'Étude de la Religion Grecque Antique, 2011).

[3] See Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003).

iconographic record to shed light on the transmission of Israelite religious concepts over time.[4] This is the goal, for example, in Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger's seminal work *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, which traces the diachronic development of religious symbols in Syria-Palestine through the Bronze and Iron ages.[5] Subsequent publications by Keel and his colleagues have examined the cultural mechanisms involved in the spread of visual motifs, such as the impact of material media, the use of minor art as vehicles of mass communication, and the function of local craftsmen and workshops.[6] Here we adopt a slightly different focus by investigating the role that *cognitive* mechanisms play in the process of cultural transmission. The focus will therefore be on the features of human cognition that make hybrid concepts so culturally contagious—or as Lévi-Strauss would put it, "good to think." This cognitive perspective on Israelite religious concepts introduces a helpful supplement to ongoing scholarship on ancient Near Eastern iconography. Indeed, the study of ancient iconography is fundamentally about accessing the religious worldview of ancient Near Eastern and Israelite people, and the present chapter offers a new perspective to that end.[7]

Overall, this chapter has two major aims. The first is to examine the role that cognitive factors play in the process of cultural transmission, with special attention to how they influence

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[4] For a helpful overview see Theodore J. Lewis, "Syro-Palestinian Iconography and Divine Images," in *Cult Image and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* (ed. N. H. Walls; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005), 69-107.

[5] Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. T. H. Trapp; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998). German original: *Göttinnen, Götter und Gottessymbole*, 1992.

[6] See Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger, eds., *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals* (OBO 125; Fribourg: Academic Press, 1993); Christoph Uehlinger, ed., *Images as Media: Sources for the Cultural History of the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean: 1st Millennium BCE* (OBO 175; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2000); Claudia E. Suter and Christoph Uehlinger, eds., *Crafts and Images in Contact: Studies on Eastern Mediterranean Art of the First Millennium BCE* (OBO 210; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005).

[7] Note the apt remark by Izak Cornelius, *The Many Faces of the Goddess: The Iconography of the Syro-Palestinian Goddesses Anat, Astarte, Qedeshet, and Asherah, c. 1500-1000 BCE* (OBO 204; Fribourg: University Press), 15: "*Cognitive iconography* or *iconography of the mind* can orient us towards the belief systems and cultural symbols of the ancient world, helping us *to see through the eyes of the Ancient Near East*." Cf. Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (trans. Timothy J. Hallett; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997). German original: *Die Welt der altorientalischen Bildsymbolik und das Alte Testament: Am Beispiel der Psalmen*, 1978.

the prevalence and popularity of hybrid representations in the Near Eastern artistic record. The goal here will be to demonstrate the ways in which a cognitive lens illuminates this particular repertoire of ancient visual art. Next, the chapter utilizes the extensive corpus of ancient Near Eastern iconography as a data set with which to empirically test current cognitive theorizing. Specifically, the chapter considers Dan Sperber's epidemiological approach to culture and Pascal Boyer's cognitive optimum theory of supernatural concepts vis-à-vis this iconography. Together, Sperber and Boyer's framework highlights the psychological features that make certain cultural expressions more successful than others. The predictions of Boyer's cognitive optimum theory are examined with reference to a range of visual images of hybrid figures. In this way, historical materials can be used to "test" recent cognitive proposals and assess their validity, and in the end, our survey demonstrates that while the theory accounts for much of the visual imagery, many hybrid representations challenge the theory's central predictions. The concluding remarks in the final section offer a more extended discussion of the iconographic analysis, with a focus on explaining why the iconographic evidence diverges from the cognitive predictions, the relationship between material representations of hybrids and their possible mental storage, and the role of ancient art in enhancing memory and imagination.

4.2. INFECTIOUS IDEAS AND A RECIPE FOR RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS

Much like biological organisms, cultural concepts must also compete for survival and reproduction. But instead of competing for resources and sex, concepts jostle for habitation within human minds. Beliefs, ideas, and concepts are constantly filtered through a process of

cultural, rather than natural, selection, and the ones that manage to lodge themselves in our minds and memory are the ones that survive and endure, becoming the stuff of culture.[8]

The notion of cultural selection is not new. The evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins first applied a Darwinian perspective to culture and coined the term "memes" as the cultural equivalent of genes.[9] Based on the model of genetic replication, Dawkins described memes as units of culture that are copied and downloaded from one mind to another: "Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperm or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation."[10] In this view, memes can manifest themselves as anything from catchy tunes to sartorial trends.

Despite offering an improvement over fuzzy notions of culture, however, the memetic approach runs into several problems.[11] Most notably, critics have pointed out that very little of culture is in fact transmitted by the faithful copying of information.[12] Unlike genes, which require high fidelity replication and undergo limited variation, cultural material is subject to mutations at every step in the transmission process. The imperfect nature of human communication and memory, in particular, reliably leads to distorted ideas and transformed messages—a phenomenon familiar to anyone who has played the children's game "Telephone."

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[8] An influential Darwinian account of culture is Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson, *Culture and the Evolutionary Process* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). They propose a gene-culture "coevolution" theory, which attempts to explain significant trends in the transmission of cultural materials using the formal modeling tools of population genetics.

[9] Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 189-201; and idem, *The Extended Phenotype* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). The notion of memes was later popularized by Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[10] Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, 192.

[11] See the collection of essays in Robert Aunger, ed., *Darwinizing Culture: The Status of Memetics as a Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[12] See, e.g., Daniel C. Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 352-360; Dan Sperber, "An Objection to the Memetic Approach to Culture," in *Darwinizing Culture*, 163-73. It should be noted that Dawkins himself recognized the limits of memetics (see, e.g., *The Extended Phenotype*, 112).

Moreover, as Maurice Bloch points out, memeticists err in viewing culture as "made of distinguishable units which have a 'life of their own.'"[13] Culture simply cannot be reduced to easily discernible, discrete bits. Even talk of combinations of memes, or "memeplexes," does not alleviate the problem, since it is still necessary to identify the units that make up the alleged memeplexes.

Despite these critiques, however, an historian of ancient art might reasonably counter that material objects like stamp seals and glyptic art, many of which depict gods and other kinds of religious imagery, come close to the kind of discrete cultural units proposed by memeticists. This is especially true of mechanically mass-produced minor art in the ancient world, which does in fact operate through a process of mechanical reproduction and imitation. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the images found on these material objects are not necessarily identical to the corresponding *mental* images found inside individual minds. I will have more to say about these issues below, but at present we note that the cultural transmission of ideas is seldom governed by the simple imitation and copying of memes.

4.2.1. Cultural Epidemiology

In parting ways with so-called memetic approaches, the anthropologist Dan Sperber has long argued that the goal of explaining culture is to address the question of *why* certain cultural representations are more successful than others.[14] In order to do so, Sperber proposes an "epidemiological" approach to culture, according to which the spread and persistence of cultural

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[13] Maurice Bloch, "A Well-Disposed Social Anthropologist's Problem With Memes," in *Darwinizing Culture*, 189-203. Cf. Peter J. Richerson and Robert Boyd, *Not By Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 60.

[14] Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); idem, "Anthropology and Psychology: Towards an Epidemiology of Representations," *Man* 20 (1985): 73-89; and idem "The Modularity of Thought and the Epidemiology of Representations," in *Mapping the Mind: Domain Specificity in Cognition and Culture* (ed. Lawrence A. Hirschfeld and Susan A. Gelman; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39-67.

material can be studied in much the same way as diseases are studied in the field of epidemiology. In short, he states that, "The human mind is susceptible to cultural representations in the same way as the human organism is susceptible to diseases."[15] In this view, whereas the spread of a disease among a population results in an epidemic, the spread of representations among a population of human minds results in what anthropologists have traditionally called culture. For Sperber, understanding the processes involved in cultural transmission therefore requires an "epidemiology of representations." Epidemiology seeks to explain macro-scale phenomena at population levels (e.g. an influenza epidemic) as the aggregation of micro-processes at the individual biological level (e.g. individuals contracting and transmitting the flu virus). Just as this research requires a detailed knowledge of human physiology, the transmission and spread of cultural phenomena entails knowledge of human psychology. The analogy, then, has the advantage of focusing our attention on the vectors of cultural transmission, specifically on the micro-mechanisms of human psychology.[16] For as Peter Richerson and Robert Boyd put it, "Culture is (mostly) information stored in human brains."[17]

According to Sperber, the entire package of culture boils down to two different types of representations. There are mental representations, which are located in individual minds as thoughts, memories, and so forth; and there are public representations that exist outside of human bodies, for example as utterances, texts, or artifacts.[18] Throughout the many cycles of cultural transmission, mental and public representations interact and mutually reinforce one another to produce stable and widely shared concepts within a group. However, rather than doing so

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[15] Sperber, *Explaining Culture*, 57. Dawkins also likens memes to pathogens, calling them "viruses of the mind." In both cases, the epidemiological metaphor is purely conceptual, and is not meant to imply negative connotations.

[16] See Sperber, *Explaining Culture*, 2, 56-61.

[17] Richerson and Boyd, *Not By Genes Alone*, 61.

[18] Sperber, *Explaining Culture*, 61-63.

through imitation and copying, *à la* memes, cultural representations achieve similar forms because universal biases in human cognitive architecture tend to steer them in particular directions—towards what Sperber calls "attractor positions."[19] In this view, the transmission of cultural ideas, between individuals and over time, is governed in large part by proclivities of human minds. The specific form that these representations take will, of course, be influenced by local environmental factors. But until recent years, psychological factors have been neglected in traditional studies of culture and cultural transmission. One aim of recent cognitive research is therefore to redress this imbalance by highlighting the psychological biases that shape and constrain cultural expressions.[20] The emerging picture suggests that ordinary features of cognition render human minds susceptible to being infected by certain types of concepts.[21]

4.2.2. Minimal Counterintuitiveness

The anthropologist Pascal Boyer has extended an epidemiological framework to the domain of religion and argues that supernatural representations are inherently easy to acquire, remember, and communicate.[22] Along with a growing number of CSR researchers, he suggests that religion

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[19] Sperber, *Explaining Culture*, 98-118. For their part, Richerson and Boyd refer to cultural "variants" and similarly argue for a process of "biased transmission," which occurs "when people preferentially adopt some cultural variants rather than others" (*Not By Genes Alone*, 68).

[20] See further the important essay John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, "The Psychological Foundations of Culture," in *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (ed. Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides, and John Tooby; New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19-136.

[21] Sperber (*Explaining Culture*, 66-67) draws a distinction between "dispositions" and "susceptibilities": dispositions emerge as adaptive products of natural selection, while susceptibilities are by-products of this process. See also Dan Sperber and Lawrence Hirschfeld, "The Cognitive Foundations of Cultural Stability and Diversity," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 8 (2004): 40-46.

[22] See Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), esp. 51-91; idem, "Religious Thought and Behavior as By-products of Brain Function," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7 (2003): 119-24; idem, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory or Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); idem, "Cognitive Tracks of Cultural Inheritance: How Evolved Intuitive Ontology Governs Cultural Transmission," *American Anthropologist* 100 (1998): 876-889; idem, "Cognitive Constraints on Cultural Representations: Natural Ontologies and Religious Ideas," in *Mapping the Mind*, 391-411.

comes naturally to human minds.[23] Religious concepts are therefore approximate a cognitive optimum.[24] Boyer's cognitive optimum theory of supernatural concepts, sometimes called minimal counterintuitiveness (MCI) theory, has been central in the cognitive study of religion.

The cognitive optimum theory builds on well-known observations about how people categorize the world around them. In particular, a wealth of findings from experimental and developmental psychology indicate that humans develop intuitive expectations about different ontological domains, such as PERSON, ANIMAL, PLANT, ARTIFACT, and NATURAL OBJECT.[25] From an early age and without social learning, young children have an intuitive ontology that obeys certain rules and supplies information about objects in each of these categories. Boyer's novel suggestion is that supernatural concepts piggyback on these everyday domains, but tweak them in special ways. Specifically, he argues that supernatural concepts are "minimally counterintuitive," meaning that they violate our domain-specific expectations in shocking yet subtle ways, but otherwise preserve the ordinary background information and, crucially, the default inferences associated therewith.[26] Ordinary expectations about these ontological domains can be violated in different ways, namely according to our everyday inferences about physics, biology, and psychology. This yields the following options for building religious concepts:

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[23] See also Justin Barrett, "Exploring the Natural Foundations of Religion," *Trends in Cognitive Science* 4 (2000): 29-34; and Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 145-221.

[24] See also Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004), 29-47.

[25] See Elizabeth S. Spelke and Katherine D. Kinzler, "Core Knowledge," *Developmental Science* 10 (2007): 89-96; and the essays in Lawrence A. Hirschfeld and Susan A. Gelman, eds., *Mapping the Mind: Domain Specificity in Cognition and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39-67.

[26] Boyer uses the term "counterintuitive" in a technical sense to denote "information contradicting some information provided by ontological categories" (*Religion Explained*, 65). Therefore, representations that are counterintuitive in this limited sense should not be confused with what is either unfamiliar, unreal, or even counter to intuitions that pertain to cultural (as opposed to psychological) knowledge. Because the ordinary connotations of the word "counterintuitive" may be misleading, Boyer acknowledges that "counterontological" would be a more precise, though cumbersome, alternative.

PERSON + physical violation	ANIMAL + physical violation	PLANT + physical violation	ARTIFACT + physical violation	OBJECT + physical violation
PERSON + biological violation	ANIMAL + biological violation	PLANT + biological violation	ARTIFACT + biological violation	OBJECT + biological violation
PERSON + psychological violation	ANIMAL + psychological violation	PLANT + psychological violation	ARTIFACT + psychological violation	OBJECT + psychological violation

Domain violations can occur in one of two ways: either by a *breach* of ontological categories, or through the *transfer* of features across domains.[27] The parade example of a breach is the concept of a ghost.[28] Ghosts violate our intuitive understanding of physics by being invisible and passing through solid walls, yet in every other respect they resemble people: they talk, perceive, think, and form intentions and beliefs. In other words, they still have minds with normal mental functioning. Alternately, a transfer involves the borrowing of properties from one domain into another. Consider a stylized *asherah* pole that listens to prayers and grants blessings.[29] In this case, human mental capacities are transferred to an artifact. The stylized pole is a solid object with counterintuitive psychology and, like a person, it must be within hearing distance to receive

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[27] Pascal Boyer and Charles Ramble, "Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Cross-Cultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-Intuitive Representations," *Cognitive Science* 25 (2001): 535-564; Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 65-74.

[28] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 73-74; Boyer, "Religious Thoughts and Behavior," 119-20.

[29] Modified after examples in Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 64; and Boyer, "Religious Thoughts and Behavior," 119.

prayers or bestow blessings. As we will see, hybrid creatures violate intuitive biological expectations by transferring human and animal properties across domains.[30]

In this view, rather than being bizarre and inexplicable, supernatural concepts follow a simple recipe: they begin with an everyday object and add a single counterintuitive feature. The concepts mentioned above can be illustrated based on Boyer's templates:

Supernatural Concept	Ontological Domain	Counterintuitive Feature
Ghost =	PERSON	+ special physical properties

Supernatural Concept	Ontological Domain	Counterintuitive Feature
Asherah pole =	ARTIFACT	+ cognitive functioning

Crucially, these and other supernatural concepts have two important cognitive effects. On the one hand, they confound our intuitive category expectations and as a result are salient and attention grabbing. At the same time, by preserving the rest of our default inferences connected with the domain in question, they remain coherent and intelligible enough to successfully think, remember, and communicate. Thus, they are regarded as counterintuitive, but only *minimally* so. As Ilkka Pyysiainen writes, "It is the intuitive aspects of religious representations that makes them understandable and learnable, but it is the counter-intuitive aspect that makes them religious."[31] It is this combination of being striking and memorable, Boyer argues, that makes religious concepts so culturally contagious.

The cognitive optimum theory has received robust empirical support. Experimental studies conducted cross-culturally and with young children have shown that minimally

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[30] On the development of intuitive biology, see Susan Carey, *Conceptual Change in Childhood* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); Susan A. Gelman, "The Development of Induction Within Natural Kind and Artifact Categories," *Cognitive Psychology* 20 (1988): 65-95; Frank C. Keil, "The Birth and Nurturance of Concepts by Domains: The Origins of Concepts of Living Things," in *Mapping the Mind*, 234-54.

[31] Ilkka Pyysiainen, *How Religion Works* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 21.

counterintuitive ideas are remembered and recalled better than others.[32] In fact, when presented with a story involving a merely exotic concept, such as a bright pink newspaper blowing in the wind, some participants later recalled the newspaper in counterintuitive terms as walking or running.[33] Yet researchers have also found that the presence of too many domain violations has the opposite effect, resulting instead in a kind of "conceptual overload."[34] So, for example, a talking snake is indeed minimally counterintuitive. But a talking snake that is invisible, made of cashmere, exists in all places at once, and gives birth to zebras, is too difficult to recall or communicate successfully, not to mention more difficult to draw inferences about. In general, the current evidence seems to support Boyer's claim that "a combination of *one* violation with preserved expectations is probably a cognitive optimum."[35]

In sum, there appears to be a kind of "goldilocks zone" where successful religious concepts tend to cluster. Such representations are minimally counterintuitive, striking a balance

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[32] See Boyer and Ramble, "Cognitive Templates"; Justin L. Barrett, "Cognitive Constraints on Hindu Concepts of the Divine," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37 (1998): 608-19; Justin L. Barrett and Melanie A. Nyhof, "Spreading Non-natural Concepts: The Role of Intuitive Conceptual Structures in Memory and Transmission of Cultural Materials," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1 (2001): 69-100; M. Azfal Upal et al, "Contextualizing Counterintuitiveness: How Context Affects Comprehension and Memorability of Counterintuitive Concepts," *Cognitive Science* 31 (2007): 1-25; Benjamin Grant Purzycki, "Cognitive Architecture, Humor and Counterintuitiveness: Retention and Recall of MCIs," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 10 (2010): 189-204. A recent study obtained similar results with seven- to nine-year old children. See Konika Banerjee, Omar S. Haque, and Elizabeth S. Spelke, "Melting Lizards and Crying Mailboxes: Children's Preferential Recall of Minimally Counterintuitive Concepts," *Cognitive Science* 37 (2013): 1251-1289. Experiments conducted by Ara Norenzayan and Scott Atran yielded mixed results, which the authors attribute to different research designs. Specifically, Norenzayan and Atran focus on longer narratives and "belief sets" rather than on discrete supernatural concepts. They argue that a small proportion of minimally counterintuitive concepts, sprinkled among a majority of intuitive ones, is the best recipe for memorable belief sets. The former activate interest, while the latter provide a framework to ensure long-term recall. See Ara Norenzayan et al., "Memory and Mystery: The Cultural Selection of Minimally Counterintuitive Narratives," *Cognitive Science* 30 (2006): 531-553; and Scott Atran, *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 100-107.

[33] Barrett and Nyhof, "Spreading Non-Natural Concepts," 89. This suggests a psychological tendency to favor counterintuitive concepts over others.

[34] Boyer and Ramble, "Cognitive Templates," 546-50.

[35] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 86 (emphasis original).

between being attention grabbing and memorable. This zone represents a cognitive optimum of ideas that are, as it were, good to think.[36]

4.2.3. Testing the Theory: Possibilities and Limitations

In order to facilitate testing of the cognitive optimum theory, Justin Barrett has presented a formal system for determining the degree of counterintuitiveness for a religious concept. In short, he proposes six steps for quantifying counterintuitiveness.[37] The first step is to identify what Barrett calls the "basic level" category membership.[38] This simply refers to the "shortest, one word, common label for an object," which can be determined by answering the question, "In one word, what is it called?"[39] Thus, according to Barrett, a golden retriever is classed as a *dog*, rather than a golden retriever, mammal, animal, or living thing. Step two is to identify the ontological category. He gives five possibilities: SPATIAL ENTITIES, SOLID OBJECTS, LIVING THINGS, ANIMATES, and PERSONS. These five ontological categories in turn correspond to five different intuitive "expectation sets" that Barrett labels, respectively, *Spatiality*, *Physicality*, *Biology*, *Animacy*, and *Mentality*. The remaining steps 3-6 involve tallying up properties that violate these intuitive expectation sets, whether through transfers (Step 3) or breaches (Steps 4-5), and adding the total number (Step 6). In our analysis of hybrid imagery below, the basic outline of Barrett's method will be used to examine each class of *Mischwesen*. But there will also be, on occasion, reason to part ways with some of his suggestions. For example, he writes that, "Persons (not humans) can have no transfers as they

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[36] It is worth mentioning that minimally counterintuitive concepts are not limited to religion. Popular folklore, cinema, and cartoons are likewise filled with such counterintuitive agents (e.g., Mickey Mouse).

[37] Justin L. Barrett, "Coding and Quantifying the Counterintuitiveness in Religious Concepts: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008): 308-338.

[38] On basic level categories in psychology, see Eleanor Rosch, Carolyn B. Mervis, Wayne D. Gray, David M. Johnson, and Penny Boyes-Braem, "Basic Objects in Natural Categories," *Cognitive Psychology* 8 (1976): 382-439.

[39] Barrett, "Coding and Quantifying," 316.

already assume or tolerate all of the sets of expectations."[40] Nevertheless, it can be argued that the person category often acts as the base ontological category for many of ancient hybrid figures, and that the transfer of animate (i.e. animal) properties to this base is an integral part of constructing these hybrid concepts. It therefore seems appropriate to describe the various iconographic combinations of living things, animals, and persons in terms of transferred properties.

Before proceeding, we may note some limitations with Sperber and Boyer's general cognitive framework, particularly when applied to ancient artistic or textual materials. First, the epidemiological approach seeks above all to explain the process of cultural transmission in contexts of oral communication, and was not explicitly formulated to address literate societies and religious institutions.[41] Indeed, Sperber acknowledges this when he writes,

> When new communication technologies appear, writing in particular, more things can be communicated, and internal memory is supplemented by external memory stores. As a result, memorisation and communication have weaker filtering effects. For instance, other forms of literature can develop and the particular forms found in oral tradition need not be maintained at all.[42]

Moreover, like most CSR proposals, the cognitive optimum theory is probabilistic and as such predicts that counterintuitive concepts will enjoy a transmission advantage *all else being equal*, with all other factors held constant. However, as we shall see, culture is a messy arena wherein a variety of factors inevitably complicate this ideal scenario. We must also consider the fact that many religious traditions value, even pride themselves on, concepts that are far more than just

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[40] Barrett, "Coding and Quantifying," 323.
[41] Cf. Ilkka Pyysiainen, *Supernatural Agents: Why We Believe in Souls, Gods, and Buddhas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.
[42] Sperber, "Anthropology and Psychology," 85.

minimally counterintuitive—take for instance the Western notion of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent deity, or the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. As we explored in the previous chapter on the Deuteronomic theology, cognitively demanding concepts such as these require additional cultural supports to be successfully transmitted.[43] Specifically, such complex religious concepts are difficult to encode in memory and therefore require external mnemonic aids in order to avoid being distorted or disappearing altogether. In focusing on non-optimal religious concepts and practices, Whitehouse argues that his own theory of divergent modes of religiosity provides "the mnemonic infrastructure required to build *maximally counterintuitive concepts*."[44] In the case of Deuteronomy, textual resources are used to standardize religious doctrines and ensure correct ritual performance. In addition to texts, however, we suggest here that material art is capable of serving much the same mnemonic function.[45]

4.3. HYBRID CREATURES IN ICONOGRAPHY

Even at first sight, ancient hybrid deities and demons display all the qualities of a salient concept: their appearance is fantastic and often frightening, a clear indication of their otherworldly character.[46] Mixed creatures, or *Mischwesen*, are attested in both textual and visual

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[43] See Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*; idem, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Sperber and Boyer are aware of these issues but simply focus the naturalness of religion, whereas Whitehouse investigates more costly religious beliefs.

[44] Whitehouse, "Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion," in *Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion* (ed. Harvey Whitehouse and Jaimes Laidlaw; Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2004), 187-205 (192, emphasis original). I prefer to speak, however, of *radically* or *substantially* counterintuitive representations. McCauley and Lawson make a similar point about complex rituals relying on special cultural technologies, or "scaffolding," to prop up them up and ensure proper performance and transmission. See Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[45] Material art is all the more crucial for memory because in ancient Israel, as most of the ancient world, the majority of the population was non-literate, and therefore texts would have been of little value in their personal religious lives.

[46] See Karen Sonik, "The Monster's Gaze: Vision as Mediator Between Time and Space in the Art of Mesopotamia," in *Time and History in the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the 56th Recontre Assyriologique Internationale at Barcelona* (ed. L. Feliu et al; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 285-300.

sources dating back to the Sumerian culture of the third millennium.[47] They are also widespread throughout the artistic record, making them a prime candidate for epidemiological analysis. How well, then, do representations of hybrid figures satisfy the conditions of the proposed cognitive optimum?

4.3.1 On Detecting Counterintuitiveness

Not all counterintuitive concepts leave traces in the visual record, for the simple reason that not all of them can be rendered in material form. As Theodore Lewis notes, the portrait of transcendent Baal in Ugaritic texts "cannot be crafted in stone or metal."[48] At the same time, however, some images may assume latent counterintuitive features that are not obvious with reference to the physical object alone. For example, consider a stamp seal with the image of a bull intended to represent a deity. In this case, it is implied that the bull has special cognitive functioning that is not apparent from looking at the material object alone; but this information must be inferred.[49] Similarly, the depiction of an anthropomorphic goddess may imply a host of super-human psychological, biological, or physical features not visible in the image itself. Textual materials help historians fill in these gaps, but the point is that while iconography is helpful in detecting some counterintuitive features, it may not be sufficient in all cases. The visual depiction of hybrid creatures therefore provides a useful starting point, as there is little ambiguity when it comes to the physical appearance of such figures. In the analysis that follows, the focus will be limited, in large part, to the explicit anatomical structure of the hybrid figures

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[47] See F. A. M. Wiggermann, "Mischwesen A" in *RLA* 8:222-46; Anthony Green, "Mischwesen B" in *RLA* 8:246-64; Black and Green, *Gods, Demons, and Symbols*.

[48] Lewis, "Syro-Palestinian Iconography," 76.

[49] Or, perhaps more obviously, we may consider examples of animals acting like humans (e.g., in upright postures or playing musical instruments), which display a form of counterintuitiveness to these figures. Similarly, consider an image of an Egyptian hybrid griffin wearing a royal pharonic crown. These images plainly mix together human and animals features, but not in the technical counterintuitive sense.

under question, while the implicit non-visible features will be treated in the subsequent concluding discussion.

Following the art historian Edith Porada, assyriological convention draws a distinction between *demons* in upright posture, and *monsters* that walk on all fours.[50] Moreover, in Mesopotamian tradition, both types of *Mischwesen* are typically kept distinct from full-blown deities.[51] Scholars also commonly distinguish between Mesopotamian and Egyptian divine figures. Whereas Mesopotamian deities are portrayed mostly in anthropomorphic form, in Egypt most divinities appear as composite beings with human bodies and animal heads.[52] These distinctions are somewhat arbitrary, however, and obscure the fact that both deities and demons in each culture are commonly represented as having a combination of human and animal features. Indeed, the Sumerian and Akkadian languages lack native terminology for "monster" and "demon," and the names of many so-called demons, such as La-tarāk, Pazuzu, and Lamaštu, are written in cuneiform with the divine determinative, indicating their divine status.[53] Similarly, the Egyptian term *netjer* encompasses not only deities proper, but also deified humans, spirits, demons, and monsters.[54] Therefore, despite the nuances of modern classifications, for the purposes of this paper all mixed-anatomy beings—whether deities or demons, Mesopotamian or

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[50] Edith Porada, "Introduction," in *Monsters and Demons in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds: Papers Presented in Honor of Edith Porada* (ed. Ann E. Farkas, Prudence O. Harper, and Evelyn B. Harrison; Mainz on Rhine: P. von Zabern, 1987), 1-12. Karen Sonik challenges the traditional division between monsters and demons based on ambulation, and instead classifies hybrids based on their spheres of agency—monsters operate primarily in the divine realm, demons in the human and natural world. See Karen Sonik, "Mesopotamian Conceptions of the Supernatural: A Taxonomy of Zwischenwesen," *Archiv für Religiongeschichte* 14 (2013): 103-116.

[51] The term *Mischwesen* is usually used to describe semi-divine beings such as sages/genii (*apkallū*), griffins, sphinxes, and cherubim (all potentially captured under the rubric of *kurību*).

[52] Green ("Mischwesen B," 247) writes: "In stark contrast to the animal divinities of ancient Egypt, gods and goddesses in Mesopotamia and the rest of the Near East were almost always depicted anthropomorphically," but adds that "on occasion they also might have some attributes of animal or vegetal origin or of the elements." This scholarly contrast is evident in the *Lexikon für Ägyptologie*, which devotes a separate entry for "Mischgestalt" (*LÄ* 4:145-48).

[53] Green, "Mischwesen B," 247.

[54] Wilkinson, *Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, 26. He adds that the Egyptian determinative sign for "god" could be added to the name of any unusual or exotic creature, and that even hieroglyphic signs were often regarded as "deities."

Egyptian—are included under the general rubric of *Mischwesen*. As we shall see, many of these hybrid figures are built from a limited number of explicit physical features, and it is these specific features that will be our focus.

The most common features in the iconography are wings, theriomorphic parts (especially lions and bulls), and human parts. As the early adventurer and ancient Near Eastern historian A. H. Layard put it: "[Ancient artists] could find no better type of intellect and knowledge than the head of a man; of strength, than the body of a lion; of ubiquity, than the wings of a bird."[55] In line with this observation, three general types of *Mischwesen* are found: (1) winged anthropomorphic figures, (2) winged animal-headed figures, and (3) winged human-headed sphinxes.[56] Rather than being exhaustive, the analysis highlights common examples of each image type, across different artistic media. Lastly, in view of this study's focus on Israelite religion, the analysis privileges images with geographical and chronological proximity to Iron Age Israel, namely images from Syria-Palestine, the Levant, and its immediate environs. However, since Israel undoubtedly participated in the wider Near Eastern culture, iconography from Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia are also mentioned on occasion.

4.3.2. Winged Anthropomorphic Figures

Winged monsters are attested in Mesopotamia as early as the proto-literate period, but the addition of wings to anthropomorphic figures became standard practice by the second half of the second millennium BCE. At that point wings were routinely appended to all manner of beings—

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[55] A. H. Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1849), 1:70 (quoted in Green, "Mischwesen B," 246).

[56] A similar typology is employed, to different ends, in Joel LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form in the Psalms: Exploring Congruent Iconography and Texts* (OBO 242; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2010), 39-58.

Fig. 1. Alabaster relief, Nimrud, 883-859 BCE. Source: Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains I*, 124. Cf. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 32.143.4. After LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form*, fig. 2.19.

an artistic tendency that Wiggermann describes as the "meaninglessness" of wings.[57] The most common winged anthropomorphic figures are the minor deities called *apkallū*.[58] These mythological sages appear on Neo-Assyrian wall relief panels, often standing behind the king or in front of a stylized tree, holding a bucket and cone used for purification rites (**fig. 1**). Similar images appear within the environs of Israel-Palestine: an Iron Age conoid seal from Gaza depicts typical Assyrian genius conveying a caprid (**fig. 2**), while upright anthropomorphic winged figures appear throughout the West Semitic seal record.[59]

Male winged figures were common in the Egyptian (or Egyptianizing) tradition as well, appearing earlier, for example, on a 19th Dynasty seal found at Tell el-Far'ah (south) (**fig. 3**), and on Iron Age Phoenician glyptic with Egyptianizing influence (**fig. 4**).[60] These figures often have four wings and grasp trees, plants, or papyrus-like objects.[61] This is also the case with the beardless winged deity engraved on an 8th century BCE bone carving from Hazor (**fig. 5**), a common motif in Israel and Phoenicia during

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[57] Wiggermann, "Mischwesen A," 241.

[58] See Stephanie Dalley's electronic entry for "Apkallu" in the Iconography of Deities and Demons: http://www.religionswissenschaft.uzh.ch/idd/prepublication.php.

[59] E.g., see Tally Ornan, "Mesopotamian Influence on West Semitic Inscribed Seals: A Preference for the Depiction of Mortals," in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals*, 58-59 and figs. 17-19. Cf. Keel, *Symbolism*, fig. 61.

[60] See further Eric Gubel, "The Iconography of Inscribed Phoenician Glyptic," in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals*, 123-126.

[61] Gubel, "Iconography of Inscribed Phoenician Glyptic," figs. 64-70.

the first millennium.[62] According to Keel and Uehlinger, the presence of four wings, as opposed to two, indicates the celestial and omnipresent nature of this deity.[63] Less common are winged female hybrids, such as the frontal facing figure on the seal of *g'l bn š'l* (**fig. 6**), the crowned female on the Moabite seal of *kmšṣdq* (**fig. 7**), and the winged Egyptian goddesses flanking a *Djed* pillar on an ivory from Samaria (**fig. 8**).

Fig. 2. Conoid seal, Gaza, Iron Age IIB (ca. 830-700 BCE). Source: Keel, *Corpus, Band III*, fig. 3.

Fig. 3. Skaraboid seal, Tell el-Far'a South, 19th Dynasty (1292-1190 BCE). Source: Keel, *Corpus, Band III*, fig. 138.

Fig. 4. Carnelian scaraboid of 'Uzza, Dan, Iron Age IIB-C (830-600 BCE). Source: Keel, *Corpus, Band II*, fig. 1

Fig. 5. Bone carving, Hazor, early 8th C. BCE. Source: *GGG*, fig. 210.

Fig. 6. Seal of *g'l bn š'l*. Source: Sass, "Pre-Exilic Hebrew Seals," 201, fig. 6.

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[62] Cf. Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, figs. 211b, 211c, and 212a-b.

[63] Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 195. This is a reasonable claim, though no detailed discussion is offered in support. It is also possible, however, that the presence of four wings, instead of two, is modeled on the four-winged scarabs that appear regularly in the iconographic record, especially as seal amulets. See, e.g., Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, figs. 257a-b, 275a-b, and 277.

Fig. 7. Seal of *kmšṣdq*, unknown origin. Source: Timm, "Moabitischen Siegel," 192, fig. 3.
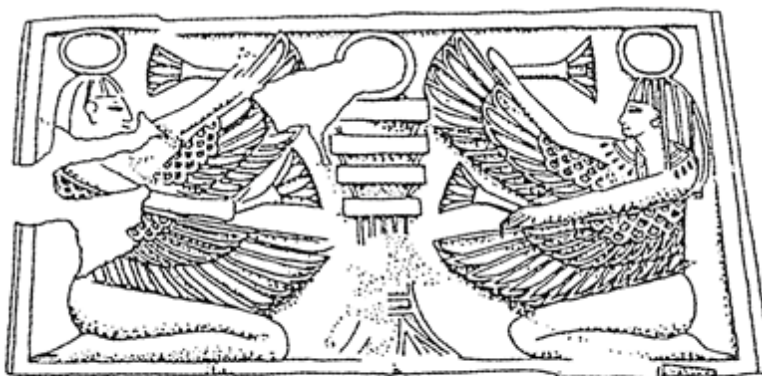
Fig. 8. Ivory inlay, Samarian, Iron Age IIB. Source: *GGG*, 250, fig. 243.

Although Ornan warns that the Assyrian *apkallū* figures should not be confused with the four-winged Egyptianizing figures mentioned above, for the purposes of this paper they are considered together because they share in common the affixing of wings to an otherwise anthropomorphic figure. In terms of the ontological templates introduced earlier, we may formulate the concept of winged anthropomorphic figures as follows:

Supernatural Concept	Ontological Domain	Counterintuitive Feature
Apkallu =	PERSON	+ special biology (wings)

One of the default biological intuitions of humans is that animals belong to one and only one species. Therefore, by transferring a biological feature from the avian class, *apkallū* and related winged figures violate a basic expectation about species membership, making them ontologically counterintuitive. Yet at the same time, they manage to preserve the remaining background knowledge associated with the PERSON category in several ways. First, in terms of anatomy, aside from the wings their physical body parts and upright posture are thoroughly human. Second, with regard to mental faculties, *apkallū* are almost identical to humans—they bestow

blessings, grant protection, and perform ritual acts. [64] Textual and iconographic evidence assumes, therefore, that *apkallū* have *minds*, which allows ancient viewers to draw important inferences about how these figures think, feel, and behave. In this sense, they are not unlike the concept of winged angels in Christian artistic tradition. In summary, the *apkallū* appear to be minimally counterintuitive in Boyer's technical sense of the term.

It should be noted that winged anthropomorphic figures are part of a larger category of anthropomorphic beings with zoomorphic appendages. [65] While wings are the most common body part added to human figures, other less common examples of human-animal hybrids, mostly deriving from the Mesopotamian artistic tradition, include lion- and bull-centaurs (human torso + animal posterior), the merman (human torso + fish posterior), and the various human-scorpion hybrids. With regard to the latter, the *girtablullû*, "scorpion-man," is identified by the addition of scorpion tail and was most common in the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods, appearing in a variety of artistic media, including monumental sculptures, apotropaic figurines, garment embroidery, and cylinder seals. [66] While scorpion tails are sometimes added to winged *apkallū* figures, the full-blown *girtablullû* is more complex, wearing the horned cap of divinity, human head and torso, hindquarters and talons of a bird of prey, snake-headed penis, and scorpion tail. In light of this conflagration of features, the *girtablullû* is arguably several degrees *more* counterintuitive than the winged *apkallu*, because it involves the transfer of *multiple* independent animal properties to the PERSON domain.

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[64] In fact, the antediluvian *apkallū* were renowned for their superior wisdom, and Mesopotamian scribes traced their lineage back to these mythical figures. See Karel van der Toorn, "Why Wisdom Became a Secret: On Wisdom as a Written Genre," in *Wisdom Literature in Mesopotamia and Israel* (ed. R. J. Clifford; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 21-29.

[65] Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic animal-headed hybrids are discussed in the next section.

[66] Anthony Green, "A Note on the 'Scorpion-Man' and Pazuzu," *Iraq* 47 (1985): 75-82. See also F. A. M. Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits: The Ritual Texts* (Cuneiform Monographs 1; Groningen: Styx, 1992), 180-181.

4.3.3. Winged Animal-Headed Figures

The second category of hybrids, winged animal-headed figures, includes the common falcon-headed sphinx or "griffin."[67] As one of the most common hybrid creatures in all of West Semitic minor art, griffins have the hind-legs and tail of a lion and the head, feet, and wings of a bird of prey.[68] Numerous eighth century amulets from Megiddo depict griffins in the middle register standing guard on either side of a sacred tree (**figs. 9-10**), or in Egyptianized form before a stylized *ankh* sign (**figs. 11-12**). Griffins with royal pharaonic crowns also appear as the primary element on Iron Age name seals, examples of which include scaraboid seals from Ashkelon, Tell el-Farʻah south, and Gezer (without crown), among others.[69]

Figs. 9-10. Seal amulets, Megiddo, 8th c. BCE. Source: *GGG*, 235, figs. 231a-b.

Figs. 11-12. Seals belonging to *ʼsp* and *ḥmn*, Megiddo, Iron Age (?). Source: *GGG*, figs. 250a-b.

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[67] Known also by the class *hieracocephalic*. LeMon (*Yahweh's Winged Form*, 39) mentions the less frequently attested winged ram-headed (*criocephalic*) sphinxes, as well as winged bulls and winged ibexes. Wiggermann ("Mischwesen A," 243) tentatively identifies the griffin with the creature known in Akkadian as *kurību*, cognate with Hebrew cherubim. See further below.

[68] For discussion see Keel, *Einleitung*, 200-201 and figs. 375-377.

[69] See Keel, *Corpus*, *Band I*, fig. 3; idem, *Band III*, fig. 307; and idem, *Band III*, fig. 553a.

An Iron Age seal from Tell el-Far'ah south portrays a variation on the winged griffin, depicting a falcon-headed figure in upright posture and with four wings (**fig. 13**).[70] This image belongs to a separate class of anthropomorphic figures with zoomorphic heads—in this case, the head of a falcon. Such anthropomorphic falcon-headed figures are widespread in the record of Egyptian-influenced stamp seals from Israel-Palestine, being linked with the deity Horus.[71] Except for their falcon-heads, they resemble in form the four-winged anthropomorphic figures discussed above.

Unlike these falcon-headed images, ram-headed sphinxes are somewhat common, [72] though less so by comparison, while goose-headed sphinxes are extremely rare.[73]

Fig. 13. Seal belonging to *pdh*, Tell el-Far'ah (south), Iron Age IIB/C. Source: *GGG*, fig. 213.

Other uncommon animal-animal hybrids worth mentioning in this context include such figures as the "goat-fish" and the winged boar, which only appear in the seal record of Israel-Palestine beginning in the Persian period.[74] Additionally, the leonine sphinx body could be paired with its matching head, as this bronze Phoenician chariot section shows a winged lion-headed sphinx subduing a human (**fig. 14**). The leonine head is also a staple of the Egyptian deity Sekhmet and the Mesopotamian lion-headed demons called *ugallū*. As for the latter, reliefs from Aššurbanipal's palace at Nineveh portray a series of upright *ugallū*, which have a human bodies, donkey ears, and muscular legs ending in bird-talons for feet (**fig. 15**).[75]

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[70] The figure is shown beneath a solar disk, perhaps to signify his status as the "Lord of Heaven." Although Keel and Uehlinger (*Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 198) identify the figure as Baal, the iconographic examples they site in support differ in displaying human, rather than falcon, heads.

[71] See Keel, *Einleitung*, 216 and figs. 452-458.

[72] See Uehlinger, "Die Elfenbeinschnitzereien von Samaria," in *Crafts and Images in Contact*, 162, fig. 4a.

[73] E.g., only at Keel, *Corpus*, *Band III*, fig. 695.

[74] See, respectively, Keel, *Corpus*, *Band I*, fig. 53; and idem, *Band II*, fig. 38.

[75] See Anthony Green, "The Lion-Demon in the Art of Mesopotamia and Neighbouring Regions," *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 17 (1986): 141-254; idem, "A Note on the 'Lion-Demon,'" *Iraq* 50 (1988): 167-68. While

The conceptual structure of these figures is more complex and therefore harder to pin down. The crucial issue is identifying the correct ontological base category—specifically, whether it is ANIMAL or PERSON. On the one hand, we might interpret creatures such as the winged griffin as animals with mixed biology (birds + lions). From a purely anatomical-artistic perspective, this makes sense, as these figures do not display obvious human properties. On the other hand, many of the griffins are portrayed with royal crowns and are intended to represent, symbolize, or be equated with the king or deity. In these cases, it would have been natural for ancient viewers to infer person-like mentation for these figures. More explicitly, some of the animal-headed figures are portrayed in an upright, bipedal posture, and with human torso and arms. As with the humanoid *apkallū*, these features suggest the base category of person. If so, then figures like the lion-demon would involve multiple ontological violations, with the transfer of both avian and leonine features to the person domain. Their template would be:

Fig. 14. Bronze disk of chariot B, Salamis, 9th-7th c. BCE (?). Source: LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form*, fig. 3.8.

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ugallū do not appear with large wings, the fringes of their garments are feathered and may suggest the power of flight. This was proposed by Michael Chan in his 2010 SBL annual meeting paper, "Symbols of Power and Protection: An Examination of Wing-Like Fringes Worn by Human and Divine Characters in Neo-Assyrian Art." For a possible instance of a winged *ugallu*-like creature, see Ulrich Hübner, "Das Ikonographische Repertoire der Ammonitischen Siegel," in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals*, 157, fig. 3.

Supernatural Concept	Ontological Domain	Counterintuitive Feature
Ugallu =	PERSON	+ special biology (lion head) + special biology (donkey ears) + special biology (bird talons) + special biology (wings)

Fig. 15. Neo-Assyrian relief detail, Nineveh, reign of Aššurbanipal (668-626 BCE). Source: Keel, *Symbolism*, pl. IV

If this interpretation is on the right track, then it is also interesting to note that many of these hybrid creatures assume human cognitive functioning, despite their animal heads. For example, the *ugallu* belongs to the seven mythological sages and was regarded as a beneficent entity that protected against evil forces and illness.[76] The retention of human cognition is also suggested by the fact that falcon-headed *apkallū* fulfill the same ritual roles as their human-headed counterparts. This is clear from their parallel portrayal in Assyrian art. For example, an alabaster relief from Nimrud juxtaposes human- and falcon-headed *apkallū* in nearly identical poses, performing nearly identical rites (**fig. 16**). This indicates that the presence of animal heads does not block standard theory of mind inferences that are normally applied to humans. In much

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[76] See Wiggermann, *Mesopotamian Protective Spirits*, 170-72.

the same way, numerous well-known Egyptian scenes depict animal-headed deities executing uniquely human actions. In a classic Book of the Dead scene, for instance, the jackal-headed Anubis escorts the deceased, the ibis-headed Thoth records the results of the weighing of the heart, and the falcon-headed Horus presents the individual before Osiris (**fig. 17**). Each of these actions assumes super-animal, person-like mental functioning.

Fig. 16. Alabaster relief panel, Nimrud, ca. 883-859 BCE. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 32.143.3

Fig. 17. Page from the *Book of the Dead* of Hunefer, Thebes, 19th Dynasty, ca. 1275 BCE. Source: The British Museum, EA 9901/3.

In contrast, one of the most important and frequently attested animal-animal hybrids throughout the Bronze and Iron ages is the Egyptian winged uraei. Keel demonstrated that these hybrid figures provided the iconographic backdrop for the fiery seraphim described in the throne vision of Isaiah 6.[77] However, while the portrayal of winged uraei in Egyptian art involves the straightforward addition to the cobra of either one or two pairs of wings, the biblical seraphim represent a "supercharged variety" of the winged uraei.[78] Specifically, for our purposes, it is significant that the biblical description adds several layers of counterintuitiveness not present in the iconography. Not only do Isaiah's seraphim have six wings, with which they fly and cover their face and genitalia (or feet, depending on one's interpretation; Isa 6:2), but they also incorporate distinctly human qualities. Most obviously, they speak, calling out to one another in proclaiming the holiness of Yahweh (6:3), and addressing the prophet (6:7). They also have hands (*yad*) with which they grasp and manipulate ritual instruments (6:6). Finally, the biblical seraphim presume human emotional capacities, as they cover their own faces and genitalia from the presence of the imposing deity, an emotional reaction inspired either by fear, deference, or shame. The biblical seraphim, in contrast to their iconographic counterparts, therefore display a more complex mixture of ontological categories. The piling on of counterintuitive properties is enabled largely by the textual medium through which these hybrid creatures are given description; the literary presentation endows them with speech and mental lives. This augmentation of the iconography points to a relevant difference between images and texts, as distinct media, when it comes to the potential for representing supernatural figures. In this

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[77] Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst : Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4* (SBS84/85; Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 70-115. See also Keel, "Mit Cherubim und Serafim," *Bibel heute* 112 (1992): 171-74.

[78] J. J. M. Roberts, "Isaiah in Old Testament Theology," in *Interpreting the Prophets* (ed. James Luther Mays and Paul J. Achtemeier; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 62-74 (64).

particular case, the textual descriptions expand the boundaries of imagination found in the iconography, making explicit what is only implicit in the latter.

4.3.4. Winged Human-Headed Sphinxes

The final category of *Mischwesen* is winged human-headed sphinxes, most of which have leonine bodies. The larger category here is zoomorphic body + anthropomorphic head, of which the standard (non-winged) human-headed sphinx is a leading example. While human heads were attached to all manner of animal bodies, by far the most frequently attested is the sphinx. By contrast, early examples of the human-headed beetle are rare and only become popular in the later Persian Period.[79] Similarly, the Egyptian *ba* bird, although common in ancient Egyptian tomb paintings, is relatively rare among seal amulets from Israel-Palestine.[80]

Fig. 18. Winged lion of Aššurbanipal, Nineveh, 8th c. BCE. Source: Pritchard, *ANE*, vol. 1, fig. 163.

The most complex type of hybrid image is the winged human-headed sphinx. Winged sphinx-like creatures served as massive doorway bull colossi in Neo-Assyrian royal palaces (**fig. 18**), and as gigantic orthostats at Carchemish (**figs. 19**).[81] In minor art, a Neo-Assyrian ivory inlay from Nimrud shows sphinxes on either side of a stylized tree **(fig. 20)**. From the Levant, they are often depicted in

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[79] See the 8th century BCE Hebrew seal of *blth* in Sass, "The Pre-Exilic Hebrew Seals," in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals*, 215, fig. 88.

[80] Two Iron Age seals from Gezer are notable exceptions. See Keel, *Corpus, Band IV*, figs. 17 and 561.

[81] On the bull colossi in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh, see John Malcolm Russell, *Sennacherib's Palace without Rival at Nineveh* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991). On the monumental architecture of ancient Carchemish and Zincirli, see Alessandra Gilibert, *Syro-Hittite Monumental Art and the Archaeology of Performance* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011).

Egyptianized form with pharonic crowns. For example, they appear crowned on two Samarian ivories (**figs. 21-22**).[82] Similar sphinxes are often featured in a recumbent pose, for example in the bottom register below winged uraei on a seal from Megiddo (**fig. 23**), on an oval plate from Tel Halif (**fig. 24**), and with elaborate headdress on several objects from Gezer (**figs. 25**).[83]

Fig. 19. Winged sphinx, Carchemish, early 10th c. BCE. Source: Pritchard, *ANE*, vol. 1, fig. 165.

Fig. 20. Ivory inlay, Nimrud, 9th-8th century BCE. Source: Keel, *Symbolism*, fig. 189.

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[82] Cf. the figures positioned before ankh symbols in Keel and Uehlinger, *GGG*, fig. 249; and Keel, *Corpus, Band I*, fig. 140.

[83] The winged human-headed sphinx motif persisted well into the Persian period. See, for example, the metal ring imprint from Wadi ed-Daliyeh in Keel, *Corpus, Band II*, figs. 66, and the scaraboid seal from Akko in idem, *Corpus, Band I*, fig. 163. These figures are variations of the traditional motifs and include instead avian bodies and scorpion tails. The seal from Akko is unusual in displaying a female sphinx with breasts.
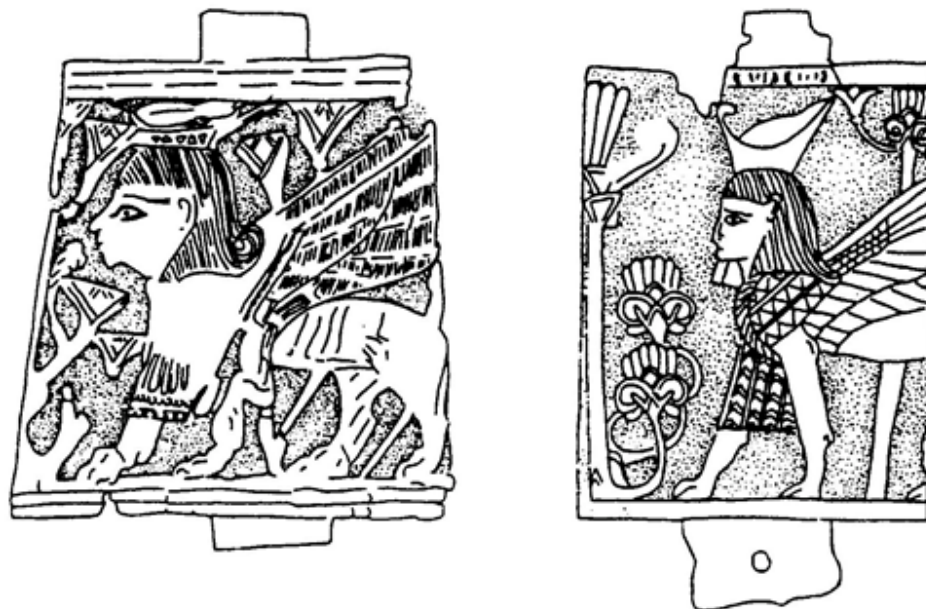
Figs. 21-22. Ivory inlays, Samaria, Iron Age IIB. Source: *GGG*, figs. 232a-b.

Fig. 23. Hebrew seal of *'l'mr*, Megiddo, 6th c. BCE. Source: *GGG*, fig. 246.

Fig. 24. Fig Oval plate, Tel Halif, Iron Age IIB (ca. 830-700 BCE). Source: Keel, *Corpus, Band IV*, fig. 21.

Fig. 25. Rectangular engraved plate, Gezer, 18th-19th Dynasty (1479-1190 BCE). Source: Keel, *Corpus, Band IV*, fig. 395.

The base category for these more complex figures is again less than clear. They can either be classified as persons with wings and animal bodies, or as lions with wings and human heads. In either case, what matters for our purposes is that they involve multiple counterintuitive violations beyond the cognitive optimum. In schematic template form:

Supernatural Concept	Ontological Category	Counterintuitive Feature
Winged Sphinx =	PERSON	+ special biology (wings) + special biology (lion body)

OR:

Supernatural Concept	Ontological Category	Counterintuitive Feature
Winged Sphinx =	ANIMAL (lion)	+ special biology (wings) + special biology (human head) + special psychology (human cognition)

Indeed, the sphinx displayed on the Carchemish orthostat defies both ontological and conventional cultural expectations by having *two* heads, one human and one leonine.[84]

At this point it is also worth mentioning the textual description of the cherubim found in Ezekiel 1 and 10. Although Uehlinger minimizes the cherubim as examples of indigenous *Mischwesen* iconography in Israel-Palestine on the grounds that they were "clearly not regarded as primary deities in Palestine,"[85] the present chapter has maintained that that the distinction between major and minor deities, while perhaps culturally meaningful, is in many ways artificial from a cognitive perspective.[86] As with the iconographic representation of winged sphinxes considered so far, it is likewise possible to evaluate the extent to which the biblical cherubim either conform to or depart from the model of minimally counterintuitive concepts.

The etymology of the Hebrew term כרובים (*kerûbîm*) is not certain, but is likely connected with Akkadian *kurību*, which typically refers to winged genii, though can also denote a wider

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[84] Cf. the winged griffin with both falcon and human heads in Keel, *Corpus: Einleitung*, 201, fig. 377.

[85] Christoph Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; CBET 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 97-155 (144).

[86] Strawn also notes that hybrid creatures are nevertheless quite common the archaeological record of Israel-Palestine and, moreover, that while some of these objects are imported goods or reflect imported motifs, others are local products (e.g., the Bes drawings at Kuntillet ʿAjrud). See Brent A. Strawn, "*Mischmetaphors*: Complex Divine Images, Conceptual Blending, and Ancient Near Eastern *Mischwesen*." Paper presented at the 2010 SBL Annual Meeting.

variety of winged hybrid creatures.[87] In any case, the cherubim are most closely identified with the iconography of sphinxes in Mesopotamia and Egypt, with winged lion body and human head.[88] In the biblical corpus they appear in two primary functions, either as guardians or sacred trees or else as guardians and bearers of divine thrones. The latter role is described most extensively in the throne vision of Ezekiel, which, in addition to the physical elements of these hybrids, offers the best opportunity to determine the cognitive functioning of these beings, a feature that is unavailable in the iconographic examples discussed above. First, in terms of physical appearance, Ezekiel 1:4-14 describes the following attributes of the cherubim: human form (דמות אדם); four faces (ארבעה פנים) [=human (אדם); lion (אריה); ox (שור); eagle (נשר)]; four wings (ארבע כנפים); straight legs (רגליהם רגל ישרה); bovine feet (כף רגל עגל); human hands (ידו אדם). In addition to these features, the cherubim are said to "sparkle like burnished bronze" (נצצים כעין נחשת קלל).

While we have encountered the presence of wings on anthropomorphic and zoomorphic hybrids, the four faces of the cherubim stand out in this passage as exceptional. The four-faced heads would seem to enhance the otherworldly nature of the creatures and also their omnidirectional vision. The latter is crucial for the navigational role as divine throne-bearers and each of the four faces must be capable of visualizing its intended path. Moreover, the cherubim are said to "dart to and fro like a flash of lightening" (רצוא ושוב כמראה הבזק). This description of their movement highlights the transcendence of normal human or animal location. The are portrayed as moving through the air with speed, precision, and coordination, as they maintain contact with their wings at a forty-five degree angle and maneuver "in any of the four directions

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[87] On the biblical *cherubim*, see Alice Wood, *Of Wings and Wheels: A Synthetic Study of the Biblical Cherubim* (BZAW 385; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); T. N. D. Mettinger, "Cherubim," in *DDD*, 189-92; Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 191-250; idem, "Mit Cherubim und Serafim," 171-74; W. F. Albright, "What Were the Cherubim?" *BA* 1 (1938): 1-3.

[88] See Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen*, 15-45.

without veering as they moved" (Ezek 1:18). The text states that, "wherever the spirit would go, they went" (1:12, 20). This omnidirectional mobility and coordination might suggest a high level of cognitive functioning in the form of intentions, planning, and obeying orders, though it is also possible to interpret their movement as being under sole control of the deity. Regardless, it is the case that the cherubim not only violate species membership expectations by transferring multiple animal properties much like the iconographic images of winged sphinxes, but the textual description also introduces further counterintuitive features such as four heads, intense luminosity, enhanced speed, and possibly person-like cognitive functioning.[89] Thus, as with Isaiah's seraphim, the biblical representation presents a far more complex blend of counterintuitive features than do its iconographic counterparts.

In the previous section, it was noted that the lack of a human head on a hybrid figure did not prevent the representation of these figures as agents with human cognition. This was true for *Mischwesen* with both zoomorphic and anthropomorphic bodies. In light of the human-headed sphinxes examined in this section, I would argue that the converse is true as well. That is, the presence of human heads might make it easier to attribute human cognition to these otherwise animal-like figures. If correct, this observation has implications for the standard view of Semitic anthropology, which views the mind as located in the heart.[90] In the biblical plagues narrative, for example, when Yahweh hardens pharaoh's heart, he is in effect making Pharaoh's *mind* impervious to reason. However, the human-headed sphinxes surveyed above suggest that basic cognitive functioning—both mental and emotional—was in fact strongly associated with the head and face region. The Egyptian representation of the *ba* as a human-headed bird also points

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[89] On Ezekiel's four-faced cherubim, see also the discussion in Thorkild Jakobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 166.

[90] See, e.g., Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 40-58. See also John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 210.

in this direction, representing both the physical and psychic features of the deceased.[91] These observations gleaned from ancient iconography are consistent with recent experimental research by the psychologists Cristina Starmans and Paul Bloom, who found that young children and adults identify the location of the "self" around the eyes and face.[92] Finally, when cultic statues were ritually mutilated in the ancient Near East, the primary targets were the statue's head and eyes.[93] Overall, then, a cognitive perspective on the iconography may force us to rethink the simple one-to-one equation of the heart (located in the body) with the mind. In thinking about heads, bodies, and likely cognition, human- or person-like cognition appears to be imputable to both human-headed animals *and* animal-headed humans. In my view, it is therefore best to conclude that, when it comes to the visual representation of supernatural beings, the attribution of human-like cognition does not depend strictly on bodies or biology. In a sense, mentality transcends anatomy. This conclusion is not only consistent with research in CSR and psychology, which shows that people naturally attribute minds to disembodied beings like ghosts, but it is also consistent with the complex hybrid combinations examined to this point.

4.3.5. Hybrid Demons: Pazuzu and Lamaštu

The hybrid demons Pazuzu and Lamaštu are the most complex composite representations in the ancient iconographic record. Their physical form involves the transfer and combination of

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[91] See Richard H. Wilkinson, *Reading Ancient Egyptian Art: A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Egyptian Painting and Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson), 98-99.

[92] Christina Starmans and Paul Bloom, "Windows to the Soul: Children and Adults See the Eyes as the Location to the Self," *Cognition* 123 (2012): 313-18.

[93] See Mark A. Brandes, "Destruction et mutilation de statues en Mésopotamie," *Akkadica* 16 (1980): 28-41; and recently Natalie Naomi May, "Decapitation of Statues and Mutilation of the Image's Facial Features," in *A Woman of Valor: Jerusalem Studies in the Ancient Near East in Honor of Joan Goodnick Westenholz* (ed. W. Horowitz, U. Gabbay, and F. Vukosavović; Madrid: Consejo Superor de Investigaciones Científicas, 2010), 105-118; Amon Ben-Tor, "The Sad Fate of Statues and the Mutilated Statues of Hazor," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever* (ed. Seymour Gitin, J. Edward Wright, and J. P. Dessel; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 3-16.

multiple animal properties, making them the most counterintuitive of the *Mischwesen*. Unlike demons and hostile supernatural forces in ancient Egypt (for the most part), Pazuzu and Lamaštu were personalized as specific entities of affliction.[94]

Pazuzu is the chief demon of pestilence and protection, and appears commonly in the form of sculpted heads, amulets, and statuettes.[95] The early history of Pazuzu is somewhat obscure, but he achieves a "sudden, iconographically fully developed appearance" during the Iron Age.[96] The earliest iconographic representations of Pazuzu appear in the royal tombs at Nimrud at the end of the 8th century BCE, though most of the objects date to the 7th-6th centuries.[97] On a well-known bronze statuette, he is identified by his canine face, jaws, and teeth, bulging eyes, caprid horns, scaly body, bird talons, massive wings, scorpion tail, and erect snake-headed penis (**figs. 26-27**).

Fig. 26. Bronze Pazuzu statuette, Iraq, 800-600 BCE. Source: Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago, OIM A25413. After LeMon, *Yahweh's Winged Form*, fig. 2.18.

This figurine displays a complex transfer of numerous animal properties, and is an example of what we might call the demon's full-blown iconographic profile.

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[94] On the demonic in ancient Mesopotamia and Israel in general, see Anthony Green, "Beneficent Spirits and Malevolent Demons: The Iconography of Good and Evil in Ancient Assyria and Babylonia," in *Visible Religion: Annual for Religious Iconography Volume III: Popular Religion* (ed. H. G. Kippenberg et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 80-105; and Henrike Frey-Anthes, *Unheilsmächte und Schutzgenien, Antiwesen und Grenzgänger: Vorstellungen von "Dämonen" im alten Israel* (OBO 227; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2007).

[95] On Pazuzu, see Nils P. Heeßel, *Pazuzu: Archäologische und philologische Studien zu einem altorientalischen Dämon* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); idem, "Evil Against Evil: The Demon Pazuzu," *SMSR* 77 (2011): 357-368; F. A. M. Wiggermann, "Pazuzu," *RLA*, 10:373-81; idem, "The Four Winds and the Origins of Pazuzu," in *Das Geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient: Beiträge zu Sprache, Religion, Kultur und Gesellschaft* (ed. Joost Hazenbos and Annette Zgoll; Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 125-66.

[96] Heeßel, "Evil Against Evil," 358. Cf. Wiggermann, "Four Winds," 125.

[97] Heeßel, "Evil Against Evil," 359.

Fig. 27. Copper/bronze Pazuzu statuette, Assyrian or Babylonian, early First Millennium BCE. Source: Musée du Louvre, MNB 467. After Frey-Anthes, *Unheilsmächte und Schutzgenien*, 310, fig. 31.

The evil goddess Lamaštu (Sumerian: *Dimme*) was the most personalized and feared demon in ancient Mesopotamia.[98] Walter Farber describes her as "an almost satanic force, a personification of evil and aggressiveness."[99] Lamaštu has a similar full-blown iconography. In material art, she has the face of a ferocious lion, a naked and spotted fur-covered body, donkey ears and teeth, and bird talons (**fig. 28**). Depicted in both winged and non-winged form, she is often grasping serpents in her claws and with a piglet and dog suckling at her breasts. Sometimes she appears with a tail. She was blamed above all for causing complications in pregnancy and for

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[98] On Lamaštu, see Walter Farber, *Lamaštu: An Edition of the Canonical Series of Lamaštu Incantations and Rituals and Related Texts from the Second and First Millenia B.C.E.* (Mesopotamian Civilizations 17; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014); idem, "Lamaštu," *RLA*, 6:439-46; and F. A. M. Wiggermann, "Lamaštu, Daughter of Anu: A Profile," in *Birth and Babylonia and the Bible: Its Mediterranean Setting* (ed. M. Stol; Groningen: Styx, 2000), 217-252.

[99] Farber, *Lamaštu*, 3.

snatching and torturing young newborn babies. She is accordingly depicted with long, sharp fingers. However, she also preyed on adult men, the elderly, and even domesticated animals.

The visual representations of Pazuzu and Lamaštu are the most conceptually complex of the hybrid concepts encountered so far. They transfer multiple animal biological features, thereby rendering them not just minimally, but *radically* counterintuitive. Yet from a cognitive view, we have seen that the downside of highly counterintuitive representations is that they exert greater cognitive demands and, consequently, are difficult to remember and communicate in their present form. Indeed, the further a concept strays from intuitive expectations, the more likely it will be forgotten or transformed into a more cognitively optimal version.
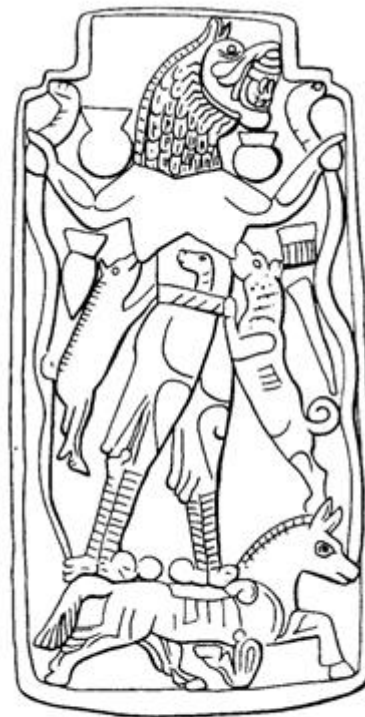
Fig. 28. Lamaštu amulet, Assyria. Source: Frey-Anthes, *Unheilsmächte und Schutzgenien*, fig. 28.

When we consider the full corpus of Pazuzu and Lamaštu objects, many artifacts illustrate this tendency to favor representations that are less complex and more optimal. The best example in this regard is the large assemblage of apotropaic Pazuzu heads (**figs. 29-31**). These amulets are made from a variety of materials, including bronze, iron, gold, bone, and terracotta. Pazuzu's apotropaic power resides in his head, and many of these objects have holes and suspension loops for attaching a chain or string, allowing women to wear them around their necks during pregnancy in order to ward off evil spirits that might harm the unborn child. Clay molds of Pazuzu heads indicate that they were mass-produced and, overall, the number of heads

far exceeds the number of full-body figurines.[100] While they are most common in the Mesopotamian heartland, Pazuzu objects have also been found in the Levant.[101]

Figs. 29-31. Pazuzu heads. Source: Uri Gabbay, "Pazuzu Objects in Jerusalem," figs. 2, 4, 6.

These objects indicate that Pazuzu was identified above all by the head and face; the head was the demon's most essential feature and was used *pars pro toto* for the demon as a whole.[102] By omitting the composite body and isolating the head alone, these representations of Pazuzu are automatically less counterintuitive. It is also worth noting that despite some animal features, the facial configuration and basic shape of the head remain largely humanlike. The Pazuzu heads are frightening and grotesque, but many have a markedly human appearance.[103]

The Lamaštu iconography is more limited, but while there is variation in the demon's head and face, the distinctive identifying feature is always the claws (**figs. 32-33**). Beyond that,

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[100] Heeßel, "Evil Against Evil," 358.

[101] Heeßel ("Evil Against Evil," 360 n. 9) mentions Pazuzus from Horvat Qitmit, Tel Beth Shean, and Beth Shemesh (with references). See also Mordechai Cogan, "A Lamashtu Plaque from the Judaean Shephelah," *IEJ* 45 (1995): 155-61. See also the plaque discovered in Northern Syria featuring both Pazuzu and Lamaštu alongside a variety of *Mischwesen*, in *ANEP*, 658. Cf. Frey-Anthes, *Unheilsmächte und Schutzgenien*, fig. 29; Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World*, figs. 91-92; Green, "Beneficent Spirits," fig. 2.

[102] Heeßel, "Evil Against Evil," 358.

[103] Rather than having clearly discernible, discrete human and animal features, the purpose of Pazuzu's head and face seems to instead be to display more generally what Wiggermann ("Four Winds," 125) calls his "malformed inhuman ugliness."

however, the rest of Lamaštu's body is quite humanlike.[104] As with Pazuzu, she is always depicted in an upright anthropomorphic posture, indicating that the form of both demons was modeled on a human foundation. So when we consider the full corpus of images, except for a few exceptional artifacts, most material representations of Pazuzu and Lamaštu are limited in their conceptual complexity. Pazuzu is mostly embodied with a largely anthropomorphic head and face, Lamaštu is characterized above all by her sharp claws, and both demons have a predominantly person-like form. Although these simplified images are the result of reflective artistic activity, they nevertheless express a more intuitive and optimal understanding of the demons.

When we compare the iconography with textual descriptions of Pazuzu and Lamaštu found in ancient literary sources, we see that although the textual and visual evidence match up in some ways, they also diverge in important respects. Pazuzu texts mostly consist of short, standardized spells inscribed on small apotropaic objects.[105] For example, Pazuzu's wings and power of flight are alluded to on an amulet that contains the following short text, presented as the demon's first person speech:

> I am Pazuzu, son of Hanbu, king of the evil phantoms.
> I ascended the mighty mountain that quaked.
> The winds that I went against were headed toward the west.
> One by one I broke their wings.[106]

Other incantations include a long list of verbal formulations detailing Pauzuz's destructive power: he parches the land, withers trees, frosts the mountains, and attacks young men and

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[104] Wiggermann, "Lamaštu," 232; cf. Farber, *Lamaštu*, 5.

[105] There are two standard incantations: (1) standard incantation A, written in the first-person voice of Pazuzu, and (2) standard incantation B, addressed to Pazuzu in the second-person.

[106] Translation Benjamin R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (3d. ed.; Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1996), 848. Cf. Heeßel, *Pazuzu*, 62.

women.[107] What is perhaps most striking about the textual evidence, however, is the complete absence of any description regarding the demon's physical appearance. There is no mention of his wings or tail, body or face. Instead, he is described simply as "fierce" and "furious," but there are hardly any corporeal details. In this regard, the literary evidence shares little in common with the iconography.

Lamaštu texts are more plentiful and include various spells from the second and first millennia BCE, the most important of which is the canonical series of Lamaštu incantations and rituals from the first millennium. Unlike Pazuzu, the texts are more forthcoming about her appearance. For example, an Old Babylonian incantation describes her origins by stating, "Anu begot her, Ea reared her. Enlil doomed her the face of a lioness. She is furious."[108] A first millennium text provides a more detailed anatomical description:

> Her head is the head of a lion,
> Her form is the form of a donkey.
> Her lips are a rushing wind, they pour out [   ].
> She came down from the peaks (?) of the mountains,
> She roars like a lion,
> She keeps up the howling of a demonic dog.[109]

This text explicitly alludes to Lamaštu's animal features and hybrid form. Throughout the corpus, the most common feature mentioned is her leonine face.[110] However, other features—such as her bird talons, wings, and tail—are attested either rarely or not at all, and are found scattered across different texts rather than consolidated into a single extended physical

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[107] See Foster, *Before the Muses*, 847.
[108] Foster, *Before the Muses*, 173.
[109] Foster, *Before the Muses*, 850.
[110] See also W. Fauth, "Ištar als Löwengöttin und die löwenköpfige Lamaštu," *Welt des Orients* 12 (1981): 21-36.

description. Moreover, as with Pazuzu, references to her appearance are often vague and have nothing to do with her hybrid body; these include references to her disheveled hair, wild face, and exposed breasts.[111] Overall, the incantations spend far more time reciting the demon's malicious deeds and how to avert them, while remaining silent about her physical appearance:

> [She is] cl[ad] in scorching heat, fever, cold, frost, (and) ice.
> The root of the licorice tree, the seed(s) of the chaste tree,
> the fruit of the poplar, pride of the river meadow, she spoiled.
> By crossing a river, she makes it murky.
> By leaning against a wall, she smears (it) with mud.
> When she has seized an old man, they call her "The Annihilator."
> When she has seized a young man, they call her "The Scorcher."
> When she has seized a young woman, they call her "Lamaštu."
> When she has seized a baby, they call her "Dimme."
> Because you (=Lamaštu) came here and attacked his face,
> took hold of the joints, destroyed the limbs,
> (are now) consuming the muscles, twisting the sinews,
> make faces turn green, turn features the way they should not be,
> cause depression, burn bodies like fire. (Lam. I, 62-75)[112]

In this passage, Lamaštu is described with vivid verbal expressions: she crosses the rivers, seizes and attacks her victims, destroys their limbs, consumes their muscles, twists their sinews, and burns their bodies. Elsewhere, she is said to slither like a serpent through doorways and windows in search of prey.[113] Overall, as with the Pazuzu texts, Lamaštu is primarily depicted using verbs that describe what she *does* rather than with adjectives describing how she *appears*. Finally, it is worth noting that in the ritual instructions for making Lamaštu figurines out of clay, there are no

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[111] For example: "…like a leopard, her feet are like those of Anzu, her hands are dirty, her face that of a lion; she comes out of the marshes, her hair in disorder, her breasts uncovered, she follows the cattle and the sheep, her hands in flesh and blood."

[112] Farber, *Lamaštu*, 153. Compare also the lengthy incantation of Lam. I, Incantation 5, of which only 2 of the 118 total lines make reference to her physical features ("[Tee]th of a dog are her teeth, talons of an eagle are her talons").

[113] "Like a serpent she glides through the windows, leaves the house, 'Bring me your children to suckle, I shall be their nurse' (is her call)." After Farber, "Lamaštu," 439.

specific details about how this should be done or what the product should look like.[114] The instructions either *assume* that people knew how to make one, or that the figurine's physical details were of little importance for the efficacy of the ritual incantation.

Overall, then the literary evidence offers its own distinct presentations of the demons. Whereas the iconography accentuates the demons' unnatural and fantastic physical form, the literary sources focus on action over appearance, emphasizing the demons' wicked deeds at the expense of their anatomy. As with the iconography, literary descriptions steer towards less counterintuitive, more optimal portrayals. These texts represent the demons in largely ordinary, anthropomorphic terms as humanlike agents. Specifically, apotropaic amulets and plaques dedicated to both Pazuzu and Lamaštu show that ancient people attempted to appease or win favor from them, which in turn indicates their person-like cognition. People offered gifts to Lamaštu in the form of female products such as cosmetics, shoes, and pots. Moreover, both demons, despite their composite form, have a highly anthropomorphic structure as their anatomical foundation. Textual evidence for Lamaštu, in particular supports this, as she is largely humanlike in her transportation on boats or donkeys through the desert. Lastly, texts often endow these demons with language and speech.

4.4. GENERAL DISCUSSION

Jeremy Black and Anthony Green have written that Mesopotamian gods and demons are "bewilderingly complex to the modern reader."[115] In contrast to this common sentiment, this chapter has attempted to show that hybrid images in fact have a limited repertoire and are

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[114] See, e.g., Farber, *Lamaštu*, Lam I, 47 and Lam I, 94. At most, one is told to "cover the head with hair."
[115] Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols*, 9.

constrained in a number of predictable ways. It is simply not the case that "anything goes."[116] So, for example, at a basic level, nearly all hybrid figures display ordinary bilateral symmetry. Ancient artists designed hybrids with two, four, or six wings, and mixed different animal parts, but the limbs and appendages almost always appear in equal measure on each side of the body.[117] Another major finding is that wings and large mammalian features dominate the iconography, while insect and fish hybrids appear far less frequently. In terms of physical morphology, lions, large birds, and quadrupeds are more adjacent categories to humans, and it is reasonable to suppose that this facilitated the transfer of biological properties across domains. Furthermore, human + artifact hybrids, such as the so-called "boat-god," and human + natural object hybrids, including mountain and river combinations, are even rarer.[118] Indeed, the Urartians produced an assortment of novel *Mischwesen* imagery that flaunted both Assyrian and Babylonian artistic conventions as well as ordinary ontological categories, and as a result enjoyed little cultural success in the ancient Near East.[119] This case suggests that, as a corollary to Lévi-Strauss's dictum, not all ideas are equally good to think.

Overall, hybrid creatures by definition involve the transfer of biological features from one species to another. In the case of winged human figures such as the *apkallū*, the transfer is simple and these figures are minimally counterintuitive in Boyer's technical sense. Conversely, many figures are conceptually more complex, often involving *multiple* ontological domain

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[116] Green ("Mischwesen B," 262) observes that in Mesopotamian art, "the overall repertoire [of hybrid figures] remained very restricted."

[117] This is consistent with Thomas Ward's experimental findings on the constraints of imagination. See Thomas B. Ward, "Structured Imagination: The Role of Category Structure in Exemplar Generation," *Cognitive Psychology* 27 (1994): 1-40.

[118] These are inductive observations that admittedly require further quantitative analysis. Likewise, one expects to encounter fewer depictions of human + plant hybrids than human + animal ones—a prediction that appears to be substantiated by the material remains, though this too remains an empirical question. There is contemporary experimental evidence to suggest that the proximity of ontological categories exerts certain cognitive constraints on imagination. For example, Frank Keil and Michael Kelly determined that the most common metamorphoses in myth and folklore occur between close ontological categories. See Kelly and Keil, "The More Things Change…: Metamorphoses and Conceptual Structure," *Cognitive Science* 9 (1985): 403-406.

[119] Green, "Mischwesen B," 262-4.

violations. These iconographic representations do not fit the minimally counterintuitive paradigm quite so neatly. The material evidence suggests that it may be helpful therefore to think about varying *degrees* of counterintuitiveness, with different hybrids falling along a graded spectrum. Framing the issue in this way might allow us to determine whether or not subtle differences in hybrid forms conferred an advantage in terms of historical and regional transmission. Similarly, the various hybrid combinations encountered above might prompt us to investigate further the relationship between body posture and physical anatomy on the one hand, and the implicit cognition of the hybrid figure on the other.

Yet even this picture is further complicated if we take into account counterintuitive qualities that are not explicitly depicted in the image itself. To this point, the analysis has mostly been limited to the visible physical features explicitly represented on each image. But textual sources reveal additional counterintuitive features. For instance, Pazuzu does not just have a radically counterintuitive anatomy, but is also represented as having special healing powers and knowledge, the power of flight and possibly omnipresence, and presumably invisibility. In conjunction with his visual depictions, this larger Pazuzu concept includes an elaborate mix of breaches and transfers that would seem to far exceed the cognitive optimum.

In order to explain the apparent ubiquity of radically counterintuitive images and concepts, one must look to the mode and medium of transmission. As mentioned above, the epidemiological model of culture was developed to address cultural transmission in oral, non-literate settings, with a major focus on communication and memory. The rules of the game change, however, once writing and other material modes of cultural expression emerge. Specifically, beyond the psychological biases outlined above, the spread and survival of highly counterintuitive visual representations also owes much to the materiality of the iconographic

medium. Once fantastic hybrid concepts are committed to stone, metal, and clay, the images become permanent and long-lasting. [120] Iconographic researchers have shown that such images are often produced as minor art that functions as a kind of mass media for disseminating religious motifs and political propaganda. My proposal here is that ancient Near Eastern iconography, like written texts, functioned as an external aid to memory, providing a form of mnemonic support that was crucial for transmitting complex religious concepts. In a similar vein, the psychologist Merlin Donald has explored how, in the course of human cognitive evolution, writing and literacy functioned as a form of "external symbolic storage," that is, as material devices outside the body used for downloading and conveying information.[121] He associated the symbolic level of culture—what he called the "theoretic" level—with the advent of literacy. The anthropologist Colin Renfrew critiqued Donald, however, for overemphasizing writing systems and neglecting the role of material culture, especially in early human societies.[122] In line with Renfrew's observation, we may note that while texts help store symbolic ideas quite well, material iconography can fulfill the same purpose. In particular, we may recall that successful concepts must strike a careful balance between being salient and memorable. As a mnemonic aid, material images of elaborate hybrids enjoy the benefits of beings highly salient, while at the same time bypassing the ordinary demands of human memory. This paves the way for a cumulative effect wherein a religio-artistic tradition can produce increasingly complex hybrid

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[120] The role of mechanical image production and its connection with ancient hybrid representations has been explored recently in David Wengrow, *The Origins of Monsters: Image and Cognition in the First Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014). Wengrow engages the epidemiological approach of Sperber and Boyer, but ultimately argues against the cultural and cognitive universality of hybrids. He instead concludes that the mass dissemination of hybrid figures occurs only with the rise of technological and political supports. Unlike Wengrow's study, my interests are firstly in the narrow question of whether or not ancient Near Eastern hybrid representations are *minimally* counterintuitive in the technical sense specified by Boyer, and secondly in how the material factors that Wengrow examines give rise to *radically* counterintuitive images.

[121] Merlin Donald, *Origins of the Modern Mind: Three Stages in the Evolution of Culture and Cognition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[122] See Colin Renfrew and Chris Scarre, eds., *Cognition and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Symbolic Storage* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 1998).

representations by incrementally appending new anatomical features to a preexisting image type.[123] Visual art therefore appears to have functioned in the ancient Near East as, among other things, a permanent medium for generating and stabilizing conceptually complex religious concepts, thereby allowing an array of hybrid representations to break free from the confines of the cognitive optimum.

If we return to Sperber's important distinction between public and mental representations, we must reiterate that the two are not necessarily identical. In short, *material* images are not the same as *mental* images. [124] They are different phenomena that involve different cognitive processes. This was recognized already by the psychologist Rudolf Arnheim, who problematized the misguided idea that "mental images are faithful replicas of the physical objects they replace."[125] Given the conceptual complexity of some Pazuzu and Lamaštu iconography, there is *prima facie* reason to think that these public, material representations differed from their mental representations in ancient minds and memory. This means that while many images of the complex hybrid demons Pazuzu and Lamaštu appear to exceed the parameters of minimal counterintuitiveness, these demons were likely imagined most of the time in a more cognitively optimal form. Indeed, the notion of theological correctness predicts that the further a concepts strays from intuitive expectations, the more likely it will be either forgotten or transformed into a more cognitively palatable concept, or else will require extensive cultural support—in the form

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[123] We have seen this above with the optional addition of wings to non-winged anthropomorphic figures, and the same holds true for cases like the addition of a tail to the *girtablullû*, or "scorpion-man."

[124] In English, the term "image" is commonly used for both mental and visual objects. However, this slippage in terminology only obscures important cognitive differences between public and mental representations, in terms of processing and modes of transmission. In general, it is tricky to infer mental representations based on explicit public representations alone, whether in the form of texts or material artifacts. See W. J. T. Mitchell, "What is an Image?" *New Literary History* 15 (1984): 503-37.

[125] Rudolf Arnheim, *Visual Thinking* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 102.

of material imagery—to sustain them. [126] It is possible, therefore, that the radically counterintuitive Pazuzu and Lamaštu imagery discussed above was spontaneously simplified in memory to a more intuitive form. As we have seen above, the majority of ancient iconographic and textual evidence, each in their own way, opt for a cognitively optimal conception of the demons. The iconographic and textual records therefore converge with cognitive theorizing and reflect a more intuitive, optimal understanding of the demons, one that more closely approximates how they might have been mentally represented and remembered most of the time in actual religious reasoning, intuitive cognitive thinking, and everyday life. [127]

4.5. APPENDIX: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

It is worth examining just how prevalent hybrid figures were in ancient Near Eastern art. As a rough gauge, the orientalist Kurt Galling considered the representation of various hybrid creatures ("Mischwesen") to be the "most conspicuous and characteristic" motif in Northwest Semitic glyptic. [128] While Galling was correct in this observation, we can probe further and attempt to quantify the occurrences of hybrid representations in the material record. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis of all hybrid imagery in the totality of ancient Near Eastern art, whatever the parameters of that inquiry might be.

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[126] There is nothing necessarily "theological," in the sense of rules and doctrines, about the phenomenon of theological correctness. The larger issue pertains to the distinction between intuitive and reflective beliefs/concepts and their differential effects on cognition and memory.

[127] The distinction between intuitive and reflective modes of thinking is again relevant, since different contexts and situations will require or trigger one mode or the other. Barrett illustrates how a single reflective concept can have different degrees of relevance depending on the situation, writing that, "It may be that an idea with great inferential potential in off-line processing (e.g., relativity theory for a physicist in the lab) may have rather poor on-line inferential potential (e.g., relativity theory for a physicist driving in rush hour traffic)." We can repackage this idea with reference to the conceptions of Pazuzu or Lamaštu by stating, "An idea with great inferential potential in off-line processing (e.g., the iconographic representation of Pazuzu for an artist designing an amulet) may have rather poor on-line inferential potential (e.g., the mental representation of Pazuzu when performing an incantation, treating an illness, or attributing misfortune)." Ancient situations that necessitated fast, intuitive thinking would have been more likely to activate the optimal mental versions of Pazuzu or Lamaštu.

[128] As reported by Christoph Uehlinger, "Introduction," in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals* (ed. Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger; OBO 125; Fribourg: Academic Press, 1993), xv.

Nevertheless, it is possible to delimit our analysis by using recently published corpora of iconographic objects. In particular, this section gathers data from the extensive collections of West Semitic seals in Avigad and Sass's *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* and Othmar Keel's more recent *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel*. Although these works do not include larger material objects, they provide a helpful starting place for determining the frequency of hybrid figures in the important medium of minor art.

The methodology for collecting quantitative data on hybrid figures in the iconographic record amounts in large part to a counting exercise. Figures are scored and registered based on the explicit physical representation shown on the object, and do not rely on potentially implicit properties. The method used adheres to the following rules: each occurrence on an object of a hybrid figure (e.g. any figure that combines person, animal, plant, or object properties) is registered with a score of 1. If more than one hybrid figure appears on a single object (including obverse and reverse), it is still registered as 1. As reference points of comparison, non-hybrid animals (hereafter simply called "animals"[129]) and what will be called persons (whether intended to be humans or anthropomorphic divine beings) are also scored and registered according to the same rules. This allows us to calculate the proportion of hybrid figures in relation to the total number of objects in a given corpus, as well as the relative proportion of hybrids in relation to animal and person figures. Thus, if a single object contains one of each category (hybrid, animal, and person), each category receives a score of 1. Here are a few additional comments as they pertain to tallying the occurrences:

- The analysis does *not* score plants, artifacts, or natural objects on their own, but only if or when they appear in a hybrid combination.
- Winged sun disks are scored as hybrids, as examples of natural object + animal properties.

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[129] Moreover, "animal" is used as a short-hand for non-human animal, as a way to distinguish this category from persons.

- Animals with human apparel or instruments (e.g. falcon with crown or scepter) are scored as animals, despite the fact that such animals often symbolize/represent kings or deities, and therefore could reasonably be considered hybrids, and therefore counterintuitive in a sense.
- Isolated bodily parts and appendages (e.g. *Wedjat* eye, feathers, arms, etc.) are *not* scored.

4.5.1. Avigad and Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals

Let us first consider Avigad and Sass's revised *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*. This corpus includes 1217 Hebrew, Phoenician, Aramaic, Ammonite, Moabite, Edomite, and Philistine seals, bullae, and impressions. The objects date from the 9th-6th centuries BCE.

TABLE 1. Based on Nahman Avigad and Benjamin Sass. *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals*. **Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1997.**

Object Type	Hybrid	Animal	Person	Total #
Hebrew Seals	47	44	18	399
Hebrew Bullae and Other Sealings	2	4	4	262
Hebrew Jar Handle Impression	2	0	0	50
Phoenician Seals	20	9	9	38
Aramaic Seals	40	31	35	107
Ammonite Seals	30	49	17	149
Moabite Seals	12	1	12	42
Edomite Seals	4	2	2	10
Moabite or Edomite Seals	0	1	1	7
Possible Philistine Seals	1	0	1	5
Hebrew-Aramaic Seals	0	0	0	6
Hebrew-Ammonite Seals	0	0	0	1
Hebrew or Moabite (or Edomite) Seals	1	0	3	4
Phoenician or Aramaic (or Ammonite) Seals	9	9	12	21
Aramaic or Ammonite Seals	7	8	7	18
Undefined Seals	41	25	23	70
Seals with Pseudo-Script: A Selection	2	3	0	5
Questionable and Forged Seals	4	1	4	21
West Semitic	1	2	1	2

Attribution Doubtful				
TOTAL #	**223**	**189**	**149**	**1217**
TOTAL %	**18.32**	**15.53**	**12.24**	**(100)**

Based on these numbers, the first observation to note is that hybrid creatures appear on more seals than either animals or persons, accounting for 223 of the total 1217 objects (= 18.32%). They are followed by animals (189/1217 = 15.53%) and persons (149/1217 = 12.24%). Second, of the 561 combined seal occurrences of hybrids, animals, and/or humans, hybrids make up almost 40% of the total (223/561 = 39.75%). Next, with regard to the Hebrew seals: while the relative hybrid-animal-person ratio is comparable to that of the other seal types, the percentage of each category (hybrid, animal, and person) is by far the lowest. For example, of the 399 total Hebrew seals, hybrids make up only 11.78%, animals 11.03%, and persons 4.51%. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that since many objects display more than one figure (hybrid, animal, person), the majority of the corpus comprises seals or other objects that have *none* of the above three specimens. The most common alternatives among these non-iconic/non-representational objects include epigraphic writing, geometric designs, and plants or tree, the latter frequently in the form of lotus flower line dividers.

4.5.2. Keel, Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel

The collection in Keel's *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel* is far more extensive, covering four volumes to date and comprising 5,811 total items.[130] Although the project's chronological span is massive—stretching from the Chalcolithic to the Persian period— the objects are circumscribed to the immediate regions of Israel-Palestine and therefore reflect the iconographic trends therein. The seals catalogued in these volumes are mostly beetle

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[130] See the reviews of the *Einleitung* and *Band IV* by, respectively, Mark W. Chavalas and Brent A. Strawn: (http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/2677_1883.pdf) and (http://www.bookreviews.org/pdf/9243_10197.pdf).

scaraboid in form, but also include ape, caprid, duck, frog, hedgehog, calf, feline, lion, ox, ram, and human scaraboids. A few notes regarding the scoring of figures:

- Hybrids, animals, or persons that appear as hieroglyphic symbols used in personal or throne names, titles, or phrases, are *not* scored.[131] For example, the most common hieroglyphs that are not counted include:
  - bee (*bjt*) sign, usually used in royal titles for "King of Lower Egypt" and the phrase *nśwt bjtj*, "King of Upper and Lower Egypt"
  - *maat* (*m3ˁt*) sign for the god of order and justice, used in the throne names of, among others, Hatshepsut, Amenhopis III, Sethos I, Ramses II-XI
  - scarab beetle (*ḫpr*), used in throne names of Sesostris I, II, Thutmosis I, II, III, IV, and many others.[132]
- Hybrids, animals, or persons that appear as part of the artistic use of hierolgyphs are scored (unlike the previous bullet).
- Figures or plants that appear to be attached/connected to/part of other animals or objects are *not* scored. For example, this is the case on numerous seals that show uraei appended to trees or potentially as limbs (both arms and feet) of anthropomorphic figures. These images could plausibly be interpreted as hybrid figures. However, since the intention of the artisan is not sufficiently clear (e.g., the figures in question could be holding the uraei), such images are *not* scored as hybrids.

To manage this huge number of objects, the present analysis in Table 2 includes only sites yielding a minimum sample size of twenty objects.

TABLE 2. Based on Othmar Keel. *Corpus der Stempelsiegel-Amulette aus Palästina/Israel: Von den Anfängen bis zur Perserzeit.* **4 volumes. Orbus Biblicus et Orientalis Series Archaeologica 13, 29, 31, 33. Fribourg: Academic Press; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997-2013.**

Site	Hybrid	Animal	Person	Total Objects
(Tell) Abu Hawan	5	12	7	20
Achsib	35	59	29	162
Afek	3	10	11	53
(Tell el-) ʿAğul	68	288	143	1244
Akko	39	114	79	297
Arad	1	5	3	37
Ashdod	9	20	15	67
Ashkelon	15	44	21	120
Aseka	2	6	2	32
Asor	1	10	4	23
ʿAtlit	7	17	16	49

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[131] Note that Keel himself groups "Names and Titles" under its own motif class. I simply follow this classification in counting figures.

[132] Also "owl" (*m*), used in throne names of Amenemhet I, II, III, IV.

Bet-El	2	7	3	23
Bet-Mirsim	8	28	10	105
Bet-Shean	25	101	33	255
Bet-Shemesh	18	89	31	228
(Wadi ed-) Daliyeh	21	13	42	70
Dan	6	15	9	41
Der el-Balah	30	34	29	140
Dor	12	18	15	61
Dotan	8	10	9	41
Ekron	16	22	13	74
En-Samiyeh	1	14	5	34
(Tell el-) Far'a North	2	22	7	53
(Tell el-) Far'a South	168	262	114	954
(Tel) Gamma	22	68	29	213
Gath	9	16	9	60
(Tel) Gerisa	8	16	4	54
Gezer	61	185	82	692
Gibeon	2	13	9	58
Ha-Gosherim	0	3	1	38
(Tel) Halif	5	7	3	24
(Tel) Harasim	5	13	4	40
Hazor	13	25	14	118
(Tell el-) Hesi	2	3	3	24
TOTAL #	629	1569	808	5504
TOTAL %	11.43	28.51	14.68	(100)

As with the collection of images in Avigad and Sass's *Corpus*, many of the objects in Keel's *Corpus* feature no hybrids, animals, or persons.[133] Immediately, one notes a lower percentage of hybrids in this corpus of images (11.43%). While not as high as the count in Avigad and Sass's *Corpus*, this figure still represents a statistically significant minority deserving of consideration and explanation. Moreover, animals appear on 1569/5504 seals (= 28.51%), while persons score 808/5504 (= 14.68%). This means that hybrids account for only 629 of the 3006 total occurrences of hybrids, animals, and/or persons, a percentage 20.93%.

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[133] The *Einleitung* volume is organized into eleven different "Motivklasse," nine of which are non-iconic or non-representational. The classes include: (1) Linear Patterns and Plant Motifs, (2) Spirals, (3) Egyptian Signs and Symbols, (4) Circles Concentric Circles, (5) Cruciform and Rosette patterns, (6) Knot and Loop Patterns, (7) Spiral Borders, (8) Rope Borders, (9) Animals and Mischwesen, (10) Humans and Deities, (11) Names and Titles. It is noteworthy, however, that Keel regards classes 9 and 10 (animals, Mischwesen, humans, deities) as the most important ("wichtigsten") for understanding the religious history of Israel-Palestine.

These lower figures may be explained in several ways. First, the low number of hybrids relative to animal and person figures is due, in large part, to the dominance of Egyptian influence and of hieroglyphs in particular. While animals and humans that appear in titles and names are not scored, animal and human hieroglyphs in other contexts (e.g. as artistic symbols or designs) are still highly prevalent. Second, and related to Egyptian themes, even when hybrids do appear, they are often accompanied by animals, notably uraei, falcons, and lions. Similarly, animals also often flank cartouches and written text. It is worth noting, however, that hybrids are still common as the main iconographic element, often appearing by themselves. Third, one might also cite a distinction between raw statistical frequency and the overall importance of a given motif. That is, hybrid animals might have played a more important role in the ancient imagination than the quantity distribution suggests. In fact, this even seems true of the modern imagination. For example, by my count, of the eclectic 383 images discussed in Keel and Uehlinger's *GGG* (most of which appear in Keel's *Corpus*), a total of 96 depict at least one hybrid creature, yielding a percentage of 25.07%. When compared with the 11.43% yielded by Keel's *Corpus*, the significantly higher percentage of hybrids found in *GGG* seems to suggest that hybrid creatures are also "good to think" for contemporary scholars writing histories of ancient Israelite religion. Yet, in the end, the statistics registered here offer a reminder that hybrid figures account for only a small, albeit important, part of the total seal record in Israel-Palestine during the Bronze and Iron ages.

CHAPTER 5:
ON ARTIFACTS AND AGENCY: THE MESOPOTAMIAN *MĪS PÎ* RITUAL,
BIBLICAL IDOL POLEMICS, AND BELIEF IN CULT STATUES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The regular veneration of cult statues or icons was commonplace in the religious world of ancient Egypt, Hatti, Mesopotamia, and at times perhaps even ancient Israel.[1] In this ancient context, temples served as the residences of deities, and deities inhabited temples in the form of material anthropomorphic statues that were at the heart of the religious cult.[2] In order for the statue to function as an effective cultic entity, religious specialists were entrusted with the task of animating or enlivening the material statue so that the deity would be present in and united with it. In other words, the inanimate material object needed to be transformed into an animate divine entity. This process of transformation involved a complex sequence of ritual actions and that are attested most extensively in the records of ancient Mesopotamia, where there existed two closely

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[1] See the collection of essays on cult statues in ancient Egypt, Hatti, and Mesopotamia, as well as modern India, in *Cult Images and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Neal H. Walls; Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005); Michael B. Dick, ed., *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999). See also W. W. Hallo, "Cult Statue and Divine Image: A Preliminary Study," in *Scripture in Context II: More Essays on the Comparative Method* (ed. W. W. Hallo, James C. Moyer, and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 1-17. On the possibility of an anthropomorphic cult statue of Yahweh in the Jerusalem temple, see Herbert Niehr, "In Search of YHWH's Cult Statue in the First Temple," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; CBET 21. Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 73-95; Christoph Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary in Iron Age Palestine and the Search for Yahweh's Cult Images," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; CBET 21. Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 97-155.

[2] Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013). In Mesopotamia, there was a tendency during the second half of the first millennium BCE for divine symbols to replace anthropomorphic representations of gods and goddesses on minor art—what Tally Ornan refers to as the "triumph of the symbol." The temple cult, however, appears to have been more conservative in its continued use of traditional anthropomorphic cult statues. See Tally Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban* (OBO 213; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005). A similar development toward divine symbols and aniconic representations in minor art and personal seals occurred in ancient Israel, on which see Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (trans. T. H. Trapp. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); Benjamin Sass, "The Pre-Exilic Hebrew Seals: Iconism vs. Aniconism," in *Studies in the Iconography of Northwest Semitic Inscribed Seals* (ed. Benjamin Sass and Christoph Uehlinger; OBO 125; Fribourg: Academic Press, 1993), 194-256. In contrast to minor art, cult statuary in Israel flourished throughout the Iron Age, on which see Uehlinger, "Anthropomorphic Cult Statuary."

related ritual ceremonies that caused the deity to become embodied in the image: the *pīt pî* ("mouth-opening") and the *mīs pî* ("mouth-washing") rituals.[3] The Mesopotamian *mīs pî* ritual was performed by priestly specialists over the course of two intensive days and involved a series of rites and incantations carried out at a variety of specified locations. It seems likely that several biblical authors became acquainted with the *mīs pî* ritual during the exile of Judean populations to Babylon during the first part of the sixth century B.C.E., and therefore the *mīs pî* texts, ritual, and biblical anti-idol polemics will be the focus of this chapter.[4]

At the heart of the Mesopotamian religion, then, was the cult statue and the notion that this material statue was in some sense the embodiment of a divine entity. This idea was, of course, mocked and ridiculed by the biblical authors, who asked incredulously how their ancient neighbors could believe that a deity could be "made" by human craftsmen. Yet, the biblical authors were not the only ones who recognized the fantastic nature of this idea. Native Mesopotamians themselves grappled with the mystery of how a statue could be or become the deity. Based on the available textual evidence, it appears that such a concept of divine embodiment was at once both deeply mysterious but also deeply familiar. One finds in the ancient ritual corpus, for instance, explicit statements that at times equate the statue with the

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[3] For translation and discussion see Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mīs Pî Ritual. Transliteration, Translation, and Commentary* (SAALT 1; Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001); and idem, "The Induction of the Cult Statue in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian *mīs pî* Ritual," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Michael Dick; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 55-121. See also Angelika Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik* (Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998); eadem, "Washing the Mouth," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; CBET 21; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 45-72; Ivan Hrůša, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: A Descriptive Introduction* (trans. M. Tait; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2015), 67-73.

[4] On Judean exposure to Mesopotamian cult statues during the exilic period, see Casey A. Strine, "Ezekiel's Image Problem: The Mesopotamian Cult Statue Induction Ritual and the *Imago Dei* Anthropology in the Book of Ezekiel," *CBQ* 76 (2014): 252-72. On the parallels between the Yahwist creation account and Mesopotamian washing of the mouth ritual, see Catherine L. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden: The Creation of Humankind in Genesis 2:5-3:24 in Light of mīs pî, pīt pî, and wpt-r Rituals of Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt* (Siphrut 15; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015);

deity itself, but at other times maintain the distinction between the two. For example, as the living embodiment of the deity, offerings were made not to the statue of Marduk, but to the deity himself; texts refer to the statue simply as "Marduk." Similarly, when the Assyrian king Sennacherib kidnapped (or "godknapped") the Marduk statue from Babylon in 689 B.C.E., ancient authors described this as the *god* Marduk's exile to Assyria.[5] These examples suggest that the deity and statue were thought to be coterminous to some extent. At the same time, however, it is also clear that deities such as Marduk and Ishtar had several temples dedicated to them, each with its own cult statue, and, moreover, that deities were present in the form of heavenly bodies. These examples indicate that the deity and statue were distinct entities, the former being somehow "more than" the latter.[6]

This apparent paradox—what Thorkild Jacobsen described as the "to be or not to be" problem—has continued to occupy scholars to this day.[7] To resolve the issue of how, for ancient Mesopotamians, the cult statue could both be and not be the deity, scholars have claimed that despite the logical inconsistency, this did not pose an issue for ancient Near Eastern people. Michael Dick writes, for example, that the "difficulty of reconciling heavenly and earthly presence lies with the modern mind, which directed by the fear of logical contradictions has problems reconciling these elements."[8] Similarly, Gebhard Selz remarks, "That the statue itself is man-made, a piece of decorated wood (or stone), *and* the god…all of this seems problematic,

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[5] For translation and commentary of the so-called "Marduk Ordeal Text," see Alasdair Livingstone, *Court Poetry and Literary Miscellanea* (SAA 3; Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1989), 82-91.

[6] See Benajmin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 12-24.

[7] See Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross* (ed. Patrick D. Miller, Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987), 15-32.

[8] Michael B. Dick, "The Mesopotamian Cult Statue," in *Cult Images and Divine Representation in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Neal H. Walls; Boston, MA: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2005), 43-67 (56).

even contradictory to us, but evidently was not to the mind of ancient man."[9] From a cognitive perspective, however, the claim that ancient minds operated according to a *sui generis* kind of logic when it comes to basic ideas about being and ontology must be regarded with serious skepticism. Indeed, Dick's claim about the gap between ancient and modern minds is all the more puzzling given that he spends a good deal of time arguing for an analogy between Mesopotamian belief in cult statues and Roman Catholic theology of "real presence" (transubstantiation) in the Eucharist, which is a concept that enjoys widespread adherence among *modern* minds today. Indeed, if we return to our central distinction between implicit and explicit beliefs, it would be more accurate to suggest that slow, reflective thinking may identify logical contradictions, but crucially there is no reason to think that this did *not* also occur with ancient thinkers as well. Finally, Jacobsen reflects the same sentiment when he writes,

> The contradiction of *is* and *is not* in the matter of the cult statue is so flagrant and cuts so deep that there must seem to be little hope of resolving it unless one goes to the most basic levels of understanding and attempts to gain clarity about the very fundamentals of ancient thought, about what exactly "being" and "nonbeing" meant to the ancients.[10]

Although Jacobsen makes the same mistaken assumption about "ancient thought," his framing of the issue in terms of "basic levels of understanding" and (cognitive) "fundamentals" is on the right track (accepting of course, that such fundamentals are common to ancient and modern thought alike).

In other words, we can build on Jacobsen's important insight by clarifying the relationship between statue and deity from a cognitive perspective. Specifically, this chapter will

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[9] Gebhard J. Selz, "The Holy Drum, the Spear, and the Harp: Towards an Understanding of the Problems of Deification in Third Millennium Mesopotamia," in *Sumerian Gods and Their Representations* (ed. I. L. Finkel and M. J. Geller; Groningen: Styx, 1997), 167-209 (183).

[10] Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," 18.

seek to identify the distinct cognitive systems that play a role in the mental representation of divine cult statues. In doing so, we will explore the fundamental ontological categories involved in the concept of divinized statues, as well as the cultural tools that were used in ancient Mesopotamia to support this widespread religious idea. As we shall see, the representation of Mesopotamian cult statues relies on specialized cognitive systems, each of which attends to distinct environmental inputs and operates according to distinct conceptual principles. Therefore, rather than speaking about "ancient thought" or a monolithic "belief" among ancient Mesopotamians, we can break down the very idea of divine cult statues into its constituent cognitive processes and understand it as the result of the *confluence* of different mental systems. In short, the thesis of the present chapter is as follows: ancient Mesopotamians did not represent anthropomorphic cult statues as either divine agents or as inanimate artifacts alone; rather, they represented them as *both*, insofar as distinct mental systems simultaneously processed the material cult statue in different ways, which in turn produced distinct inferences and expectations about both the agency and inanimacy of the statue. In this manner, a cognitive approach opens up the possibility of a nuanced understanding of the very nature of "belief" in cult statues. As we shall see, it will also put us in a better position to understand the confident rejection of this belief by the biblical authors. Contrary to much scholarly thought on this topic, this chapter endeavors to show that the concept of divine cult statues was not as obvious and straightforward to native Mesopotamians as it is sometimes imagined.

5.2. CULT STATUES AND INTUITIVE ONTOLOGY

The religious concept of divine cult statues can be understood according to the same ontological categories discussed at length previously in chapter four. In that chapter, they were used to make

sense of the iconography of hybrid creatures in ancient Syro-Palestinian and Near Eastern art. In the same way, we can attempt to identify the cognitive processes and conceptual ingredients that are recruited to build the representation of divine statues. Since the literature on ontological domains and minimally counterintuitive (MCI) religious concepts has already been presented in some detail, it is necessary to offer only a brief review of the main points.

Recall that the human mind tends to process objects in the world based on distinct ontological categories or domains, which appear early in childhood development and persist cross-culturally into adulthood.[11] These domains include persons, animals, plants, artifacts, and natural objects, and for each of these domains, people develop a specialized set of expectations about entities belonging to each group. In general, this intuitive knowledge is stable in people the world over. Persons and animals, for example, are animate beings and accordingly, people expect them to be self-propelled and, especially in the case of human and human-like agents, act intentionally. Stones, trees, and mountains, on the other hand, are not expected to display these properties, but when they do in legends, mythology, and folklore, these concepts involve salient violations of our intuitive knowledge. We have seen previously that religious concepts that introduce limited violations to the intuitive expectations associated with these domains are minimally counterintuitive (MCI), and therefore juicy food for thought.[12] Such concepts may violate either our intuitive sense of physics, biology, or psychology—consider, for instance, an

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[11] See Elizabeth S. Spelke and Katherine D. Kinzler, "Core Knowledge," *Developmental Science* 10 (2007): 89-96; and the essays in Lawrence A. Hirschfeld and Susan A. Gelman, eds., *Mapping the Mind: Domain Specificity in Cognition and Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39-67.

[12] See Pascal Boyer and Charles Ramble, "Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Cross-Cultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-Intuitive Representations," *Cognitive Science* 25 (2001): 535-564; Justin L. Barrett and Melanie A. Nyhof, "Spreading Non-natural Concepts: The Role of Intuitive Conceptual Structures in Memory and Transmission of Cultural Materials," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1 (2001): 69-100; See Konika Banerjee, Omar S. Haque, and Elizabeth S. Spelke, "Melting Lizards and Crying Mailboxes: Children's Preferential Recall of Minimally Counterintuitive Concepts," *Cognitive Science* 37 (2013): 1251-89. For a detailed discussion of these categories, see Justin L. Barrett, "Coding and Quantifying Counterintuitiveness in Religious Concepts: Theoretical and Methodological Reflections," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 20 (2008): 308-338.

invisible pebble, a pebble with wings, or a frustrated pebble, respectively. The combinations of domains and violations is presented in the following chart:

PERSON + physical violation	ANIMAL + physical violation	PLANT + physical violation	ARTIFACT + physical violation	OBJECT + physical violation
PERSON + biological violation	ANIMAL + biological violation	PLANT + biological violation	ARTIFACT + biological violation	OBJECT + biological violation
PERSON + psychological violation	ANIMAL + psychological violation	PLANT + psychological violation	ARTIFACT + psychological violation	OBJECT + psychological violation

As a result of these conceptual violations, religious ideas are more attention grabbing and therefore stand a greater chance of being discussed, remembered, and transmitted in terms of cultural selection.

In terms of the ontological categories outlined above, cult artifacts in ancient Israel, Egypt, and Mesopotamia—whether stone, wood, or metal—belong to the default category ARTIFACT. That is, artifacts are objects that were intentionally designed and manufactured for some intended purpose.[13] At a very early age, infants are capable of distinguishing natural objects from artifact objects.[14] Some artifacts, such as plows and spoons, serve functional everyday purposes, whereas cultic artifacts such as figurine and altars, were designed for explicitly religious purposes. Just like with each ontological domain, the ARTIFACT category supplies a specialized set of default inferences and expectations about any objects that could

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[13] Paul Bloom, "Intention, History, and Artifact Concepts," *Cognition* 60 (1996): 1-29.

[14] Note, however, that there is also a tendency for young children to ascribe teleological explanations to the natural world. See Deborah Keleman, "Why are Rocks Pointy? Children's Preference for Teleological Explanations of the Natural World," *Developmental Psychology* 33 (1999): 1440-52; eadem, "Are Children 'Intuitive Theists'? Reasoning about Purpose and Design in Nature," *Psychological Science* 15 (2004): 295-301.

possibly fall under this heading.[15] For example, unlike agents and animals, people do not expect artifacts to be self-propelled and move of their own will.[16] Mental systems represent artifacts according to their mechanical interactions, while entirely different systems deal with agency and intentional goal-directed actions. Now, since the artifact system attends to the motion of objects (or lack thereof), it is possible to "fool" these systems into detecting agency, as was the case when in a series of experiments Albert Michotte showed people moving dots on a screen, which were naturally interpreted not as mere solid objects but as animate objects moving intentionally.[17] As we will see below, biblical polemics against idol veneration explicitly emphasize the inanimate nature of cult statues in order to downplay the agentive nature of the concept and instead elicit artifact inferences in their Judean audience.

It is also apparent, of course, that Mesopotamian cult statues were not mentally represented (or literally constructed) as everyday ordinary artifacts. Rather, they were treated as a special kind of object that is held to have unique properties characteristic of a powerful divine agent. Not only were cult statues crafted in anthropomorphic physical form, they are said to possess person-like psychological qualities. Cult statues are objects of devotion, capable of receiving petitions and offerings, and in particular cult statues within the Mesopotamian temple were clothed and fed in a manner befitting a king.[18]

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[15] See Kristin Shutts, Lori Markson, Elizabeth S. Spelke, "The Developmental Origins of Animal and Artifact Concepts," in *The Origins of Object Knowledge* (ed. Bruce M. Hood and Laurie R. Santos; Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2009), 189-210; Elizabeth S. Spelke, "Principles of Object Perception," *Cognitive Science* 14 (1990): 29-56.

[16] Rochel Gelman and Elizabeth S. Spelke, "The Development of Thoughts about Animate and Inanimate Objects: Implications for Research on Social Cognition," in *Social Cognition* (ed. John H. Flavell and Lee Ross; New York: Academic Press, 1981), 43-66; Susan A. Gelman, "The Development of Induction Within Natural Kind and Artifact Categories." *Cognitive Psychology* 20 (1988): 65-95.

[17] Albert Michotte, *The Perception of Causality* (London: Methusen, 1963).

[18] A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (rev. ed. by Erica Reiner; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 188-92. Oppenheim and others have noted that although the food was presented to the deity, humans were not permitted to witness the deity consume the meal, and the actual dish was afterward sent to the king. On some intuitive level, then, ancient Mesopotamians were fully aware that the deity did

In terms of intuitive ontological knowledge, then, the mental representation of divine cult statues recruits two distinct and specialized cognitive systems. First, there is the default artifact category, which operates according to its own unique set of inputs and principles. In the case of cult statues, the artifact system processes the physical appearance of the statue as an object intentionally constructed from stone, wood, or metal, and is further stimulated by any actions, statements, or knowledge about the statue having been designed and made by human craftsmen. Assuming ancient Mesopotamian cult statues did not move of their own accord, either before, during, or after the opening of the mouth ritual, we would also expect the artifact system to process the *lack* of intentional self-propelled movement of the statue as indicative of its status as an inanimate artifact. Overall, then, the physical appearance of the statue would elicit a host of default inferences about the nature of the statue as an artifact. Yet despite these perceptual inputs and inferences, during the *mīs pî* ritual the cult statue was also treated like a person-like divine agent. For starters, although presumably the statue is incapable of speaking or moving on its own, it is depicted in anthropomorphic form.[19] Much like miniature household figurines, cult statues were designed to convey a human image at the visual level. Perhaps more importantly, however, in the course of the ritual one would observe other people *talking about* and *treating* the object much like a person (e.g., clothing, feeding, interacting, conversing, and so on). These latter behaviors represent external stimuli that violate the default template of the artifact

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not literally consume the meal. For a parody of this aspect of Babylonian idolatry, see the apocryphal addition to the book of Daniel, Bel and the Dragon.

[19] In literature and mythology, there are of course countless examples of inanimate objects behaving like human-like agents. In the ancient world, for example, Lucian's *De Dea Syria* describes the worship of Semitic deities and their cult statues, which are said to perform a wide range of fantastic behaviors. These literary descriptions are good examples of minimally counterintuitive concepts represented in literary form as public representations. We may wonder, however, about the extent to which such public textual representations coincided with people's private mental representations of the gods during everyday thought, especially outside of particular religious contexts and ritual interactions.

category. The result of this combination of inputs is a religious concept—artifact with transfer of person properties—that is regarded as (minimally) counterintuitive:

Supernatural Concept	Ontological Domain	Counterintuitive Feature
CULT STATUE =	ARTIFACT	+ special cognitive properties

Therefore what is captured in the tidy little template above is actually quite a bit more complex. Rather than a uniform "belief," there are distinct specialized systems, each of which attends to its own environment cues and produces appropriate inferences and expectations based on these cues. As Boyer writes, religious concepts "*violate* certain expectations from ontological categories," while at the same time they also "*preserve* other expectations."[20] This recipe is what makes many religious concepts unique and memorable. In the case of divine cult statues, this process involves the transfer of agency properties to an otherwise inanimate artifact. Boyer similarly describes the case of Sudanese ebony trees that overhear human conversations and gossip, or, more familiarly Christian prayers directed to a specific regional Madonna. Much as the case with ancient Mesopotamian cult statues, praying before a Madonna icon involves standing and speaking to an artifact. As Boyer writes about the veneration of Christian cult icons:

> You may find this description rather crude, and retort that no one is really talking to a man-made object; people are considering a "symbol" of the Virgin, a "sign" or "representation" of her presence and power. But that is not the case. First, people are really representing the Madonna as an artifact. If I tell them who made it, using what kind of wood and paint, they will find all that information perfectly sensible, as it would be indeed of any other man-made object. Second, it really is the artifact they are addressing. If I proposed to chop the Madonna to pieces because I needed firewood, and suggested

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[20] Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 62.

that I could replace it with a photograph of the statue or with a sign reading "pray to the Virgin here," they would find that shocking.[21]

Therefore, people continue to represent the material object, in part, as an artifact that is stationary and motionless. In the above examples, as with ancient cult statues, it is also important to note that these concepts do not involve combinations of ontological violations; rather, the conceptual violations remain circumscribed. For example, Boyer notes that people often "have a concept of agents that can hear you wherever you are; they also have a concept of artifacts that can hear you. But they do not have the concept of artifacts that can hear you wherever you are."[22] This is why, he explains, when people want to pray to a particular Madonna—say, Our Lady of Lourdes—people actually travel to that site and "in most cases take care to stand *within hearing distance* of the statue when they utter their prayers."[23]

As the foundational default category, the artifact domain continues to evoke powerful inferences related to that domain, despite the cultural practices of speaking about and treating religious images and icons as divine agents. The artifact category is therefore still very much active, cognitively speaking. Indeed, it is only against this ordinary default template that counterintuitive features become extraordinary in the first place. Indeed, as Boyer writes, "Violations are attention-grabbing only against a background of expectations."[24] Although CSR researchers have concentrated on the counterintuitive aspect of religious concepts (this is, after all, what makes them "religious" and distinct from everyday concepts), it is equally important not to neglect the *intuitive* (i.e. *non-counterintuitive*) side of religious ideas. (We may forgive scientists and scholars for focusing on the fantastic side of religion, since they are human and are

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[21] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 86.
[22] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 86.
[23] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 86 (emphasis original).
[24] Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 86.

prone to being captivated by the same types of concepts as religious adherents.[25]) When it comes to Mesopotamian cult statues, in particular, this means that despite the explicit religious teaching and treatment of cult statues as divine agents, when considering or confronted with the statue, ancient minds would have also been busy formulating expectations and making inferences about these objects *as artifacts*. This entails, for example, that the statue is represented as being designed and made by someone, fashioned out of particular materials, and bound in space as a solid object.

The intuitive artifact-ness of cult statues is thus pertinent to assessing the costliness or optimality of this religious concept. At this point, we return again to the fundamental distinction between implicit and explicit types of beliefs. We can now attempt to clarify what might occur at a cognitive level within ancient Mesopotamian minds when considering or confronted with a cult statue, acknowledging of course that the mental representation will depend on the specific contextual factors as well. On the one hand, specialized systems designed for dealing with artifacts process the material statue (a public representation, in Sperber's words) as an *artifact*, and accordingly trigger domain-specific inferences and expectations about that ontological category (the object should not move, speak, etc.). These intuitions about the artifact-ness of the statue would be facilitated by any information pertaining to the human origins of the artifact (hearing about or witnessing its construction). These intuitive expectations would operate constantly in the background, contributing to the non-conscious, implicit representation of the statue as an inanimate artifact. On the other hand, individuals would be exposed to verbal and visual cues, along with explicit behaviors, about the divine agency of the statue. These include, for instance, written texts or spoken utterances about the animacy or psychology of the statue, its

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[25] This tendency was also observed in Chapter 4, where it was pointed out that academic articles and monographs on Israelite iconography tend to gravitate towards the counterintuitive hybrid creatures to a degree that is not commensurate with their quantitative representation in the ancient artistic record.

anthropomorphic physical appearance, and routine actions such as feeding, clothing, and interacting with the statue. The effect of these culturally prescribed behaviors would be to activate an entirely different set of specialized mental systems that deal with persons and agency. The representation of the statue as an agent would be encouraged by explicit statements, made by trusted religious specialists, that this statue *is* Marduk, or that statue *is* Ishtar.

When it comes to the mental representation of divine cult statues, what we have, then, are two distinct, specialized, and in this case competing systems, which problematizes any attempt to speak about a monolithic belief in "divine cult statues" among ancient Mesopotamians. We have a foundational implicit knowledge about the statue as an inanimate object, while on the other hand we have explicit cultural strategies for treating the statue as an agent, accompanied by explicit religious teachings that the statue *is* the deity.[26] This is a tension that cuts to the core of human cognition. Although counterintuitive violations of ordinary ontological knowledge are central to religious concepts, it does not mean that the default knowledge ceases to exist, or that the overcoming of that default knowledge is straightforward or easy.[27] We must take seriously the persistent and powerful intuitions about the artifact nature of the statue, especially in light of the observation that much of human mental life is governed by these non-conscious intuitive

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[26] It is possible that regular cultural conversations about and behaviors towards the statue as an agent shaped and modified people's basic intuitions. The impact of such cultural practices may be minimal, however, since ontological intuitions appear to be stable the world over. On the other hand, there is a greater likelihood for religious specialists, who perform the ritual washing of the mouth ceremony, to achieve a proficiency with the concept of the divine nature of the statue—what McCauley calls a "practiced naturalness." This would be in contrast, one would think, to the greater populace, who would not have any exposure to the ritual, and therefore would not benefit (directly) from the strategies designed to emphasize the divine agency of the statue. These issues are discussed in more detail below.

[27] This picture of competing specialized mental systems is not dissimilar from Boyer's framework for understanding cultural attitudes and behaviors towards corpses. Boyer notes that being confronted with a corpse simultaneously triggers a complex set of inferences from various systems. The animacy system registers the dead body as an inanimate object that does not move, while the "person-file" system, responsible for tracking members of one's social circle, continues to process the deceased individual as the person they were in life. In the case of (some) corpses we have, therefore, conflicting intuitions produced by (at least) two distinct systems—both of which normally deal with persons. According to Boyer, this explains the tendency for people to treat deceased individuals as persons (speaking with them, etc.) while also acting with a sense of urgency that something must be done with the inanimate (polluting) body. See Boyer, *Religion Explained*, 207-28.

processes that occur in the "mental basement" of thought. Although scholars have considered the belief in cult statues cognitively "optimal" in some sense, a deeper look may reveal that there are costly aspects as well. Because the notion of divine cult statues is not fully intuitive (as we have seen, it is minimally *counterintuitive*), it comes with a slight cost in terms of mental processing, and even minimally counterintuitive beliefs may require cultural "scaffolding" to support them.[28] Indeed, it will be argued below that the very complexity and pageantry of the Mesopotamian *mīs pî* ritual functions, in part, to tip the balance in favor of accentuating the agency of the statue, as opposed to its inanimacy, thereby encouraging the ritual participants to assent to the explicit belief that statue is the god. As we saw in the previous chapter, public representations are not necessarily the same as mental representations, and similarly explicit religious statements (the statue *is* the deity) are not the same as implicit representations (of the statue as an artifact). As we will see below in our analysis of the Mesopotamian *mīs pî* ritual, we can glimpse in this text the manifestation of both systems operating at different times: the statue is described in some parts of the ritual as an artifact distinct from the deity, elsewhere as coterminous with the deity. This model of implicit knowledge versus explicit statements helps to account for the fact that the ancient textual evidence preserves *both* the explicit belief in the statue as literally the deity and *also* a host of inferences about the statue as an artifact.[29]

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[28] As cognitive anthropologists have observed, it is largely the explicit counterintuitive violations that are socially, and I would add textually, transmitted. Implicit, intuitive background expectations, by contrast, are ever-present while not being explicitly transmitted because they tend to operate outside of conscious awareness.

[29] Thus, contrary to the sentiments of the biblical authors, the belief in divine cult statues among Mesopotamians is not a cognitive deficiency, but a *feature* of the way our minds collect and process information.

5.3. ENLIVENING DIVINE AGENTS: THE *MĪS PÎ* RITUAL

Cult statues in ancient Mesopotamia were fashioned from precious materials.[30] The core of the statue or divine image (Akkadian, *ṣalmu*) was carved from bitumen or cedar, cypress, or tamarisk wood, which was then overlaid with a metal covering, usually gold, silver, copper, or electrum. Finally, the eyes, eyebrows, beard, and hair were decorated with a variety of precious stones such as lapis lazuli and obsidian. In the Erra Epic, the *mēsu*-wood that was used to construct the statue's core is referred to as the "flesh of the gods," an example of appropriating agency language in the description of the artifact.[31]Once a cult statue had been designed and constructed by the ancient craftsmen entrusted with this task, it was necessary to enliven, animate, and install the statue as a functioning ritual entity within the temple. In order to do this, various mouth washing rituals served to purify the image from human contamintation. Two related ritual ceremonies accomplished this religious transformation: the *pīt pî* ("mouth-opening") and the *mīs pî* ("mouth-washing") rituals. These rituals are attested in several Akkadian and Sumerian texts, most of which come from the Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian libraries and date to the middle of the first millennium B.C.E.[32] The most detailed account we have is for the *mīs pî*, "washing of the mouth," a ceremonial process that involved a complex series of acts, events, and incantations that spanned over two full days.[33] The ritual ceremony

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[30] See Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "What Goes in Is What Comes Out: Materials for Creating Cult Statues," in *Text, Artifact, Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Gary M. Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis; Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), 3-23.

[31] Benjamin Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature* (3d. ed.; Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 1993), 888. It is unclear why this type of wood, the identity of which remains in question, was used and (perhaps) preferred in the construction of cult statues.

[32] There are references to these ceremonies as far back as the Sumerian era at the end of the third millennium B.C.E.

[33] There survive two main textual versions of the *mīs pî* ritual—one from Nineveh and the other from Babylon—upon which modern reconstructions are based. The text can be found in Walker and Dick, *Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, and idem, "Induction of the Cult Statue in Ancient Mesopotamia." Further descriptions of the ritual with commentary are offered in Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth," 45-72; Hrůša, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 67-73; Tammi J. Schneider, *An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 111-13.

explicitly proclaims the heavenly origin of the cult statue and declares that the gods themselves participated in, and were responsible for, the construction of (or "birth") of the statue. Here we will briefly walk through the ritual sequence of actions, noting its main features and focusing attention on the verbal and visual cues that would activate the agent and artifact systems.

The ritual process was a secretive affair carried out by a small group of priestly specialists, led by the *āšipu*-priest. Over the course of two days, the cult statue—the new god— was transported from location to location, with different rites and incantations being performed at each new site. The different locations were part of a single, large enclosed territory, which was accessible to temple personnel only.[34] Based on Angelika Berlejung's reconstruction of the textual editions, the phases of the ritual can be summarized as follows:

1. Preparations in the city, countryside, and temple
2. At the workshop
3. Procession from the workshop to the river
4. At the River bank
5. Procession from the river bank into the orchard
6. In the orchard within the circle of reed-huts and reed-tents
7. Procession from the orchard to the gate of the temple
8. At the gate of the temple
9. Procession from the gate to the Holy of Holies
10. Holy of Holies (i.e., abode)
11. To the quay of the *Apsû*

The first day of the ritual began in the temple workshop, or *bīt mummi*, where vessels of water are prepared for the washing of the mouth purification rites to follow. Offerings were made to the craftsmen deities Ea and Asalluḫi (often identified with the Babylonian god Marduk), as well as to the new deity, and the following incantation is repeated three times: "In heaven it is born of

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[34] Berlejung, "Washing of the Mouth," 50.

itself, on earth it is born of itself; in heaven it is complete, on earth it is complete."[35] This incantation introduces the theme of the "birth" of the new deity.[36] Already at this stage, the cult statue was referred to simply as the god (*ilu*).

The priestly officiant then processed the statue from the workshop to the riverbank, uttering incantations along the way. This marked the beginning of the statue's departure away from the temple workshop and thus the human artisans who crafted it. This stage in the ritual can be regarded as a "rite of separation."[37] At the riverbank, a reed-hut was constructed for the statue and additional offerings were made to Ea, Asalluḫi, and the new god. Next, in a symbolic gesture, the tools used for fashioning the statue (axe, saw, chisel) were cast into the river along with offerings to the subterranean craftsmen deity Ea (lines 8-9). This marks a further transition of the divine image from the craftsmen who created it to the river god. Thus, in another rite of separation, "the sinking of the carpenter's tools implied that the god of the artisans reclaimed the instruments he had used as the medium for his work…The image was thus isolated from the tools and thereby divested if its human past."[38]

The statue was then moved to the garden beside the river and placed on a mat and linen cloth. Washing purification rites are performed along with offerings to various celestial deities. This series of actions concludes day one, with the deity spending the night in the garden in his reed-hut. Walker and Dick describe the subsequent part of the ritual as a liminal stage in which the deity undergoes its "divine gestation": "The womb-like tamarisk trough is filled with the water's fructifying 'semen' and other items used to make the statue and now used for its divine

[35] Text and translations follow Walker and Dick, *Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*.
[36] Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "The Mesopotamian God Image, From Womb to Tomb," *JAOS* 123 (2003): 147-57.
[37] Berlejung, "Washing of the Mouth," 54.
[38] Berlejung, "Washing of the Mouth," 55.

birth."[39] The language of the birth of the image continues to accentuate the agency and animacy of the cult statue.

The second day begins in the reed-hut with new offerings of dates, fruit, and honey. The divine origins of the statue are again stressed in the incantation, "Born in heaven by his own power!" which is recited several times and followed by the sacrifice of a ram (lines 42-45). New incantations are uttered to spark the higher deities to permit the new god to fulfill its destiny as the divine cult statue: "For this statue which stands before you, magnificently grant him the destiny that his mouth may eat, that his ears may hear! May the god become pure like heaven, clean like the earth!" Offerings are then made again to the divine artisans, accompanied by a long incantation beginning with, "When the god was fashioned, the pure statue completed." The creation of the statue is now attributed to the gods Ninkurra, Ninagal, Kusibanda, Ninildu, and Ninzadim (Incantation Table 3).[40] Yet despite establishing the divine origins of the statue, even its designation as a god, it is still described in inanimate terms: "This statue cannot smell incense, cannot eat food, nor drink water without the 'Opening of the Mouth' ceremony."[41] At this stage in the ritual process, artifact attributes of the statue are emphasized, which are of course in need of enlivening to transition the inanimate statue into a living deity. After further washing of the mouth rites are performed, the high deities are invoked to open the mouth of the statue. Next, the human craftsmen who made the statue were brought forward and their hands were symbolically cut off:

> The axe that touched him, the chisel that touched hum, the saw that touched him, and the craftsmen who touched him, ...

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[39] Walker and Dick, "Induction," 76.
[40] Walker and Dick, "Induction," 151.
[41] Walker and Dick, "Induction," 151.

With a scarf bind their hands; with a tamarisk knife cut off the fists of the stoneworkers (*gurgurru*) who touched him. (lines 83-86)

These human craftsmen were then made to recite, "It is not I who made it, the god Ninagal made it, the Ea of the craftsmen!" Thus the major transformation occurred in the sacred garden. What follows is a procession towards the temple in order to inaugurate the deity's triumphal entry into its new residence. The new god is moved from outside progressively deeper into the temple precincts until it arrives in the cella, or holy of holies, the innermost part of the temple where it will reside permanently. Once inside, final incantations are pronounced along with a final washing of the mouth rite, the fourteenth total in the overall ceremony.

It is clear from this brief outline of the *mīs pî* ritual that there are numerous points in the process where the divine agency of the cult statue is emphasized. From the very opening lines describing the ritual actions in the temple workshop, the priest is told to refer to the statue as a deity: "When you wash the mouth of the god" (*enūma pî ili temessû*). Thereafter the heavenly origins and intentional agency of the deity are introduced with the address, "Born in heaven by your own power." This incantation is repeated multiple times throughout the remainder of the ritual. It also introduces the theme of the god's "birth," later reiterated in the filling of the trough beside the river, as well as in references to Ea as the god's "father" (*abika*, "your father"). Although there is no description of the statue's physical appearance, we know from other sources that such statues were anthropomorphic in form, with eyes, ears, and beard, while the mouth is referred to explicitly throughout.

On the other hand, all of these "counterintuitive" features are transferred onto the background of default inferences and expectations about artifacts, which can be observed in the text as well. For starters, the ritual procession originates in the workshop of the human craftsmen

and it is of course necessary for the statue to be transported from the workshop to the series of subsequent sites at which the ritual acts are carried out. At the riverbank, the very tools used to craft the statue are presented and then cast into the river; despite their disposal, their initial presence and use demonstrates the statue's human origins. Most noticeably, the statue's lack of agency is explicitly declared when it is stated that the statue cannot smell incense, eat food, or drink water. Finally, despite its effort to eliminate any vestige of its creation by human hands, the scene in which the hands of the workmen are symbolically severed nevertheless and ironically identifies these human actors and their role in the process. Therefore, in addition to the ritual's overt effort to attribute person-like agency to the cult statue, there remain numerous junctures in the text and ritual where the recognition of the statue as an *artifact* is apparent.

5.4. IMPLICIT VS. EXPLICIT CONCEPTS AND THE NATURE OF "BELIEF"

When considering ancient religious beliefs, it is crucial to differentiate between intuitive or implicit knowledge on the one hand—governed by a host of mental systems that operate automatically and non-consciously—and explicit religious ideas and statements that most historians simply refer to as "beliefs," on the other.[42] While these reflective, explicit beliefs are connected to intuitive knowledge, they are also often *post facto* elaborations that defy that intuitive knowledge in some way, as in the case of counterintuitive supernatural concepts.[43] When it comes to ancient Mesopotamian explicit belief in divine images, it will be argued below

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[42] As Boyer (*Religion Explained*, 306) writes: "So what does it mean to say that someone "has" a belief? Superficially, it means that they can assent to a particular interpretation of how their minds work. But...we realize that each of these simple beliefs is the outcome of several processes in the mental basement that they are not really aware of."

[43] Nicolas Baumard and Pascal Boyer, "Religious Beliefs as Reflective Elaborations on Intuitions: A Modified Dual-Process Model," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22 (2013): 295-300.

that a great deal of effort is necessary to override the primary default implicit tendency to mentally process cult statue as an artifact.

Now, we have seen that the *mīs pî* text references both the heavenly and earthly origins of the cult statue, the result of both divine and human craftsmen. As Walker and Dick write, "The creation of the god was a supreme act of synergy between the heavens and the earth…for the statue has been produced by earthly and godly artisans."[44] The ritual acknowledges the role of human artisans when it states, "In heaven he was built, on earth he was built" (*ina šamê ibbanu ina erṣeti ibbanu*) and "The statue is the work of god and human" ([*ṣa*]*lam* [*bun*]*nanê ša ilī u amēli*).[45] Berlejung describes the aim of the *mīs pî* ritual as follows:

> In general, the function of the *mouth-washing* was to establish perfect purity and to enable contact between the earthly and the divine worlds. Having followed this procedure, the thus purified image became 'charged' with positive powers. The prime purpose of the *mouth-opening* rites, therefore, was to activate these powers."[46]

In interpreting the *mīs pî* ritual, Berlejung goes on to write, "The ritual itself was based on belief in the supernatural origin of the divine statue or symbol created by 'inspirational co-operation' (*inspirative Zusammenarbeit*) between the gods and mortals."[47] This is the same basic idea behind Walker and Dick's notion of "synergy" between the divine and human realms. While these are reasonable *emic* interpretations of what allegedly occurs during the ritual, according to the explicit textual statements of the priestly writers, they do not capture the cognitive dynamics at play. As we have seen, a cognitive view problematizes the notion of ancient "belief" in the supernatural origins of the cult statue. An understanding of the specialized mental systems that

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[44] Walker and Dick, "Induction," 114.
[45] Walker and Dick, "Induction," 98.
[46] Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth," 45.
[47] Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth," 45.

are operative in the representation of Mesopotamian cult statues, in particular, urges us to develop a more nuanced idea of "belief." There is not a single area in the mind-brain where the "belief" in a divine statue is stored. Rather, there are distinct systems that operate largely independently—attending to certain cues and processing their own information, creating mini-theories about objects encountered in the world. According to this framework, the "belief" in the divine statue does not necessarily exist in the brain as an implicit concept at an intuitive level, but is expressed only as an explicit belief as the result of more reflective consideration, such as "this statue is the deity Marduk."

In light of this picture, it may be necessary to exercise a bit more caution when speaking too confidently about what ancient Mesopotamians *believed* about cult statues. In terms of the nature of the evidence we have at our disposal, we have explicit textual statements that likely differ from ancient implicit understandings of the divine images and inferences people would have spontaneously made about them. If so, then there is reason to be skeptical of Berlejung's confident remark that "nobody ever doubted the supernatural way of birth of such an image."[48] From a cognitive point of view, ancient Mesopotamian minds would have relied on intuitive ontological knowledge and in this regard the artifact system would not have delivered inferences in support of the "supernatural birth" of the statue, but instead would have processed the statue as an artifact. As we have seen, human cognition comprises numerous independent specialized systems and, according to Boyer, each is its own attorney and judge, making decisions on its own about available information that pertains to its domain.[49] This cognitive activity operates outside of conscious awareness. This means that a crucial part of ancient cognition would have

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[48] Berlejung, "Washing the Mouth," 46.
[49] Boyer, "Why Belief," in *Religion Explained*, 297-330.

continued to implicitly and automatically interpret cult statues as artifacts, based on this ontological category and the expectations associated with it.

Overall, then, when viewed at the level of cognition and intuitive ontological categories, the representation of cult statues is more complicated than simply stating that "Mesopotamians believed X" or "Mesopotamians never doubted Y." So, for example, E. M. Curtis writes that "the Mesopotamians believed that the deity was present in the cult statue."[50] And yet, while this may be what ancient Mesopotamians recorded in their texts, or how they may have responded if we could travel back in time and interview them, it does not reflect the cognitive complexity that goes into creating the concept of a "divine cult statue." Again, theoretical work in CSR, along with the available textual evidence that refers to the human origins of the statue—that is, the nature of the statue as an artifact—together indicate that a significant part of the mental representation of a cult statue would have *challenged* the idea that the statue *was* the deity.

The same applies to any attempt to discern ancient ontological categories based solely on textual evidence. Benjamin Sommer, for example, writes that people in the ancient Near East made a fundamental distinction between cult symbols that merely *represented* the god, and divine statues that equated with the god, writing that "the ancients themselves saw an ontological difference between images that were mere symbols and images that were the god."[51] While this may be true of (some) of the reflective textual passages in the *mīs pî*, it does not mean that ancient Mesopotamians made *intuitive* ontological distinctions between these types of material artifacts, any more or less so than modern people do. After noting that divine statues were often simply referred to as "gods," Sommer goes on to state, "it is clear that a divine statue in

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[50] E. M. Curtis, "Images in Mesopotamia and the Bible: A Comparative Study," in *The Bible in the Lights of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III* (ed. W. W. Hallo, B. W. Jones, and G. L. Mattingly; Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 42.

[51] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 22.

Mesopotamian thinking was no mere sign pointing toward a reality outside of itself. Rather, the *ṣalmu* was an incarnation, whose substance was identical with that of the god."[52] The distinction between optimal and costly representations, however, shows that there is diversity of beliefs within a population, such that claims about "Mesopotamian thinking" are somewhat simplistic. Or consider Zainab Bahrani's discussion of Mesopotamian visual representation and *ṣalmu*.[53] Drawing on post-structuralism and post-colonial thought, Bahrani argues that the *ṣalmu* statue was understood in Mesopotamia thinking as a "metasemiotic reality," a "form of image that circulates through the real."[54] According to this idea, in the magical thought world of the ancient Mesopotamians, *ṣalmu* was its own ontological category that substitutes for the real thing: "rather than being a copy of something in reality, the image itself was seen as a real thing" and further "instead of being a means of signifying an original real thing, it was seen as ontologically equivalent to it, existing in the same register of reality."[55] First of all, however, we have seen that there is nothing "magical" about the mental or public representation of divine statues; such concepts are not unique to ancient Mesopotamian "thought" but instead emerge out of ordinary human cognition as exciting counterintuitive ideas that are good to think.[56] Second, although Mesopotamian texts may imply that cult statues were regarded as somehow equivalent to the deity itself, a cognitive view problematizes the notion that they were processed at a mental level as "ontologically equivalent." In terms of intuitive ontological knowledge, cult statues are not *sui generis*, but instead combine aspects of *different* ontological categories. In this way, discussions about ancient cult statues and Mesopotamian religious belief could benefit from a more nuanced

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[52] Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 22.

[53] Zainab Bahrani, *The Graven Image: Representation in Babylonia and Assyria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 121-48.

[54] Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 127.

[55] Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 127.

[56] Bahrani, *Graven Image*, 129, writes, for example, that "in Assyro-Babylonian thought, sign or symbol, proper or symbolic meaning, could not be easily separated."

cognitive understanding. Such a perspective can help to avoid interpreting ancient cultural beliefs as overly distant and exotic, and instead understand them as products of ordinary cognitive activity not unlike modern religious ideas.

The framework of implicit and explicit beliefs therefore helps account for several features of the *mīs pî* ritual found in the texts. First, it explains why ritual and the Mesopotamian priests go to such great lengths to deny the human origins of the statue and insist instead on its divine origins. The result is that the ritual "speaks explicitly of the birth of the new god: there is no question of the manufacture of a cultic object but of the birth of a divine being."[57] However, this observation holds true only insofar as it refers to the reflective, explicit statements found in the text, while it would be premature to conclude that this interpretation also applied to ancient Mesopotamian intuitive, implicit representations of cult statues. Moreover, it is worth recalling that the *mīs pî* ritual was produced by priestly specialists and reserved for their eyes only. Indeed, one reason why the ritual makes such an effort to establish the divine origins of the statue may be *precisely because* such a belief was less than established or assured. It may be the case, in other words, that the priestly architects of the *mīs pî* ritual "doth protest too much." Throughout the ritual, (1) the tools of the craftsmen are ceremonially disposed of in the river, (2) it is insisted that the statue was created by the deity Ea and not the result of human hands, (3) the hands of the human craftsmen are ritually cut off in order to symbolically sever their role in the making of the statue, and (4) the human craftsmen explicitly deny their involvement in the statue's construction. If the divine origins of the statue were truly "self-evident," completely "taken for granted," "never doubted" in the least, or fully natural to ancient Mesopotamians, none of these actions would be necessary.

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[57] Hrůša, *Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 69.

Second, once the cognitively costly aspects of the belief in divine cult statues is appreciated, it is also possible to then make sense of the elaborate nature of the *mīs pî* ritual. To say, for example, that the ritual functioned to unite the heavenly and earthly realms and allow the deity's divine presence to suffuse the statue, does not explain why this particular *mode* of ritual behavior is necessary to accomplish the goal.[58] That is, why must this precise and complex series of ritual actions be carried out in order to induct the statue as the deity within the temple? Why, for example, does a simple verbal utterance not suffice? Why must the incantations be accompanied by prescribed ritual procedures? Therefore, we may follow Boyer's lead and flip the standard logic on its head: it is not a monolithic belief in the divine nature of cult statues that gives rise to the ritual, but rather the elaborate ritual actions are necessary to facilitate the explicit belief in the divine agency of the statue and make this belief plausible and compelling in the first place. While such a description may strike us as odd, it seems heuristic, if not actually more accurate in terms of the way cult statues are mentally processed. In fact, in response to the traditional scholarly interpretation that the belief in the divine agency of cult statues caused Mesopotamians to perform the mouth-washing ceremony, CSR has shown that there is no necessary or obvious link between explicit discourse (in this case, textual commentary) and people's motivations and behavior.[59]

If we are on the right path in thinking that the ritual itself functions, in part, to make the very theory (or "belief" or "idea") of the statue's transformation more compelling or plausible to

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[58] This is a general point about ritual behavior that is noted by Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and Boyer, "Why Rituals?" in *Religion Explained*, 229-63.

[59] See Jonathan Lanman, "How 'Natives' Don't Think: The Apotheosis of Overinterpretation," in *Religion, Anthropology, and Cognitive Science* (ed. Harvey Whitehouse and James Laidlaw; Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 105-132.

participants, we should expect such a ritual to be up to the job. Indeed, this is exactly what we

encounter in the *mīs pî* performance. As Boden remarks,

> In my opinion, within the hierarchy of Mesopotamian ritual, the lengthy performance of washing the mouth of the temple statue is the most solemn, most sacred and most secret of rituals. This conclusion is reached from consideration of the special circumstances of the performance of the *mīs pî*, the investment of time and resources, and the goal of the ritual.[60]

The cognitive effect of this complexity, time, resources, and pageantry, is the implication that

something significant must have occurred. In other words, the extraordinary and costly belief in

the transformation of statue to god requires an equally extraordinary and costly ritual. As

Hundley notes, "one action is insufficient. Instead, the mouth-washing ritual for a cult statue

employs a multiplicity of means (both word and deed) to ritually accomplish the desired ends. In

fact, the very complexity of the ritual indicates its importance."[61] Yet we may go one step

further: in addition to utilizing multiple means to make the ritual more effective, such ritual

complexity and pageantry also serves to enhance the very notion that an extraordinary

transformation has occurred at all.[62] The type of sensory pageantry found in the *mīs pî* ritual

ceremony is characteristic of what Lawson and McCauley call "special agent rituals," in which

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[60] Peggy Jean Boden, "The Mesopotamian Washing of the Mouth (Mīs Pî) Ritual: An Examination of Some of the Social and Communication Strategies Which Guided the Development and Performance of the Ritual Which Transferred the Essence of the Deity Into Its Temple Statue" (Ph.D. dissertation, Near Eastern Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, 1998), 95. Berlejung ("Washing the Mouth," 45) similarly notes the "duration, expenditure and complexity" of the ritual.

[61] Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings*, 251, and further note 200: "The multiple means ritualize the activity, setting it apart from both normal activities and other less elaborate rituals." See also Schneider (*An Introduction to Ancient Mesopotamian Religion*, 112): "Such elaborate ritual underscores the importance of the event."

[62] Hundley (*Gods in Dwellings*, 251) writes, "Instead of indicating sloppy writing or editing, the repetitions [of ritual actions and incantations] appear to bolster the ritual's effectiveness, on the premise that repeating words and actions in different settings somehow makes what is said and done more of a reality." This is a far-reaching observation and one that aligns with research done by Boyer and Legare and colleagues on the factors that influence people's judgments of ritual efficacy (discussed at length in the next chapter on ritual in Leviticus 16).

the god acts to bring about dramatic and long-lasting changes in the religious world.[63] The ritual performance accordingly involves many actions and incantations that mention or imply the oversight of the ritual by the divine realm. The costly ritual performance of the *mīs pî* ritual functions to make such a belief more plausible and compelling to the ritual participants, whose minds, partly, continually process the statue in a significant way as an artifact.[64] In this way, the profound transformation from statue to deity demands an equally profound ritual performance.

It is possible, moreover, that over the course of many performances and routine daily care of the divine cult image, these cultural practices would have re-tuned and modified the implicit understandings of ancient priestly elites, allowing them to achieve what McCauley calls a kind of "practiced naturalism" according to which the representation of divine agency became more natural and easy over time.[65] Consider, as an analogy, Tanya Luhrman's recent book, *When God Talks Back*, which describes the intensive process whereby evangelical Christians attempt to build personal and intimate relationships with God, and the effort and difficult involved in doing so.[66] To achieve such a relationship with God requires a great deal of sustained training and mental effort to make the belief seem real. In a similar manner, the thesis of this chapter is that "belief" in cult statues, while optimal in some respects, requires hard work as well.

By way of summary, a cognitive framework adds nuance to our understanding of the ancient Mesopotamian "belief" in the divine agency of cult statues. At one level, we can speak

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[63] Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 26-33. The idea of special agent and special patient rituals is likewise taken up in more detail in the next chapter.

[64] On this point the comment in Isaiah 44:9 is relevant: "The makers of idols all work to no purpose; and the things they treasure can do no good, *as they themselves can testify*." While this excerpt overstates the case, there is evidence from the Akkadian texts, too, that the Mesopotamians acknowledged the sensory limitations of the statue, at least prior to the completion of the mouth-washing ritual.

[65] Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20-30.

[66] Tanya Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 2012). See also Pascal Boyer, "Why 'Belief' is Hard Work: Implications of Tanya Luhrmann's *When God Talks Back*," *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3 (2013): 349-57.

about an explicit belief in the divine nature of certain ritual artifacts that have undergone the proper ritual transformations. On another level, however, there are powerful implicit representations of the statue as a mere artifact, and these intuitions do not cease even after the explicit belief becomes encoded in writing or ritual performance. Moreover, we can also appreciate the effort that goes into making such a belief in divine statues so compelling. This is accomplished through explicit discourse about the agency of the statue, but also through the prescribed ritual procedures that function, in part, to override or minimize the artifact inferences that continuously operate in the background. In this view, the ritual performance is not a response but rather a *justification* for the "belief" in the divine cult statue. In this manner, the entire ritual process functions, in part, as a grand credibility enhancing display, or what CSR researchers call CREDs (discussed further in the next section).[67] Such behaviors are often found in rituals and in the case of the *mīs pî* ritual, serve to enhance the credibility of both the priestly officials as well as the credibility of the belief underlying the ritual itself. That the ritual is needed to bolster the explicit belief in cult statues indicates that such a belief is not solely a matter of the conceptual content. Indeed, the ancient biblical authors appear to have represented the concept of cult statues in much the same way—as an artifact with counterintuitive features— and yet they firmly rejected the divine nature of these statues. The following section discusses the biblical idol polemics and attempts to locate these within the cognitive framework offered thus far.

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[67] Joesph Henrich, "The Evolution of Costly Displays, Cooperation and Religion: Credibility Enhancing Displays and Their Implications for Cultural Evolution," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 30 (2009): 244-60.

5.5. BIBLICAL ANTI-IDOL POLEMICS AND THE "MARDUK PROBLEM"

The biblical authors mocked their Mesopotamian neighbors for their stated belief in the divinity of cult artifacts. These so-called "idol parodies" are found among the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible and mostly date to the exilic or post-exilic periods, during which time it is believed the Judean biblical authors had exposure to and gained direct or indirect knowledge of Babylonian cult images and/or the ritual performances associated with them.[68] The main texts are found in Second Isaiah, Jeremiah 10, a few of the Psalms, and some of the late wisdom texts, as well as Bel and the Dragon, an apocryphal addition to the Greek book of Daniel. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a full discussion of each of these texts and their larger literary and historical contexts, we will highlight the key ideas and assumptions that are relevant for our purposes.

Despite their unique features, the depictions of Mesopotamian religion found in the idol parodies are polemical caricatures that categorically reject the iconic worship practices of the inhabitants of Babylon. They delight in ridiculing the apparent absurdity of the belief in and worship of divine cult statues. Despite their polemical bias, however, the biblical prophets seem to present a fairly realistic portrayal of the manufacturing process of divine images in Mesopotamia.[69] They attest, for example, to the materials commonly used to construct the idols and the craftsmen involved. The prophetic texts do not, however, make reference to the Babylonian temples, priesthood, or the waters of purification used throughout the mouth-

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[68] See Michael B. Dick, "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Michael B. Dick; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 1-53; Nathaniel B. Levtow, *Images of Others: Iconic Politics in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2008), ch. 2; and Jill Anne Middlemas, *The Divine Image: Prophetic Aniconic Rhetoric and Its Contribution to the Aniconism Debate* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "Isaiah's Impure Lips and Their Purification in Light of Mouth Purification and Mouth Purity in Akkadian Sources," *HUCA* 60 (1989): 39-89.

[69] See Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 522-26.

washing ritual. These elements, of course, are critical for the perceived efficacy of the ritual and the transformation from statue to deity that the ritual purports to achieve.

Crucially, for our purposes, these prophetic idol polemics share in common an obvious focus on the inanimate nature of the idols to which their Mesopotamian neighbors bowed down in devotion. That is, the idol polemics almost exclusively privilege the implicit ontological knowledge associated with the specialized mental system for dealing with artifacts. Consider Jeremiah 10:3-15, in which the prophet announces the Israelite deity Yahweh's condemnation of the nations who oppose Israel. This text describes in considerable detail the various stages involved in the process of manufacturing a cult image, from chopping down the tree and carving the wooden core, to plating the wood with metal and ultimately clothing the statue. Jeremiah compares the image to a "scarecrow in a cucumber patch" (Jeremiah 10:5) in that they cannot speak or walk, but must instead be carried about. They are "the work of craftsmen and the smith's hands" (מעשה חרש וידי צורף), "all of them are the work of skilled men" (מעשה חכמים כלם). Similarly, Isaiah 44:9-22, which is the most extensive idol parody in the Hebrew Bible, stresses the inanimate nature of foreign images. The prophet states of the statues that "they can neither look nor think" (Isaiah 44:9). He goes on to describe in great detail the process whereby the craftsman makes the image and the tools he uses, stressing the various types of trees and wood used. In this way, the prophet behind Second Isaiah goes one step further than Jeremiah by emphasizing not just the artifact nature of the cult statues but also their origins as *natural physical objects*.

The biblical Psalms likewise mention on occasion the foreign cult images. Psalm 115:4 declares that the idols are silver and gold, "the work of human hands" (מעשה ידי אדם).[70] The text

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[70] For idols made of silver, gold, and other precious materials, see also Exodus 20:19; Isaiah 2:20; 31:7; Hosea 8:4; and Micah 1:7.

details the physical features of the statues including their mouths, eyes, ears, noses, hands, and feet, but declares that they cannot speak, see, hear, smell, touch, or walk (Psalm 115:5-7; cf. Psalm 135:15-18). The prophet Habakkuk mocks the worshippers of idols saying, "Ah, you who say, 'Wake up,' to wood, 'Awaken,' to inert stone! Can that give an oracle? Look, it is encased in gold and silver, but there is no breathe within it" (Habakkuk 2:19, cf. NJPS). The overriding agenda of these idol polemics is to contrast the cult images as lifeless artifacts with the living deity Yahweh. Whereas the gods of the Mesopotamians were created of metal by human hands, Yahweh himself is the creator of all things. Whereas Mesopotamian craftsmen selects his tools and materials, Yahweh elects Israel as his prized nation.[71]

Biblical commentators have long recognized the ideological bias inherent in the biblical idol parodies. Michael Dick goes so far as to call them "both unoriginal and methodologically flawed."[72] He notes that ancient Mesopotamians themselves recognized the same apparent problem in believing that the statue both *was* the deity and *was not* the deity at the same time. Indeed, the ancient Assyrian king Esarhaddon reflects this awareness when he made the following observation:

> Whose right is it, O great gods, to create gods and goddesses in a place where humans dare not to trespass? ... Is it the right of deaf and blind human beings who are ignorant of themselves and remain in ignorance throughout their lives? The making of (images of) the gods and goddesses is your right, it is in your hands.[73]

Contrary to the opinions of the biblical authors, it is not that Mesopotamians believed that material objects were deities *in general*. Rather, the belief was limited to specific ritually

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[71] On wordplay in Isaiah 44 see Mark S. Smith, *The Origins of Biblical Monotheism: Israel's Polytheistic Background and the Ugaritic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 189.

[72] Dick, "Prophetic Parodies," 45.

[73] Quoted in Dick, "Introduction," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, x, 38.

endowed objects, the idea being that *this specific* statue is in some sense special. And, as we have

seen, this notion was based in no small measure on the specific ritual ceremony that made it so.

For their part, the biblical authors viewed the Mesopotamian belief in cult statues as a form of

cognitive negligence. By contrast, the ancient Mesopotamian priestly elite recognized the

fundamental problems involved in their belief, but attempted to resolve the problem cultically by

means of the mouth-washing and mouth-opening rites.

For native Mesopotamians immersed in that particular cultural matrix, their world

included this elaborate ritual, as well as other cultural practices that confirmed the very

proposition of a divine statue, including regular daily feeding and nurturing of the deity in his

temple shrine, as well as the Babylonian New Year festival in which the cult statue of the deity

was paraded throughout the city in a public procession. (Now, with the exception of the public

akītu celebration, these rituals were reserved for the priestly elites, who would have therefore had

greater exposure to those rites that helped to solidify into cognition and memory the

representation of the cult statue's divine agency.) Mesopotamians were immersed, in other

words, in a world full of "credibility enhancing displays," or CREDs.[74] The idea here is that in

addition to verbal expressions signaling one's view, cultural learners rely on behavioral displays

that demonstrate commitment to that view and thereby enhance the credibility of the teacher or

model. As Henrich writes,

> These displays provide the learner with reliable measures of the model's actual degree of
> commitment to (or belief in) the representations that he has inexpensively expressed
> symbolically (e.g., verbally). Learners should use such displays in determining *how much*

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[74] Joseph Henrich, "The Evolution of Costly Displays, Cooperation and Religion: Credibility Enhancing Displays and their Implications for Cultural Evolution," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 30 (2009): 244-60.

to commit to a particular culturally acquired mental representation such as an ideology, value, belief or preference.[75]

In this view, with regard to the *mīs pî* ritual performance in particular, the actions performed by the priestly actors were intended for internal consumption in that they served to provide other priestly participants with reliable indications of their commitment to the belief in the divine nature and origins of the statue. The degree of pageantry, detail, and elaborate nature of the ritual ceremony would have further served to enhance the credibility of the underlying belief in the transformation of statue into a divine agent. Therefore, in addition to the conceptual ingredients that make up the counterintuitive notion of a divine cult statue, specific ritual behaviors were necessary to bolster this somewhat less-than-intuitive notion.

Now, of course, the biblical authors, despite firsthand knowledge of Mesopotamian cult images but without the full benefit of having observed and participated in the mouth-washing rites, did not come to adopt a belief in the divinity of the *ṣalmu* statue. Moreover, the biblical authors show no confusion over the conceptual structure of the concept of a divine statue—just as the Mesopotamians did, they recognized that the concepts entails a counterintuitive animated artifact, and yet unlike their Near Eastern neighbors they reflectively rejected this idea. Indeed, this situation occurs throughout the world today, where religious communities do not readily accept the beliefs, doctrines, and deities of one another. In response to this observation, within CSR there arose an objection to the standard by-product view of religion, which holds that the success of religious concepts was governed by their conceptual structure and psychological content biases that steered them in the direction minimally counterintuitive concepts (MCI). Scholars quickly pointed out, however, that the by-product view has no way of distinguishing

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[75] Henrich, "Evolution of Costly Displays,"244-45.

fictional MCI beings from religious ones. That is, while most if not all religious concepts are counterintuitive, not all counterintuitive concepts become *religious*. According to this objection, the by-product view cannot explain why religious adherents develop strong faith and commitment to certain deities rather than others.[76]

In CSR literature, this has become known as the "Zeus Problem," which refers to the fact that people often fail to develop faith in and commitment to the gods of their neighbors.[77] In this case, Zeus is simply a stand-in for any deity that is not believed in, either because they belong to a different religion (the biblical stance towards Marduk, or the Christian stance towards Vishnu) or because the deity in question is widely regarded as defunct (Zeus, Wotan, etc.). Consider Mickey Mouse, for instance. As a mouse who can talk, Mickey is a perfect example of a MCI concept. And yet, despite approximating a cognitive optimum in terms of conceptual content, there are no religious cults of Mickey today, with religious devotees and established dogmas and priesthoods. So too with Zeus: both the Greek deity Zeus and the biblical deity Yahweh display similar counterintuitive properties, and despite the fact that Zeus once attracted an impressive amount of attention in the ancient world, only the latter is worshipped as a deity today (notwithstanding contemporary neo-pagan religious communities). The same issue applies to the endless supply of counterintuitive figures in folklore and mythology, children's books and television. Superman has x-ray vision and leaps tall buildings with a single bound, yet he receives no sacrificial offerings or prayers.

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[76] It should be noted that in fact, this objection to the standard by-product account of religion is not really an objection per se, but rather an attempt to point out its explanatory limitations. I note also that an important contribution of the cognitive study of religion has been its emphasis on the fact that religious concepts are not special. Counterintuitive concepts are not limited to the domain of religion.

[77] Will M. Gervais and Joseph Henrich, "The Zeus Problem: Why Representational Content Biases Cannot Explain Faith in Gods," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 10 (2010): 383-89. The article is in response to Justin L. Barrett, "Why Santa Claus is Not a God," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 8 (2008): 149-61.

According to Gervais and Henrich, any explanation "invoking only representational content" cannot explain why people do not come to believe in the gods of others. At one point in time, Zeus possessed all the same bona fides as Yahweh and as a result, received similar levels of belief and commitment. If this is true, ask Gervais and Henrich, "Why doesn't the representational content of these gods instill faith in those who hold the representational content, outside of their respective eras and cultural milieus?"[78] To return to the original problem: why is there no longer any cult of Zeus, or Marduk for that matter?

We might, then, characterize the biblical authors' lack of belief in the divine nature of cult statues as an ancient example of the "Marduk Problem." According to Gervais and Henrich, in order to address the Marduk Problem one must recognize that conceptual content is not enough to produce faith and commitment to a supernatural concept. Rather, in addition to content-biases, context-based learning and *context-biases* are necessary to garner true belief and commitment. This refers, for example, to any situational factors that function to enhance the potential success of certain religious ideas, including ritual behaviors and credibility enhancing displays (CREDs) of the type discussed above. In the case of Zeus, whereas ancient Greek ritual practices, sacrifices, monumental architecture, and everyday communication served as CREDs that indicated widespread commitment to a belief in Zeus, these displays no longer operate in the modern world (to the same degree).

Similarly, although the prophets and biblical authors may have had exposure to certain Mesopotamian displays of this sort (sacrifices, festivals, *akītu*, cult images, etc.), they did not have access to the *mīs pî* ritual. But just as importantly, context-based learning depends on more than just the content of what's being learned, but also depends on a variety of other factors. Empirical research indicates, for instance, that children and adults preferentially learn from

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[78] Gervais and Henrich, "The Zeus Problem," 385.

others based on the prestige and statue of the model/teacher, as well as his/her success, skill, age, ethnicity, and sex.[79] Henrich therefore suggests that humans have evolved contextual learning mechanisms that guide them in filtering cultural information. These include a bias towards believing information that derives from a prestigious cultural model, as well as a tendency towards conforming to the beliefs and behaviors of one's social group. Moreover, in response to the adaptive challenge of determining whom to trust, learners have evolved a cognitive sensitivity for credibility enhancing displays. In terms of publicly available CREDs, the Babylonian New Year festival, in which the cult statue was paraded throughout the city in front of an audience, would have served to enhance the credibility of the priests, as representatives of the official cults and the deity. CREDs therefore work as a kind of a "cultural immune system" that privileges behavioral displays over verbal utterances alone. Teachers or cultural models must exhibit CREDs in order for their statements or beliefs to be taken seriously. While these displays and context-biases are of course culturally-specific and pertain to behaviors and public representations, they have crucial effects on cognition, namely on degree to which certain religious ideas are represented as credible and compelling, which in turn has an effect on the cultural success and transmission of these ideas.

5.6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter began noting a mystery at the heart of Mesopotamian religion: how could the *ṣalmu* both *be* the deity and *not be* the deity at the same time? This is what Thorkild Jacobsen called the "to be or not to be" problem. The biblical prophets ridiculed their ancient Near Eastern neighbors for thinking a man-made artifact was divine, but Mesopotamians also grappled with the

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[79] See Joseph Henrich and Francisco Gil-White, "The Evolution of Prestige: Freely Conferred Deference as a Mechanism for Enhancing the Benefits of Cultural Transmission," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 22 (2001): 165-96.

mysterious nature of this belief and resolved the problem ritually by means of the mouth-washing ritual and the transformation it was said to create. Many scholars have concluded that whereas modern minds perceive the logical inconsistency posed by the "to be or not to be" problem, such an idea made perfect sense to ancient Mesopotamian thought. It has been demonstrated, however, that the representation of divine artifacts emerges naturally from the way human cognition works, past and present. Human minds categorize the world based on distinct ontological domains, and divine cult statues are modestly counterintuitive (CI) enough to confer a selective advantage in terms of memory, recall, and cultural transmission. This is not unique to "ancient thought," as many modern cultures have similar beliefs about the transformation of everyday objects (e.g., transubstantiation) and the special powers of certain objects (e.g., worship of icons in Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism). These types of concepts are good to think and do not require special mentality or cognitive machinery.

At the same time, however, we have also noted that the concept of a divine cult statue involves a single counterintuitive feature—namely the transfer of agent-like qualities to an inanimate artifact—which is added against an entire backdrop of intuitive default knowledge and expectations about artifacts. While CSR research has emphasized the CI aspects of religious concepts, this chapter has urged us to take seriously the host of *non-CI* features that remain active when considering the explicit concept of a divine statue with agency. If we return to our distinction between intuitive and reflective modes of cognitive processing, and between implicit and explicit beliefs, we can clarify the cognitive dynamics involved in representing such a concept. Specifically, as we have seen, the representation of a "divine cult statue" enlists two distinct specialized mental systems: one for dealing with agency, the other for dealing with human-made artifacts. Both systems operate concurrently, attending to their own particular cues

in the environment, and supplying expectations and inferences based on the available information. This framework helps make sense of the dual-nature of the belief in divine cult statues, as well as the textual evidence of the *mīs pî* ritual, in which the *ṣalmu* is described both as an artifact and as a divine agent. The argument here is that the textual evidence reflects the explicit religious belief in the divinity of the *ṣalmu*, while also preserving more implicit understandings of the *ṣalmu* as an artifact. It is the implicit understanding of the statue as an artifact that supplies continues to supply powerful intuitions and crucial inferences about the material object, *despite the explicit belief*. The explicit belief does not erase the implicit understanding that operates according to intuitive ontological categories. The same may be said for any explicit religious concept, whether in the form of verbal self-reports or ancient written text. The ancient Greek writer, Lucian, for example, wrote about Syro-Phoenician cult practices in his *De Dea Syria*, in which he reports that the cult statues behaved in extraordinary ways including sweating, moving, and uttering oracles. These are perfectly understandable examples of CI concepts, but we should not confuse these textual descriptions with actual ancient intuitions and implicit beliefs about cult statues among ancient people.

This perspective therefore problematizes any attempt to speak straightforwardly about an ancient Mesopotamian "belief" in divine cult statues. That is, we must be more precise and state instead that the available textual evidence attests to an *explicit* concept of the divinity of certain statues, which, however, must not be confused with ancient *implicit* understandings of the material statue. In this view, then, the full-blown concept of a divine cult statue was attenuated, at a cognitive level, by persistent intuitions about the artifact-ness of the statue. In this sense, then, although the notion of a divine statue is only minimally counterintuitive, the counterintuitive features come with a cognitive cost, insofar as they run counter to the powerful

intuitions delivered by the default artifact systems. In this sense, the belief in divine cult statues is not entirely intuitive and therefore is modestly costly. As a result, it has been argued that a great deal of effort was necessary to overcome this primary default tendency to mentally represent the cult statue as an artifact. This is where the *mīs pî* ritual ceremony fits in. Indeed, during this ritual, the Mesopotamian priests go to great lengths to deny the human origins of *ṣalmu* and instead insist upon its heavenly origins. Once the cognitively costly aspect of belief in divine cult statues is recognized, we can also make sense of the elaborate nature of the *mīs pî* ritual ceremony. In this respect, the mouth-washing ritual can be regarded as a credibility-enhancing display (CRED) that functioned among the priestly participants to demonstrate commitment to the belief in the transformation of the statue into the deity. The status of the priestly elite within Mesopotamian society would have served, in turn, as a further CRED among the larger populace, supplemented by the daily rituals directed towards the cult statue, as well as the annual Babylonian *akītu* festival in which the divine image was publically displayed and paraded throughout the city. In short, the extraordinary and costly belief in the transformation of statue to god required an equally extraordinary and costly ritual.

CHAPTER 6:
RITUAL AND COGNITION IN LEVITICUS 16 AND THE DAY OF ATONEMENT RITUAL

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The present chapter employs a selection of cognitive perspectives and findings in order to offer a focused treatment of a particular biblical text, Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement ritual described therein. This is what Martin Noth memorably referred to as *das große Reinigungsritual*, "the great cleansing ritual."[1] Leviticus 16 prescribes a complex set of ritual procedures that are designed to remove impurity and sin from the Israelite sanctuary and community. The objective of the chapter is to ask, in an open-ended manner, how various CSR approaches to ritual activity enhance our understanding of biblical rituals in general and the Day of Atonement ritual in particular. What insights do recent cognitive proposals bring to bear on this ritual text and the distinct ritual procedures that underlie it?

The road map for the chapter is straightforward. First, several CSR theories are presented, each of which seeks to explain a distinct aspect of religious ritual and its associated behavior. Despite the unique focus of each theory, they share in common the goal of describing the cognitive systems that shape and constrain ritual activity, as well as the cognitive effects that specific behaviors have upon ritual participants and observers. Together, then, these approaches offer new avenues for investigating ritual practices in ancient Israel, with different questions and methods from those usually found in religious studies, biblical scholarship, and ritual theory.[2] The next section walks through the biblical text of Leviticus 16, laying out its ritual instructions, as well as the central issues regarding the chapter's narrative context and literary composition.

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[1] Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 115. German original *Das Dritte Buch Mose: Leviticus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 98.

[2] For a helpful overview of approaches to ritual in the Hebrew Bible, see David P. Wright, "The Study of Ritual in the Hebrew Bible," in *The Hebrew Bible: New Insights and Scholarship* (ed. Frederick E. Greenspahn; New York: New York University Press, 2008), 120-39.

Finally, having introduced both the theoretical frameworks and the basic contours of the biblical text, the Day of Atonement ritual is examined through the lens of these cognitive perspectives with the goal of illuminating the ritual dynamics found in the text.

6.2. COGNITIVE APPROACHES TO RITUAL

Over the past twenty years, a number of influential theoretical approaches to religious ritual have emerged within CSR. Despite the different aims of these proposals, cognitive theories of ritual are usually informed by the broader goal of explicating (a) *why* humans perform ritual actions across cultures and throughout history, and (b) the cognitive, and often by extension social, *effects* that certain ritual behaviors have upon participants.[3] This section will introduce a handful of leading proposals that address these issues, each in its own way.

6.2.1. McCauley and Lawson: Ritual Form

In a pair of influential publications, *Rethinking Religion* and the follow-up *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, McCauley and Lawson set out to examine how basic cognitive constraints shape the form of religious rituals.[4] Unlike earlier work in the subfield of ritual theory, they focus on the general underlying properties of rituals, rather than specific cultural meanings attached to them. They start from the premise that ritual action, despite often being complex or seemingly bizarre, is a subset of human action more generally. That is, ritual behavior is a type of human behavior, and therefore it can be studied using the same tools employed by the latter. As they put it, "Ritual

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[3] For a succinct overview of recent cognitive views on religious ritual, from a biblical studies angle, see Risto Uro, *Ritual and Christian Beginnings: A Socio-Cognitive Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), especially chapter 2.

[4] E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Robert N. McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

drummers ritually beating ritual drums are still drummers beating drums."[5] According to McCauley and Lawson, ritual activity requires no special cognitive machinery, but instead relies on the ordinary mental representation of people (or agents) and their actions.

Drawing inspiration from so-called competence theories in the field of linguistics, which analyze native speakers' implicit knowledge about their own language, McCauley and Lawson suggest that ritual participants have similar implicit knowledge and expectations about ritual action. "With little, if any, explicit instruction, religious ritual participants are able to make judgments about various properties concerning both individual rituals and their ritual systems. These include inferences about religious ritual forms and relationships and about the efficacy of ritual actions."[6] They suggest, in particular, that the role of gods or other "culturally postulated superhuman" (CPS) beings is a crucial factor that determines the specific properties of a given ritual. Gods may appear in religious rituals either as the *agent* who acts to bring about significant changes (e.g., in weddings and baptisms), or, alternately, as the *patient* or recipient to whom ritual actions are directed (e.g., in the case of animal sacrifices). Therefore, religious rituals tend to cluster into two main types or forms: *special agent rituals* and *special patient rituals*.[7]

According to McCauley and Lawson, ritual form explains why some rituals are frequently performed while others are not, and moreover why certain rituals are repeatable, reversible, and permit substitutions. The principle of superhuman agency predicts, for example, that special agent rituals, in which the god is the active agent, are more likely to be emotionally arousing and high in their relative level of "sensory pageantry." Furthermore, special agent rituals do not allow substitutions and, because their effects are powerful and permanent, they are

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[5] McCauley and Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, 10.

[6] McCauley and Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, 5.

[7] As we have seen in previous chapters, these alternate ritual forms represent distinct attractor positions. For a visual illustration, see the charts in McCauley and Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, 43 and 139.

not repeatable. Special agent rituals may, however, be reversed through ritual means (e.g., in the case of divorce). By contrast, special patient rituals, such as animal sacrifice, cannot be reversed once they are performed, but can be repeated and often do allow substitutions when it comes to sacrificial offerings.

Several examples from the biblical corpus illustrate these principles. Consider, for instance, the priestly ordination of Aaron and his sons in Leviticus 8-9 as an example of a special agent ritual, in which the deity is responsible to bringing about a religious transformation regarding the status of Aaron and the priestly family. Over the course of seven full days, the ordination ceremony involves an assortment of animal sacrifices, blood manipulations, anointing with oil, purifications, and blessings—overall, a significantly higher degree of detail and pageantry than other rituals prescribed in the book of Leviticus.[8] Indeed, the entire ceremony culminates in dramatic fashion with divine fire pouring forth from the deity and consuming the offerings placed upon the altar. Upon witnessing this display, "all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces" (Lev 9:24). Once the ritual ceremony is completed according to the instructions of the deity, the end result is the permanent installation of the Aaronid priestly lineage, as the earlier instructions in Exodus make clear: "[Aaron and his sons] shall have priesthood as their right for all time" (*lĕḥuqqat 'ôlām*; Exod 29:9). In the words of Lawson and McCauley, this type of change in status is "super-permanent," and there is thus no need to repeat

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[8] Gerald A. Klingbeil, *Bridging the Gap: Ritual and Ritual Texts in the Bible* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2007), 245-52. Klingbeil presents in chart form data from all the ritual texts in the Pentateuch. This data includes the number of subrites in each ritual, as well as the presence or absence of ten distinct features (interactive, collective, traditionalizing innovation, communicative, symbolic, multimedia, performance, aesthetic, strategic, integrative). Much like Levicitus 8-9, Leviticus 16 is marked by having greater than ten subrites and a majority of the specified features. For an exhaustive catalogue and discussion of all the ritual actions and sub-actions in Leviticus 16, see also Roy E. Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structure* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2004), 115-97.

or renew the ordination process.[9] Indeed, no such ritual procedure is ever mentioned again in the priestly literature.[10] Yahweh is the ritual agent responsible for enacting this super-permanent religious transformation.

Sacrifices, on the other hand, are classic special patient rituals. They involve humans acting upon the deity, usually in the form of making gift offerings to appease, mollify, or stimulate God to action. As predicted, ritual sacrifices are often repeated, being used on an as-needed basis whenever a situation requires them. As such, the biblical instructions for sacrificial procedures often begin with the Hebrew temporal particle *kî*, translated as "when" or "whenever," indicating their voluntary and repeated nature (Lev 1:2: "When any of you presents an offering of cattle to Yahweh").[11] The ritual form hypothesis also predicts that special patient rituals are more likely to permit substitutions with respect to ritual elements. McCauley and Lawson mention the substitution of sand for water in purification rites, as well as Evan-Pritchard's work on the Nuer, who will offer a cucumber to the ancestors if a bull is unavailable or too expensive. Similarly, in Leviticus, an individual who commits a sin is commanded to bring a sheep or goat as a sacrificial offering, but the priestly text permits less valuable animals as substitutes, including turtledoves and pigeons (Lev 5:7-10), or even a measure of baking flour (Lev 5:11-13).[12] In contrast to the extravagant priestly ordination ritual discussed above, animal

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[9] Lawson and McCauley, *Rethinking Religion*, 134. McCauley and Lawson (*Bringing Ritual to Mind*, 32) define "super-permanent effects" as "putative arrangements that exceed even the spatial and temporal limits of participants' lifetimes."

[10] This particular special agent ritual, wherein Yahweh acts to ordain Aaron and the priests, includes several sub-rites, nested within the larger ritual cycle, that are themselves examples of special patient rituals (sacrifices).

[11] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 144, also notes the "conditional and optional nature of the law" following the conjunction *kî*.

[12] There is some debate with regard to which purification offerings these allowances apply. For discussion see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 292-318. With regard to other offerings in the Priestly tradition, it may be the case that the sacrificial instructions challenge the prediction of the ritual form hypothesis with respect to allowing substitutions. Leviticus is often quite detailed about the specifications of the offerings, such that they would seem to preclude (easy) substitution. The red heiffer rite in Numbers 19, for instance, requires a cow without blemish or defect, suggesting a substitution of anything else would be not be permitted. This raises interesting questions,

and grain offerings are not accompanied by much pageantry, being matter-of-fact affairs that place emphasis above all on correct performance and adherence to procedure.[13]

In evaluating the ritual form hypothesis, Barrett and Lawson have shown that the presence of special agents was the most important variable influencing people's judgments about a ritual's efficacy.[14] This finding supports a prediction of the theory, namely that a superhuman agent acting within a ritual will be deemed more important than the specific actions performed in the ritual. According to the authors, the finding therefore challenges the idea that correct performance is the most important aspect of ritual. Perhaps more importantly, however, this research suggests that superhuman agency *and* proper ritual performance seem to be more important than participants' intentions and mental states when it comes to their judgments about ritual efficacy.[15] That is, the presence of a supernatural agent and the proper execution of ritual actions are often sufficient for people to deem a ritual to be efficacious, without the need for participants to adopt a proper intention or attitude.

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however, concerning the potential discrepancy between the prescribed textual rituals laid out in Leviticus and the real-life practice of these rituals. It seems likely that in many respects, the Priestly dictates represent an idealized portrait of how the sacrificial system should operate, when in reality the actual implementation of these ritual practices on the ground would have been messier.

[13] The priestly ordination ceremony in Leviticus 8-9 exhibits a higher level of "sensory pageantry," relative to individual sacrifices, in its degree of complexity and the number of ritual elements, incorporation of additional rites such as anointing and consecration, and the special garments used in the ritual.

[14] Justin L. Barrett and E. Thomas Lawson, "Ritual Intuitions: Cognitive Contributions to Judgments of Ritual Efficacy," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1 (2001): 183-201.

[15] This point is also made by Humphrey and Laidlaw, who compare ritual to art in that both lack any "technical motivation." See Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). In more recent literature, rituals are described as "causally opaque" (see below). McCauley writes, "[R]eligious rituals are effective not because of human participants' states of mind but, putatively, because of these ritual acts' forms, which have been specified by the CI-agents whom those rituals engage." And further: "if a properly qualified ritual practitioner carries out one of these rituals on an appropriate ritual patient, the ritual has been performed, regardless of what thoughts the practitioner or the patient might have been entertaining. Many religions certainly exhort ritual practitioners and participants to adopt a proper state of mind when carrying out these rituals, but, for practical purposes, it cannot matter, since participants' states of mind are not definitively discernible—except, of course, to the gods." Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Sciences is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 192. The Priestly rituals recorded in Leviticus, of course, are explicitly said to derive from the Israelite deity Yahweh.

To anticipate our analysis of the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16 below, there are several takeaways from Lawson and McCauley's ritual form theory. First, as we have observed, the theory puts forward specific predictions about the form that rituals take, and these predictions can be tested against the textual evidence. We can ask how the Day of Atonement ritual complex fits with the different special agent and special patient ritual profiles and, moreover, whether this aligns with the predictions about repeatability, reversibility, and substitutions.[16] We can also consider the ways that biblical ritual systems may combine elements from different ritual forms. A recent study, for example, by Jutta Jokiranta applies these insights to the ritual system of the Qumran sectarian movement.[17] Jokiranta explores the notion of ritual "balance" and the ways in which religious traditions may benefit from having a combination of both high arousal special agent practices alongside routinized special patient rituals. As McCauley writes, "It appears that unless religious ritual systems possess rituals at both attractors, their survival is less likely."[18] Jokiranta shows that the Qumran movement was an example of a balanced ritual system, which incorporated arousing practices such as initiations and covenant renewal ceremonies, together with frequently performed practices like meals, prayers, and purifications. It is important, then, to consider both the individual ritual actions, as well as the larger ritual complex and tradition in which they are embedded. Building on this line of inquiry, we will observe a kind of ritual balance built into the form of the Day of Atonement ritual, which has implications for

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[16] To date, this task of theory-testing has been explored by several scholars. See, for example, Douglas L. Gragg, "Do the Multiple Initiations of Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* Falsify the Ritual Form Hypothesis?" in *Past Minds: Studies in Cognitive Historiography* (ed. Luther H. Martin and Jesper Sørensen; London: Equinox, 2011), 125-30; Tamás Biró, "Is Judaism Boring? On the lack of Counterintuitive Agents in Jewish Rituals," in *Mind, Morality, and Magic: Cognitive Science Approaches in Biblical Studies* (ed. István Czachesz and Risto Uro; Durham: Acumen, 2013), 120-42; Jutta Jokiranta, "Ritual System in the Qumran Movement: Frequency, Boredom, and Balance," in *Mind, Morality and Magic*, 144-63.

[17] Jokiranta, "Qumran Ritual System."

[18] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not*, 205.

understanding its complex nature, possible historical development, and the different textual layers of Leviticus 16.

6.2.2. *Whitehouse: Divergent Modes of Religiosity*

As we saw in Chapter 3 on the Deuteronomic theology, Harvey Whitehouse's modes theory builds on the longstanding observation that religious traditions tend to cluster into dichotomous types, from Max Weber's routinized vs. charismatic religions to Jack Goody's literate and non-literate religions.[19] When it comes to rituals, Whitehouse notes that some religious practices are dry, routinized, and highly repetitive, while others are rarely performed but intense and emotionally charged. We thus encounter two different "modes" of religion: the *doctrinal mode* and the *imagistic mode*, respectively. Unlike earlier theorists, however, Whitehouse turns to cognitive science and psychology to explain what gives rise to these divergent modes of religiosity.

An important insight from Whitehouse, echoed by other cognitive researchers, is that for any religious system to thrive and endure, it must satisfy two conditions. "First, these religious beliefs and rituals must take a form that people can *remember*. Second, people must be *motivated* to pass on these beliefs and rituals."[20] In this view, then, the success of a religious tradition depends fundamentally on memory and motivation. The general view builds on the cultural-selection frameworks of Sperber, Boyer, and others in that it stipulates that some religious ideas and practices possess certain features that make them more likely to survive the process of cultural transmission. For Whitehouse, memory is a crucial factor in this process. In a nutshell,

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[19] Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004). A notable dichotomy within biblical studies is Robert Wilson's discussion of "central" and "peripheral" prophetic groups and intermediaries in ancient Israel. See Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

[20] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 54 (emphasis original).

his thesis is that each mode is accompanied by its own distinct sets of ritual and socio-economic features, as well as a unique psychological strategy for ensuring memory and transmission.

The doctrinal mode is characterized by frequently performed, routinized rituals involving relatively low levels of excitement and arousal. While such practices do not tend to pack an emotional punch, they activate our "semantic" memory and are reinforced through frequent repetition monitored by religious leaders. Such practices, according to Whitehouse, go hand in hand with a host of specific socio-political features such as hierarchical centralized institutions, doctrines, and orthodoxy. Think, for example, of the Catholic Church and its standardized "high mass." By contrast, the imagistic mode involves highly personal, arousing, and often painful rituals. Almost by necessity, these rituals are performed less frequently (it would be difficult, for instance, to muster resources to hold a graduation commencement every weekend). Whitehouse ventures that such rituals are more likely to arise among small-scale, decentralized communities. As examples, scholars have pointed to the intense initiation rites documented among the Baktaman of New Guinea or the Kalenjin of Kenya.[21] Whitehouse argues that because of their emotional nature, these rituals activate a different type of long-term memory, our "episodic" memory, which concerns salient life experiences.

Now, despite its appeal, Whitehouse's theory has been heavily critiqued on several grounds. Many researchers, for example, have noted a lack of clarity in the theory and its predictions, which has, in turn, limited the testability of the theory against historical and ethnographic evidence.[22] Recall that our discussion of Deuteronomy, for example, highlighted

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[21] See, for example, the descriptions in Frederik Barth, *Ritual and Knowledge Among the Baktaman of New Guinea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975); and Michael Houseman and Carlo Severi, *Naven or the Other Self: A Relational Approach to Ritual Action* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Harvey Whitehouse, "Rites of Terror: Emotion, Metaphor, and Memory in Melanesian Initiation Cults," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 2 (1996): 703-15.

[22] See, e.g., Harvey Whitehouse and James Laidlaw, eds., *Religion, Anthropology, and Cognitive Science* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007); Harvey Whitehouse and Luther H. Martin, eds., *Theorizing Religions*

the ways in which the Deuteronomic program did not align neatly with the predicted socio-economic features of doctrinal mode. Furthermore, Boyer challenges the idea that imagistic rituals, in particular, are about transmitting religious knowledge and information at all. This may be the aim of doctrinal practices, argues Boyer, but the same cannot really be said about highly emotional imagistic practices, which often result in idiosyncratic religious views that vary from person to person. Boyer adopts a more minimalist interpretation, suggesting that imagistic practices survive and are repeated *not* because they transmit some important revelation, but they are structured in such a manner that people feel compelled to repeat them in precisely the same way each time. We will return below to Boyer's recent work on the features that make rituals compelling and contagious, but at present the main takeaway is that contrary to Whitehouse's general idea, rituals can be successfully transmitted *independently* of people's motivations to do so.[23] That is, not all features of ritual exist solely by the design of its authors or tradents, but may instead persist because they confer an advantage in terms of long-term cultural selection.

Whitehouse has recently refined the modes theory in notable ways. In a co-authored paper titled, "The Ties That Bind Us," Whitehouse and Lanman reexamine the very idea of ritual and its impact on social group cohesion.[24] They argue that the concept "ritual" carries too much baggage to be useful as an analytic category, and as a result should be dissected (or

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Past: Archaeology, History, and Cognition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004); Harvey Whitehouse and James Laidlaw, eds., *Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press 2004).

[23] Pascal Boyer, "Book Review Forum: Harvey Whitehouse, *Arguments and Icons: Divergent Modes of Religiosity*," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 16 (2002): 4-43 (8-13). Boyer writes that, "Instead of assuming that people repeat rituals because they re-establish revelation (which requires a very rich interpretation of people's very vague utterances on the topic) we could start from what people actually say: that there is a perceived danger in not performing the ritual or performing it in a different way; that they often cannot really explain what that danger is, or why non-performance would make it real; that most people who have gone through the ritual feel that way too." As we will see presently, this idea is developed in more detail in recent work and has implications for understanding what makes the Day of Atonement rituals cognitively appealing.

[24] Harvey Whitehouse and Jonathan Lanman, "The Ties That Bind Us: Ritual Fusion, and Identification," *Current Anthropology* 55 (2014): 674-95. For a deconstruction of "ritual," see also Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

"fractionated") into more tractable empirical behaviors that can be studied for the unique cognitive and behavioral effects they have on social cohesion and cooperation.[25] Building on the original modes theory, they propose that doctrinal and imagistic practices each function to promote a different type of group bonding. On the one hand, the frequently repeated practices of the doctrinal mode result in "group identification," which serves as a bonding mechanism for larger groups of anonymous individuals. In addition to solidifying doctrines and teachings, doctrinal systems achieve trust and cooperation among group members by, among other things, invoking "big gods" who monitor individual behavior, and furthermore incorporating costly behaviors performed by religious models and specialists. On the other hand, imagistic practices (what Whitehouse and Lanman describe more precisely as painful rituals of "dysphoric" arousal) lead to "identity fusion."[26] This is the sense, upon experiencing a traumatic ritual experience, of being bound as psychological kin, which prepares fused members to engage in risky activities like hunting and war.[27]

Although this sketch of the argument is brief, it provides us with some insights to bear in mind when approaching the textual material in Leviticus 16. In short, we can aim to identify the *nature* of the ritual actions described in the Day of Atonement ritual in terms of doctrinal or imagistic practices—or more specifically, in terms of causally opaque action sequences and

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[25] The idea of fractionating ritual into observable behaviors and phenomena is pivotal to the work of Boyer and Liénard on ritualized behavior (discussed below). With regard to religion more broadly, see Pascal Boyer and Brian Bergstrom, "Evolutionary Perspectives on Religion," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37 (2008): 111-30.

[26] As Whitehouse and Lanman ("Ties That Bind Us", 681): "We have argued that different kinds of collective rituals produce different kinds of group cohesion. Life-changing, emotionally intense (especially dysphoric) rituals produce identity fusion and a durable sense of psychological kinship with other group members. This psychological kinship motivates relatively extreme forms of parochial altruism, especially when the group is threatened. By contrast, routinized rituals produce identification that serves to enhance prosociality, trust, and cooperation towards the members of potentially very large groups comprising anonymous others, at least when salient social cues are present and when the group's prospects are healthy." See also Ronald Fischer and Dimitris Xygalatas, "Extreme Rituals as Social Technologies," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 14 (2014): 345-55.

[27] Biblical examples might include circumcision and other ritual acts that serve to bind Israelites together (*běnê Yisrā'ēl*), especially on the verge of war and conquest in the Promised Land. On genealogy in ancient Israel see Robert Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

euphoric or dysphoric arousal. Then, in turn, we can theorize the likely cognitive *effects* on ancient ritual participants in terms of social cohesion, and, wherever possible, compare the predicted effects with the actual effects insofar as it is possible to discern or infer them from the available textual evidence. This exercise has the potential to enhance our understanding of the ways in which these ritual performances impacted the group dynamics of those who participated in them. More broadly, the theoretical insights of Whitehouse and of Lawson and McCauley encourage historians and biblical scholars to consider the role of memory in facilitating the transmission of ritual actions and religious traditions.[28] Beyond the use of textual instructions for ritual procedures, we can analyze the form and features of the ritual itself and ask how these might contribute to the transmission potential of a given ritual.

6.2.3. Boyer and Liénard: Hazard Precaution Systems

Similar to Whitehouse and others, Boyer and Liénard consider the study of "ritual," or the idea of developing a "theory of ritual," problematic and ultimately unhelpful. Therefore, rather than getting bogged down with the slippery question of what counts as "ritual," they focus instead on a specific type of action they call "ritualized behavior."[29] This phrase denotes "a specific way of organizing the flow of behavior, characterized by compulsion (one must perform the particular sequence), rigidity (it must be performed the right way), redundancy (the same actions are often

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[28] See Harvey Whitehouse and James Laidlaw, *Ritual and Memory: Toward a Comparative Anthropology of Religion* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2004).

[29] Pascal Boyer and Pierre Liénard, "Why Ritualized Behavior? Precaution Systems and Action Parsing in Development, Pathological and Cultural Rituals," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29 (2006): 1-56; Pierre Liénard and Pascal Boyer, "Whence Collective Rituals? A Cultural Selection Model of Ritualized Behavior," *American Anthropologist* 108 (2006): 814-27. The idea of ritualized behavior is not to be confused with the notion of ritualization as "strategic mode of acting," as proposed by the ritual theorist Catherine Bell. Although both theories share in common the emphasis on ritual as a type of human activity (or "practice" in Bell's terminology), Boyer and Liénard's cultural selection framework aims to make sense of why these specific features of ritual are universal, rather than how they may impact power structures and create relationships between the individuals involved.

repeated inside the ritual) and goal demotion (the actions are divorced from their usual goals)."[30] Ritualized actions are "causally opaque" in the sense that there is no obvious causal connection between the action and the purported effect or outcome. Taking their cue from anthropologists such as Roy Rappaport, Maurice Bloch, and Humphrey and Laidlaw, who have long observed the presence of these features in cultural activities, Boyer and Liénard seek to explain *why* these features are so common in cultures the world over.[31]

In addition to these physical elements, ritualized behavior centers on specific recurring themes related to social and biological threats, often manifested as concerns with pollution and contamination as well as order and boundaries. From an evolutionary perspective, humans evolved specialized mental systems for dealing with potential threats in the environment, and Boyer and Liénard propose that humans are equipped with a "hazard-precaution system" that is activated by cultural rituals.[32] That is, rituals often incorporate cues and behaviors that result in the "cognitive capture" of thus hazard-precaution system. As a result, insofar as collective cultural rituals activate this hazard-precaution system, such cultural rituals become salient and compelling to ritual participants and, as a result, will enjoy an advantage in terms of cultural selection. Rituals with these features are more cognitively optimal than those without them, and are thus be more likely to be performed over and over again over time.[33]

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[30] Boyer and Liénard, "Whence Collective Rituals?" 815.

[31] Ritualized behaviors also appear in variety of life circumstances, from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) pathologies to normal adult behavior during and after the birthing life-cycle stage, and, most importantly for our purposes, in cultural rituals both religious and non-religious.

[32] Liénard and Boyer, "Whence Collective Rituals?" 817: "This is not just a matter of metaphors. In many rituals, blood, semen, or excrement are a primary concern, the miasma or smells of decaying corpses are important, and the use of water or fire as possible ways of getting rid of pollution and contamination is also recurrent." There are of course numerous examples, both in the priestly literature but also in the biblical corpus more broadly, of the concern about purity and pollution in biblical law and everyday life. See Thomas Kazen, "Dirt and Disgust: Body and Morality in Biblical Purity Laws," in *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible* (ed. Baruch J. Schwartz, David P. Wright, Jeffrey Stackert, and Naphtali S. Meshel; LHBOTS 474; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 43-64; idem, *Emotions in Biblical Law: A Cognitive Science Approach* (Sheffield; Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 9-94.

[33] Liénard and Boyer, "Whence Collective Rituals?" 815: "Ritual performance produces specific effects in participants that result in subsequent performance."

Overall, the model of ritualized behavior offers a general explanation for why such recurring features appear so commonly in religious and cultural rituals. When ancient biblical rituals are considered in this cultural-selection framework, it is possible that the Priestly ritual practices, including the Day of Atonement ritual, owes much of its appeal and cultural success to its ability to activate specific cognitive systems. As Boyer and Liénard write, "What our model implies, is a more precise manner, is that, *inasmuch as* there is ritualized behavior in rituals and ceremonies, it is liable to activate precaution systems in at least some of the participants, and thereby enjoy some transmission advantage."[34] In this view, then, the elements of the Day of Atonement ritual may exist not (solely) because of their conscious design by priestly leaders, but in part because these specific behaviors have specific cognitive effects, unbeknownst to the designers of the ritual as well its participants. Religious rituals may, for example, activate the hazard-precaution system by "including typical clues for relevant potential dangers. In other words witnessing or performing the prescribed ritual actions should result in cognitive capture of the hazard-precaution system."[35] As interpreters of the biblical ritual, we can attempt to identify these "typical clues" of potential danger within the textual evidence. Moreover, we can extend these insights to theorize the likely effect upon those who witnessed *or* performed rituals, since either role is sufficient to activate the same systems.

In addition to these broader questions, it is important to distinguish *ritualization*, which requires a good deal of focused concentration and cognitive effort on the one hand, and *routinization*, which describes (ritual) actions that are performed on "auto-pilot" with little conscious effort. It may be the case, of course, that new rituals that initially require time and

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[34] Boyer and Liénard, "Why Ritualized Behavior?" 46.

[35] Liénard and Boyer, "Whence," 822. Note also that the argument is *not* that cultural rituals are OCD writ large, and their goal is not to explain "ritual." Rather, they seek to explain why cultural rituals often incorporate these specific ritualized behaviors.

energy to learn and commit to memory may later become routinized and second nature with enough practice. This process would involve what McCauley refers to as "practiced naturalism"—the kind of cognitive facility that comes with intensive training and expertise in a particular domain (e.g., riding a bike or tying one's shoes).[36] Nevertheless, the distinction is significant and has implications for biblical scholars dealing with ritual texts, who are interested in trying to understand the effects of certain ritual behaviors on their participants. Part of this goal lies in understanding the unique cognitive demands of different types of human behaviors.

6.2.4. Cognitive Resource Depletion

Like previous cognitive research on religious ritual, a group of Scandinavian scholars has recently explored the cognitive effects of certain ritual behaviors. Schjoedt and colleagues propose a model of "cognitive resource depletion," which highlights the ways in which specific activities exert significant demands on working cognition. They examine three common features found in religious rituals (or what they call religious "interactions"): (1) the demand for suppression of emotions, (2) exposure to causally-opaque and goal-demoted actions, and (3) the presence of charismatic authority.[37] Their main thesis is that each of these features places a heavy burden on real-time working memory (a point made previously by Boyer and Liénard) and, as a result, limit the ability of individuals to process religious events while they are being performed. This "swamping" of working memory, in turn, opens the door for religious

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[36] McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not*, ch. 1.

[37] Uffe Schjoedt, Jesper Sørensen, Kristoffer L. Nielbo, Dimitris Xygalatas, Panagiotis Mitkidis, and Joseph Bulbulia, "Cognitive Resource Depletion in Religious Interactions," *Religion, Brain and Behavior* 3 (2013): 39-86. Cognitive resource depletion: "Because executive functions recruit the same frontal regions, these regions have been found to compete for cognitive resources in critical situations. This corresponds with a resource model of executive function in which a dramatic increase of cognitive load from attention detracts from executive processes because it depletes a common pool of resources. For example, increased attentional load on the frontal networks has been shown to impair performance in executive control tests such as the Stroop task. We term this phenomenon *cognitive resource depletion*" (41).

authorities to then impart religious teachings and doctrines prior to and subsequent to the ritual performance, ultimately favoring the transmission of these religious teachings.

Schjoedt and colleagues offer several empirical studies to support the hypothesis. They note that from ethnographic observations, many intense cultural rituals (i.e., "dysphoric" rituals) demand the suppression of emotions during the ritual process. This occurs in many rites of passage in which adolescents undergo a painful process of initiation in order to become adults. During these rites, the participants undergoing the ritual are often commanded to suppress any outward sign of fear or pain. From ethnographic research on participants during fire-walking rituals, for example, such intense practices often demand participants to remain resolute and unwavering throughout the ordeal.[38] Contrary to Whitehouse's idea that high arousal rituals imprint vivid and accurate "flashbulb" memories in people's minds, more recent studies show that individual memories of intense experiences are often distorted and full of inaccuracies. Schjoedt and colleagues suggest that this is because during high arousal rituals which require the regulation of emotions, cognitive resources that are otherwise used to formulate real-time memories are in fact *depleted* by the ritual itself, since the ritual requires a huge amount of energy on concentration and emotion suppression.[39] Therefore, against Whitehouse, intense rituals actually prohibit memory formation by creating a *gap* in one's working memory, a gap that can be filled with religious teachings before and after the ritual event.

The cognitive resource depletion model also provides further support for Boyer and Liénard's theory of ritualized behavior. According to the model, exposure to causally opaque

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[38] See Dimitris Xyglatas, Uffe Schjoedt, Joseph Bulbulia, Ivana Konvalinka, Else-Marie Jegindø, Paul Reddish, Armin W. Geertz, and Andreas Roepstoff, "Autobiographical Memory in a Fire-Walking Ritual," *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 13 (2013): 1-16; and Dimitris Xygalatas, *The Burning Saints: Cognition and Culture in the Fire-Walking Rituals of the Anastenaria* (Acumen: London, 2012). While there is nothing quite like this in the Hebrew Bible, adult circumcision is perhaps the closest thing, though it does not explicitly require one to suppress negative emotions.

[39] Schjoedt et al., "Cognitive Resource Depletion," 41: "dramatic increase of cognitive load from attention detracts from executive processes because it depletes a common pool of resources."

and/or goal-demoted ritual actions, people become so fixated on the specific low-level details of the action sequence (and the need to perform the actions in precisely the way specified), that proper performance requires a huge amount of concentration and cognitive effort.[40] Again, the effect of these ritualized actions is to swamp working memory, preventing ritual participants from forming their own interpretations of the ritual. Lastly, the presence of a charismatic religious teacher also has its own particular cognitive effects. Experiments suggest that when listening to a charismatic individual (whether a priest or professor), people's trust in the authority figure causes them to become less vigilant in their assessment of that figure's statements. In other words, "the presence of a charismatic authority may simply reduce the amount of resources that participants invest in error monitoring and updating."[41]

The idea of cognitive resource depletion, as it relates to religious rituals, is summed up by Schjoedt and colleagues as follows: "[W]e propose a resource model of ritual cognition in which collective rituals limit the cognitive resources available for the individual processing of religious events in order to increase participants' susceptibility to collective rituals."[42] In this view, then, religious rituals serve to transmit religious ideas and teachings, though not in the way scholars have traditionally assumed. Rather than communicating meanings symbolically, the cognitive resource depletion model suggests that specific ritualized features promote the transmission of religious ideas through the demands they place on real-time cognition and memory. "As a result, prior expectations and post-ritual interpretations may become more important for participants' understanding of the ritual than their actual perceptions of the ritual context...In the context of depletion, however, individuals may be prevented from making their own attributions during the

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[40] And crucially, participating or observing rituals with these features has same effect.
[41] Schjoedt et al., "Cognitive Resource Depletion," 47.
[42] Schjoedt et al., "Cognitive Resource Depletion," 40.

ritual event, creating an attributional gap which may be filled by shared attributions after the event."[43]

6.2.5. Does it Work? Evaluating Ritual Efficacy

The experimental work of Cristine Legare and colleagues focuses on people's perceptions of ritual efficacy.[44] Or, in other words, she is interested in what features of ritual make people believe that a ritual will work and achieve its stated goal. Through a series of experimental studies, her findings suggest that the main variables that influence people's judgments of ritual efficacy are (1) repetition of actions; (2) the number of procedural steps; and (3) the presence of religious icons or markers of divine agency. When presented with an assortment of rituals involving different steps and ingredients, people intuitively believe that the more procedural steps, the more repetition, and the more salient the supernatural presence, the more effective a given ritual is likely to be.

Legare and colleagues eschew the idea that rituals act as a mode of symbolic communication, not least because causally opaque ritual activity (or ritualized behavior as outlined above) almost by design precludes any straightforward meaning from being conveyed. Instead, rituals often work instrumentally by means of the specific actions and elements that they incorporate. In the rituals studies by Legare, ritual efficacy was judged even in the absence of any ritual leaders or experts; if the ritual was performed correctly and included specific elements,

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[43] Schjoedt et al., "Cognitive Resource Depletion," 41.

[44] Christine H. Legare and André L. Souza, "Evaluating Ritual Efficacy: Evidence from the Supernatural," *Cognition* 124 (2012): 1-15. "Rather than conceptualize ritual as a process of intensive symbolic communication, we suggest that the process of ritualization tends to evacuate actions of meaning through goal-demotion and redundancy. Thus, we predict that intuitive causal reasoning, not content familiarity, is driving how ritual efficacy is evaluated." And: "We hypothesize that information reflecting intuitive biases in causal reasoning (i.e., repetition, number of procedural steps, and the specificity of procedural detail) is used to evaluate the efficacy of ritual action." See also William S. Sax, "Ritual and the Problem of Efficacy," in *The Problem of Ritual Efficacy* (ed. William S. Sax, Johannes Quack, and Jan Weinhold; Oxford Ritual Studies; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3-16.

it was deemed efficacious. When it comes to the Priestly ritual texts in Leviticus, a religious expert such as Moses or Aaron is always present to oversee the execution of the ritual, along with the deity who communicates the ritual. The experimental findings about the nature of ritual efficacy fit squarely with the observations of biblical scholars, who in recent years have argued for instrumental functions for biblical ritual activity, as opposed to symbolic meanings.[45] Recent cognitive research helps to extend these insights by clarifying the specific features that are likely to enhance the perceived instrumental efficacy of rituals in the eyes of its ancient audiences and practitioners.

6.2.6. Applying Cognitive Insights

Each of the studies discussed above investigates a particular aspect of ritual action. In all cases, the types of questions posed, and answers sought, differ from those that have traditionally occupied biblical scholars and ritual theorists. We must therefore not expect these cognitive views to address the textual, exegetical, and interpretive queries of most biblical scholars. Cognitive theories therefore have limitations for historiographical and textual study, since they tend to operate at a different level of analysis. Still, this does *not* mean that cognitive theories and findings somehow lie outside of the "proper" domain of biblical scholarship, as if biblical scholarship were a static category of inquiry to begin with.[46] Indeed, cognitive researchers, historians, and biblical scholars are ultimately interested in much the same questions concerning human thought and behavior, whether past or present. Cognitive theories provide a general

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[45] See, for example, William K. Gilders, "Anthropological Approaches: Ritual in Leviticus 8, Real or Rhetorical?" in *Method Matters: Essays on the Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David L. Peterson* (ed. Joel M. LeMon and Kent H. Richards; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 233-50; idem, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004),

[46] Indeed, one could make the case that cognitive questions belong squarely within the purview of biblical scholarship, not least because they concern issues of interest to historians and humanists more broadly, namely: human thought and behavior. Despite their limitations, the texts remains "artifacts of cognition" (Brent Strawn, personal communication), which likely preserve a blend of both reflective and intuitive types of thought.

understanding of the psychological processes that make ritual activity so widespread and persistent. Equipped with an informed view about the cognitive mechanisms that underpin ritual action, and the effects they have on participants' thought and behavior, biblical scholars and historians can examine the ways in which these mechanisms play a role in past rituals, as well as the ways in which they are tweaked in unique ways by local cultural traditions.

In light of the cognitive interest in human behavior, however, we must take care to recognize the difference between ritual *actions* and ritual *texts*, and avoid conflating the two. We do not have access to ancient Israelite religious practices in a manner similar to ethnographers who study a living social community.[47] Rather, we have at our disposal only the textual records from these ancient people, records which may or may not describe the way rituals were actually performed in ancient Israel.[48] Indeed, there is much reason to think that the priestly literature is, to some degree, utopian in its presentation of Israelite society and ritual practice, having been written by a group of elite ritual experts that was concerned above all with establishing their own authority and narrating their own particular ideological vision of Israel's history.[49] In any event, the important point here is that ancient ritual texts—whether Israelite or otherwise—offer both descriptive and prescriptive statements of ritual, but may *not* guarantee a direct window onto ancient Israelite lived religious practice.

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[47] See Gilders, "Anthropological Approaches," 233-50.

[48] There is debate among biblical scholars regarding the degree to which ritual texts reflect actual ritual practice in ancient Israel, with researchers falling along a continuum of minimalist to maximalist positions. While I recognize that the biblical texts must by necessity be approached first from a literary perspective—that is, as religious *literature*—I do not follow some of my colleagues in denying the possibility that this literature *also* describes practices that were familiar and available in ancient Israelite society. Indeed, it is hard to understand how such texts could be expected to have any meaningful impact on readers/listeners if they did not in some way correspond to practices that were widely known among the audience.

[49] See David P. Wright, "Ritual Theory, Ritual Texts, and the Priestly-Holiness Writings of the Pentateuch," in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect* (ed. Saul M. Olyan; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 195-216.

Despite this cautionary note, there is no need to despair; we may still learn something important about the nature of ancient Israelite representations of ritual by investigating the textual evidence. Indeed, even if the biblical texts were shown to be entirely fictional or ahistorical, and the descriptions of ritual procedures were demonstrated to be inaccurate or idealistic and never performed in exactly the manner described, the textual evidence still preserves ancient ideas and intuitions about what ritual activity was or should be like. Douglas Gragg articulates the idea nicely when evaluating the ritual form theory vis-à-vis classical Greek texts: "If the hypothesis is valid, then the cognitive mechanisms that constrain human intuitions about ritual form 'in the wild' should also constrain a novelist's intuitions about ritual form in the imagination."[50] Thus, there is still much to be learned from ancient texts, utopian or otherwise, with respect to ancient ritual thought. Similarly, Dirk Johannsen argues that reading and listening to religious stories and mythologies is a powerful experience in itself: "[Being confronted by a story] may activate similar or identical cognitive mechanisms as those activated by the situations described."[51] Even if we set aside the question of the reality of lived practice underlying biblical descriptions of ritual, we are still in a similar position to ancient Israelite readers/listeners, for whom these ritual texts had great meaning and significance.

6.3. WALKING THROUGH LEVITICUS 16

The Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16 belongs to the Priestly source of the Hebrew Bible (also known as P). Like the other pentateuchal strata, the Priestly story begins with creation in

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[50] Gragg, "Initiations of Lucius," 28.

[51] Dirk Johannsen, "No Time to Philosophize? Norwegian Oral Tradition and the Cognitive Economics of Belief," in *Past Minds: Studies in Cognitive Historiography* (ed. Luther H. Martin and Jesper Sørensen; London: Equinox, 2011), 77-88. Sticking to (broadly) priestly literature in the Hebrew Bible, this is plainly the aim of much of the disgust language employed by the prophet Ezekiel when recounting the impurity and unfaithfulness of Israel towards its God. The prophet deploys a number of disgust terms and metaphors, the rhetorical aim of which is to elicit reactions of disgust in his audience.

the book of Genesis, continues with the patriarchs, and proceeds with the Israelites departure from Egypt in the book of Exodus. Within the larger Priestly narrative, the laws of Leviticus follow immediately after Yahweh reveals to the Israelites the divine law code along with the blueprints for constructing the tabernacle. Within Leviticus itself, the book begins with prescriptions for different categories of sacrificial offerings (Lev 1-7), the ordination ceremony for Aaron and the priestly family (Lev 8-10), descriptions and rules for dealing with various types of impurity (Lev 11-15), and culminates in the grand Day of Atonement ritual found in chapter 16.

As the text stands in its current form, Leviticus 16 is presented as an annual ritual taking place on the tenth day of the seventh month (Leviticus 16:29,34). In the canonical text, then, we have a large ritual performed once a year in order to remove from the tabernacle all impurities that have accrued to it. Scholars have long noted, however, that the concluding verses that identify the ritual as an annual observance were added by a later redactor of the text. Whereas the bulk of the chapter (vv. 1-28) belongs to the Priestly source (P), many scholars believe that the final paragraph (vv. 29-34a) was written by a different school of priestly authors known as the Holiness School (or H).[52] According to this view, P does not explicitly state that the Day of Atonement ritual was intended as an annual ritual event, and in fact is silent regarding the time and frequency of the ritual.[53] There is actually some evidence that it was *not* meant to be an annual occurrence, but rather was introduced as an emergency rite to be used whenever necessary. Support for this idea comes from the larger literary context. Specifically, the ritual in

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[52] The label "Holiness School," or alternately "Holiness Code," was coined based on the source's unique terminology, theology, and emphasis on the concept of holiness. Notably, H exhorts the Israelite people to strive for a state of holiness ("You shall be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy" [Lev 19:2, 37]), unlike P, which reserves holiness solely for the priests. The H material in Leviticus 17-27 was added to P as a secondary layer. The seminal study on the topic remains Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). On Leviticus 16:29-34a, see also Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1064-65.

[53] It is of course possible that P intended the ritual to be an annual rite. The point, however, is that P does not explicitly say so and there is some basis for thinking that it was not.

Leviticus 16 is linked explicitly with the abrupt death of Aaron's sons previously in Leviticus 10, and their subsequent defilement of the sanctuary.[54] Leviticus 16 begins with the words, "Yahweh spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of Yahweh" (Lev 16:1). According to the narrative trajectory, then, the proximate cause for the establishment of the Day of Atonement ritual is the events narrated in Leviticus 10—the death of Aaron's sons polluted the tabernacle and Leviticus 16 supplies the ritual procedure needed to remove the impurity and rectify the situation. If the Day of Atonement ritual was initially designed to address a specific ritual calamity, it is therefore possible that the Priestly authors similarly intended it to function thereafter as an emergency rite of purgation to be performed whenever necessary. If so, it would have been conceived as a repeatable ritual, but not necessarily an annual one.[55] Only with the concluding verses added by the Holiness School in Lev 16:29-34a, however, is the reader told that the Day of Atonement ritual is to be performed annually on a specific date, "in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month." We will return to the implications of this observation below in our discussion of ritual form and frequency.

Now, the purification of the sanctuary is but one part of the larger ritual cycle described in Leviticus 16. The entire chapter consists of two distinct rites: (1) the purification of the sanctuary and its various sanctums by means of the blood from sacrificial animals, called *ḥaṭṭā't*

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[54] The intervening material in Leviticus chapters 11-15 is devoted to various forms of impurity and how to deal with them. These ritual procedure and instructions are presented as prescriptive ritual laws ("If x occurs, then do y"). Despite this intrusive material, the narrative flows naturally from Lev 10 to Lev 16. This does not mean, however, that Lev 11-15 derive from a different author.

[55] Milgrom (*Leviticus 1-16*, 1013) writes that the ritual in Leviticus 16 originally functioned as an "emergency measure": "initially the purgation rite for the sanctuary was an emergency measure, a thesis that fits the theory that originally this chapter followed upon the deaths of Nadab and Abihu" (cf. 1011). This observation would hold true even if "originally" the textual order looks the same as it does in its current form (Lev 10 > Lev 11-15 > Lev 16), since the Priestly authors of all this material could have arranged the chapters in just this way, with the *narrative* in Lev 10 giving way to the ritual instructions in Lev 11-15 and resuming again in Lev 16.

offerings, meaning "sin" or "purification" offerings (Lev 16:3-19),[56] and (2) the dispatching into the wilderness of a scapegoat bearing the Israelites'' sins and impurities (vv. 16:20-22). Within these two main rites, the entire ritual cycle includes a series of intricate sub-rites and procedures. It is worth describing these in some detail, in order to both lay out the specific ritual actions but also to give a sense of the complexity of the entire ritual cycle.

First, in order to enter the holy sanctuary into the presence of the deity, the high priest Aaron must wash his body and clothe himself in the sacred vestments (tunic, breeches, sash, turban). Aaron is then instructed to bring two goats to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and lots are cast to determine their fates: one goat is slaughtered as a purification offering (*ḥaṭṭā't*) on behalf of the people, while the other is set aside as a scapegoat that will carry away their sins into the wilderness. Next, a bull is slaughtered as a purification offering on behalf of the high priest and his household. The priestly authors state that the purpose of these sacrificial offerings is to "make expiation" (*kippēr*) on behalf of both parties. Aaron then brings a pan full of hot coals into the inner sanctum, offers incense before the deity, and fills the inner room with a dense cloud of smoke that floats over the Ark.[57] Aaron is ordered to perform blood manipulation rites in each location of the sanctuary complex, applying blood to the cover of the Ark, the inner and outer sanctums, and the courtyard altar. After passing through the concentric holy areas and arriving outside, Aaron returns to the scapegoat. As high priest, he places both hands upon the head of the live goat and then confesses all the sins of the people before banishing to goat to the wilderness

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[56] The Hebrew term *ḥaṭṭā't* was traditionally translated as "sin offering" because it shares a verbal root with the verb **ḥt'* ("to sin") and is rendered in the LXX by the Greek noun *hamartia* ("sin"). However, scholars have shown that a contextual understanding of the term also supports the rendering of *ḥaṭṭā't* as "purification offering." For discussion of the issues, see William K. Gilders, "חטאת as 'Sin Offering," in *"The One Who Sows Bountifully": Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers* (ed. Caroline J. Hodge, Saul M. Olyan, Daniel Ullucci, and Emma Wasserman; Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 2013), 119-28; James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 79-96; Jacob Milgrom, "Sin-Offering or Purification-Offering?" *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (1971): 237-39.

[57] The explicit rationale given is so that Aaron may safely enter the holy area, "so that the cloud from the incense screens the cover that is over [the Ark of] the Pact, lest he die" (Lev 16:13)

outside the camp. This is one point in the text, uniquely, where the purpose of a ritual action is explicitly stated: "Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities (*'ăwōnōt*) and transgressions (*pišêhem*) of the Israelites, including all their sins (*lĕkol-ḥaṭṭō'tām*), putting them on the head of the goat; and it shall be sent off to the wilderness through a designated man. Thus the goat shall carry on it all their iniquities to an inaccessible region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness" (16:20-22). [58] After performing these rites, Aaron removes his clothes, bathes again, clothes himself, and offers two burnt animal offerings (*'olāh*)—one on behalf of himself and his household and one for the people.[59] This lengthy process is the means by which Aaron acts to atone for, or make expiation (*kippēr*) on behalf of himself, his priestly family, and entire community of Israel.[60]

As we can see, the heart of the Day of Atonement ritual involves a purification ritual wherein the Israelite holy sanctuary is purged, or cleansed, of impurity and sin. There are two basic principles that underlie this ritual: (1) the holy structure can be polluted, and (2) God will not tolerate dwelling in a defiled sanctuary. Recall, for example, that for the priestly authors the ultimate purpose of constructing the tabernacle (*miškan*, literally "dwelling") is to provide a portable residence for the Israelite deity Yahweh to dwell among his people. In the instructions for building and assembling the tabernacle, Yahweh thus commands, "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exod 25:8). According to the priestly worldview, then,

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[58] Note here that the "sins" of the people are described as a physical thing that can be placed (*ntn) on the head of the goat, similar to the priestly description of an individual "bearing" his sin (**nś' 'ābōn*) like a physical burden. See Baruch J. Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 3-21.

[59] In total, Aaron is instructed to bathe his body twice and wash his hands and feet six times. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1018.

[60] Overall, the ritual includes the following animals: (1) a slaughtered bull as purification offering on behalf of Aaron and his household; (2) a slaughtered goat as a purification offering on behalf of the Israelite people; (3) a live goat as a vehicle to bear the people's sins and impurities into the wilderness; (4) two burnt offerings, one on behalf of Aaron, the other on behalf of the people.

the sins and impurities of the people contaminate the tabernacle and thus require remedial action in order to purify the divine abode and appease the deity. [61] For P, then, the process of "atonement" involves the cleansing of the divine sanctuary and ritual purging of all traces of contamination therein. [62] In this process, the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't* sacrifices is the purging element by which this is achieved, acting as a kind of "ritual detergent." This function of the blood manipulation rites is explicitly stated in Leviticus 16:16: "Thus he [Aaron] shall purge the shrine of the impurity and transgression of the Israelites, whatever their sins; and he shall do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which abides with them in the midst of their impurity" (cf. 16:19). [63]

6.3.1. Recent Interpretation of Biblical Ritual and Leviticus 16

Before applying cognitive insights to the Day of Atonement ritual, it is instructive to differentiate such approaches from more traditional ones within the study of biblical ritual and the subfield of ritual studies. Building on a long line of anthropological theory on ritual and sacrifice, many biblical scholars have attempted to uncover the symbolic nature of rituals in the Hebrew Bible. In recent years, for example, Jonathan Klawans has followed the lead of Mary Douglas and Victor Turner and argues that biblical rituals relating to sacrifice and impurity function as forms of symbolic communication. [64] He writes that sacrificial ritual, for instance, has "inherently

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[61] The explicit rationale for the impurity laws in P is given in Lev 15:31: ""You shall put the Israelites on guard against their uncleanness, lest they die through their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle which is among them." The death alluded to here results from the deity abandoning his people in response to their failure to maintain the purity of his dwelling (cf. Numbers 19:13, 20 and Ezekiel 1-11). These references come from Ezekiel and (probably) H material, whereas the Priestly (P) source seems to be less clear about the consequences of a defiled sanctuary. It is possible that, as in other cases, H makes explicit what is only implicit in P.

[62] See Michael B. Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

[63] For a discussion of temple purgation and elimination rites in the ancient Near East, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1067-70, 1071-79; David P. Wright, *The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature* (SBLDS 101; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987); Yitzhaq Feder, *Blood Expiation in Hittite and Biblical Ritual: Origins, Context, and Meaning* (Boston: Brill, 2011).

[64] See Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); idem, "Symbol, Function, Theology, and Morality in the

symbolic meaning."[65]The general claim that rituals communicate symbolic ideas, concepts, or meanings has been heavily critiqued, however. In his book *Rethinking Symbolism*, for example, Dan Sperber addressed prevailing symbolist and semiotic approaches within anthropology, and their attempt to decode purportedly hidden ritual meanings.[66] In his critique, Sperber pointed out that such interpretations tended to be idiosyncratic from scholars to scholar, with purported meanings being imposed upon native ritual practices that lacked any explicit rationale or meaning. Moreover, many such symbolic interpretations often ended up themselves being highly symbolic. This led to a great many interpretations or "meanings" being ascribed to the same ritual, which raised the suspicion that many such ethnographic interpretations depended largely on the creative imagination of the interpreter. Ultimately, symbolic proposals offered little clarity about the nature of ritual activity—that is, *why* people resort to a particular type of ritual behavior in order to communicate their alleged meanings. As Sperber pointed out, if symbols in stories or rituals have discernible "meanings," why not simply state them rather than resorting to a particular mode of ritual activity?[67]

Symbolic interpretations of ritual have also been challenged in recent years within biblical studies. William Gilders critiques Klawans, for example, for assuming that symbolism is an *essential* characteristic of ritual, and that therefore the job of the biblical scholars is to

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Study of Priestly Ritual," in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice* (ed. Jennifer Wright Knust and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 106-122; idem, "Methodology and Ideology in the Study of Priestly Ritual," in *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible* (ed. Baruch J. Schwartz, David P. Wright, Jeffrey Stackert, and Naphtali S. Meshel; LHBOTS 474; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 84-95.

[65] Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, 67.

[66] Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). For further critiques of symbolic approaches to ritual in anthropology see Gilbert Lewis, *Day of Shining Red: An Essay on Understanding Ritual* (Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 27; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Humphrey and Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual*. For a trenchant critique of Mary Douglas, in particular, see T. M. Lemos, "The Universal and the Particular: Mary Douglas and the Politics of Impurity," *Journal of Religion* 89 (2009): 236-51.

[67] Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, 6. See also Pascal Boyer, "Why Rituals?" in *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 229-63. For a more controversial view see Frits Staal, "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," *Numen* 26 (1979): 2-22.

interpret ritual activity symbolically.[68] Gilders cautions against the impulse to ascribe symbolic meaning to the Priestly authors, who never explicitly speak in terms of the symbolic significance of their ritual procedures:

> If symbolic interpretation of ritual was absent from ancient Israel, it would be a serious *misrepresentation* of that society to construct elaborate symbolic systems that never actually existed in any ancient Israelite mind. In my view, the evidence strongly suggests that the Israelite tradents who composed the ritual texts we now possess did *not* have a strong interest in symbolic interpretation of sacrifice. They were interested mainly in two things: 1) setting out details of practice; 2) identifying certain metaphysical effects of proper ritual performance, which they presented in instrumental terms.[69]

As we will see with Leviticus 16, the effects of the Day of Atonement ritual are presented in just this instrumental manner. In short, there is no guarantee that rituals functioned to communicate symbolic meanings among the people who practiced them. This is a presupposition that often ends up being self-fulfilling and tautological. There is no reason why a ritual, or collection of rituals, must necessarily aim to communicate through symbolic gestures some hidden knowledge, the discernment of which often ends up depending more on the ingenuity of the interpreter than on the elements of the ritual itself.[70]

A more nuanced view on biblical ritual, from a distinctly "ritual theory" perspective, is offered in Ithamar Gruenwald's impressive collection of essays in *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*.[71] In this work, Gruenwald develops numerous erudite and important observations

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[68] William K. Gilders, "Ancient Israelite Sacrifice as Symbolic Action: Theoretical Reflections," *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 78 (2013): 1-22; idem, "Review of Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple*, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 69 (2007): 784-85. See also the critique of symbolic approaches in Thomas Kazen, "Levels of Explanation for Ideas of Impurity: Why Structuralist and Symbolic Models Often Fail While Evolutionary and Cognitive Models Succeed," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 8 (forthcoming).

[69] Gilders, "Ancient Israelite Sacrifice as Symbolic Action," 10.

[70] Compare the remark by Lewis, *Day of Shining Red*, 117.

[71] Ithamar Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel* (The Brill Reference Library of Judaism 10; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

on a wide range of topics relating to ancient Jewish ritual, sacrifice, and religion. Importantly for our purposes, he also offers an extended treatment of Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement ritual. Gruenwald's focused study therefore offers an opportunity to compare the methodological approaches of cognitive researchers with those of more traditional ritual studies.

In his theoretical discussion of sacrifices in ancient Israel from what he calls a "ritual theory" view, Gruenwald is interested in uncovering the "logic" and "inner structure" of rituals.[72] Unlike Klawans, he eschews the symbolic-communicative interpretation of ritual action and, like many cognitive theorists, instead elects to focus on the ritual action itself rather than theological or ideological aspects that might accompany it. [73] In doing so, he takes seriously the understanding of ritual as a distinct mode of behavior. In this ritual theory view, ritual and sacrifice are "emphatically performative," being more about what the actions themselves communicate than about the theological frameworks that may accompany them.[74] According to Gruenwald, rather than communicating symbolically or transmitting a pre-existing theology, ritual has an internal grammar and communicates through the inherent form of the ritual itself.[75] He writes that, "behavioural acts constitute a language of their own, and language is an expression of the mind. This special kind of language utilises structured acts as its specific mode of expression...Every act, and, particularly, every ritual act has its own grammar. Thus, acts

[72] Also referred to as "embedded ritual theory" and "functional structure." See, e.g., Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 183-84, 192.

[73] Though, as we have seen, cognitive studies of ritual consider not only the behavioral elements present in religious rituals, but also, crucially, their cognitive effects of these behaviors. While this is at least somewhat different from explicit theological doctrine, it still concerns the domain of psychology and mental content.

[74] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 187, 190, etc. For this ritual theory approach to ritual and communication see also the discussion in Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 42-46, 182-87.

[75] He insists that, "to say that there is meaning in rituals is not tantamount—as many scholars believe—to saying that they are symbolic expressions of ideas. The meaning is contained in the performed essence of rituals" (199). Yet as we shall see, despite his insistence, his understanding of ritual, especially the Day of Atonement ritual, very much relies on discerning symbolic meanings.

speak for themselves and serve as communicative transmitters. Understanding what they 'say' depends on our ability to discover the nature of the language used, in each case."[76]

For Gruenwald, sacrifices are the quintessential religious ritual, representing a "dramatic modes of performance," which "are able to do what other forms of ritual cannot."[77] When it comes to sacrifices, the goal of the scholar, much as with rituals more generally, is to uncover their "own, self-maintained, ritual theory."[78] His main claim is that sacrificial rituals respond to moments of threat and crisis—they are performed with the goal of either repairing damage that has already occurred or else preventing a potential future threat. Sacrifices therefore serve to "sustain life at crucial points of existence."[79] More specifically, he argues that sacrificial ritual "enacts or repeats an act of breaking: it mimetically repeats the essence of a disastrous event."[80] As an example, he cites the case of the red heifer in Deuteronomy 21:1-9, wherein a cow's neck is broken whenever an individual is found dead in the field and the cause of death unknown. In this instance, according to Gruenwald, the slaughtering of the animal recreates the original violent act involving the human individual and therefore rectifies the situation.[81]

In the case of the Day of Atonement ritual, Gruenwald interprets the death of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, in Leviticus 10 as the immediate precursor to the ritual. He takes this connection one step further and argues that the ritual in Lev 16 mimics the disturbance that prompted it. Gruenwald identifies a crucial difference between these two events, however, namely that, "while the lived event marks a crisis that ran out of control, the ritual enactment mimetically signals a crisis that is kept carefully under control. Mimesis is a planned, controlled

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[76] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 188-9.
[77] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 185.
[78] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 187.
[79] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 185.
[80] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 185.
[81] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 185 n. 10.

event."[82] Yet, despite this distinction, death lies at the heart of both the crisis and the ritual designed to address it. This suggestion prompts the larger claim that, "death or its proximity is the ultimate context of sacrificial rituals."[83] The deaths of Nadab and Abihu caused the crisis and, accordingly, the ritual solution must reenact, in a controlled manner, this death and disturbance. Specifically, the slaughter and shedding of animal blood in Lev 16 reenacts that original crisis and loss of life. There is thus a "strong link" between the killing of the animal sacrifices and the death of Aaron's two sons.

Although Gruenwald's analysis of Leviticus 16 is filled with insights, there are several problems both with regard to his general understanding of ritual as a form of communication, as well as with his specific interpretation of the textual evidence. To begin with, the idea of ritual as a mode of communication, akin to spoken language, is not without difficulties. Indeed, much like the symbolic interpretations that he correctly avoids, his "ritual-as-communication" approach ends trying to decode ritual actions in the same way, and is therefore vulnerable to Sperber's original critique. Even for Gruenwald, who emphasizes the ritual actions as the key to uncovering the ritual's theory or meaning, the underlying assumption is still that the function of ritual is to communicate meanings in a manner similar to linguistic utterances. One should be careful, therefore, in holding that an approach to ritual must begin with the assumption, or goal, that an "inner logic" or "structure" exists. Moreover, the concept of a ritual logic implies that it was the ritual practitioners or experts who designed and implemented this logic. However, in light of Boyer and Liénard's work, this too must be called into question, since common features of religious rituals often exist for reasons other than their conscious design.

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[82] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 204.
[83] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 202.

When it comes to Gruenwald's interpretation of sacrifice, and specifically the role of sacrifices in the Day of Atonement ritual, we encounter further problems. Although Gruenwald claims to reject the idea of ritual as the symbolic expression of theology, the interpretive statements offered regarding Leviticus 16 end up themselves being theological and symbolic in nature. For instance, his focus on "death" as the central theme underlying the Day of Atonement sacrifices is less than obvious. Gruenwald claims that there exists a "strong link" between the killing of animal victims and the death of Aaron's sons: "It builds an axis of mortality that activates the link between the event and the ritual."[84] Yet the fact remains that nowhere does the text itself explicitly make such a mimetic connection. While the purification rituals are presented (literarily) as a response to the smiting of Aaron's sons, the text never comes close to hinting that the death of sacrificial animals enacts or mimics their deaths. Rather than deriving from the textual evidence, therefore, this interpretation seems to be instead imposed upon it. In fact, it raises more questions than it resolves. Consider Gruenwald's claim that the Day of Atonement sacrifices "enact a processual 'ceremony of destruction' that mimetically enacts the actual disturbance, or destruction."[85] This interpretation does not adequately explain the fact that in the priestly literature *not every death* results in sacrifice as a "mimetic" solution, and similarly neither does it account for the fact that *not every sacrifice* is performed in response to a crisis— sometimes people just bring offerings as gifts for Yahweh to ensure their own good-standing with the deity.

As discussed above, Gruenwald assumes that sacrifices are "dramatic modes of performance," but the text does not supply much support for this claim. Actually, there is a matter-of-factness in the description of animal sacrifices both in this ritual and throughout the

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[84] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 204.
[85] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 205.

book of Leviticus. Sacrifices are described as economic transactions mediated by the priests, and the slaughtering of the animal is accorded no special significance or weight.[86] Indeed, in the Day of Atonement ritual the slaughtering of the animal is emphasized far less than the blood manipulation rites, performed by the high priest, that ultimately produce *kipper*.[87] Moreover, elsewhere in Leviticus these same types of sacrifices (the *ḥaṭṭā't* and the *'olāh* offerings) are not performed in response to a crisis involving death. Sacrificial offerings in Leviticus are used to address a variety of situations, the majority of which, contrary to Gruenwald's view about death and sacrifice, do not involve death. Overall, then, the alleged connection between the death of Aaron's sons and the death of sacrificial animals in Lev 16 less than compelling. Although we may grant that the atonement rituals seek to repair some damage that has been done, perhaps even relating to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, the theory about "mimetic" reenactment is a symbolic interpretation that is ultimately unsupported by the text, and one that is not without theological implications even if Gruenwald does not recognize it.[88]

Lastly, Gruenwald writes that the complexity of the ritual actions in Leviticus 16 "reflects the complex nature of the situation to which it relates."[89] While it is true that the ritual sequence in Leviticus 16 involves an intricate progression of actions, it is less clear that these behaviors arise in response to an equally "complex" issue. Indeed, one could frame the theological issue quite simply: the temple is defiled and therefore needs to be cleansed. Rather than talk about the

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[86] The individual who slaughters the animal is never explicitly identified in the Hebrew text, suggesting perhaps that it was left to the owner who brought the animal, rather than the ritual duty of the priestly experts.

[87] Compare the remark by Wright ("The Study of Ritual in the Hebrew Bible," 127): "The brief mention of slaughter here [Lev 16] and in the rest of the Bible makes it appear to be a secondary and subordinate act, and instead presents the blood rites as the focus of the purification offerings." For a general treatment of sacrifice that decenters the death of the animal, see Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2008).

[88] He writes earlier that sacrifices are mechanisms that respond to the idea that "a certain reality, or existence, is either under threat or actually undergoing disintegration. The sacrificial ritual is done to prevent this from happening or to repair the damage that has already been done." Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 185.

[89] Gruenwald, *Rituals and Ritual Theory in Ancient Israel*, 209.

"complexity" of the crisis in Leviticus 16, the real issue seems to lie instead in the *scale* of the crisis. That is, the defilement is so severe, and the sense of urgency so high, that the community is in danger of having the deity abandon the people and cease dwelling in their midst.[90] While it is true that the ritual involves a complex sequence of actions, as we will see, there are alternative explanations for this procedural complexity, specifically relating to the ideas of cognitive capture (Boyer and Liénard), credibility enhancing displays, or CREDs (Whitehouse and Lanman), and efficacy (Legare). These are just some of the reasons why the quest for a "ritual theory" behind Leviticus 16 may be misguided. Following more recent developments in cognitive research, therefore, it proves fruitful to focus instead on specific human behaviors and their unique effects on cognition and social cohesion as a way to advance the discussion.[91]

6.4. ILLUMINATING A RITUAL TEXT, COGNITVELY

6.4.1. The Ritualization of Atonement

From even a cursory read, it is clear that the Day of Atonement ritual complex displays many of the features of ritualized behavior as identified by Boyer and Liénard. The two-stage atonement process includes, for example, *causally opaque actions*, such as applying blood to parts of the sanctuary in order to "purify" them (Lev 16:18-19; cf. vv. 14-15), laying of hands upon the Azazel goat (16:21); and washing when one has already bathed (Lev 16:24). The ritual is also accompanied by a strong sense of *compulsion and urgency*, and the idea that there will be devastating consequences if the impurity of the sanctuary is not removed. Recall that the closing

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[90] In Gilders' terms, following Peirce, the ritual is *indexical*, in that the entire ritual complex indexes the significance of the situation to which it is a response.

[91] It is worth noting that Gruenwald speaks on occasion about the "special modes of consciousness" that rituals entail (e.g., p. 185). In this sense, then, Gruenwald anticipates cognitive inquiries into the effects of ritual actions on ritual cognition. For example, he writes, "In our case, instead of making theological notions the basic motivation of ritual behavior, we speak of behavioural or mental *transformation*" (188, emphasis original). Of course, in order to develop this general idea further, it is necessary to have an informed view about the mind and cognition. The theoretical approach of this chapter therefore picks up where Gruenwald's observation leaves off.

lines of the previous chapter warn, "You shall put the Israelites on guard against their impurity, lest they die through their impurity by defiling my tabernacle which is among them" (Lev 15:31). This sense of urgency is also related to the *literalism and rigidity* of the ritual. The entire chapter is a script for ritual action, and there are dire penalties for deviating from the script. The high priest, for example, is instructed in Lev 16:2 "not to come at just any time into the shrine behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die." The gravity of the ritual prescriptions is also heightened by the fact that they come directly from the deity. The implicit expectation is that these ritual instructions are important and must be executed precisely. This is supported by the fact that according to the priestly authors, Moses follows God's orders to the letter, here and throughout Leviticus, evinced by the chapter's concluding refrain in Lev 16:34b: "and Moses did just as Yahweh had commanded him." The ritual prescriptions in Leviticus 16 also contain obvious examples of *repetition, reiteration, and redundancy*. The priest bathes and dresses multiple times (Lev 16:4, 24),[92] enters and exits the shrine multiple times, and applies blood to various objects a specific number of times (Lev 16:14, 19).[93] The ritual space, moreover, is marked by an acute attention to *order and boundaries*, with the Israelite holy sanctuary designed in terms of concentric circles of graded holiness. Only the high priest is permitted to enter the inner shrine, and only during this particular ritual. The ritual spaces in which action takes place are inaccessible to lay people, while the space of the Israelite camp more generally is contrasted with the barren wilderness into which the scapegoat is expelled. Finally, the Day of Atonement ritual involves at its core all of the specific themes of

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[92] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1018: "Thus, in sum, he would have bathed his body twice and washed his hands and feet six times."

[93] For a detailed discussion of these blood manipulation rites, see Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible*, 122-27.

ritualization: "Pollution and cleansing, protection against invisible dangers, and the creation of a special space and time are common themes associated with ritualized behavior."[94]

What does any of this suggest? Viewed within a cultural-selection framework, then, we would expect these particular features to enhance the success of the Day of Atonement ritual in terms of cultural transmission. These ritualized behaviors would make the ritual more powerful to participants (and, indeed, even to readers of the text), thus increasing the odds that they will be retained in each subsequent performance of the ritual over time. By including so many behaviors and themes that activate human cognitive systems, the ritual becomes compelling and attention-grabbing through what Boyer and Liénard called its "cognitive capture" of our hazard-precaution systems. That is, the ritual itself contains a variety of elements that activate specific cognitive systems, which will in turn be retained in subsequent iterations of the ritual over time and lead to increased success in transmission.[95] This is why, as Liénard and Boyer write, "Collective rituals are generally not 'engineered' in the sense of a deliberate process."[96] Rather, the cognitive effects of these ritualized features account for, in part, the very presence of these features within the Day of Atonement ritual complex.

This suggestion has important implications for understanding the shape and nature of this biblical ritual. Specifically, it raises questions about intentionality in the development of ritual practice. While the biblical authors themselves are most often silent about the rationale underlying certain ritual procedures, modern interpreters seek to offer their own. Consider

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[94] Liénard and Boyer, "Whence Collective Rituals?" 817.

[95] Boyer and Liénard distinguish between "strong" and "weak" activation of the hazard-precaution system. The former results from experience with direct clues for potential danger, while the latter arises primarily through indirect clues such as verbal communication from one person to another.

[96] Liénard and Boyer, "Whence Collective Rituals?" 823, and further: "In our model, scripts for collective ceremonies enjoy a transmission advantage, to the extent that they include ritualized behavior as described here—that is, they include enough hazard-precaution cues to activate the relevant systems by cognitive capture. This obviously does not imply that anyone is deliberately including such themes in collective rituals; it only suggests that variants of the collective rituals that do include them should, all else being equal, be more attention grabbing and compelling than variants that do not, and therefore they should be potentially better transmitted."

Milgrom's explanation for the redundant priestly washings in Lev 16:4 and 16:24. Milgrom notes that although Exodus 30:19 requires a priest to wash his hands and feet before entering the sanctuary, there is no biblical instance of a priest washing them at the *conclusion* of his service. As Milgrom writes of Lev 16, "This is the only time immersion after sacrifice is mentioned."[97] So why is this the case in the Day of Atonement proceedings? According to Milgrom, "Only one plausible reason remains: to remove the superholiness that he contracted by entering the adytum."[98]

There are a couple things to say in response to this suggestion. First, the text never says anything about the priest contracting "superholiness" or even "holiness" at any point during this ritual. Second, even if the text does not explicitly say so, the underlying idea behind such a proposal still involves a process of contagion. As such, this too falls under the domain of the hazard precaution system, which would be activated by witnessing or reading about this second ritual washing. Indeed, the lack of explicit reference to the dynamics of contagion makes sense, given that these involve implicit ideas governed by intuitive cognition that operates outside of conscious awareness. Lastly and most important for our purposes, our theorizing on the effects of ritualized behavior offers a plausible alternative way to account for the immersion at the end of the ritual in Lev 16:24. This additional washing can be understood as the inclusion of another ritualized feature that activates the hazard precaution system, which enhances the overall power of the ritual in terms of cognition and transmission. Therefore, rather than following Milgrom and assuming this ritual feature is best explained as a rite that was intentionally designed to fulfill some stated purpose, we can understand the extra washing rite as the piling on of ritualization, the overall effect of which is an increased cognitive capture of the ritual complex as

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[97] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1048.
[98] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 1048.

a whole. This opens up the possibility that these ritual actions were not necessarily designed solely through conscious reflection, but also arrived at their present form having been implicitly shaped by these cognitive systems over many cycles of transmission, favoring those iterations of the ritual that increasingly activated these systems. In the case of the extra washing rite at the conclusion of Lev 16, the reflective decision by the priestly authors to incorporate this rite into the ritual complex was informed, to some degree, by the intuitive susceptibility to ritualized behaviors that captured salient cognitive systems. In this way, even the reflective construction of rituals is constrained by the intuitive workings of cognition.

6.4.2. Ritual Form, Ritual Mode, and "CREDs"

In considering whether the Day of Atonement ritual fits the profile of either a special agent or special patient rituals, we may note that the entire ritual instruction derives ultimately from the deity Yahweh. As with the all the Priestly legislation, the legal prescriptions recorded in Leviticus 16 are given in the form of commandments issued by Yahweh to Moses, who acts as an intermediary between deity and people. Furthermore, Yahweh is represented as being present and located in the same space in which the ritual occurs. Thus, Aaron is told to take two goats and "stand them before Yahweh at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting" (Lev 16:7; cf. 16:30). In describing Aaron's entrance into the inner sanctum, the deity even declares, "I appear in the cloud over the cover" (Lev 16:2).[99] The deity, then, is represented as occupying the same ritual space as the human priestly participant. The high priest, of course, serves during the ceremony as the divinely ordained official, his household and lineage having been elected earlier in the

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[99] For a discussion of the deity's presence, or *kabod*, in the priestly literature more broadly, see Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68-78.

narrative. As an Aaronid, the high priest is the only individual permitted to enter this innermost part of the sanctuary.

On the one hand, Aaron is the one who performs almost every ritual action in Leviticus 16, which in some ways fits the profile of a special patient ritual. Sacrifices, as we have seen, are classic special patient rituals and the Day of Atonement sequence is filled with them. On the other hand, as an intermediary between the deity and the people, the Aaronid priest is the one who acts on behalf of the deity in order to make expiation for the people. In this sense, the atonement process is understood as a special agent ritual, with the Israelite community as the ritual patient. The sacrificial offerings, then, must be interpreted within the web of other interconnected rites, the overall stated purpose of which is to effect *kippēr* or expiation and purification on behalf of Israel. As part of the larger process of *kippēr*, the sacrifices, blood manipulations, and scapegoat rite appear to work instrumentally—that is, they are performed and expiation occurs. Rather than conveying any discernable symbolic message, the entire Day of Atonement ritual works instrumentally according to the principles of cause and effect. Now, this is not to say that the deity has no role to play in the efficacy of the ritual. Although the text does not explicitly identify Yahweh as the agent of ritual change, one could argue that his agency is implied or imagined on the grounds that such a dramatic religious event is possible only through divine intervention. Recall, also, that the presence of the deity or divine icon is a crucial factor in increasing judgments about ritual efficacy.

With regard to the question of repeatability, the distinction between the Priestly and Holiness sources is significant. If we are correct in thinking that H is responsible for transforming the ritual into an annual ceremonial performance, this might have represented a change in the frequency of ritual performance. Yet interestingly, while H arguably limits the

frequency, H does nothing to change the ritual *form*. The form, as we have seen above, appears to be a kind of hybrid blend of special patient rites embedded within a larger special agent ritual cycle. According to McCauley and Lawson, special agent rituals are normally not repeated because the consequences of the gods' actions are "super-permanent." The annual performance of the Day of Atonement ritual, however, does not seem to fit nicely into this prediction. For the priestly authors, sin and impurity can be removed once a year, but they can never be removed *permanently*. The Day of Atonement ritual is different from other special agent rituals such as baptisms or ordinations, in that it presumably involves a majority of the *same* ritual patients— namely the community of Israelite families and individuals, the beneficiaries of the atonement process year after year.[100] Even though it is repeated (somewhat infrequently) once a year, the Day of Atonement ritual displays a very high level of sensory pageantry, arousal, and dramatic ritual action. Otherwise ordinary animal sacrifices are accompanied by intense priestly activity, various blood manipulation rites, and the scapegoat rite. In other words, in terms of material cost and energy, it would be difficult to perform the Day of Atonement ritual every week. Lastly, when it comes to substitutions, there is nothing in the text to suggest that any element of the ritual (whether sacrificial animals or priestly paraphernalia) could be substituted for alternate items. Indeed, the priestly text explicitly specifies the high priest's sacred vestments as well as the types of animal offering used for each stage of the ritual. This would support understanding of the ritual as a special agent ritual.

Overall, then, the Day of Atonement ritual is a kind of hybrid ritual, involving aspects of special patient and special agent rituals. It consists of a number of special patient rites, such as

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[100] It is unclear how the predictions of McCauley and Lawson come into play regarding the irreversibility of special patient rituals. Despite achieving "atonement," sin and impurity inevitably return and persist, and in this sense atonement is temporary. At the same time, however, there is every indication that once expiation is performed and the temple purged of sin and impurity, this act cannot be undone. That is, *all of those sins and impurities* are gone, even if new sins and impurities are bound to arise in the future.

sacrificial offerings, absorbed within a larger special agent ritual cycle. The Day of Atonement ceremony displays all the sensory pageantry of a special agent ritual, but unlike special agent rituals, is repeated annually. In a way, then, it achieves the best of both worlds: it offers the excitement of a special agent procedure, along with a repeatability that is usually characteristic only of special patient rituals. Therefore, the ritual cycle as a whole seems to achieve a balance in terms of ritual form, representing a kind of hybrid ritual that taps into several qualities that make both special agent and special patient rituals so effective.

In terms of the Whitehouse's modes of religiosity, the priestly system generally resembles the doctrinal mode, especially with its emphasis on frequently repeated rituals and proper performance. The doctrinal mode fits with the centralized authority of the priestly guild and its reliance on "credibility enhancing displays" (CREDs).[101] In fact, the Day of Atonement ceremony itself can be understood as a grand example of a CRED (as outlined in more detail in the previous chapter). As the highest religious authority, the Aaronid priest is entrusted with conducting the entire ritual sequence, and this prestigious role has certain cognitive effects on observers of the ritual, or readers of the text. This is especially apparent if we consider the blood manipulation rites performed by the high priest. In response to a number of attempts to uncover the symbolic meaning of these rites, Gilders proposes an alternative approach and suggests that blood manipulation rites function as an indication, or indexical sign, of priestly power and authority.[102] As Gilders writes, "given the clear conventional association of blood manipulation with priestly prerogative in the cult represented in priestly Torah texts, its performance cannot

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[101] Joseph Henrich, "The Evolution of Costly Displays, Cooperation and Religion: Credibility Enhancing Displays and Their Implications for Cultural Evolution," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 30 (2009): 244-60.

[102] Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible*, 78-82. See also Gilders, "Why Does Eleazar Sprinkle the Red Cow Blood? Making Sense of Biblical Ritual," *Journal of Hebrew Studies* 6 (2006): 2-16; idem, "Anthropological Approaches," 242-43. The same authority is indexed by the distinct priestly vestments worn throughout the ritual in Leviticus 16, on which see further Deborah W. Rooke, "The Day of Atonement as a Ritual of Validation for the High Priest," in *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (ed. John Day; LHBOTS 422; London: T&T Clark, 2005), 342-64.

but indicate this prerogative."[103] Watts extends this line of thinking and argues that the ritual actions and rhetoric of the priestly authors aims to establish the power and authority of the priestly guild itself. When it comes to atonement (*kippēr*) in Leviticus 16, the rhetorical message is that only priests are authorized to performing this task: "One effect, then, of the priestly writers' use of *kipper* was to reinforce the priests' monopoly over Israel's cult. Priests and only priests *kipper* according to P."[104]

The priestly displays of power within Leviticus 16 have important effects not just on the social level, but on the cognitive level as well. The various actions in the process of *kippēr* can be understood as a huge CRED, which functions to legitimize priestly authority and also make the ritual procedure more compelling to viewers and readers. This CRED would also serve to boost the amount of trust people placed in the priestly officials and their doctrines. Our earlier insights on charismatic authority come into play, too. Based on that research, we may theorize that observers of the Day of Atonement ritual would have been less likely to invest cognitive resources in error monitoring or questioning the basis or success of the ritual. Priestly charisma therefore plays a role in influencing people's judgments about the efficacy of the ritual. Indeed, the Day of Atonement ceremony incorporates all the variables that tend to boost people's sense of ritual efficacy: the text mentions the presence of the deity within the ritual space; numerous ritual actions are frequently repeated (washing, blood rites); and the number of procedural steps is uniquely high among biblical rituals. We have seen that the Day of Atonement ritual functions instrumentally to bring about a dramatic religious change. Building on this instrumental approach, the cognitive ideas presented above indicate that not only did the ritual achieve its goal

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[103] Gilders, "Why Does Eleazar Sprinkle the Red Cow Blood?" 15.
[104] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus*, 134. He adds later that, *kippēr* in P used to "buttress priestly prerogatives" (139).

through its very performance, but also that it likely was regarded as highly efficacious to those who witnessed it or read about it.

These cognitive effects—increased confidence in priestly authority and increased judgment of ritual efficacy—apply not only to ancient observers of the Day of Atonement ritual, but *also* to ancient (and modern) readers/listeners of this text. In this case, the ritual actions create a kind of cognitive gap into which prevailing religious knowledge could be inserted. While cognitive researchers have suggested that such knowledge may take the form of religious teachings and doctrines, the book of Leviticus does not appear to offers many explicit doctrines. The closest we get in this regard are the statements that Aaron's blood rites cause *kippēr* or expiation on behalf of the Israelites, or that his confessing of sins onto the head of the scapegoat removes the sins of the people from the camp. Rather, following Watts, it seems likely that the key religious message was to assert the authority of the priestly lineage.[105]

6.4.3. Optimal and Costly Aspects of Sanctuary Purification and the Elimination of Sin

The purification rites performed in Leviticus 16 are part of the larger priestly understanding about how impurity and purification work.[106]One of the ideas that informs the atonement rites is the notion that the holy sanctuary can be defiled by human action. In Leviticus 16, the blood of the *ḥaṭṭā't* sacrifices is used to remove the impurity attached to the tabernacle. As Milgrom memorably put it, the blood of the sacrificial animal acts as a "ritual detergent" to cleanse the

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[105] The priests performing the ritual would not, of course, need to be reminded about their own power and authority. Thus we should not expect the same cognitive effects. It would be reasonable to think, however, that through the course of performing these ritual actions, rather than being subject to the effects of ritualized behavior, the Israelite priests would have instead achieved a kind of "practiced naturalness" discussed by McCauley. That is, the ritual actions, and any ideas explicitly associated therewith, would become second nature.

[106] See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 253-58. For a recent discussions of purification in Leviticus see Isabel Cranz, *Atonement and Purification: Priestly and Assyro-Babylonian Perspectives on Sin and its Consequences* (Fat 92; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005).

defiled sanctuary.[107] Elsewhere in the book of Leviticus, individuals are required to bring *ḥaṭṭā't*

offerings to the temple under two circumstances: (1) severe physical impurities, such as a woman

after childbirth or someone afflicted with skin disease (Lev 12-15); and (2) inadvertent sins and

other specific wrongdoings (Lev 4-5). For severe impurity, one must bring a *ḥaṭṭā't* offering and

the impurity is removed from the person by washing with water and waiting for a prescribed

amount of time to elapse. For inadvertent sins, the sinner brings the *ḥaṭṭā't* and receives

forgiveness. In both cases, the blood of the animal offering is applied to different areas of the

sanctuary in order to accomplish its cleansing effect. Notably, however, as Milgrom and others

have observed, the blood is *never* applied to an individual. This suggests that impurity and sin

defile not only the individual but *also* the sanctuary, and therefore the blood manipulation rites

function to cleanse the sanctuary on behalf of the offerer. As Milgrom writes,

> If not the offerer, what then is the object of the *ḥaṭṭā't* purgation? The above considerations lead to only one answer: that which receives the purgative blood: the sanctuary and its sancta. By daubing the altar with the *ḥaṭṭā't* blood or by bringing it inside the sanctuary (e.g., 16:14-19), the priest purges the most sacred objects and areas of the sanctuary on behalf of the person who caused their contamination by his physical impurity or inadvertent offense.[108]

In this view, the biblical concept of impurity mirrors that found elsewhere in the ancient Near

East, according to which impurity was regarded as a "physical substance, an aerial miasma that

possessed magnetic attraction for the realm of the sacred."[109] Because lay Israelites were not

always diligent in dealing with their states of impurity and rectifying their wanton transgressions

throughout the year, these lingering impurities and sins must be dealt with once a year during the

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[107] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 254. Cf. David P. Wright, "Day of Atonement," in *ABD* 2:72-76.
[108] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 256.
[109] Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, 257. See also Milgrom, "Impurity is Miasma: A Response to Hyam Maccoby," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2000): 729-33.

annual Day of Atonement ceremony, when the high priest enters the inner sanctum to apply the purifying blood. Pollution affected every sphere of the holy sanctuary, and therefore the Day of Atonement ritual requires blood manipulation rites to be performed in each concentric zone of the temple complex—from inner sanctum to outer courtyard. The Day of Atonement ritual thus served as a kind of spring-cleaning ritual for sins previously unaccounted for. The technical term *kippēr* in Leviticus 16 denotes the process by which both types of contamination—sin and impurity—are removed (cf. Lev 16:16).

At the heart of this theory, then, is the idea that human actions and states of being—in the form of both sin and impurity—cause the tangible defilement of a physical structure, the tabernacle. Rather than addressing the Israelite notion of individual impurity, a topic that has been discussed extensively in recent years, here we focus instead on the idea that human sins and impurities affect not only the state of an individual, but also the well-being of the sanctuary itself. The notion of personal defilement upon contact with certain objects and people (e.g. corpses, bodily fluids, skin diseases, etc.) is somewhat straightforward and obeys more general intuitions about disgust and contamination.[110] The notion of impurity is largely a reflective, culturally-specific way of describing more basic intuitions about contamination.[111] In this sense, the use of blood as a ritual detergent is straightforward in its significance: just as water cleans many observable sources of defilement, blood cleanses non-observable impurities. This is an

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[110] See Kazen, "Dirt and Disgust." Notably, the priestly authors recognize that impurity is an inevitable part of daily life and therefore do not prohibit people from becoming impure. Rather, what they do is to prescribe ritual means for dealing with these conditions.

[111] See Kazen, "Levels of Explanation for Ideas of Impurity," as well as Nicolas Baumard and Pascal Boyer, "Religious Beliefs as Reflective Elaborations on Intuitions: A Modified Dual-Process Model," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 22 (2013): 295-300.

example, then, of a cognitively optimal religious ritual with actions that have what Whitehouse refers to as "readily transparent meanings."[112]

The more dangerous threat, however, concerns the defilement of the tabernacle itself, since this represents God's earthly dwelling place. Here we suggest that this idea—that the sanctuary can be polluted aerially as a result of human behavior—is more conceptually complex and therefore more cognitively costly. Whereas the notion of individual impurity relies on intuitive expectations about contagion through contact, the idea that a physical structure is susceptible to contamination *from afar* does not adhere to the intuitive principles of contagion and therefore involves a conceptual leap that is considerably more counterintuitive. After all, the defilement of the sanctuary is not visible in the same way as individual bodily impurities often are (e.g., skin disease, blood, semen, etc.). The same applies to the notion of sin or transgression, which attaches to the sanctuary in manner similar to impurity. Whereas everyday social offenses result in punitive action or social reproach, the idea that these sins *also* contribute to the harm of the sanctuary entails a further conceptual step. Now, of course in the priestly view the tabernacle is a kind of proxy for the deity himself, who, as an intentional agent, can be offended by sin and impurity. However, the aerial contamination of a physical structure is nevertheless more costly in terms of intuitive ontological categories, involving the transfer of social and biological processes to an inanimate object (the tabernacle). Furthermore, Roy Gane argues, contrary to Milgrom, that blood manipulation rites throughout the year do *not* remove impurity from the sanctuary; these rites are only designed to remove pollution from the sinner or impure person.[113] While this conclusion remains open to debate, if correct, this would make the notion of sanctuary

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[112] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, 55. Even this conclusion must be slightly qualified, however, in light of the fact that although blood is a liquid substance like water, it clearly does not function in the same instrumental manner to remove physical dirt; in actuality, when applied, it of course creates a stain of its own.

[113] Roy E. Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

purification all the *more* counterintuitive and costly. If the blood of *ḥaṭṭā't* offerings removes sin

or impurity from only the individual 364 days a year, then the sudden suggestion that it removes

pollution instead from the sanctuary defies the ordinary expectation, both about what *ḥaṭṭā't*

offerings do and how sin and impurity work. In any case, the Day of Atonement ritual purports

to remove or clear away all sins and impurities that have accumulated as a result of human

conduct throughout the year.[114]

Although the text presents the ritual actions in terms of their instrumental effect—if the

blood manipulation rites are performed, cleansing (*kipper*) is achieved—it remains a mystery just

how the priestly authors conceptualized blood, as a kind of ritual detergent, removed impurity.

There is simply no explicit commentary regarding how this was imagined to work. As Gilders

remarks with respect to the silence of the priests, "We are told far more about what to do than

about why it is done."[115] This conception of purification is therefore an example of what Sperber

describes as "relevant mysteries," which are not amenable to easy cognitive processing, but

manage instead to be attention-grabbing and have a high degree of relevance, or inferential

potential, by activating certain cognitive systems. To return to Boyer and Liénard's hazard-

precaution system, although details about the mechanism by which purification occurs remain

mysterious, the cognitive capture of the blood cleansing rituals offers a clue about why these

ritual actions look the way they do. In response to the lack of explanation on the part of the

priests, Gane writes that "we are dealing with the world of ritual, which is not limited by

constraints operating in the mundane material sphere."[116] Against this suggestion, however, we

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[114] For a discussion of which types of sins penetrate the sanctuary and how they are dealt with, see Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," 3-21.

[115] William K. Gilders, "Blood as Purificant in Priestly Torah: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?" in *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible* (ed. Baruch J. Schwartz, David P. Wright, Jeffrey Stackert, and Naphtali S. Meshel; LHBOTS 474; New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 77-83.

[116] Gane, *Cult and Character*, 158.

have seen that ritual activity, as a subset of human activity more generally, is in fact implicitly constrained by ordinary cognitive mechanisms and expectations about agents and actions. To be more precise, then, we can say instead that only with the reflective theology of P do we begin to see ritual systems that depart from these more intuitive expectations.

In light of the conceptual cost involved with the notion of sanctuary defilement, we would predict that there should be certain features present in the ritual of atonement that work to offset some of this cognitive cost. Such features would serve as scaffolding for this otherwise costly representation of defilement and thus make it more compelling to people. By framing the issue in this way, we are in a position to better understand the relatively high degree of ceremonial pageantry found in the Day of Atonement ritual.

The usual understanding of the purgation process in Leviticus 16 may be summarized as follows: human impurity and sin defiles the temple from afar, and therefore the Day of Atonement ritual functions to remove this pollution and cleanse the temple. This nicely captures the logic of the ritual from an insider (emic) point of view. However, framing the concept of sanctuary defilement as a costly religious idea, and also recognizing the elaborate nature of the Day of Atonement ritual, we can analyze things differently. If the idea of human action remotely defiling the sanctuary is costly (i.e., considerably counterintuitive), we must not simply assume that lay Israelites found this belief entirely intuitive or natural. Therefore, the high level of pageantry in the Day of Atonement ritual functions to render this costly belief more plausible and compelling. As McCauley writes,

> Under most circumstances, people intuitively comprehend the sufficiency of these special agent rituals to effect lasting changes in ritual patients. The danger, however, is that those ritual patients may notice that often little, if anything, really, has been done in the course of the ritual's performance. Consequently, these special agent rituals are more likely to

incorporate features that will convince their patients that something remarkable has transpired. This is why successful religious ritual systems invariably evolve in a direction that ensures that these rituals contain comparatively high levels of sensory pageantry aimed at seizing the patient's attention and arousing his or her emotions.[117]

In the Day of Atonement ritual, then, the ritual actions and heightened sense of drama and pageantry would justify, or make sense of, the belief that the temple is defiled and has been cleansed. Rather than starting with the *belief* that a physical object (the tabernacle) can be defiled without contact, and then proceeding to interpret the ritual as a *solution* to this problem, we can instead begin with the *nature* of the ritual itself and proceed to view it as a cultural *mechanism* for making the costly belief more plausible and compelling.

From this etic cognitive point of view, then, it is possible that Israelites did not perform the Day of Atonement ritual in order to solve the problem of communal sin and a defiled temple. Rather, the great cleansing ritual was performed in the manner it was in order to justify the very notion that a defiled temple was a ritual problem in the first place. In much the same way as we observed with the *mīs pî* "mouth-washing" ritual in Mesopotamia, the extraordinary and (somewhat) costly notion of sanctuary defilement requires an equally extraordinary and elaborate ritual solution.

Indeed, the otherwise puzzling scapegoat rite becomes more sensible in this view, as well. Many commentators have pointed out that it fits awkwardly within Leviticus 16 and have suggested that it was an originally independent ritual.[118] If so, the incorporation of the scapegoat rite into the sanctuary purification process in Leviticus 16 fits the hypothesis that rituals will tend to evolve in the direction of increased levels of ceremony and arousal. In this case, the more

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[117] Robert N. McCauley, *Why Religion is Natural and Science is Not* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 197-98.

[118] David P. Wright, "Day of Atonement," *ABD* 2:72-76.

elaborate, the better. These observations are further supported by the communal activity that accompanies the purgation ritual. In Lev 16:29-34a (H additions to P), the people are instructed to practice fasting (or "self-denial", *'nh nepeš*) and abstinence from work. These additional rites can be thought of as further credibility enhancing displays, which serve to further reinforce people's engagement with the ritual process. Rather than being merely passive observers, their active participation via the physical experience of fasting arguably would have heightened their emotional investment and commitment.

6.5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Cognitive approaches to religious ritual afford new opportunities for interpreting ancient biblical ritual texts and the ritual behaviors that are reflected therein. They can help us to understand why certain rituals look the way they do in terms of the elements and actions involved, and they offer insight into the cognitive (and by extension, social) effects of specific types of behavior.

In applying a variety of approaches to the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16, we have made a number of observations. First of all, the "great cleansing ritual" incorporates a number of ritualized behaviors, including ritual purification washings, blood manipulation rites, causally opaque actions, and an overall sense of compulsion and urgency about performing the ritual. These specific themes and behaviors activate distinct cognitive systems, particularly the so-called hazard-precaution system that is designed to attend to potential threats in the environment. As a result of the "cognitive capture" of this system, these ritualized elements have the effect of making the entire ritual complex more salient, attention-grabbing, and compelling, which in turn boosts the ritual's likelihood of success in terms of cultural transmission.

Therefore, as we have seen, the presence of these elements in the Day of Atonement ritual may owe as much to their ability to "tickle" ancient minds as to intentional design.

In terms of the ritual form hypothesis, it seems most accurate to conclude that the Day of Atonement ritual represents a kind of hybrid form. That is, it appears to be a special agent ritual most broadly, in the sense that Yahweh acts as the supernatural agent through which the great cleansing transformation occurs, but one that integrates numerous special patient rites (such as sacrificial offerings). The entire ritual complex strikes an interesting balance, then, between these two attractor positions, offering a special agent ritual that has a relatively high degree of ceremony, pageantry, and excitement, and crucially is also *repeatable*. The priestly prerogative and authority exercised throughout the ritual, as well as the rhetoric of Leviticus 16, functioned as credibility enhancing displays (CREDs) that would stimulated trust and commitment to the priestly experts and the ritual procedure itself. Indeed, these elements—the elaborate nature of the ritual and the presence of CREDs—would have further served to make the purported cleansing of the sanctuary more compelling to ancient audiences and participants. In other words, the specific actions of this ritual procedure work to guarantee that the ritual achieves the instrumental effects it aims to produce. Finally, the Day of Atonement ritual complex includes several specific ritual elements that are predicted to have enhanced people's judgments about the ritual's efficacy. These include the pervasive presence of the deity, both at the textual level as the divine law-giver, as well as at the level of the ritual practice as present above the Ark in the inner sanctum, the repetition of numerous rites, and the overall procedural complexity.

The Day of Atonement ritual therefore incorporates both cognitively "optimal" and "costly" aspects. On the one hand, the use of blood as a "ritual detergent," or the transferring of sins to the scapegoat through the laying on of hands, are ritual actions that, while still mysterious

in terms of the underlying ritual mechanism by which they work, are salient and have somewhat intuitive meanings. On the other hand, the religious notion of *sanctuary* defilement from afar can be considered more counterintuitive or costly than the notion of *individual* defilement from sin or direct contact contagion. While the latter works according to the logic of contagion (even if native Israelites has only implicit knowledge of this logic), the former sanctuary defilement occurs aerially and remotely, and therefore does not operate according to the same principles. As a result, we must not assume that ancient Israelites to have simply take this idea for granted. As we have argued, the elaborate nature of the Day of Atonement ritual can be understood as a ritual mechanism not only for cleansing the temple, but for making the underlying belief in a defile temple and its cleansing more compelling and plausible to the priestly experts and lay Israelite participants, observers, readers, and listeners of the ritual text.

CHAPTER 7:
CONCLUSION

The findings, frameworks, and theories of the cognitive science of religion offer an additional methodological instrument in the toolkits of biblical scholars. Alongside traditional textual, philological, and historical-critical scholarship, cognitive approaches can help enrich our understanding of ancient Israelite religion, biblical texts, and the beliefs and practices reflected therein. Although the cognitive study of religion aims to clarify the general mechanisms and recurring patterns of religious thought and behavior, the same tools can be applied to specific religious beliefs, practices, and traditions. Cognition and culture are deeply interconnected, and historians and biblical scholars can investigate the ways in which local religious traditions are both *shaped by* natural cognitive proclivities, as well was the ways in which these cultural traditions *shape* cognition and behavior in turn.

Each of the case studies in this dissertation centers on the crucial distinction in the cognitive sciences between intuitive and reflective types of mental processing, and the implicit and explicit concepts that emerge as a result. These cognitive building blocks give rise to what have been called cognitively optimal and costly religious expressions. We observed in the first case study the extent to which cognitively optimal religious beliefs and practices suffused all spheres of life in ancient Israel. Ritual offerings performed in both domestic and official settings shared deep structural features in common in terms of their form and actions, and were guided by the intuitive mental representation of supernatural agencies, whether Yahweh or household ancestors. Israelites engaged in ritual transactions with these agents, based on the logic of social gift exchange and reciprocity. They made offerings to them with the goal of supplicating,

appeasing, or persuading them in various manners, and these religious interactions were rooted in ordinary theory of mind systems and everyday assumptions about intentional agency.

Even among the official, elite religion that carried the day during much of Israel's history, we encounter largely cognitively optimal, intuitive conceptions of the national deity. Although Yahweh is clearly presented and described as a powerful "Big God," he remains an anthropomorphic agent with discernable (and often predictable) cognitive functioning, when it comes to emotions, intentions, desires, and so on. This is obvious from the biblical narratives in which God appears as a person-like character, but it is also evinced in the petitionary prayers of the Psalms, as well the Zion-Sabbaoth theology, which portrays God as a mighty divine warrior modeled on a human ideal of kingship. From a cognitive perspective, what separates these elite depictions of Yahweh from more local or "popular" supernatural concepts is mostly a matter of *scale*. In relation to household gods or ancestors, Yahweh may be bigger and oversee more territory, but the same types of rituals are directed towards both, informed by the same types of mental expectations. Therefore, in terms of the material evidence, ritual procedures, and representation of supernatural agency, it is not an understatement to say that family religion in ancient Israel was a kind of official religion in miniature, or alternately, that official religion was a kind of family religion writ large.

With the rise of the Deuteronomic school of thought and its unique, innovate theology, however, we begin to witness a salient example of cognitively costly religion in ancient Israel. In contrast to the intuitive, optimal understanding of local kin-based household ancestors or Yahweh as a powerful but person-like warrior, Deuteronomic theology advances a far more costly set of doctrines. In particular, the Deuteronomic Name Theology, which asserts that only God's name dwells on earth, while the deity himself resides in heaven, conceptually removes a

central marker of divine agency from the Jerusalem temple and the terrestrial sphere. This concept of the Israelite deity is more abstract, counterintuitive, and ultimately costly. Moreover, the doctrines of cult centralization further removed ritual access to Yahweh's divine agency from the local and regional spheres, while the insistence on aniconic worship removed a standard material representation of God's agency. Together, then, the Deuteronomic theology as a whole must be viewed as cognitively costly both in terms of its departure from intuitive cognitive expectations, as well as in its radical transformation of prevailing religious ideas about God found within the Hebrew Bible and among Israel's ancient neighbors. Once the inherently costly nature of D's religious program is recognized and appreciated, it is possible to make sense of its emphasis on teaching, repetition, and textualization. As heavily doctrinal religion, these mnemonic aids would have been critical for generating, sustaining, and transmitting its costly set of teachings; without these cultural strategies and supports, it is unlikely that the Deuteronomic theology could have survived.

It is worth noting here, too, that while literacy, texts, and institutions appear to be *necessary* conditions for developing costly religious systems (of the kind that characterize Deuteronomic theology), they are not necessarily *sufficient* conditions for doing so. It is by no means inevitable, in other words, that literate guilds of religious specialists will produce complex theologies, but rather, as we saw with much of official religion in ancient Israel, royal state regimes are often perfectly content to advertise a form of religion that may be grand and powerful, yet ultimately cognitively optimal in its concepts and rituals.

When we focus our cognitive-theoretical lens on the material imagery and iconography native to ancient Israel-Palestine and the wider Levant and Near East, we see an interesting blend of intuitive and reflective dynamics. In analyzing the iconography of hybrid creatures in ancient

art, for example, it was observed that much of this imagery adheres to the basic principles of counterintuitiveness, by modestly mixing distinct zoological properties. That is, hybrid figures are often *minimally* counterintuitive (MCI), as predicted by the so-called cognitive optimum theory. A good deal of this imagery, however, is conceptually more complex and involves multiple violations of ontological categories. This analysis highlights the importance of carefully distinguishing between public representations such as material art, and mental representations in terms of the way these same concepts are stored, processed, and remembered in cognition and memory. It was argued that much like texts in the Deuteronomic theology, material art functioned in ancient Israel, as elsewhere, as crucial mnemonic aids to help generate and transmit more complex and elaborate and visual imagery. Specifically, material art was able to confer all the benefits of highly exciting and counterintuitive concepts, without the usual associated cost in terms of memory. By paving the way for yet more highly imaginative and costly artistic traditions, material art has the power to shape cognition and expand the religious imagination in novel ways.

A similar trade-off between intuitive and reflective processing, and between implicit and explicit concepts, can be observed in the worship of the cult statue (*ṣalmu*) in Mesopotamia and the ritual ceremony used to transform the inanimate artifact into a living deity. Although the notion of a divine cult statue puzzled ancient Israelites, as well as many biblical scholars today, this type of concept is utterly intelligible in light of the cognitive systems discussed throughout this dissertation. That is, the concept of an agent-like artifact is a straightforward example of a minimally counterintuitive concept, which is advantageous in terms of memory and cultural selection. Rather than being a unique product of "ancient thought," we have seen that such concepts are good to think the world over and throughout history. What has been understudied in

the consideration of MCI religious concepts, however, is the extent to which these same concepts rely deeply on the background of default properties and the inferences they afford. Just as important as the counterintuitive features of the cult statue are the *intuitive* features that continue to guide people's expectations. In the case of the *ṣalmu*, this means that cognitive systems are continuously and *implicitly* busy processing the statue as a human-made artifact, despite the culturally prescribed *explicit* concept of the statue as an agent. Given this (slight) cost of naturally representing the statue as a divine entity, the *mīs pî* mouth-washing ritual functioned as an elaborate ritual display to make the costly belief in the statue's transformation more compelling.

The cognitive story is similar when it comes to the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16. As discussed in the final case study, this ritual performance is a kind of hybrid in terms of its ritual form. Although best understood as a special agent ritual in which Yahweh acts as the divine agent in charge of enacting the crucial cleansing and transformation of the temple, the ritual also incorporates many special patient sub-rites, such as washing, purification, blood manipulations, and other causally opaque actions. Altogether, then, the entire ritual complex strikes a balance between the two forms, which would have contributed to its cultural success. Interestingly, in light of the relatively high degree of ceremony, complexity, and sensory pageantry, the Day of Atonement ritual is also repeatable, being performed annually. The ritual also combines a blend of optimal and costly actions and ideas. Whereas the numerous examples of "ritualized behavior" make the ceremony more compelling by virtue of activating salient cognitive systems, the underlying belief in the defilement of the physical sanctuary from afar (as opposed to individual defilement via contact contagion) is arguably more costly. Therefore,

much as with the *mīs pî* ritual, the Day of Atonement ritual functions, in part, to make the crisis which it purports to resolve more compelling and plausible.

If we return, then, to the cognitively optimal-costly continuum proposed in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, we can roughly locate each of the topics discussed in these case studies along this continuum.
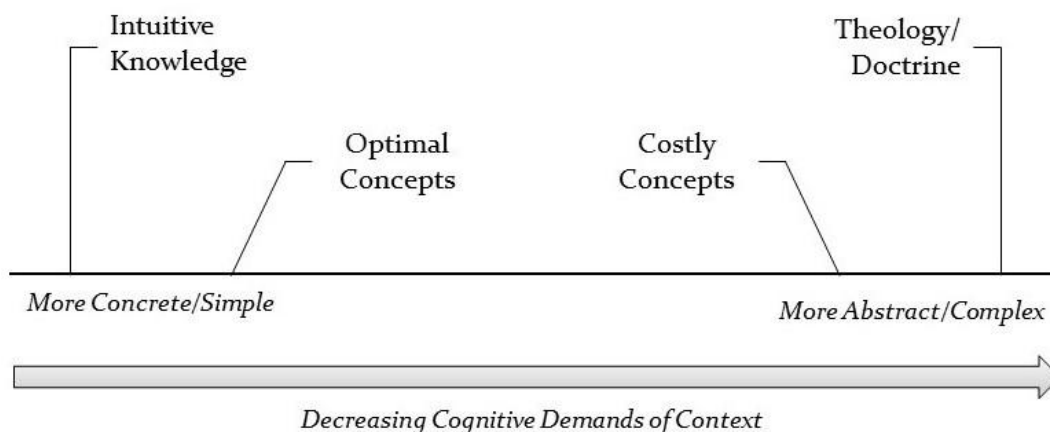
Figure 1. Cognitive continuum of intuitive vs. reflective knowledge and optimal vs. costly religious concepts. Modified after Barrett, "Theological Correctness," 327.

At the far end of the intuitive/optimal side of the continuum, we would locate the rituals and representations of God associated with family and household religion discussed in Chapter 2 on the one hand, and certain expressions of official state religion on the other. These practices and beliefs rely above all on intuitive knowledge about intentional agency. We can also include on this end of the continuum the MCI hybrid iconography discussed in Chapter 4. Moving further to the right in the direction of increasing costliness, we can include the more complex, counterintuitive hybrid representations in ancient art and texts. These would include, for example, hybrid concepts that display more than one, or several, violations of intuitive ontological categories, as well as biblical hybrid concepts such as the *seraphim* and *cherubim*.

Even more costly are the visual representations of the demons Pazuzu and Lamaštu. Somewhere near the middle of the continuum, we would find the Mesopotamian ṣalmu. As an artifact with special agency, it is an example of an MCI concept and therefore sticks closer to the intuitive side of the spectrum. However, it is somewhat unique in that it is conceptually rooted in the default artifact domain, which continues to supply a host of inferences, and these persisting qualities drag it closer to the middle, away from the purely intuitive and towards the costly end. However we decide to quantify its cognitive "cost," the mouth-washing ritual is certainly crucial and necessary in supporting the belief in the divine nature of the ṣalmu. This middle-ground area is also where we would locate the Day of Atonement ritual, which displays many of the same modest cognitive costs, and which it likewise seeks to resolve through ritual performance. Finally, squarely at the costly end of the continuum lies the Deuteronomic theology and its abstract, radically counterintuitive doctrines, along with the suite of cultural supports and strategies that are necessary to sustain them.

Clearly, the cases studies offered in this dissertation are not meant to provide an exhaustive cognitive analysis of ancient Israelite religion as a whole. There are many topics in the study of Israelite religion that are not addressed here, but which would provide fertile soil for further cognitive investigation. Future avenues of research might explore, for example, the idea of Yahweh as a "Big God," how the "size" of deities is determined, and what effects, if any, these factors have in terms of mental representation, group cooperation, and social and political organization. Future work might also apply cognitive approaches to the study of prophecy in ancient Israel, a topic not touched on in the above case studies. As scholars have shown, there was a wide range of prophetic expressions in ancient Israel and the Near East, and it would be worthwhile to examine the ways in which cognitive mechanisms shape specific prophetic

utterances, texts, and individuals, as well as how native features of Israelite culture tweak these cognitive mechanisms in unexpected ways. There would no doubt be plenty to glean regarding the optimal and costly dynamics as they relate to the landscape of ancient Israelite prophetic activity.

Nevertheless, the case studies provided here provide a few selected illustrations of how cognitive approaches to religion may offer a useful supplement to current work in the study of ancient Israelite religion. In the course of our inquiries, we have seen that the relationship between biblical scholars and cognitive researchers is a two-way street, with vital roles to be played on both sides. On the one hand, at several junctures we have observed how historical data were crucial in assessing recent cognitive proposals and predictions. At the same time, cognitive tools and findings have been used to illuminate ancient religious thought and behavior, texts and iconography, in new ways. The frameworks of intuitive/reflective cognition, implicit/explicit concepts, and optimal/costly religions are, together, but one way of accessing ancient modes of thinking. These fundamental distinctions encourage us, as historians, to clarify the cognitive foundations underlying ancient religious thought and behavior, and in doing so, to be clear about the nature of the evidence at our disposal. In our case, these cognitive categories have supplied us with fresh new lenses for conceptualizing both the stable patterns and striking diversity of religious expression in ancient Israel.

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