A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING: ANCIENT EGYPT THROUGH AN ELIADEAN LENS

by

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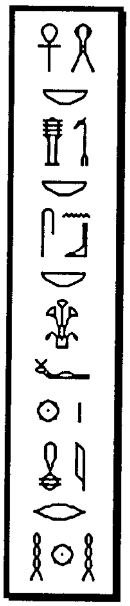

To Dr. Boulos A. Ayad,
Professor of Anthropology
at the University of Colorado at Boulder,
a gentleman and a scholar,
who taught me my first hieroglyphics
and encouraged me, by both word and example,
to pursue the study of the ancient Near East.

"May all life and security,
all stability and strength,
and all health surround him
like Ra for ever."

Indeed, if there is one area in which comparisons can be rightfully applied, it is the ancient Near East.

-- Mircea Eliade

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ABSTRACT

An endemic problem in ancient Near Eastern studies is the fragmentary nature of the evidence, especially with respect to religion; a reliable method for interpolating missing data would therefore be highly desirable. Historically, scholars have attempted to "fill the gaps" by reference to related institutions in the same society or to parallel institutions in other societies, but such efforts have often lacked sufficient rigor to be widely accepted. Mircea Eliade, the twentieth century's foremost historian of religions, developed a comparative methodology which appears--despite severe criticism in recent years--to be scientifically valid and universally applicable. An examination of religious material from Ancient Egypt shows a surprisingly close conformity to Eliade's model; this suggests that his methodology could be a powerful tool in the study of ancient Near Eastern religion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No student is "an island, entire of itself"--especially when that student first comes to graduate study in the humanities as a middle-aged refugee from the world of high technology. This thesis is not just the product of my own reorientation from operating systems to ancient cultures. It is also the result of a great deal of patience and encouragement on the part of others without whom my own efforts could not have succeeded.

From the University of Colorado at Boulder, I would like to thank Professor Boulos A. Ayad of the Anthropology Department and Professor Hara Tzavella-Evjen of the Classics Department, both of whom were exceedingly kind and encouraging to a former computer wizard testing the waters of a massive career change.

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An old saying has it that sergeants run the army. If so, the sergeants of the university are its professional staff; and no staffers could be more professional than LCA's Terri Wipperfurth and Classics' Norma Maynard, who have often gone the extra mile to make sure that requirements were satisfied and paperwork was filed on time. Without their diligence and attention to detail, none of this would have been possible.

And then, of course, there are my friends and family. Most notable in this regard are Dr. Robert W. Atwood, who for two decades has given me the benefit of his brilliant insight and creativity, and Dick Wulf of Colorado Springs, who challenged me to pursue my dreams wherever they might lead. And most of all, I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my wife Therese and my son Christopher, who have endured the unpredictable vagaries and outrageous fortunes of the graduate-school experience with exemplary patience and fortitude.

ABBREVIATIONS

Note: For more complete publication data on some works, see the Bibliography.

Auto1	Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume I: 1908-1937, Journey East, Journey West*, tr. Mac Linscott Ricketts (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).
Auto2	Mircea Eliade, *Autobiography, Volume II: 1937-1960, Exile's Odyssey*, tr. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).
BR	Mircea Eliade, *Birth and Rebirth: The Religious Meaning of Initiation in Human Culture*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).
CH	Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959).
FC	Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, 2nd ed., tr. Stephen Corrin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
FPZ	Mircea Eliade, *From Primitives to Zen: A Thematic Sourcebook on the History of Religions* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).
HRI1	Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas, Volume I: Fom the Stone Age to the Eleusinian Mysteries*, tr. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).
IS	Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, tr. Philip Mairet (London: Harvill Press, 1961).

MA	Mircea Eliade, *Mephistopheles and the Androgyne: Studies in Religious Myth and Symbol*, tr. J. M. Cohen (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965).
MDM	Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries: The Encounter Between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* , tr. Philip Mairet (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).
MR	Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality* tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).
MRS1	Wendell C. Beane and William G. Doty, eds. *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).
Ordeal	Mircea Eliade, *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet*, tr. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).
PCR	Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, tr. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958).
Quest	Mircea Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).
RPS	Herbert Feigl and May Brodbeck, eds., *Readings in the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953).
Shamanism	Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, rev. ed., tr. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).
SP	Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, tr. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1959).
Yoga	Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, tr. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958; second edition, 1969).
Zalmoxis	Mircea Eliade, *Zalmoxis, The Vanishing God: Comparative Studies in the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe*, tr. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

CHAPTER 1

COMPARATIVE METHOD AND THE STUDY OF ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN RELIGION

As in most areas of science, the student approaching this field with a romantic notion of finding great precision, high objectivity, and the accumulation of verified truth will find these attributes to some extent, but will also find an exciting struggle to gain a foot-hold on slippery slopes, a considerable measure of conflict and even intellectual turmoil, and occasionally, a genuine insight.

—Amitai Etzioni and Fredric L. Dubow

The Problem: Fragmentary Data

An endemic problem in ancient Near Eastern studies is the fragmentary nature of the evidence. After millennia of war, pillage, social upheaval, erosion, quarrying, and just plain rot, most of the primary evidence is gone. All that remains of the Near Eastern past--its grandiloquent texts, its glorious temples, even the humble evidences of its daily village life--are the meager scraps which time and chance have left to us. It is from these scraps that we must attempt to reconstruct the languages, histories, and cultures of the ancient Near East.

Nowhere are the difficulties greater than in the study of the region's ancient religions. Not only have their material evidences suffered from the same ravages as everything else; but our own ability to understand the material we do possess is rendered more difficult by the psychological distance which separates our modern

viewpoints from the worldview of the ancients. Nor are these issues unimportant--for from the religions of the ancient Near East are derived the modern religions to which half the world's population adheres today; and these modern faiths are still engaged in bitter and even violent conflicts whose roots lie in those ancient times.

A powerful technique for bridging some of the gaps in our knowledge is to use correlation and comparison to interpret and interpolate the extant data. For example, if we have a manuscript with holes in it, we can often fill the holes by reference to other manuscripts of the same or similar texts. If we have a partially preserved temple, we can reasonably attempt to reconstruct the rest by reference to other temples of similar design.

But the further we try to extend these techniques, the more hesitant we must become. For example, in Egyptology it is perfectly reasonable to reconstruct a damaged Coffin Text by reference to another Coffin Text, since they both come from the same period of the same culture and tend to be more or less standardized. It is less certain but still reasonable to reconstruct a Coffin Text by reference to a much older Pyramid Text, since both served the same purpose in the same culture and we can prove by abundant examples that the former are often derived from the latter. But how reasonable is it to interpret the symbolism of an Egyptian New Kingdom cult temple through the text of an Old Kingdom cosmogony? Or to clarify our understanding of an obscure Assyrian coronation text by reference to the coronation literature of Egypt?[1]

In some cases, satisfactory proofs can be given to justify some surprising results: for example, correcting textual corruptions in the biblical Book of Proverbs by

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[1] The answer to this last question, by the way, is that it is quite reasonable indeed. See Anthony Spalinger, "An Egyptian Motif in an Assyrian Text," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 223 (1976), 64-67.

consulting the Egyptian Wisdom of Amenemope,[2] or explaining obscure passages in the literature of classical Greece by reference to Hittite, Ugaritic, and Mesopotamian myths.[3] In other cases, however, proof for the validity of alleged parallels and influences has remained tantalizingly out of reach, yielding results that are suggestive but not conclusive. In the final analysis, isolated resemblance tells us nothing, and *ad hoc* theories fail to convince. What is needed is a credible methodology, solidly grounded in fact and of general applicability--in other words, a science of comparison.

General Truths from Particular Facts

It has been said that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who divide the world into two kinds of people, and those who do not. Among the former was Aristotle, who distinguished between two very different ways of approaching the facts of human experience:

> The difference between a historian and a poet is not that one writes in prose and the other in verse--indeed the writings of Herodotus could be put into verse and yet would still be a kind of history, whether written in metre or not. The real difference is this, that one tells what happened and the other what might happen. For this reason poetry is something more scientific and serious than history, because poetry tends to give general truths while history gives particular facts.[4]

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[2] D. C. Simpson, "The Hebrew Book of Proverbs and the Teaching of Amenophis," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 12 (1926), 235-236; R. B. Y. Scott, ed., *Anchor Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1965), 20-21, 135-136.

[3] See, for example, Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959; reprint 1980); Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Charles Penglase, *Greek Myths and Mesopotamia: Parallels and Influence in the Homeric Hymns and Hesiod* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and by far the most comprehensive, M. L. West, *The East Face of Helicon: West Asiatic Influences in Greek Poetry and Myth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

[4] Aristotle *Poetics* 9.2-3, tr. W. Hamilton Fyfe, in W. Hamilton Fyfe and W. Rhys Roberts, eds., *Aristotle: The Poetics, "Longinus" on the Sublime, Demetrius on Style,* Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 35.

While most people today would probably decline to endorse Aristotle's conclusion that poetry is "more scientific" (φιλοσοφώτερον) than history, his distinction between "general truths" and "particular facts" is pertinent to the epistemological battles of modern science even in our own day. These battles have been especially bloody in the social sciences, among which we must include the study of religion.

Since the time of Francis Bacon (1561-1626), it has been an axiom of the physical sciences that the scientific method requires both the accumulation of particular facts and the discovery of general truths.[5] As one modern philosopher of science put it:

> The main business of science is to trace in the chaos and flux of phenomena a consistent structure with order and meaning, that is, to interpret and to transcend direct experience. "The object of all sciences," in Einstein's words, "is to coordinate our experiences and to bring them into a logical system." And Niels Bohr agrees when he says "The task of science is both to extend the range of our experience and to reduce it to order." ... Indeed, in science, as in art and philosophy, our most persistent intellectual efforts are directed toward the discovery of pattern, order, system, structure, whether it be as primitive as the discernment of recurring seasons or as sweeping as a cosmological synthesis.[6]

In the physical sciences, then, mere description is not enough; the demand is to bring the brute facts into an ever greater schematization of relationship and explanation, until ultimately the particular facts fade into insignificance beside the general laws which, presumably, gave rise to them.

When we move from the physical sciences to the social sciences, however, this consensus breaks down. On the one hand, there are those who insist that since the whole purpose of the scientific enterprise is to reduce unwieldy mountains of specific facts to the simple clarity of general laws, this must apply to the social

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[5] For an analysis of Bacon's contributions and enduring influence in scientific methodology, see Edward H. Madden, ed., *Theories of Scientific Method: The Renaissance through the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1960), 50-74.

[6] Gerald Holton, *Introduction to Concepts and Theories in Physical Science* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1952), 216-217.

sciences no less than to the physical if they are to be properly classed as sciences at all. For example:

> The aims of science are description, explanation, and prediction. The first aim is basic and indispensable, the second and third (closely related to each other) arise as the most desirable fruits of scientific labors whenever inquiry rises beyond the mere fact-gathering stage. History, often and nowadays quite fashionably declared an art, is scientific to the extent that it ascertains its facts concerning past events by a meticulous scrutiny of present evidence. Causal interpretation of these facts (in history, but similarly also in psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology, and economics) is usually much more difficult than, but in principle not logically different from, causal interpretation (that is, explanation) in the natural sciences. The aims of the pure (empirical) sciences are then essentially the same throughout the whole field.[7]

This position has been strongly endorsed by a number of eminent social scientists, at least in theory. For example, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955), a seminal figure in British social anthropology,[8] declared:

> My view of natural science is that it is the systematic investigation of the structure of the universe as it is revealed to us through our senses. There are certain important separate branches of science, each of which deals with a certain class or kind of structures, the aim being to discover the characteristics of all structures of that kind. So atomic physics deals with the structure of atoms, chemistry with the structure of molecules, crystallography and colloidal chemistry with the structure of crystals and colloids, and anatomy and physiology with the structure of organisms. There is, therefore, I suggest, place for a branch of natural science which will have for its task the discovery of the general characteristics of those social structures of which the component units are human beings.[9]

On the other hand, many other social scientists hold that social phenomena are in principle so different from physical phenomena that the procedures governing the study of the one are of limited value, if not entirely useless, when applied to the

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[7] Herbert Feigl, "The Scientific Outlook: Naturalism and Humanism," in *RPS*, 10-11.

[8] See Kenneth Maddock, "Radcliffe-Brown, A. R.," in Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer, eds., *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 465-467.

[9] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (New York: Free Press, 1952), 190.

other.[10] Some even go so far as to claim that the very concept of "scientific laws" is meaningless when applied to human beings. Numerous arguments have been adduced in support of these positions, including the difficulty of conducting controlled social experimentation, the impossibility of accounting for the effects of individual free will, and the inevitable subjectivity and bias which attend the study of human beings by other human beings.[11]

All of these objections, however, have been analyzed and dismissed by the philosophers of science, who consistently hold that the same obstacles have been faced and overcome in the physical sciences, and can therefore (at least in principle) be overcome in the social sciences as well. They maintain, therefore, that the social sciences, although coming late to the game, should be able to proceed along the same path pioneered by the physical sciences and ultimately arrive at a body of empirically verifiable scientific laws governing the behavior of human beings.[12]

It has also been pointed out that even the most skeptical social scientists actually behave as if they believe in the possibility of social-scientific laws, even while rejecting them in name. As Radcliffe-Brown observed:

> Generalisations about any sort of subject matter are of two kinds: the generalisations of common opinion, and generalisations that have been verified or demonstrated by a systematic examination of evidence afforded by precise observations systematically made. Generalisations of the latter kind are called scientific laws. Those who hold that there are no laws of human society cannot hold that there are no generalisations about human society because they themselves hold such generalisations and even make new ones of their own. They must therefore hold that in the field of social phenomena, in contradistinction to physical and biological phenomena, any attempt at the systematic testing of existing

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[10] Adolf Grünbaum, "Causality and the Science of Human Behavior," in *RPS*, 766-778.

[11] Ernest Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961), 447-502.

[12] Ibid. See also Ernest Nagel, "The Logic of Historical Analysis," in *RPS*, 688-700; Grünbaum, *op. cit.*

> generalisations or towards the discovery and verification of new ones, is, for some unexplained reason, futile.[13]

Even the most hard-boiled skeptic must surely recoil from such an extreme position.

However, this does not mean that our difficulties are over. Theoretical possibility is one thing; practical implementation is another. As one philosopher of science aptly put it:

> The net outcome of the discussion ... is that none of the methodological difficulties often alleged to confront the search for systematic explanations of social phenomena is unique to the social sciences or is inherently insuperable. On the other hand, problems are not resolved merely by showing that they are not necessarily insoluble; and the present state of social inquiry clearly indicates that some of the difficulties ... are indeed serious.[14]

In the final analysis, these difficulties boil down to the problem of method. Once it is agreed that it is both possible and desirable to arrive at valid generalizations about human behavior and human societies, how do we go about doing it? Ultimately, the single most powerful and most widely used method for arriving at social-scientific laws is the same as the one used by the physical sciences: the method of comparison.

The Comparative Method

Just as it has been axiomatic since the time of Bacon that the scientific method consists in the extraction of general truths from particular facts, so has it been axiomatic since Bacon's day that the former are derived from the latter by the procedures of classification and comparison. Bacon wrote that our factual knowledge "is so various and diffuse, that it confounds and distracts the

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[13] Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function*, 187.

[14] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 503.

understanding, unless it be ranged and presented to view in a suitable order."[15] This order, he believed, could be discerned by collecting facts into "tables of presence", "tables of deviation", and "tables of comparison"--in other words, by what we today would call "the comparative method".

Many modern social scientists would agree. Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), the founder of French sociology, wrote:

> We have only one way to demonstrate that a given phenomenon is the cause of another, viz., to compare the cases in which they are simultaneously present or absent, to see if the variations they present in these different combinations of circumstances indicate that one depends on the other. When they can be artificially produced at the will of the observer, the method is that of experiment, properly so called. When, on the contrary, the production of facts is not within our control and we can only bring them together in the way that they have been spontaneously produced, the method employed is that of indirect experiment, or the comparative method. ... Comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts.[16]

One can also find comparativists among social anthropologists. To quote Radcliffe-Brown again:

> It is only by the use of the comparative method that we can arrive at general explanations. The alternative is to confine ourselves to particularistic explanations similar to those of the historians. ... It is not a question of whether my theory, or any other general theory ... is or is not satisfactory. It is the different question of whether such a general theory is possible, or whether attempts to arrive at one should be abandoned in favour of resting content with particularistic explanations.[17]

Furthermore, the comparative method has a powerful popular appeal as well:

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[15] Madden, 55.

[16] Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* , tr. S. A. Solovay and J. H. Mueller, ed. George E. G. Catlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 125, 139.

[17] Radcliffe-Brown, *Structure and Function*, 113-114.

> While a fascination with remote and exotic social phenomena has often been a stimulus for comparative research, at least as powerful a motivation has been the search to better understand ourselves through the recognition of differences and similarities across a wide range of societies. The deeper roots of this quest lie in a desire not merely to understand our immediate social, cultural, and personal selves, but to comprehend our underlying human nature. ... Here, comparisons can help; actually, such questions may be unanswerable without some systematic comparative study or reflection.[18]

Unfortunately, as these same authors point out, "the intellectual assistance and vigor provided by the comparative approach are not without cost; it is a rather intricate business."[19] In fact, the same kinds of disputes which we saw over the very possibility of social-scientific laws have also occurred over the methods of arriving at those laws. We have seen a hint of this already in Radcliffe-Brown, with his observation that the only alternative to the comparative method is the "particularistic explanations" of the historians. But it is not only historians who object to the comparative method:

> Anthropologists argue that to understand the meaning of a cultural item one must immerse himself in the particular culture involved. ... Similarly, historians have argued that we must involve ourselves in the *zeitgeist* both of a period *and* of a particular society; and Gestalt psychologists and phenomenologists demand immersion in the particular personal or cultural context. It is even maintained that a researcher can attain a high degree of understanding of at most only one culture, period, or society, and that any use of analytic concepts (other than those of the observed actors) separates the researcher from his subject and thus distorts the meaning and richness of what he observes.[20]

These examples from a variety of disciplines are all variations on the claim that social facts are "historically conditioned" or "culturally determined", and that once

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[18] Amitai Etzioni and Fredric L. Dubow, *Comparative Perspectives: Theories and Methods* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1970), 1-2.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] Ibid., 9.

they are removed from the specific historical context in which they occur, they become meaningless:

> By fastening its attention on what is or appears to be identical or similar in diverse, even widely removed societies--historically and geographically--[the comparative method] lumps these features together, thus providing proof for the axiomatic basic likeness of men and their societies, which serves as a philosophical launching pad for the comparative method on the grand scale. At the same time, and in full consciousness, it completely loses sight of what makes cultures, societies and men ready objects for comparison, namely the peculiar and sometimes particularistic traits which one developed independently of and in distinction from others.[21]

As one observer summarized the position:

> Specific traits and regularities of social phenomena display an enormous variation from society to society and from one time to another. Social phenomena are most importantly viewed as culturally-historically conditioned. The meaning of a given trait, variable, or regularity is dependent on the total culture in which it occurs and should not be torn out of this context as is done in cross-societal hypothesis-testing and comparisons.[22]

If these objections are valid, then the search for social laws which hold true across widely divergent cultures is a waste of time and energy which would be better invested in describing and understanding a particular culture in a particular time and place. While this argument has a certain kind of common-sense appeal, especially to those who see science as consisting primarily in the accumulation of data, it has the effect, in its strongest form, of making *any* sort of genuine social science a theoretical impossibility, ruling out "not only comparative analysis but all analysis, at least in the form of a generalizing science."[23]

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[21] Shemaryahu Talmon, "The 'Comparative Method' in Biblical interpretation--Principles and Problems," Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977, *Vetus Testamentum Supplementum* 29 (1978), 322-323.

[22] Robert M. Marsh, *Comparative Sociology: A Codification of Cross-Societal Analysis* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1967), 18.

[23] Etzioni and Dubow, 9.

Furthermore, it is a position whose philosophical inadequacy has long since been demonstrated. To take one commonly cited example, a number of physical phenomena--lightning, the movements of a compass, medical X-rays, radio and television, the functioning of a telescope or the lens of a camera, and even the appearance of a rainbow in the sky--appear on first examination to be just as unrelated to one another as the disparate phenomena of differing social systems. The temptation is strong to assume that these phenomena can only be understood by the development of a separate explanation or "special law" for each one; and, indeed, such individual laws were formulated at an earlier stage of physical investigation. In the end, however, they all turned out to be derivable from a single set of mathematical equations governing electromagnetism.[24]

Given a similar expenditure of time and effort on the part of social scientists, there is no reason why apparently unrelated social phenomena could not be brought under the same kind of theoretical umbrella. In fact, as has often been pointed out, this is precisely what has already happened in linguistics:

> Every language presents a unique structure; yet the development of rigorous methods for forming theoretical statements about these structures has made possible the development of *general* linguistics, which makes statements about language in general.[25]

In the final analysis, then, comparison cannot be avoided if one wishes to create a true *science* as opposed to a mere accumulation of facts; indeed, "cross-societal comparative analysis is fundamental to any general sociological or anthropological theory."[26]

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[24] Nagel, *Structure of Science*, 462.

[25] Marsh, 10.

[26] Marsh, 6.

But once this is agreed upon, questions still remain. What kinds of comparison shall we attempt? By what methods? And with what ends in view? In the glory days of early comparativist scholarship, these questions were easily answered; it was only necessary to show that element A in culture X was a lot like element B in culture Y, and you were free to draw whatever conclusions came to mind. But this kind of naive "comparativism" has long since been discredited--and properly so. As one observer put it, " the comparative method, in its naive nineteenth century form, is a dead horse that requires no more flogging."[27] Modern scholarship, both more skeptical and more rigorous than its predecessors, demands demonstrable proof before it will accept that alleged parallels are anything more than mere coincidence.

Two Kinds of Comparison

Analytically, there are only two ways that similar structures can be manifested in two different societies: Either they arose independently of one another, or else they are dependent upon a common source (which, of course, could actually be one of the two societies in question).[28]

Theories of dependence are often referred to as "diffusion theories", because in them it is held that social institutions typically originate in one society and then "diffuse" into other societies. In this approach,

> the units of comparison are societies that are geographical neighbors and historical contemporaries, constantly influenced by one another. During the historical development of such societies, they are subject to the same

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[27] Kenneth E. Bock, "The Comparative Method of Anthropology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 8 (1965-66), 269.

[28] Marc Bloch, "Toward a Comparative History of European Societies," in Frederic C. Lane and Jelle C. Riemersma, eds., *Enterprise and Secular Change: Readings in Economic HIstory* (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1953), 494-521.

> over-all causes, just because they are so close together in time and space. Moreover, they have, in part at least, a common origin.[29]

This approach is essentially a historical one, and is by far the easier course; to establish the plausibility of diffusion in any particular case, it is only necessary to show that the two cultures had--or at least *could* have had--some kind of significant contact with one another in which elements of one could pass to the other. Trade, migration, military invasion, gift exchange, tourism--almost anything will do.

Claims of independence, on the other hand, can be described as a search for "cultural universals". This approach is by far the more difficult, but it can also be the more fruitful one. In this case,

> the units of comparison are societies far removed from one another in time or space. Analogous phenomena observed in these societies cannot be explained, therefore, by mutual influences or by a common origin. ... The basic postulate of this method, as well as the conclusion to which it constantly returns, is the fundamental unity of the human spirit or, if you wish, the monotony and astonishing poverty of human intellectual resources during the course of history.[30]

The appeal to universals recognizes the fact that "limits are imposed upon human behavior, whether by biological, geographical, or sociocultural factors. And as a result only a limited number of stable patterns can arise."[31] Gender and family relations, for example, fall largely into this category, since important elements of them are biologically determined and are therefore found in virtually every human society. More murky are allegedly universal psychological structures, such as Carl Jung's "archetypes of the collective unconscious", which--depending on who you believe--are either ubiquitous determinants of human behavior, or else meaningless

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[29] Bloch, 498.

[30] Bloch, 496-498.

[31] Gideon Sjoberg, "The Comparative Method in the Social Sciences," in Etzioni and Dubow, 26.

figments of Jung's own schizophrenic imagination. We shall examine this question in more detail later.

From the standpoint of our original concern with filling the gaps in missing data, the universalist approach has much to commend it:

> Gaps in documentation may be overcome by hypotheses based on analogies, comparisons may suggest research in new directions and, in particular, may explain many "survivals" ... customs which are retained and crystallized in a milieu entirely different from (and later than) the psychological environment in which the customs originated. Such phenomena would appear bizarre and inexplicable, were it not for the existence of similar traits in other cultures which allow precise reconstruction of that vanished social environment.[32]

Given the success of the comparative method in the physical sciences, the support it has received from major figures in the social sciences, and the ringing affirmation offered in its defense by philosophers of science, one might expect that by now it would have carried the day. Surprisingly, however, the opposite has occurred; in fact, there has been an increasing tendency over the past century for social scientists to regard comparative analysis as "a kind of luxury, a functionless adornment of the solid structure of sociology."[33] Especially since World War II, there has been a striking decline in the "fashionability" of comparative studies in both sociology and anthropology, especially in the English-speaking world.[34] The advocates of comparison, it would seem, have consistently won the theoretical battles--but over time it has become clear that they are nevertheless losing the scholarly war.

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[32] Bloch, 497.

[33] Marsh, p. 6.

[34] Sjoberg, 37; Gopala Sarana, "Comparative Method," in Barnard and Spencer, 118.

Particularists versus Generalists

Throughout the social sciences and their allied fields, we run into the same fundamental split over and over again. On the one hand we have those who see the world in terms of specifics: concrete facts, embedded in the particulars of time and place. On the other, we have those who see the world in terms of global principles and sweeping syntheses, of which the particular facts are but a local example. In anthropology, it is the comparativists versus the ethnographers:

> An ethnographer is constructing a theory that will make intelligible what goes on in a particular social universe. A comparativist is trying to find principles common to many different universes. His data are not the direct observations of an ethnographer, but the laws governing the particular universe as the ethnographer formulates them. It is by noting how these laws vary from one universe to another and under what conditions, that the comparativist arrives at a statement of laws governing the separate sets of laws which in turn govern the events in their respective social universes.[35]

In sociology, it is the inter-societalists versus the intra-societalists:

> The close link between cross-societal analysis and studies limited to a single society can also be seen in terms of the logic of scientific method. A science strives to formulate universal propositions. Once a proposition has been tentatively formulated, the task of research is to replicate it, attempt to state limiting conditions and intervening variables, and analyze "exceptional" cases. In this process, inter-societal comparative analysis is but a necessary extension of intra-societal comparative analysis. It is a necessary step, but one that many sociologists ... fail to take.[36]

All of these are examples of what we might call the war of the particularists versus the generalists. At the risk of oversimplification, we may trace this conflict all the way back to the two rival "schools" with which modern sociology began. The French school, founded by Emile Durkheim, consciously modeled its study of society on the natural sciences. It was, therefore, positivist, evolutionist, and

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[35] W. H. Goodenough, cited in Marsh, 9.

[36] Marsh, 11.

comparativist; the search for general principles and universal laws was paramount.[37] The German school, founded by Max Weber (1864-1920), was just the opposite: historicist, anti-reductionist, anti-evolutionist, and focused primarily with the uniqueness of individual societies and particular historical moments, with a pronounced tendency toward diffusionism.[38]

In short, the French school of social science was generalist, while the German school was particularist. While there have been various deviations and cross-fertilizations along the way, both schools have remained more or less true to their roots; they have also exported their conflicting approaches into the world of Anglo-American social science as well, beginning with the opposition at Cambridge of Frazer (the comparativist) and Haddon (the historicist).[39]

One might hope social scientists would recognize that both approaches--the particular and the general--are valid; indeed, both are necessary for a proper understanding of human cultures, which display such tremendous variety while at the same time exhibiting uncanny similarities across both space and time:

> Reality manifests itself as a system of particular facts. One can undertake to search for the general laws which produce them: this is the work of science. One can also undertake to enumerate these facts by themselves, to locate, to characterize and to explain them one by one, and to give an account of their particularities and their singular location in time: this is the work of history.[40]

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[37] John Leavitt, "French Anthropology," in Barnard and Spencer, 242-245.

[38] Walter Dostal and Andre Gingrich, "German and Austrian Anthropology," in Barnard and Spencer, 263-265; Jelle C. Riemersma, "Introduction to François Simiand," in Lane and Riemersma, 464.

[39] A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, "The Comparative Method in Social Anthropology," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 81 (1951), 15.

[40] Cantecor, quoted in François Simiand, "Causal Interpretation and Historical Research," in Lane and Riemersma, 487-488.

Along these same lines, American anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942) pleaded with his fellow scholars to recognize what he called the "two tasks" of anthropology--the first task being the historical, the second (and more important) task the comparative:

> A comparison of the social life of different peoples proves that the foundations of their cultural development are remarkably uniform. It follows from this that there are laws to which this development is subject. Their discovery is the second, perhaps the more important aim of our science. ... In the pursuit of these studies we find that the same custom, the same idea, occurs among peoples for whom we cannot establish any historical connection, so that a common historical origin cannot be assumed and it becomes necessary to decide whether there are laws that result in the same, or at least similar, phenomena independently of historical causes. Thus develops the second important task of ethnology, the investigation of the laws governing social life.[41]

To quote Radcliffe-Brown yet again:

> History, in the proper sense of the term, as an authentic account of the succession of events in a particular region over a particular period of time, cannot give us generalizations. The comparative method as a generalising study of the features of human societies cannot give us particular histories. ... It will be only in an integrated and organized study in which historical studies and sociological studies are combined that we shall be able to reach a real understanding of the development of human society, and this we do not yet have.[42]

But all too often the two camps have been content to snipe at one another, each claiming the mantle of "true science" while denigrating the other as a waste of time. For example, François Siamand, an early twentieth-century comparativist, wrote that:

> the historian fails to observe that one period is more characteristic and more important than another; he does not see that certain "crucial" phenomena merit deeper study, while the repetitions of a known type of phenomenon are uninteresting and a rather sterile ground for further

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[41] Franz Boas, quoted in Radcliffe-Brown, "The Comparative Method," p. 15.

[42] Radcliffe-Brown, "The Comparative Method," p. 22.

> research. ... I firmly believe that history, not in the sense of an auxiliary discipline and the grouping of materials, but as an autonomous science complete in itself, has no reason for existence and is bound to disappear: it has no explanatory method of its own.[43]

The historian, for his part, replies that the social sciences ultimately "will have the choice between being history and being nothing."[44]

Unfortunately, there is considerable evidence from psychological studies that these two ways of approaching the scientific enterprise are rooted in fundamental differences between personality types, and that those who naturally gravitate toward one approach are to a large extent simply incapable of understanding the other.[45] This suggests that it takes an extraordinary and collective effort on the part of scholars to maintain a balanced approach which draws on the strengths of both types.

> Comparisons of large numbers of societies, however similar to each other, may well require collaboration among experts who have specialized on each society and who can pool their knowledge and serve as checks on each other's perceptions. ... While one researcher may be able to cover only one or a few similar societies, the cumulative work of several researchers may allow, at a later stage, the development of an abstract and generalizing theory.[46]

This brings us to one of the largest and most widespread instances of "cumulative work" ever to take place: the modern scientific study of religion.

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[43] Simiand, 471, 487.

[44] Frederic William Maitland, quoted in Bock, 280.

[45] While most of the evidence for this is statistical and/or anecdotal, the cumulative weight is persuasive; see, for example, Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* (Palo Alto: Davies-Black Publishing, 1995), as well as Carl Jung's comments and analyses of personality types scattered throughout his works.

[46] Etzioni and Dubow, 10.

Religionswissenschaft: The Science of Religion

It should come as no surprise that the split between particularists and generalists which we have found in the social sciences also appears in the modern scientific study of religion; for not only is religion itself inextricably intertwined with other social and cultural practices, but its study claims many of the same founding fathers: Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Edward Tylor, James Frazer, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, and a host of others.[47]

Joachim Wach (1898-1955) discerned three stages in the modern scientific study of religions, or *Religionswissenschaft* as it is sometimes called.[48] The first stage, which began with Max Müller in the mid-nineteenth century, was the hour of the generalists:

> [This stage] was characterized by a genuine enthusiasm, a sincere desire to understand other religions, and a measure of speculative interest. Among the various forms of expression of religious experience it was mythology which attracted special attention. Language study, history, and philosophy were blended during this era while theology receded. ... The historians of religion willingly cultivated their reputation as discoverers of a new and highly promising method of inquiry. Everyone was looking for "parallels."[49]

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[47] Useful surveys of the study of religion include Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Mircea Eliade, "The 'History of Religion' as a Branch of Knowledge," (*SP*, 216-232); Mircea Eliade, "The History of Religions in Retrospect: 1912 and After," (*Quest*, 12-36); and Douglas Allen, *Structure and Creativity in Religion: Hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's Phenomenology and New Directions* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 3-101. For a comprehensive effort, see Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

[48] Wach was professor and chair of the History of Religions department at the University of Chicago. See Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The Life and Thought of Joachim Wach," in Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958); and Joachim Wach, "Development, Meaning, and Method in the Comparative Study of Religions" in the same volume.

[49] Wach, 3.

In the second stage, a generation later, the pendulum swung in the opposite direction and scientific positivism came to the fore. These were the glory days of the particularists:

> This second period was dominated by philological and historical concerns and was characterized by a positivistic temper. Description was to take the place of evaluation. Norms and values were to be "explained" historically, psychologically, and sociologically. ... Specialization was highly developed and "objectivity" was the supreme demand. ... While the mistake of the first stage had been neglect of detail, the second erred in its overestimation of detail.[50]

The third stage, which began around the time of World War I, was in many ways a synthesis of the first two. On the one hand, there was "a sharp reaction against the predominance of the positivistic temper"; on the other hand, "the foundation upon which a fruitful comparative study of religions rests must always be historical and philological, or, in other words, *critical* studies." On the one hand, "by stressing the non-rational element in religion ... an exaggerated intellectualism and scholasticism are excluded"; on the other, "superficial identification and parallelism" are ruled out.[51] This third stage was, according to Wach, characterized by a more integrated outlook, a rejection of exaggerated specialization and compartmentalization, and a new exploration of deeper questions about epistemology, metaphysics, and the nature of religious experience--subjects considered out of bounds or even irrelevant in the previous, more positivistic phase.[52]

Most important, a signal emphasis of the third stage was on participatory understanding:

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[50] Ibid., 4.

[51] Ibid., 6.

[52] Ibid., 5.

> What is required is not indifference, as positivism in its heyday believed--"Grey cold eyes do not know the value of things," objected Nietzsche--but rather an engagement of feeling, interest, *metexis*, or participation. ... [R]eligion is a concern of the total person, engaging intellect, emotion, and will.[53]

This approach draws on two older conceptions which were originally derived from the old German school, but--at least in the study of religion--were appropriated by the comparativists: *Verstehen*, or deep understanding, pioneered by Max Weber, and the "phenomenology" of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), which seeks to go beyond the accumulation of data to ascertain the "meaning" which lies beneath.[54]

In the third stage, then, the trick is to be both particular and general, both analytic and synthetic, both local and global, historical and comparativist--standing outside the phenomenon as an objective observer while also entering into it as a sympathetic participant. As Raffaele Pettazzoni put it:

> Phenomenology and history complement each other. Phenomenology cannot do without ethnology, philology, and other historical disciplines. Phenomenology, on the other hand, gives the historical disciplines that sense of the religious which they are not able to capture. So conceived, religious phenomenology is the religious understanding ... of history; it is history in its religious dimension. Religious phenomenology and history are not two sciences but are two complementary aspects of the integral science of religion, and the science of religion as such has a well-defined character given to it by its unique and proper subject matter.[55]

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[53] Ibid., 12.

[54] See, among others, Wach, 24-25; Capps, 110-114, 162-168; Joseph M. Kitagawa, "The History of Religions in America," in Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, eds., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 1-30; Jacques Waardenburg, *Reflections on the Study of Religion* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1978); Theodore Abel, "The Operation Called *Verstehen*," in *RPS*, 677-687; and Sanford Krolick, "Through a Glass Darkly: What is the Phenomenology of Religion?" *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 17 (1985), 193-199.

[55] Raffaele Pettazzoni, "The Supreme Being: Phenomenological Structure and Historical Development," in Eliade and Kitagawa, *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology*, 66.

The premier example of this double-barreled approach was Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), author of *Das Heilige*,[56] the famous groundbreaking study of numinosity and sacrality. But more famous still was the man who consciously followed in Otto's footsteps and staked his whole career--and, indeed, his whole life--on the centrality of the sacred: Mircea Eliade.

Mircea Eliade and the Science of Religious Comparison

Without a doubt, the foremost comparativist in the modern study of religion was Mircea Eliade. Born in Romania in 1907 and first published in 1921, Eliade entered the University of Bucharest in 1925 as a student in literature and philosophy.[57] After visiting Italy, Egypt, and Sri Lanka, he spent three years (1928-1931) in India, where he studied philosophy under Surendranath Dasgupta at the University of Calcutta, and yoga under Swami Shivananda; upon his return he completed a doctoral dissertation on yoga and began lecturing at his alma mater on Indian metaphysics. He also became embroiled in politics, becoming a "spokesman for his generation" in the bitter factional struggles which were tearing his native land apart.

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[56] Rudolph Otto, *Das Heilige* (1917); translated into English by John W. Harvey as *The Idea of the Holy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923).

[57] Useful summaries of Eliade's life and career can be found in David Cave, *Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6-12; and Carl Olson, *The Theology and Philosophy of Eliade: A Search for the Centre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 1-7. A brief biography and partial bibliography through 1967 can be found in Ann Pritchard and D. E. Fitch, *Mircea Eliade: A Check-List of His Publications in the History of Religions* (Santa Barbara: University of California, 1968); a much larger and more nearly complete effort is Douglas Allen and Dennis Doeing, *Mircea Eliade: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1980), which also provides a detailed chronology of Eliade's life (pp. xiii-xxii). Eliade's autobiographical works include his four-volume *Journal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), *Autobiography, Volume I: 1907-1937, Journey East, Journey West*, tr. Mac Linscott Ricketts (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), *Autobiography, Volume II: 1937-1960, Exile's Odyssey*, tr. Mac Linscott Ricketts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), and *Ordeal by Labyrinth: Conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet*, tr. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

As events in Romania began to spin out of control, Eliade was interned for several months in a concentration camp and then, ironically, sent out of the country with the diplomatic service--first as a cultural attaché in London from 1940 to 1941, and then as an advisor to the Romanian embassy in Lisbon until 1945. With the subsequent Communist takeover of Romania, he reluctantly became a permanent exile. For a decade he lived in Paris, where he wrote several of his most influential books and taught at the Sorbonne; during this time he became acquainted with such luminaries as Georges Dumézil, Carl Jung, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Raffaele Pettazzoni, Geraardus van der Leeuw, and Joachim Wach, and in fact established himself as their peer. Then, in 1956, he came by invitation to the United States, where he joined the faculty of the University of Chicago, first as a visiting professor and then as chair of its History of Religions department. For the next three decades he was the cornerstone of what was already, by general agreement, the most important and respected locus of religious studies in North America.[58]

In his later years, Eliade was often hailed, with considerable justification, as the world's best-known and most influential historian of religions[59]--a position he continued to occupy even after his death in 1986. In 1993 one observer declared that any historian of religion who wished to go beyond Eliade must first "be initiated through Eliade".[60] That same year Russell McCutcheon, a critic of Eliade, admitted that:

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[58] As one of Eliade's admirers aptly put it: "During the sixties and seventies the history of religions largely rotated around his insights, orientations, and terminology." (Cave, 4.)

[59] Guilford Dudley III, *Religion on Trial: Mircea Eliade & His Critics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977, 15; Douglas Allen, "Recent Defenders of Eliade: A Critical Evaluation," *Religion* 24 (1994), 333; Pritchard and Fitch, 5; Capps, 139-145.

[60] Cave, 185.

> Eliade's theories and methods continue to exert a subtle, yet remarkable, influence within virtually all North American departments of religion and programs in religious studies, ensuring that anyone who has read in such areas as myth, world religions, or even religion and film or literature has no doubt come upon his work--if not explicitly, then perhaps implicitly.[61]

To what can we attribute such widespread and long-lasting influence? First, Eliade demonstrated a lifelong genius for absorbing and synthesizing vast quantities of information from a wide variety of sources, including history, the humanities, and the sciences. He read obsessively, learning language after language--Italian, English, Sanskrit, Russian, Portuguese--in order to obtain direct access to the original texts. He also wrote incessantly, marking his hundredth published article in the year he turned eighteen;[62] over the course of his life he turned out a staggering corpus of more than two thousand titles,[63] including newspaper columns, short stories, novels, essays, lectures, book reviews, journal articles, and numerous scholarly books--as well as editing several journals[64] and a monumental new encyclopedia of religion.[65]

But it is not just the quantity of Eliade's work that must be taken into account; even more important is its quality. Throughout his life, Eliade was driven by a single, consuming passion: the re-sacralization of the world. In the furnace of pain that was inter-war Romania, Eliade learned first-hand the consequences of anomie and chaos, and in subsequent years he saw the same disease spreading around the planet. As a result, he made it his life's work to lay the groundwork for what he called "a new humanism"--a world in which life could once again be grounded in

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[61] Russell T. McCutcheon, "The Myth of the Apolitical Scholar: the Life and Works of Mircea Eliade," *Queen's Quarterly* 100 (1993), 643.

[62] *Auto1*, 94.

[63] Allen and Doeing, viii.

[64] Most notably *History of Religions*, the house organ of Eliade's department at Chicago.

[65] *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1986).

eternal verities instead of the ephemera of profane existence.[66] As one observer of Eliade's life aptly put it:

> The unity of Eliade's life and work suggests that he spent his creative career searching for the centre of his own existence. And this quest for a meaningful centre of existence is a theme that runs throughout his scholarly and literary publications ... Eliade's advocacy of a new humanism is connected to his call for a creative hermeneutics which will stimulate philosophical thought, lead to a change in human beings, form a source for new cultural values, and enable one to discover one's place in the world.[67]

As one would expect from a representative of Wach's "third stage", Eliade was keenly aware of the conflict between those who interpret religious facts solely by reference to their historical situation, and those who search for the universals behind the facts. He wrote:

> The growing interest in phenomenology of religion has created a tension among the students of *Religionswissenschaft*. The different historical and historicistic schools have reacted strongly against the phenomenologists' claim that they can grasp the *essence* and the *structure* of religious phenomena. For the historicists, religion is exclusively a historical fact without any transhistorical meaning or value, and to seek for "essences" is tantamount to falling back into the old Platonic error.[68]

Eliade doubted that this conflict would ever be resolved, because (as we have already observed) it seems to be grounded in differing individual temperaments. In the long run, however, this turns out to be a good thing--because when the same data are viewed from both perspectives, the result is a deeper understanding than either perspective could have provided alone:

> For, if the "phenomenologists" are interested in the meanings of religious data, the "historians," on their side, attempt to show how these meanings

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[66] Mircea Eliade, "History of Religions and a New Humanism," *History of Religions* 1 (1961), 1-8 [reprinted with revisions in *Quest*, 1-11]. See also Cave, *op. cit.*

[67] Olson, 157, 162.

[68] *Quest*, 35-36

> have been experienced and lived in the various cultures and historical moments, how they have been transformed, enriched, or impoverished in the course of history. But if we are to avoid sinking back into an obsolete "reductionism," this history of religious meanings must always be regarded as forming part of the history of the human spirit.[69]

For Eliade, then, the ideal methodology is one which attains "a broader perspective in which the two methodological approaches could be integrated."[70]

> The historian of religions does not reach a comprehension of a phenomenon until after he has compared it with thousands of similar or dissimilar phenomena, until he has situated it among them; and these thousands of phenomena are separated not only in time but also in space. For a like reason, the historian of religions will not confine himself merely to a typology or morphology of religious data; he knows that "history" does not exhaust the content of a religious phenomenon, but neither does he forget that it is always in History--in the broadest sense of the term--that a religious datum develops all its aspects and reveals all its meanings. In other words, the historian of religions makes use of all the *historical* manifestations of a religious phenomenon in order to discover what such a phenomenon "has to say"; on the one hand, he holds to the historically concrete, but on the other, he attempts to decipher whatever transhistorical content a religious datum reveals through history.[71]

This is an ambitious undertaking, indeed--one which has not only inspired a generation of Eliade's students and disciples, but also (as we shall soon see) outraged a number of Eliade's critics.

But for our purposes we must look not toward the future, but back to the past. Eliade, as the master comparativist of our time, devoted his professional life to what can only be called a "science of the sacred". Our task is to determine whether that science can be applied to the data of ancient Near Eastern religion--and what, if any, useful results can thereby be obtained. Before we can apply Eliade's methodology, however, we need to know what it is. That is the subject of our next chapter.

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[69] *Quest*, 9 (reprinting Eliade, "History of Religions and a New Humanism," pp. 7-8).

[70] *Quest*, 36.

[71] *Shamanism*, xv.

CHAPTER 2

ELIADE'S METHODOLOGY

A religious phenomenon will only be recognized as such if it is grasped at its own level, that is to say, if it is studied as something religious. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art or any other study is false; it misses the one unique and irreducible element in it--the element of the sacred.

—Mircea Eliade

Mircea Eliade made a career of analyzing and comparing manifestations of the sacred from around the world. His work is particularly valuable in this regard because it draws on materials from a wide range of cultures, including not only those of the ancient Near East but also those of northern Europe, south and east Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Australia, the Pacific islands, and the Americas. The patterns he discovered cannot, therefore, be attributed to cultural diffusion, but instead come close to the character of human universals.[1]

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[1] Eliade was careful to distance himself from "the errors of the nineteenth century" (*SP*, 16) and what he called the "confusionist" positions of Tylor and Frazer (*IS*, 175). Nevertheless, he continued to insist that symbols, myths, and rituals might "reveal something of the human condition regarded in its own right as a mode of existence in the universe." (*IS*, 176)

Following in the footsteps of Emile Durkheim,[2] Geraardus Van der Leeuw (1890-1950),[3] and especially Rudolf Otto,[4] Eliade was concerned above all with the universal human experience of the sacred--i.e., the self-manifestations of numinous power, of something "wholly other", in the midst of the profane world.[5] According to Eliade, these manifestations or "hierophanies" are rare and often unwanted in the modern world, which has to a large extent been "desacralized";[6] but in pre-modern societies they are welcomed and even sought after:

> The man of the archaic societies tends to live as much as possible *in* the sacred or in close proximity to consecrated objects. The tendency is perfectly understandable, because, for primitives as for the man of all pre-modern societies, the *sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and, in the last analysis, to *reality*. ... Religious man's desire to live *in the sacred* is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality, not to let himself be paralyzed by the never-ceasing relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion. ... Religious man's profound nostalgia is to inhabit a "divine world," ... *to live in a pure and holy cosmos, as it was in the beginning, when it came fresh from the Creator's hands.*[7]

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[2] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, tr. Joseph Ward Swain (George Allen and Unwin, 1915; reprinted by The Free Press, 1965).

[3] Geraardus Van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (Tübingen, 1933), translated into English by J. E. Turner as *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (George Allen and Unwin, 1938; 2nd edition, 1964; reprinted by Princeton University Press, 1986).

[4] Eliade explicitly compared (and contrasted) his approach to Otto's in *SP*, 8-10; see also *Quest*, 23.

[5] *SP*, 11.

[6] *SP*, 17.

[7] *SP*, 12, 28, 65. All italics in quotations (here and elsewhere) are in the original. Note that here, as throughout his writings, Eliade seems to use the terms "archaic" and "primitive" (and, in other places, "traditional" as well) as synonyms. In Eliade's usage, all three seem to refer indiscriminately to the earliest and/or least complex human societies and the people who comprise them. In the shadow of modern political sensibilities, such "loaded" terminology may well seem inadvisable if not actually offensive; certainly there is at the very least some danger of confusion. Henceforth we will use the term "archaic" in preference to the others except when quoting Eliade directly.

The distinction between sacred and profane applies to both space and time. We will examine each in turn.

Sacred Space

Profane space--that is, space which has not been consecrated--is essentially a chaos: fluid, formless, homogeneous, unknowable, and populated with malign entities.[8] For archaic man, such a space is incapable of sustaining any kind of meaningful existence; rather, it is a place of unrestrained danger and terror:

> Religious man thirsts for *being*. His terror of the chaos that surrounds his inhabited world corresponds to his terror of nothingness. The unknown space that extends beyond his world--an uncosmicized because unconsecrated space, a mere amorphous extent into which no orientation has yet been projected, and hence in which no structure has yet arisen--for religious man, this profane space represents absolute nonbeing. [9]

It is only when the sacred is manifested in this profane space that a portion of the chaos becomes a cosmos--an ordered world--in which one can live:

> For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality, opposed to the nonreality of the vast surrounding expanse. ... In the homogeneous and infinite expanse, in which no point of reference is possible and hence no *orientation* can be established, the hierophany reveals an absolute fixed point, a center.[10]

In short, the discovery or establishment of a "center" is a religious act equivalent to the creation of a world.[11]

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[8] *SP*, 20; *SP*, 29-32; *IS*, 37-38; *CH*, 9-10; *MA*, 115.

[9] *SP*, 64.

[10] *SP*, 21; see also *CH*, 10-11.

[11] *SP*, 22, 30, 63.

> Since to settle somewhere, to inhabit a space, is equivalent to repeating the cosmogony and hence to imitating the work of the gods, it follows that, for religious man, every existential decision to situate himself in space in fact constitutes a religious decision. By assuming the responsibility of creating the world that he has chosen to inhabit, he not only cosmicizes chaos but also sanctifies his little cosmos by making it like the world of the gods.[12]

Sacred centers can come about in a number of different ways. First, they can be *discovered* when the sacred spontaneously manifests itself in a natural object such as a tree or stone, in a spectacular display such as a meteor fall or a lightning strike, or in a dream or vision. Second, they can be *evoked* by prayer or divination, as when an animal is hunted and killed, or an arrow is shot randomly into the air. In either case, the center is known to be sacred because its location has been revealed by the gods.[13]

But sacred centers can also be deliberately constructed and ritually consecrated by human action.[14] In the latter case, the location may be (at least tentatively) selected by man--but it becomes sacred because its creation is homologized to the creation of the world by the ritual repetition of "the paradigmatic work of the gods."[15] In the case of altars and sanctuaries, this is usually "based on a primeval revelation which disclosed the archetype of the sacred space *in illo tempore*, an archetype which was then indefinitely copied and copied again with the erection of

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[12] *SP*, 65; see also SP, 34.

[13] *SP*, 26-28; *PCR*, 369-370.

[14] *SP*, 26-29. Eliade seems to have contradicted himself on this point. In *PCR*, (p. 369) he stated categorically that sacred places are never chosen by human decision, but only *discovered* when the sacred place reveals itself. But a few pages later (*PCR*, 382), he declared that "man cannot live except in this sort of sacred space. And when there is no hierophany to reveal it to him, he constructs it for himself according to the laws of cosmology and geomancy." The latter position is confirmed by his statement in *SP*, (p. 65) about man's "existential decision to situate himself in space" and "assuming the responsibility of creating the world that he has chosen to inhabit." I have found no way to reconcile these divergent viewpoints except to observe (as Eliade himself did with respect to the multiplicity of "centers") that profane logic does not always apply in the sacred realm!

[15] *SP*, 32.

every new altar, temple or sanctuary."[16] In fact, as Eliade repeatedly emphasized, *"every construction or fabrication has the cosmogony as paradigmatic model."*[17] As a result, every deliberate construction--whether altar, house, palace, temple, or city--is an *imago mundi* or "image of the world"; and every such construction is therefore in some sense a sacred center.[18]

To the modern mind, all this creates a serious problem. If every construction is a sacred center, and every center is a "center of the world", then the world has a multiplicity--indeed, almost an infinity--of "centers". How can this be? Eliade's answer is that this way of thinking betrays a profane understanding which is simply not applicable to the world of the sacred.[19]

Because every center involves a hierophany, it is therefore also a point of "breakthrough" where communication is possible between earth and heaven, or even between earth and the underworld.[20]

> The irruption of the sacred does not only project a fixed point into the formless fluidity of profane space, a center into chaos; it also effects a break in plane, that is, it opens communication between the cosmic planes (between earth and heaven) and makes possible ontological passage from one mode of being into another.[21]

It is here, in the sacred center, that prayers and offerings go up to the gods (or down to the chthonic spirits); and sometimes, in response, the gods come down (or the spirits comes up) by the same path. The path itself is often symbolized by some

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[16] *PCR*, 371-372.

[17] *SP*, 45.

[18] *Zalmoxis*, 184; *SP*, 65.

[19] *PCR*, 379, 385; *IS*, 39-40.

[20] *IS*, 40; *CH*, 15-17; *PCR*, 373-377; *SP*, 26.

[21] *SP*, 63.

kind of physical connection between earth and sky: a pole, a rope, a tree, a ladder, a pillar, or--if circumstances allow--by a real or artificial mountain.[22] Whatever its actual physical form, this connection functions as the *axis mundi*, "which at once connects and supports heaven and earth and whose base is fixed in the world below."[23] The sacred center is also often viewed as "the navel of the world", the point from which creation began and spread out--just as an embryo appears to grow out of its connection to the placenta. It may also be the venue where subsidiary creations took place, including especially the creation of the human race.[24]

A temple is a specialized version of the domestic dwelling--a "house of the gods"--and therefore partakes of the same symbolism as any other habitation. It, too, is a sacred center; it, too, is an *imago mundi*; it, too, is constructed according to the cosmogonic paradigm. But its sacrality is of a higher order than all others--a fact which has important implications:

> If the temple constitutes an *imago mundi*, this is because the world, as the work of the gods, is sacred. But the cosmological structure of the temple gives room for a new religious valorization; as house of the gods, hence holy place above all others, the temple continually resanctifies the world, because it at once represents and contains it. In the last analysis, *it is by virtue of the temple that the world is resanctified in every part.* However impure it may have become, the world is continually purified by the sanctity of sanctuaries.[25]

And if the temple happens to be situated on a natural "high place", such as the top of an already existing mountain, then so much the better.

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[22] *SP*, 36-42; *Shamanism*, 259-274; *PCR*, 374-376.

[23] *SP*, 36; see also *CH*, 12-15.

[24] *IS*, 43-44; *CH*, 16-17; *PCR*, 231-235, 377-378.

[25] *SP*, 59.

Finally, in some cultures the earthly center is seen not only as a sacred place in its own right, but as a symbol or shadow of something even greater--a heavenly temple, a heavenly city, or perhaps even the primordial paradise itself:[26]

> The world that surrounds us, then, the world in which the presence and the work of man are felt--the mountains that he climbs, populated and cultivated regions, navigable rivers, cities, sanctuaries--all these have an extraterrestrial archetype, be it conceived as a plan, as a form, or purely and simply as a "double" existing on a higher cosmic level.[27]

This notion of a "cosmic double" appears primarily in what Eliade calls "the great oriental civilizations" of the ancient Near East, India, and China.[28] Perhaps it is no coincidence that it is also in these more "advanced" cultures that we find the rise of heroic myths and initiatory mysticism:

> Man's desire to place himself naturally and permanently in a sacred place, in the "center of the world", was easier to satisfy in the framework of the older societies than in the civilizations that have come since. Indeed, this result became harder and harder to achieve. The myths about "heroes" who alone are in a position to enter a "center" became commoner as the civilizations producing them became more developed. The notions of merit, courage, strong personality, initiatory trials and so on, played an increasingly important part, and were fed and assisted by the ever more exclusive emphasis on magic, and on the idea of personal power.[29]

Heroism and mysticism, then, can be considered as way stations between the regular sacrality of archaic life, and the unrelieved secularism of the modern world--symptoms of a society in which the sacred has already become inaccessible to many, and is about to become inaccessible to all.

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[26] *SP*, 58-62; *CH*, 6-10.

[27] *CH*, 9.

[28] *SP*, 58.

[29] *PCR*, 383.

Sacred Time

Sacred time is to profane time what sacred space is to profane space. Just as the irruption of the sacred in the form of a hierophany marks a specific place as a sacred place, so also it marks a particular time as a sacred time.[30] Just as sacred space can be discovered in spontaneous manifestation, evoked by divination, or constructed by ritual performance, so also can sacred time. And--perhaps most important for our purposes--just as every sacred space is homologized to the cosmos, so also every sacred time is homologized to the time of creation:

> The cosmogony serves as the paradigmatic model for every creation, for every kind of doing. It is for this same reason that *cosmogonic time* serves as the model for all *sacred times*; for if sacred time is that in which the gods manifested themselves and created, obviously the most complete divine manifestation and the most gigantic creation is the creation of the world.[31]

Hierophanic time is mainly encountered in clock and calendar. The endless cycles of sunrise and sunset, lunar phases, solstice and equinox, planting and harvest, all constitute hierophanies because "those rhythms are seen as revelations--that is, manifestations--of a fundamental sacred power behind the cosmos."[32] And it is in the festivals which celebrate these events that man re-enters sacred time and re-experiences the direct presence of the sacred:

> In the festival the sacred dimension of life is recovered, the participants experience the sanctity of human existence as a divine creation. At all other times there is always the danger of forgetting what is fundamental--that existence is not given by what modern men call Nature but is a creation of *Others*, the gods or semi-divine beings. But in festivals the participants recover the sacred dimension of existence, by learning again

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[30] *SP*, 68-69; *PCR*, 388-389.

[31] *SP*, 81.

[32] *PCR*, 388.

> how the gods or the mythical ancestors created man and taught him the various kinds of social behavior and of practical work.[33]

The annual round of these festivals constitutes, in effect, the sacred calendar,[34] each complete cycle of which is "equivalent to the creation, duration and destruction of a world."[35] And it is through this series of festivals that archaic man maintains his sense of living in a sacred universe.[36]

> With each periodical festival, the participants find the same sacred time--the same that had been manifested in the festival of the previous year or in the festival of a century earlier; it is the time that was created and sanctified by the gods at the period of their *gesta*, of which the festival is precisely a reactualization. In other words, the participants in the festival meet in it *the first appearance of sacred time*, as it appeared *ab origine, in illo tempore*.[37]

Foremost of these sacred times is the turning of the New Year and its associated festivals, which are "the exemplary pattern of all renewal";[38] in essence they constitute a repetition of the cosmogony itself, and thus a return to a time when all was pure and holy.[39]

> Since the New Year is a reactualization of the cosmogony, it implies *starting time over again at its beginning*, that is, restoration of the primordial time, the "pure" time, that existed at the moment of Creation. This is why the New Year is the occasion for "purifications," for the expulsion of sins, of demons, or merely of a scapegoat. ··· Symbolically, man became contemporary with the cosmogony, he was present at the creation of the

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[33] *SP*, 89-90.

[34] *SP*, 85.

[35] *IS*, 72.

[36] *MR*, 18-19.

[37] *SP*, 69-70. The *gesta* are, obviously, the deeds of the gods in the primordial time.

[38] *MA*, 148.

[39] *PCR*, 400-404; *SP*, 75-76, 92; *MR*, 50-51.

> world ... hence he was born anew, he began life over again with his reserve of vital forces *intact*, as it was at the moment of his birth.[40]

But it is not just the natural festival of the New Year which is homologized to the cosmogony. So also is *every* beginning; because to begin something is to engage in an act of creation, and every creation involves "an enormous reserve of sacred power."[41]

> The cosmogony is the exemplary model for every kind of "doing"; not only because the Cosmos is at once the ideal archetype of every creative situation and of every creation but also because the Cosmos is a divine work; hence it is sanctified even in its structure. By extension, whatever is perfect, "full," harmonious, fertile--in short, whatever is "cosmicized," whatever resembles a Cosmos--is sacred. To do something well, to work, construct, create, structure, give form ... all this comes down to bringing something into existence, giving it "life," and, in the last analysis, making it like the pre-eminently harmonious organism, the Cosmos.[42]

Hence, "every beginning is *illud tempus*, and therefore an opening into the Great Time, into eternity."[43] Among these "beginnings" are initiation, marriage, the birth of a child, the start of planting or harvest, taking possession of a land, or the founding of a temple or city.[44] But for our purposes, one of the most important--indeed, perhaps the most important of all--is the enthronement of a king.[45] As a ceremony of renewal, it is easily homologized to the cosmogony; and as the opening of a new era, it is easily homologized to the New Year. In fact, it is often the case

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[40] *SP*, 77-80; see also *MA*, 145-150; *CH*, 51-73.

[41] *MA*, 114.

[42] *MR*, 32-33.

[43] *PCR*, 396.

[44] *MA*, 114, 148, 151-159; *CH*, 73-85; *MR*, 21-38; *SP*, 81-91; *PCR*, 404-407.

[45] *MR*, 39-41; *MA*, 152-155; *CH*, 80-81.

that years are reckoned according to the years of the king's reign, and the enthronement date itself is often the starting point for the civil calendar.

But the rise of the enthronement ceremony as a cosmogonic festival can lead to a disjunction between the natural cycles of the world and the more linear time of historical experience. Furthermore, once this historicization of cosmogonic events begins to take place, the same process can also be applied to other historic events that are felt to have "cosmic" significance.[46]

> The *renovatio* accomplished at the coronation of a king had important consequences in the later history of humanity. On the one hand, the ceremonies of renewal become movable, break away from the rigid frame of the calendar; on the other, the king becomes in a manner responsible for the stability, the fecundity, and the prosperity of the entire Cosmos. This is as much as to say that universal renewal is no longer bound to the cosmic rhythm and is connected instead with historical persons and events.[47]

Although Eliade does not seem to have drawn the parallel himself, one can easily see in this historicization of sacred time the same phenomenon as the aforementioned monopolization of sacred space by heroes and mystics. In both cases the once-universal experience of sacrality through the natural order becomes restricted to the province of a privileged few--a process which, taken to its ultimate conclusion, results in the historicization and secularization of the entire world.

But secularization is not the only possibility; another option is the complete *nullification* of history in eschatology. Archaic man's overwhelming desire to live in the sacred is, for Eliade, a kind of "nostalgia for paradise":

> By this we mean the desire to *find oneself always and without effort* in the Center of the World, at the heart of reality; and by a short cut and in a

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[46] *MR*, 49-50, citing A. J. Wensinck, "The Semitic New Year and the Origin of Eschatology," *Acta Orientalia* 1 (1923), 159-199.

[47] *MR*, 40-41, quoting Mircea Eliade, "Dimensions religieuses du renouvellement cosmique," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 28 (1960), 270-271.

> natural manner to transcend the human condition, and to recover the divine condition.[48]

This divine condition is sought in a return to the "perfection of the beginnings", which is

> the expression of a more intimate and deeper religious experience, nourished by the imaginary memory of a "Lost Paradise," of a state of bliss that preceded the present human condition.[49]

Thus just as the solar day or year comes full circle with a death and rebirth of the sun, so in this conception does the cosmos return to its beginnings--reduced to primordial chaos, and then created anew.[50]

Myth and Ritual

As we have seen, archaic man desires above all else to have his existence grounded in sacred space and sacred time, without which his life remains, as Shakespeare wrote, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."[51] Fortunately, man is not constrained to wait helplessly for the sacred to manifest itself spontaneously; he also has it within his power to actualize the sacred on his own initiative by means of ritual.

But not just any ritual will do; one cannot arbitrarily conjure up a meaningless jumble of "ritual acts" and expect sacrality to be manifested. Rituals are a form of human behavior; and just as time becomes sacred by being homologized to primordial time (i.e., the time of creation), just as space becomes sacred by being homologized to the cosmos (i.e., what was created in primordial time), so human

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[48] *IS*, 55; see also *PCR*, 383, 407-408.

[49] *MR*, 50-51; see also *SP*, 92.

[50] *MR*, 50-74.

[51] Shakespeare *Macbeth* v.47.

behavior becomes sacred by being homologized to the deeds which were done in the primordial time:

> In the particulars of his conscious behavior, the "primitive," the archaic man, acknowledges no act which has not been previously posited and lived by someone else, some other being who was not a man. What he does has been done before. His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others.[52]

But how can one know the details of events which took place before human beings were present to observe them? From the stories of those events as they are recounted in myths.

Here it is important to distinguish between our colloquial use of the term "myth" to represent a story which is contrary to fact, and the technical use of the term to mean precisely the opposite. It is also important to distinguish between myths proper, and other kinds of stories--fables and folk tales--which may be told by the same people; the latter may be amusing or instructive, but are not considered to be "true" in the sense that they describe things which really happened. Myths, properly understood, are always "true" for the people who tell them, because they are always about origins--i.e., about the absolutely *real* primordial time when divine beings shaped the world.[53]

> Every creation springs from an abundance. The gods create out of an excess of power, an overflow of energy. Creation is accomplished by a surplus of ontological substance. This is why the myth, which narrates this sacred ontophany, this victorious manifestation of a plenitude of being, becomes the paradigmatic model for all human activities. For it alone reveals the *real*, the superabundant, the effectual.[54]

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[52] *CH*, 5; see also *CH*, 32.

[53] *MR*, 8-11; *SP*, 95; *Quest*, 73.

[54] *SP*, 97-98.

While there may be a number of apparently distinct myths in a given society, they should not be viewed as "an incoherent agglomeration" but rather as "a single corpus endowed with meaning"[55] which collectively reveals the "sacred history" of primordial times:

> Now this primordial, sacred history, brought together by the totality of significant myths, is fundamental because it explains, and by the same token justifies, the existence of the world, of man and of society. This is the reason that a mythology is considered at once a *true history*: it relates how things came into being, providing the exemplary model and also the justifications of man's activities.[56]

But all myths are not created equal; even among the sacred stories there is a kind of hierarchy, and the myth of the cosmogony "enjoys a special prestige."[57]

> Every mythical account of the origin of anything presupposes and continues the cosmogony. From the structural point of view, origin myths can be homologized with the cosmogonic myth. The creation of the World being *the* pre-eminent instance of creation, the cosmogony becomes the exemplary model for "creation" of every kind.[58]

Thus myths serve a number of functions. First, they reveal the events of the primordial time--events which otherwise could not possibly be known.[59] Some of these stories, designated "cosmogonic" myths, tell about the creation of the world as a whole; other myths may describe the creation of plant or animal life in general, individual species (including human beings), particular aspects of human existence (such as sexuality or agriculture), or various human social institutions. Second, myths serve to explain and justify, directly or indirectly, the present order of human

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[55] *Ordeal*, 144.

[56] *Quest*, 76.

[57] *Quest*, 75.

[58] *MR*, 21.

[59] *SP*, 95; *MR*, 41.

existence: sexuality, mortality, sexual dimorphism, the organization of society, and the need to earn bread by the sweat of one's brow.[60]

But the foremost function of myth is to reveal the "exemplary models" or paradigms by which human life is to be lived, thereby imparting order, value, and meaning to human existence.[61] And among these "exemplary models" are the paradigms for the rituals by which the sacred is caused to manifest itself in the midst of a profane world.[62]

> A sacrifice, for example, not only exactly reproduces the initial sacrifice revealed by a god *ab origine*, at the beginning of time, it also takes place at that same primordial mythical moment; in other words, every sacrifice repeats the initial sacrifice and coincides with it. All sacrifices are performed at the same mythical instant of the beginning; through the paradox of rite, profane time and duration are suspended. And the same holds true for all repetitions, i.e., all imitations of archetypes; through such imitation, man is projected into the mythical epoch in which the archetypes were first revealed.[63]

For example, houses, villages, or temples may be sanctified the symbolic installation of an *axis mundi*, or by a foundation sacrifice which repeats the cosmogonic sacrifice of a dragon, a giant, or some other primordial creature --thus guaranteeing that the new construction will have the same stability and endurance as the cosmos to which it is thereby homologized.[64] Similarly, agricultural sacrifices guarantee the fertility of the fields by reiterating the primordial sacrifice through which edible plants first came into the world;[65] and so forth. In fact, there is a

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[60] *MR*, 5-6, 11; *Quest*, 75-76.

[61] *MR*, 2; *SP*, 85, 100-102.

[62] *MR*, 8; *CH*, 21-27.

[63] *CH*, 35.

[64] *CH*, 20; *SP*, 52, 100; FC 31-33; *PCR*, 373.

[65] *SP*, 101.

cosmogonic significance to many of the rituals which involve blood sacrifices, whether animal or human:

> The fundamental idea is that Life can only take birth from another life which is sacrificed. The violent death is creative--in this sense, that the life which is sacrificed manifests itself in a more brilliant form upon another plane of existence. The sacrifice brings about a tremendous transference: the life concentrated in one person overflows that person and manifests itself on the cosmic or collective scale. A single being transforms itself into a Cosmos, or takes multiple rebirth in a whole vegetable species or race of mankind. A living "whole" bursts into fragments and disperses itself in myriads of animated forms. In other terms, here again we find the well-known cosmogonic pattern of the primordial "wholeness" broken into fragments by the act of Creation.[66]

Of necessity, then, all rituals by which the sacred is to be manifested must have a "divine model";[67] and they are meaningful and efficacious only because they deliberately repeat the primordial divine acts which are revealed in myths.[68] In fact, according to Eliade, in the normal order of things myth and ritual are *always* linked together: "a *living myth* is always connected with a cult, inspiring and justifying a religious behavior."[69] Conversely, the ritual "cannot be performed unless its 'origin' is known, that is, the myth that tells how it was performed for the first time."[70]

But with the power to invoke the sacred comes a heavy responsibility.[71] Rituals are not something that man can take or leave as he chooses, not something he can carry out only when he wishes to accomplish something for his own immediate gratification. For the world does not remain static; it deteriorates over time, like a

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[66] *MRS1*, 250 (quoting *MDM*, 183-185).

[67] *CH*, 21.

[68] *CH*, 5-6.

[69] *Quest*, 73.

[70] *MR*, 17.

[71] *SP*, 100-104.

worn-out garment. The chaos of profane time and space inevitably begins to overcome the order and meaning which sacred time and space had brought about. Hence it is incumbent upon man to assist from time to time in the re-sacralization of the world, either by means of the rituals which the myths have revealed to him or by a solemn recitation (itself a kind of ritual) of the myth itself.[72]

> The myth reveals absolute sacrality, because it relates the creative activity of the gods, unveils the sacredness of their work. In other words, the myth describes the various and sometimes dramatic irruptions of the sacred into the world. This is why, among many primitives, myths cannot be recited without regard for time or place, but only during the seasons that are ritually richest (autumn, winter) or in the course of religious ceremonies--in short, during *a sacred period of time*.[73]

Even the healing of the sick or the reversal of defeat in warfare qualify as a new "beginning" which can be secured by the recitation of the cosmogonic myth:

> The man of the traditional societies feels the basic unity of all kinds of "deeds," "works," or "forms," whether they are biological, psychological, or historical. An unsuccessful war can be homologized with a sickness, with a dark, discouraged heart, with a sterile woman, with a poet's lack of imagination, as with any other critical existential situation in which man is driven to despair. And all these negative, desperate, apparently irremediable situations are reversed by recitation of the cosmogonic myth.[74]

For archaic man, then, a myth is not simply an entertaining story, nor even an edifying morality tale; it is a revelation to be lived:

> "Living" a myth, then, implies a genuinely "religious" experience, since it differs from the ordinary experience of everyday life. The "religiousness" of this experience is due to the fact that one re-enacts fabulous, exalting, significant events, one again witnesses the creative deeds of the

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[72] *MR*, 13, 18-19, 35, 42-45.

[73] *SP*, 96-97.

[74] *MR*, 31; see also *SP*, 82-85.

> Supernaturals; one ceases to exist in the everyday world and enters a transfigured, auroral world impregnated with the Supernaturals' presence. What is involved is not a commemoration of mythical events but a reiteration of them.[75]

Conclusion

To sum up, then: (1) Myths are "true" stories which describe the acts of divine beings in the primordial time. (2) The premier divine act was the creation of the world, and therefore the premier myth is the cosmogony. (3) Rituals are the human reiterations of the deeds of the divine beings which are revealed in these myths. (4) Construction rituals actualize sacred space in the midst of profane space by defining a "center" which is homologized to the cosmos. (5) Ceremonial rituals actualize sacred time in the mist of profane time by homologizing the present to primordial time. (6) The world is thereby sacralized and renewed, and human life is able to continue with a sense of order, meaning, and purpose. In Eliade's words:

> To live near to a Center of the World is, in short, equivalent to living as close as possible to the gods. ... To reintegrate the sacred time of origin is equivalent to becoming contemporary with the gods, hence to living in their presence--even if their presence is mysterious in the sense that it is not always visible. The intention that can be read in the experience of sacred space and sacred time reveals a desire to reintegrate a primordial situation--that in which the gods and the mythical ancestors were *present*, that is, were engaged in creating the world, or in organizing it, or in revealing the foundations of civilization to man.[76]

Such, then, is Eliade's methodology. It is sometimes maddeningly subtle and complex, but also amazingly powerful in its explanatory power. In it we find a means of tying together the disparate elements of sacred space (including sacred mountains, temples, and holy cities), sacred time (including especially the

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[75] *MR*, 19.

[76] *SP*, 91-92.

celebration of New Year's festivals, the coronation of kings, and funerary rites), sacred ritual (by which sacred space is constructed and sacred time is celebrated) and sacred myth (including especially cosmogonic myth). By bringing all these things into systematic relation, we are (at least potentially) in a much better position to use elements of one part of the complex to validly interpret elements of other parts of the complex--and, perhaps, to fill in some of the gaps which still exist. As Eliade himself wrote:

> Obviously, the metaphysical concepts of the archaic world were not always formulated in theoretical language; but the symbol, the myth, the rite, express, on different planes and through the means proper to them, a complex system of coherent affirmations about the ultimate reality of things, a system that can be regarded as constituting a metaphysics.[77]

But the question still remains: Is Eliade's methodology, however powerful and persuasive it may be, scientifically valid? For Eliade's critics, therein lies the rub. Before we attempt to use Eliade's methodology, we need to examine the critiques of those who claim that Eliade's methods--and, indeed, Eliade himself--were so fundamentally flawed as to be useless.

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[77] *CH*, 3.

CHAPTER 3

ELIADE'S CRITICS

Confronted with a difficult oeuvre *such as Eliade's, one's prejudices have a strong tendency to conjure explanations before all the data have been considered. At the same time a style of expression such as Eliade's is liable to suggest interpretations which will not be borne out by further research. To put the matter more briefly, Eliade's thought is open to misinterpretation and it has been misinterpreted.*

—Bryan S. Rennie

Scholars of Eliade's erudition and influence inevitably attract critical comment from other scholars--some of it fair and well-intentioned, some of it less so. This has certainly been true in Eliade's case. In fact, anyone who attempts to use an Eliadean methodology these days runs the risk of being told that "nobody takes Eliade seriously anymore" or even that "Eliade has been completely discredited." Clearly, then, before we can use Eliade to analyze the materials at hand, we need to reckon with his critics and determine whether his methodology is still viable.

Edmund R. Leach

Eliade's earliest critics, not surprisingly, were the anthropologists.[1] One of Eliade's earliest and most vehement detractors was Edmund R. Leach (1910-1989) , a

[1] A good summary of early anthropological criticism of Eliade is Mac Linscott Ricketts, "In Defense of Eliade: Toward Bridging the Communications Gap between Anthropology and the History of Religions," *Religion* 3 (1973), 13-34.

British anthropologist and self-proclaimed "maverick" who was famous (or, perhaps, infamous) for his trenchant views and blistering attacks on his peers.[2]

In 1965, Leach published a vicious attack on the "founding fathers" of British social anthropology, James Frazer and Bronislaw Malinowski. He wrote that:

> neither Frazer nor Malinowski appears particularly laudable. Both men seem to have been more concerned with the plaudits of the gallery than with the pursuit of truth. Both made a cult of the outrageous ... the interests of the two men were very much the same, and at their grandest, they spoke in much the same language.[3]

Frazer was accused of being nothing more than a "voraciously diligent library mole" who indulged in "glaringly defective" scholarship; stole all his ideas from others; distorted and misrepresented his sources; pandered to imperialists, white supremacists, and devotees of sadomasochistic pornography; spent fifty years "simply ... repeating himself over and over again on an ever larger scale, adding nothing of significance in the process"; profited undeservedly from "an outstandingly successful public relations operation" run by his wife; and ultimately had no enduring impact on anyone or anything.[4]

Malinowski came off somewhat better, but was still severely criticized (along with Frazer) for what Leach saw as the same fundamental flaw:

> Frazer and Malinowski in their different ways were both prepared to make sweeping generalisations about human nature itself. Frazer could never have seriously expected that his general reader would be terribly interested in what did or did not go on at Nemi in 200 B.C., and the reader of Malinowski can get along very well without worrying as to whether the Trobriand Islands lie North or South of the Equator or East or West of longitude 180°. Both authors are really talking about Mankind, i.e., about

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[2] Martha Macintyre, "Leach, Edmund Ronald," in Christopher Winters, ed., *International Dictionary of Anthropologists* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991), 385-386; Elizabeth Hall, "A Sketch of Edmund Leach: Scandal among the Intellectuals," *Psychology Today* (July, 1974), 65.

[3] Edmund Leach, "On the 'Founding Fathers'," *Current Anthropology* 7 (1966), 567.

[4] Ibid., 561-4.

> you and me. It is because each of us can recognise in their pages the savage within us that we feel the excitement of insight, the unverifiable validity of a statement of genius.[5]

Leach also made some peculiar remarks in passing about Frazer's relations with Christianity--remarks which turn out to be more important than they may seem at first glance:

> Frazer ... had other publics which were more rewarding and more influential. One of these came from the ranks of liberal-minded "modern churchmen" who felt a special commitment to discover the true historical origins of Christianity. For them the passages in *The Golden Bough* which draw attention to parallels between Christianity and other Middle Eastern cults were both disturbing and fascinating. This material had originally occupied less than 100 pages, but in response to special demand it was blown up into a separate volume ... Frazer's upbringing had been rigorously Presbyterian; although in later life his attitude towards established religion became increasingly cynical, his direct references to Christianity are always carefully ambiguous. As a result, *The Golden Bough* was treated ... as a source book of scholarly information by professional Christians.[6]

This echoed similar comments which Leach had made in an earlier article on Frazer entitled "Golden Bough or Gilded Twig?":

> In Cambridge the classicists had great influence, but so also had the men of God, and Frazer did not forget this either. Despite the seemingly heretical implications of much of his writing, Frazer always took special care to avoid giving ecclesiastical offense.[7]

We shall see the significance of these passages shortly.

In 1966, Leach turned his guns on Eliade in an article for the *New York Review of Books*, "Sermons by a Man on a Ladder," which has been described as "one of the

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[5] Ibid., 567. "Nemi" refers to Frazer's famous jumping-off point for *The Golden Bough*, the ancient grove of Diana near the modern Italian village of Nemi, and the allegedly homicidal rites connected with the transfer of its priesthood.

[6] Ibid., 562-563.

[7] Edmund Leach, "Golden Bough or Gilded Twig?", *Daedalus* 90 (1961), 372.

most damning assaults on another man's scholarship that has ever appeared in that publication."[8]

Leach began by referring to Eliade and his work as "Merlin and his magic forest". Then, in a relentless series of hammer blows, he accused Eliade of "bad history ... bad ethnology ... bad method ... bad psychology ... confusion of terms", adding for good measure that "every methodological error of which Sir James Frazer and his contemporaries have ever been accused is here exhibited in its purest form."[9]

Leach admitted that Eliade's footnotes and bibliographies "convey the impression of enormous erudition", but dismissed it all with the claim that anyone "who publishes a dozen books within fifteen years and appends over a thousand references to at least three of them is probably learned in only a rather superficial sense."[10] His proof of this sweeping assertion was rather meager: Eliade, he said, showed no awareness of the work of the French anthropologists Marcel Mauss and R. Hertz, and only passing familiarity with Arnold van Gennep. ("Whatever may be the explanation for this silence," he wrote, "it can do Eliade no credit.") Similarly, Leach implied that Eliade was unaware of Lévy-Bruhl's change of heart on the issue of "archaic mentality", and also declared that "there is no indication that he has ever heard of Lévi-Strauss, who has often concerned himself closely with the kinds of fact which Eliade makes central to his analysis."[11]

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[8] Dudley, 37.

[9] Edmund Leach, "Sermons by a Man on a Ladder," *New York Review of Books*, 20 October 1966, 28.

[10] Ibid., 29.

[11] Ibid., 28-29. Levy-Bruhl had originally put forward an evolutionist scheme according to which archaic man possessed a "primitive mentality" which was substantively different from that of modern man. In his later years he reconsidered the evidence and rejected his own formulation, although he died before he was able to publish his new views. See Mircea Eliade, "The History of Religions in Retrospect: 1912-1962," *Journal of Bible and Religion* 31 (1963), 99-100.

In point of fact, all of these accusations were overblown at best, and reflected more on Leach's own sloppy scholarship than anything else. Eliade quoted Mauss in *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1958) and included two of his works in its bibliographies;[12] he also devoted a paragraph to him in his 1963 essay "The History of Religions in Retrospect: 1912-1962".[13] Both Mauss and van Gennep were cited in *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954)[14] and in *Shamanism* (1964);[15] no doubt other examples could be found. While Eliade may not have cited the specific works which Leach named, he certainly was familiar with at least two of the three authors in question.

As for Eliade's alleged ignorance of Lévy-Bruhl and Lévi-Strauss, again Leach got his facts wrong. The former's recantation of his original formulation was well described in Eliade's 1963 essay; and the latter, while indeed given short shrift by Eliade, was certainly not unknown to him. As Eliade explained when asked about it years later:

> I admire Lévi-Strauss very much as a writer, and I regard him as a remarkable mind; but insofar as it excludes hermeneutics, there is nothing in his method that I can put to much use.[16]

Leach also accused Eliade of outright dishonesty in the marketing of his books, solely on the basis of the confusing array of titles under which they had been published in English. "The gentle art of selling the same pup twice is well

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[12] *PCR*, 35-36, 390, 396, 409.

[13] Eliade, "Retrospect", 100.

[14] *CH*, 21-22, 34.

[15] *Shamanism*, 45, 64, 85, 136, 137, 469, 490.

[16] *Ordeal*, 142. In another context, Eliade credited Lévi-Strauss's approach with being both "more ambitious" and "more subtle" than garden-variety positivism, but he nevertheless rejected it as yet another form of "materialistic reductionism". (*Quest*, 132)

established among academics," he wrote, "but is seldom manifested on quite this scale or in quite so glaring a fashion."[17] This, again, was a baseless slander. Leach specifically cited *Cosmos and History* as an example of a work which, he alleged, had been re-issued under a different title "just to improve the sales". But Eliade had already explained in print--*before* Leach's accusation--that the original title was altered *by the publisher* and was subsequently restored by Eliade as a result of the "misunderstandings" to which the revised title--*The Myth of the Eternal Return*--had given rise.[18]

Once all the red herrings, vituperation, and ad hominem are cleared away, one finds that Leach actually offered little substantive criticism of Eliade's methodology. He could not even fault Eliade for being a comparativist *per se*, because Leach himself was a comparativist of the structuralist school. In fact, on the most critical issue--Eliade's basic paradigm concerning the opposition of sacred and profane as fundamental categories of human experience--Leach admitted that Eliade had more or less gotten it right:

> Eliade makes it all sound terribly complicated and splashes his pages with Sanscrit and theological Latin, but once the anthropological reader sees that the *coincidentia oppositorum* means no more than the synthesis of opposites, he is on familiar ground. ... The cosmological schema in question is not nearly so universal nor homogeneously consistent as Eliade makes out but the ethnographic illustrations which he has assembled are apt enough. ... At the level of structural analysis his "archaic" system is fairly convincing. The basic religious distinction is between the here-now and the other. The other is the sacred. The here-now is the center of the universe and man constructs it in imitation of a prototype already existing in the other. ... Many anthropologists would agree that this general pattern fits a great many sets of ethnographic data ...[19]

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[17] Leach, "Ladder," 28.

[18] *CH*, vii.

[19] Leach, "Sermons," 29-30.

So if Eliade's system is "convincing" and his illustrations "apt", what's the problem? In essence, Leach's critique boils down to the complaint that Eliade failed "to distinguish clearly between the content of a set of symbols and its structure." In other words, he was the *wrong kind* of comparativist--i.e., not a structuralist:

> The trouble with Eliade is that although he stresses his concern with the history of symbols, as distinct from the structure of symbolism, he does not really distinguish one from the other ... [For Eliade] it is the symbol *per se* that matters, so he tells us about trees and ladders as means of reaching the other world but never gets around to boats or bridges, or tunnels, or rocky cliffs, or heavenly fishing nets, or magic beanstalks, all of which things, and many others besides, can serve the same function in mythical syntax.[20]

Worse yet, in Leach's estimation, is the possibility that Eliade was a "Jungian":

> As part of his Christian-Jungian faith [!] he believes that particular symbols have archetypal and universal significance, so he gives us long essays on *the* meaning of the Cosmic Tree, of Mystical Light, of the symbolism of knots, and so on. Now it is quite true that the same symbols frequently crop up in entirely different religious contexts and that there is then an "historical" problem as to why this should be so. Does the similarity indicate diffusion from a common source, the recurrence of a universal archetype deeply buried in the human psyche, or just a common human aptitude for resorting to analogy? The answers in most cases are just any man's guess.[21]

But are they? Leach's comment about the "archetypal and universal significance" of particular symbols in Eliade's thought echoes one of his charges against Frazer--i.e., that his comparativism was based on the premise of "a psychic unity of mankind."[22] This was a premise which Leach was unwilling to grant; but he was also forced to admit that if it *were* granted, everything else followed:

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[20] Ibid., 30-31.

[21] Ibid., 30.

[22] Leach, "Fathers," 567.

> If there is indeed "a psychic unity of mankind," Frazer was surely justified in developing a synthetic picture out of multiple parts. The parts come indifferently from all corners of the globe and have no chronological unity, but if Primitive Man is a unity then the diversity of source material cannot matter. We should be able to understand the Priest of Nemi by looking at what goes on in the Maldive Islands. Malinowski went about things the other way round. He concentrated exclusively on one small group of "savages" and looked at them under a sociological microscope. But he too, like Frazer, postulated a psychological unity of mankind and gradually step by step found himself talking, not about the Trobrianders in their uniqueness, but about Primitive Man in his generality. And why not? Why should a Trobriand Islander be deemed any more, or less, typical of the human race than the Priest of Nemi?[23]

As Ernest Gellner noted in response to Leach, Frazer's materials do in fact lend themselves very nicely to a Jungian interpretation.[24] So, indeed, do Eliade's--and there, for Leach, lay the difficulty.

At root, then, Leach's primary critique of Eliade stands or falls on the question of "psychic unity". This is ironic, since the structuralists themselves are often criticized on precisely this ground. For example:

> Despite the theoretical sophistication of the structuralists, their modes of comparative analysis are not wholly satisfactory. Their ultimate explanatory principles are fundamental epistemological structures of the human mind: notions of duality, complementarity, opposition, reciprocity, and the demands of the rule as rule. The difficulties of these explanatory principles are manifold. As basic properties of the human mind, the epistemological structures are taken as givens and are not to be further analyzed, at least not by students of social systems. ... By using these psychological-epistemological elements to "explain" empirical social relations the structuralists seem to have repudiated Durkheim's insistence upon explaining social facts in terms of other social facts.[25]

And again:

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Ernest Gellner, "Comments," *Current Anthropology* 7 (1966), 574.

[25] Marsh, 26.

> There are other problems in the comparative method of the structuralists. Lévi-Strauss has given various formulations in different publications to some of the "fundamental structures of the human mind." Much of the analysis done by the structuralists consists of ex post facto interpretations of their own and others' field data. The rules for inferring "structure" from empirical social relations, and for explaining the latter by the former, are unclear. The operations are more an art than a codified science.[26]

Nevertheless, this is an issue which must be squarely faced squarely. Was Eliade a "Jungian"? And if he was, does this invalidate his whole methodology? This is a large question, and an important one, which we will take up in the next chapter.

In addition to his assault on Eliade's alleged misunderstanding and/or misuse of symbolism, Leach attacked Eliade's use of ethnographic materials, which he described as the application "in Frazerian fashion" of "any snippets of exotic ethnography which conveniently come to hand"; this, he said,

> can only illustrate by example, it can never properly be used as a basis for generalization. ... Eliade is a library scholar. What matters for him is that everything he says should be based on what someone else has put in a book. The printed word is authority enough and since there are enough oddities around to write almost everything, it is always quite easy to find "authoritative support" for one's own opinions. This again was Frazer's procedure.[27]

To some extent this exemplifies the chronic complaint of the field worker against the theoretician, a split which goes all the way back to the very foundations of social anthropology as a modern science. As one of Eliade's early defenders pointed out:

> It cannot be said too often to anthropologists that Eliade is not trying to be one of them. Unless anthropologists assume that theirs are the only possible ways for handling the data drawn from primitive cultures, then I think they have no right to fault Eliade (as Leach does) for using only information acquired from books. If one is going to write general theories, how else *can* one proceed? ... And why have anthropologists written the

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[26] Marsh, 28.

[27] Leach, "Ladder", 28, 30.

> books (which Eliade uses) if it is not possible to communicate knowledge through the written word![28]

In Leach's case, moreover, this is a particularly dangerous game to be playing. Leach was a self-proclaimed follower of Lévi-Strauss (although Lévi-Strauss himself seems not to have had much good to say about Leach in return);[29] and by Leach's own admission his work is "heavily impregnated" with structuralist ideas which he received from the "great guru".[30] But Lévi-Strauss himself, again by Leach's own admission, became increasingly "Frazerian" as his work matured:

> There was the phase when [Lévi-Strauss] was primarily interested in the structural permutations of systems of kinship terminology. At that point his structuralism was markedly mathematical, but when he got on to *Mythologiques* and started to talk about "the human mind" we were in a different ball game. Some of the earlier myth analyses ... are more or less acceptable because they are concerned with a limited terrain. ... But in the later volumes of *Mythologiques* the manner has become Frazerian. Any evidence will do; it can be drawn from any part of the map. The "structure" is imposed on the evidence; it does not emerge out of the evidence.[31]

Thus in attacking Eliade's "Frazerian" tendencies, Leach was also attacking his own master Lévi-Strauss--and thereby laying the ax to the root of his own structuralist tree. More importantly, he was also mounting a broad attack against an entire school of quite respectable work in the social sciences.[32] This does not prove that Leach's critique on this point was necessarily incorrect; but in order to make it stick he would have needed to provide a great deal more argumentation and

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[28] Ricketts, "Defense," p. 30.

[29] Hall, 65.

[30] Adam Kuper, "An Interview with Edmund Leach," *Current Anthropology* 27 (1986), 380-381; Hall, 65.

[31] Kuper, 381.

[32] Marsh, 17-18.

evidence than he did. The burden of proof was on him, and it is a burden he did not meet.

Leach capped his evaluation of Eliade's scholarship with an utterly gratuitous (and unsupported) accusation which sounds like yet another a re-tread of his earlier swipes at Frazer:

> I am not suggesting that his erudition is wholly fake but that his knowledge of the history of anthropology must be abysmal. This is not a subject which can be understood by reading predigested textbooks and scrabbling through an index to find an appropriate reference.[33]

To those who knew Eliade and watched him work, this charge must have seemed especially appalling. Eliade's own description of his method belies every implication of Leach's charge:

> You have to realize that I come from a minor, provincial culture. I was afraid of not being as well informed as I ought to be. So I wrote to my masters, to my colleagues; and every summer I went abroad, to ransack the libraries. ... The first point is to go to the best sources--the best translations, the best commentaries. To find out which those are, I question myself, my colleagues, and the specialists in the field. ... My concern to know all the sources thoroughly was in fact one of the reasons why I devoted seven or eight years to Australian studies: I felt that it would be possible for me to read all the essential documents myself.[34]

Further, first-hand confirmation of Eliade's claim was provided after his death by one of his colleagues at the University of Chicago:

> His methodology was very simple: he read everything that was written about religion, he remembered everything that he read, and he was very, very smart. ... He continued to read about religion and to remember everything he read until his final moments of consciousness. His body aged, and his eyes and his hands troubled him, but he went on reading books and articles and reviews and students' dissertations, because he

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[33] Leach, "Sermons," 29.

[34] *Ordeal* ,143-144.

> loved to do it. His mind never aged, perhaps because he used it unceasingly.[35]

As for Eliade's alleged "abysmal" knowledge of the history of anthropology, no one who had read his "The History of Religion as a Branch of Knowledge"[36] or "The History of Religions in Retrospect: 1912-1962"--both of which were readily available in English years before Leach wrote--could have made such an accusation in good faith. One can only conclude either that Leach was operating in bad faith, or else that he had not done his homework.

In the final analysis, then, Leach's substantive charges against Eliade--insofar as they had any basis at all--were the same as his charges against Frazer and Malinowski, and they stood up no better. But there seems to have been another issue lurking just beneath the surface of Leach's hostility toward both Eliade and Frazer--an issue which may explain the depth of that hostility and, in Eliade's case, Leach's willingness to believe the worst of a man about whom he knew so little. We have already seen Leach's rather odd comments accusing Frazer of pandering to "modern churchmen" and "established religion". So also with Eliade. In Leach's view, Eliade's alleged academic crimes were committed in the service of an even greater offense: a "Christian-Jungian faith" which Leach himself detested:[37]

> Whatever may be the faults of [Eliade's] method, it is easy to see why the thesis as such should appeal strongly to several kinds of anti-positivist. I observe that the translation of Eliade's larger works was sponsored by the Bollingen Foundation, always a stalwart patron of Jungian psychology;

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[35] Wendy [Doniger] O'Flaherty, "Remembering Eliade: 'He Loved It All'," *Christian Century* 103 (1986), 540.

[36] Published in 1959 as the final chapter of *The Sacred and the Profane*.

[37] Leach once described how his mother wanted him to be a missionary, how he was sent to "a school founded for the benefit of the sons of impoverished clergymen" with twice-a-day chapel, how he "was bound to react against such a regime", and how--presumably as a result--he became an atheist with "a marked personal aversion to 'organized religion'" who found it "fun to flutter the Christian dovecotes" (Kuper, 381).

> several others were originally prepared for the Jungian *Eranos* circle at Ascona; three books carry the imprint of the Catholic publishers Sheed and Ward; the laudatory comments quoted on the dust covers are consistently of Jungian or Catholic origin. One may suspect that harsh objectivity is not one of Eliade's outstanding virtues.[38]

And again:

> Eliade's personal mysticism seems to give him a confidence hardly justified by his evidence. He proclaims the truth as an enlightened prophet speaking from a great height. Shamans do not need to be consistent.[39]

These are not the comments of a scientist whose sense of proper methodology has been offended, but of a man whose personal faith--or, in Leach's case, anti-faith--has been outraged. It is a phenomenon we shall see again.

John A. Saliba

A more measured critique from the anthropological perspective came in a dissertation published in 1976 by John A. Saliba.[40] Saliba began by admitting that much of the bad feeling between anthropologists and such historians of religion as Eliade could be laid at the anthropologists' own feet. He tacitly admitted anthropology's reductionist bias (in effect, defending reductionism as a necessary evil even while protesting that it isn't *really* reductionist at all);[41] more important, he acknowledged anthropology's institutional hostility toward the religious beliefs which are the object of the historian of religion's study.[42] On the other hand, Saliba

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[38] Leach, "Sermons", 28.

[39] Ibid., 30.

[40] John A. Saliba, *'Homo Religiosus' in Mircea Eliade: An Anthropological Evaluation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976).

[41] Saliba, 100-102.

[42] Saliba, 100-101.

again repeated (without proof) the ever-present charge that Eliade's formulations were biased by an assumption of the normativeness of Christianity.[43]

In several instances Saliba's critiques suggest that he was not as familiar with Eliade's works as he ought to have been. For example, he claimed that Eliade never discussed the difference between myths which are taken as literal truth, and those which are symbolic or merely false--something which, as we have already seen, is an important element of Eliade's formulations. Saliba also stated that Eliade's system takes no account of eschatology, when in fact it is a significant element in his understanding of sacred time.[44]

Methodologically, Saliba's critique of Eliade stood on two main points. The first was his claim that Eliade had repeated Lévy-Bruhl's self-discredited distinction between the "pre-logical" mentality of primitive man and our modern rationalistic mentality. Saliba went on at length about how Eliade's formulations were based on an assumption that primitives "differ in mental structure from Western culture";[45] whereas in reality, Saliba said:

> It must ... be insisted that so-called non-literate man has the same mental structure as contemporary Western man. Even those peoples often mentioned for their "primitiveness" have to be accredited with intelligence and acumen. ... When it comes to religious thought, the evidence is overwhelming that these people possess the same basic mind structure as all people belonging to the biological species "homo sapiens."[46]

Unfortunately, Saliba's critique on this point seems to be based on a confusion about whether Lévy-Bruhl (and, by implication, Eliade as well) maintained that

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[43] Saliba, 103, 141.

[44] Saliba, 126-127.

[45] Saliba, 124.

[46] Saliba, 123-124.

primitives differ from moderns because of *innate capacity* or *social conditioning*. Insofar as Lévy-Bruhl held to the former position, Saliba's criticism is justified; but it is a criticism that was shared by Eliade himself, who dismissed Lévy-Bruhl's original system as "based on an erroneous hypothesis".[47] In fact, as we have already suggested (and as will be confirmed in the next chapter), Eliade's own synthesis depends heavily on the notion of the "psychic unity of mankind", in direct contradiction to Lévy-Bruhl's original system. On the other hand, Lévy-Bruhl's later formulations (published posthumously) make clear that "psychic unity" does not preclude a social conditioning which effectively renders the modern "scientific" mindset difficult if not impossible to achieve. As Stanley Tambiah put it:

> Lévy-Bruhl held that primitives do not probe causal connections in the scientific mode, not because of deficiencies in their individual mental structures, but because such examination is precluded or excluded by their social doctrines, and by the parameters of their systems of knowledge.[48]

Such an approach does not, as Saliba seemed to believe, preclude the possibility that "primitives" can engage in rational thought or participate in technically complex activities; it does, however, preclude the development of the kind of reductionist secularism which, according to Eliade, is the hallmark of our modern worldview. In fact, in light of Tambiah's work on "multiple orderings of reality", one can easily rescue Eliade from the (alleged) clutches of Lévy-Bruhl simply by postulating that both modes of processing are available to all human beings, primitive or modern--only in varying proportions and with different degrees of social encouragement.[49]

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[47] *Quest*, 16.

[48] Tambiah, 88.

[49] Tambiah, 84-90.

Saliba's second main point is that Eliade's whole conceptualization of the dichotomy between "sacred" and "profane", and especially archaic man's alleged desire to "live in the sacred" as a way of extracting himself from the "terror" of chaos, is a projection of modern categories onto a situation where they do not apply.[50] (Ironically, as we have seen, this was the one area where Leach--himself an anthropologist--thought Eliade was on solid ground!) As proof of this assertion, Saliba pointed to the fact that in many primitive societies, people are much more concerned with the everyday problems of growing food, curing disease, promoting fertility, and protecting themselves from witchcraft than they are in "escaping from the terror" of profane time.

> Magical rites, divinatory rites, hunting rites, fertility cults and curing rituals are not directed at providing the religious man with the time and space wherein he can gain a brief escape from the humdrum of daily existence. Rather these rites direct man to control the human condition, to be able to predict it and to ensure that the food supply does not run short. ... The religious man whose main or sole religious concern is to be freed from earthly life does not correspond to ethnographic reality.[51]

Once again, however, Saliba was knocking down a straw man. As we saw in the previous chapter, Eliade's methodology specifically relates the desire to live in the sacred with the attempt "to control the human condition". According to Eliade, it is precisely the unpredictability and uncontrollability of the profane world which compels archaic man to seek refuge in the sacred. The rites and myths by which the cosmos is re-sacralized are not an attempt to "be freed from earthly life" but rather to make earthly life livable. In fact, Saliba's interpretation of "living in the sacred" as nothing more than "a brief escape from the humdrum of daily existence" serves to demonstrate his own projection of modern Western categories onto the archaic

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[50] Saliba, 125.

[51] Saliba, 137-138.

situation. In this, as in a number of other instances, Saliba proved himself guilty of the very offense which he imputed to Eliade.[52]

The one place where Saliba might seem to be on solid ground is in his complaint that Eliade's synthesis fails to follow the proper norms of the comparative method. As we have seen, an essential element of the comparative method is the compilation not only of similarities, but also of differences. This, Saliba claimed, Eliade simply did not do.

> Eliade ignores the repeated insistence of his colleagues that differences must also be taken into consideration. What Eliade compares most of the time is the outward manifestations of things rather than their meanings. Images are collected in great abundance under pre-arranged labels because they portray an exterior likeness, while they may possibly have meant something quite different to the groups that used them. ... Had Eliade started his investigations by an attempt to grasp religious data firstly in their cultural and social environment, he would have avoided many of his ill-conceived comparisons. For religious beliefs, values and symbols make sense only when seen in the total context of a cultural milieu.[53]

Here we find Saliba repeating an axiom which is widely held in anthropology and history: that because social facts are historically conditioned, they can therefore be understood *only* by reference to their unique historical context. However, as we saw in the first chapter, this is not a universal scientific principle. In fact, among those social scientists who are more sympathetic to the generalist position, precisely the opposite is often maintained:

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[52] Another example is Saliba's attempt to refute Eliade's formulations on the symbolism of death and resurrection with the observation that "The concept of resurrection, as understood in the Christian tradition, has not been recorded in non-literate cultures. ... Thus to explain initiation rites as symbolizing death and resurrection would not make much sense to the people who practice them." (Saliba, 132) This is undoubtedly true; but it has nothing to do with Eliade, who was careful to distinguish between the Christian concept of Jesus' resurrection as a once-for-all historical event and the archaic conception of ahistoric and periodic resurrections such as one finds in initiation rites and mystery cults. (*BR*, 117.)

[53] Saliba, 111-112, 114.

> There are at least two methodological strategies in science that enable one to move from culturally specific propositions to universal propositions. One strategy is to formulate laws that deliberately ignore specific cultural differences. ... This strategy has been explicitly stated by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard: "A comparative study ... has to be on an abstract plane where social processes are stripped of their cultural idiom and are reduced to functional terms. The structural similarities which disparity of culture conceals are then laid bare and structural dissimilarities are revealed behind a screen of cultural uniformity."[54]

Eliade's approach, then, while perhaps unacceptable to the narrow historicist standards employed in the mainstream of modern anthropology, are perfectly acceptable as a methodological strategy within the social sciences at large. In the final analysis, then, Saliba's only salient criticism of Eliade essentially comes down to the complaint that Eliade was not an anthropologist, just as Leach's central complaint was that Eliade was not a structuralist. As one observer aptly put it:

> Saliba's study, though well documented, fails to grasp some essential Eliadean principles. Like many anthropologists, Saliba does not understand the discipline of the History of Religions, and therefore he misunderstands much of the related discourse. His criticisms are, as a result, often naive undertakings based on inaccurate citations taken out of context. His study must thus be read with caution and a critical eye.[55]

Adriana Berger

While Eliade was still alive (when, it might be noted, his reputation was still protected by the libel laws), the criticisms leveled against him were primarily methodological rather than personal; nevertheless, as we have seen, even these could be scathing to an extent which was almost unprecedented in the annals of modern scholarship. After his death in 1986, things got even uglier; the attacks

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[54] Marsh, 19-20, citing M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), 3.

[55] Frank J. Korom, "Of Navels and Mountains: A Further Inquiry into the History of an Idea," *Asian Folklore Studies* 51 (1992), 118.

turned personal, and articles began to appear in both the mainstream press and scholarly publications, denouncing Eliade as a fascist, a sexist, and an anti-Semite.

One of the early adherents of this "new school" of Eliade criticism was Adriana Berger.[56] Ironically, Berger herself was Romanian and had been Eliade's assistant and protégé before turning violently against him.[57] In a shocking series of attacks, Berger accused Eliade of being "an acknowledged member of the Romanian Fascist Movement" and "a supporter of Nazism" who "wrote viciously anti-Semitic propaganda" and had been "detained in England because of his political activities on behalf of ... Nazi Germany".[58]

Something of Berger's method can be seen in her review of Mac Linscott Ricketts' *Mircea Eliade--The Romanian Roots*.[59] Here she adopted the tone of the inquisitor: presuming the suspect's guilt, dismissing his defenders as naive incompetents or willing co-conspirators, and hinting darkly at nefarious machinations. Twice in the course of a rather short article she referred to the "mysterious" fire which destroyed Eliade's office four months before his death, strongly implying that Eliade had set it himself in order to destroy "old papers and correspondence" which might have been incriminating--as if Eliade could not have simply removed such items and quietly disposed of them without anyone noticing. (In point of fact, the loss of his library was one of Eliade's greatest fears; he had already endured it once during World War II,[60] and he had nightmares of its

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[56] Adriana Berger, "Fascism and Religion in Romania," *Annals of Scholarship* 6 (1989), 455-465.

[57] D. Allen, "Defenders," 343.

[58] Ibid., 344; Bryan S. Rennie, "The Diplomatic Career of Mircea Eliade: A Response to Adriana Berger," *Religion* 22 (1992), 387.

[59] Mac Linscott Ricketts, *Mircea Eliade--The Romanian Roots, 1907-1945*, 2 vols. (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1988), reviewed in Berger, *op cit*.

[60] *Auto2*, 86.

recurrence for the rest of his life. In Eliade's mind, the fate of his personal library was strongly linked to his own, and he seems to have considered the office fire to be a premonition that his own end was near.[61])

Berger's accusations were taken up and demolished in 1992 by Bryan S. Rennie. Rennie pointed out that Berger had cited as evidence a number of British diplomatic documents which apparently no longer exist, and seriously misrepresented those which do.[62] She consistently put the worst possible spin on the data at every point, and ignored evidence tending to put Eliade in a good light. His alleged anti-Semitism, for example, was belied not only by the testimony of those who knew him (including a number of prominent Jews),[63] but also by published statements in which Eliade denounced "Fascist persecutors of the Jews" as "hooligans" on an equal footing with the Communists who burned churches and stood priests before firing squads.[64]

In the end, Berger's accusations amount to nothing more than the fact that Eliade as a young man was associated with older men who later proved to be fascists and anti-Semites, and that for a time he was aligned with a Romanian-nationalist religious movement--the "Legion of the Archangel Michael" and its allied political movement, the Iron Guard--which later committed anti-Semitic atrocities. This might seem damning at first sight; but from the evidence of Eliade's own writings, he was shocked and horrified by what his former comrades subsequently became. The movement to which he had been attracted had "strict orders for nonviolence,

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[61] Eliade, *Journal*, vol. 4, 150-155.

[62] Rennie, 387.

[63] Seymour Cain, "Mircea Eliade, the Iron Guard, and Romanian Anti-Semitism," *Midstream* 35 (November, 1989), 27-31.

[64] Rennie, 377.

even for renunciation of passive resistance."[65] However, after the movement's leader was executed on orders of Romania's King Carol, violent retribution was meted out by some of his followers--an act which, in Eliade's eyes, "nullified the religious meaning of 'sacrifice' held by the Legionaries executed under Carol, and ... irreparably discredited the Iron Guard, considered from then on as a terrorist and pro-Nazi movement."[66]

While there is probably some element here of wishful thinking and selective memory on Eliade's part--a process all of us engage in when reconstructing our past for the benefit of others--there are also mitigating factors which must be taken into account. As Seymour Cain has pointed out, "later generations cannot understand what it was like to cope with the chaotic political world of the 1930's", and hindsight is always clearer than foresight. The worst one can honestly say of Eliade's pre-war politics is that he was one of many who

> saw no hope for their peoples in liberal democracy and sympathized with movements that promised liberation from powerlessness, mismanagement, and corruption, not knowing what monsters they were fathering.[67]

To capitalize on this in such a way as to transform Eliade into some kind of raving Nazi is dishonest in the extreme. In fact:

> To draw a connection between [Eliade's] scholarship and his "fascist" period, to cast an inquisitorial eye on "suspect" details in his many learned studies, would be to provide a perfect example of totalitarian methodology.[68]

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[65] *Auto2*, 66.

[66] Ibid., 85.

[67] Cain, 31.

[68] Norman Manea, "Happy Guilt: Mircea Eliade, Fascism, and the Unhappy Fate of Romania," *The New Republic* (August 5, 1991), 33.

And finally, once again, there is the issue of Eliade's alleged devotion to Christianity. Berger made this point time and again. Here is her description of Eliade's Rumanian ancestors:

> These traditionalists were convinced of the purity of the Romanian race and of the continuity of the Romanian nation, and sought refuge in the spirit of the Thracian ancestors, whose religion was purportedly close to Christianity. They argued that Romanian Orthodox Christianity represented both the religion of their ancestors and a traditional Romanian way of life. Consequently, they regarded Orthodoxy, archaic peasant values, and nationalism as inseparable. The country Romania was only for the Romanians, and being Romanian was synonymous with being Orthodox Christian.[69]

Similarly, she described the circles in which Eliade moved in Romania as having a

> pronounced interest in Eastern Orthodoxy, seen as a redeeming force of Romanian nationalism capable of dominating all of Europe ... linked with the notion of the purity of the Romanian race, together with antisemitism and hatred of democratic regimes.[70]

And again, concerning Eliade's time in Portugal:

> He did find time, however, to write an adulatory book on the Portuguese dictator, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, in whom he saw the ideal model of a Christian leader.[71]

Berger never explained the relevance of these repeated references to Christianity and Eastern Orthodoxy. Perhaps in her eyes the Christian name alone, like the smear word "fascist", is enough to do all the necessary damage.

In the final analysis, Berger's critique of Eliade offered little more than suspicion, innuendo, and a tendentious and one-sided reconstruction of questionable data, all in support of her own "politically correct" ideology. As one observer of Eliade's life put it:

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[69] Berger, 455.

[70] Ibid., 457.

[71] Ibid., 460.

> It is a pernicious characteristic of some academics to be unforgiving for someone who did not have the correct ideology throughout his/her life. Even if Eliade was a hard-core Fascist throughout his life, for which I have not found any evidence, this political ideology did not affect his scholarship to any sinister extent, and it is unjust to taint someone and to judge them guilty by association.[72]

Carol P. Christ

Berger accused Eliade of fascism and anti-Semitism; Carol P. Christ accused him of deep-seated patriarchal sexism. In a 1991 article in the *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, Christ claimed that

> androcentric assumptions are deeply structured into Eliade's conceptions of the nature and origin of religion. These biases make it virtually impossible for him to recognize the importance of women and Goddesses in the history of religion.[73]

This is a rather peculiar complaint in light of the large amount of space that Eliade's writings devote to "women's issues". In fact, Christ herself noted that Eliade "affirms a number of the conclusions of the feminist critical reading of the origins and history of Western religion" and "corroborates much of the feminist critical reading" of both prehistory and history. Nevertheless, she said, "despite these points of agreement, Eliade's reading of the history of religion is deeply androcentric, and in the end proves disappointing to those who seek to recover the history of women and Goddess symbolism in Western religion."[74] Christ supported her claim by describing three allegedly "androcentric assumptions" which "serve to

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[72] Olson, 4-5.

[73] Carol P. Christ, "Mircea Eliade and the Feminist paradigm Shift," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7#2 (1991), 79.

[74] Ibid., 79-81.

highlight the religious contributions of men and male symbolisms, while obscuring the contributions of women and female symbolisms."[75]

The first of these is Eliade's allegedly "Platonic" definition of the sacred as standing in opposition to "the chaotic and dangerous flux of things." Christ claimed that this definition instantiates a mind-body dualism in which mind is given the nobler portion, thereby elevating the masculine values of "rationality, order, and transcendence" over the feminine celebration of "birth, death, and transformation."[76] It is hard to know how to respond to such an argument, except to point out that it has long been a stock-in-trade of feminist polemic that men unjustly lay claim to the virtues of rationality and the life of the mind while identifying women with the physical and denigrating them as chaotic and fickle; now it seems that poor Eliade is to be raked over the coals for *not* indulging in precisely this stereotype. This looks to be a case of "damned if you do, damned if you don't." There's no way Eliade could have won this one, except perhaps to have been born a woman.

Christ's second accusation was that Eliade's "idealistic focus" on religious ideas that are later "valorized" allowed him "to ignore the significance of power politics, including the struggle for patriarchal dominance, in the history of religion."[77] The result, she claimed, was that since "the major civilizations of both East and West have been patriarchal for thousands of years, this criterion too biases him towards granting greater significance to manifestations of religion associated with the male gender."[78] Perhaps this is so (although the evidence for an alleged "struggle for

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[75] Ibid., 81.

[76] Ibid., 81-82.

[77] Ibid., 81.

[78] Ibid., 82.

patriarchal dominance" in prehistory remains scanty to the point of nonexistence); but even granting her objection, it is hard to know what remedy she would propose. Yes, most societies throughout history (in fact all of them, so far as we know) have been ruled by men.[79] Hence most of the history we are able to recover was written by men; most of it is concerned with the interests of men; and most of it is focused on great deeds accomplished by men. It sounds harsh to say it out loud, but a comprehensive history of religion (or almost anything else) which had an equal number of pages devoted to "men's history" and "women's history" would have a lot of blank pages on the women's side. It is not "androcentric" to point this out, nor is it proof of bias to take it into account when one is actually going about the business of writing a history book.[80]

As a subsidiary point, Christ also claimed that Eliade's focus on "crises" and "creative moments" in the history of religious ideas led him to find "peaceful and stable societies uninteresting"[81]--a real shock to anyone who is familiar with his intense study of Australian aborigines.

Finally, Christ claimed that Eliade put too much emphasis on hunting, weapons, blood sacrifice, and the worship of a sky god as "basic structures of religious consciousness",[82] and that as a result "Eliade values the contributions of 'man the

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[79] See Steven Goldberg, *The Inevitability of Patriarchy* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1974).

[80] As feminist historian Gerda Lerner pointed out regarding American history: "the literature concerning the role of women in American history is, with a handful of exceptions, topically narrow, predominantly descriptive and generally devoid of interpretation. ... The problem of how to fit women into human history, how one is to conceptualize their role, and how one is to evaluate their contributions, remains to be solved." (Gerda Lerner, "Women's Rights and American Feminism," *The American Scholar* 40 (1971), 235-236.) If such is the case in American history--an unusually fertile and well-plowed field for women's studies--the situation with respect to other times and places must be even more difficult.

[81] Christ, 82.

[82] Ibid., 81.

hunter' while devaluating the contributions of 'woman the gatherer.'"[83] Part of her support for this alleged error on Eliade's part was that "it is not conclusively proved that women did not participate in early hunting."[84] Of course not; nor is it ever likely to be, since one can seldom "conclusively prove" a negative, especially about events which happened thousands of years ago over half the surface of the planet. On the other hand, Christ adduced no evidence to show that women *did* participate in early hunting; instead, she was content to accuse Eliade of a supposed "bias" which "leads him to value hunting over gathering."[85]

Similarly, Christ faulted Eliade for suggesting "that the hierarchical relation of the sexes not only stems back to Paleolithic times, but is one of the essential characteristics of humanity."[86] Given that the extant evidence for past and present cultures universally demonstrates sexual hierarchy and male dominance, it is hardly fair to criticize Eliade for simply reiterating that fact and taking it into account.[87]

But most disturbing of all, Christ accused Eliade of intellectual crimes which he simply did not commit. For example:

> [Eliade] does not consider the possibility that burials might reflect notions of collective or communal survival, or simply symbolize a return to the Mother. Eliade notes that corpses were usually buried with red ochre, often in fetal position. ... But he does not speculate that the red ochre might have represented the female blood of birth, nor that the corpses were set in fetal position in order to symbolize return to the womb of the mother. ... And though he mentions that both burial and other rituals

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[83] Ibid., 83.

[84] Ibid., 83.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 93.

[87] Goldberg, *op. cit.*

> were performed in caves, he does not consider the possibility that the cave might have symbolized the womb of the "Universal Mother."[88]

Even if true, it is not clear that this constitutes proof of any "androcentric bias" on Eliade's part. There is no scholarly requirement that one consider *every* possibility when speculating from inadequate data--in fact, there is no requirement that one speculate at all.

But even granting that the data in question somehow require the particular hypothesis which Christ demanded, was Eliade really guilty as charged? Here is what he had to say on the subject:

> One thing that must never be lost sight of, is that when the Earth becomes a goddess of Death, it is simply because she is felt to be the universal womb, the inexhaustible source of all creation. Death is not, in itself, a definite end, not an absolute annihilation, as it is sometimes thought to be in the modern world. Death is likened to the seed which is sown in the bosom of the Earth-Mother to give birth to a new plant. Thus, one might speak of an optimistic view of death, since death is regarded as a return to the Mother, a temporary re-entry into the maternal bosom. That is why bodies buried in neolithic times are found lying in the embryonic position; the dead were laid in the earth in the attitude of the embryo in the womb, as though they were expected to come back to life.[89]

And again:

> The Earth-Mother never entirely lost her primitive prerogatives of being "mistress of the place", source of all living forms, keeper of children, and womb where the dead were laid to rest, where they were reborn to return eventually to life, thanks to the holiness of Mother Earth.[90]

It would be hard to make Eliade's position any clearer: On this point, at least, he was in total agreement with Christ, and said exactly the things which she claimed he

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[88] Ibid., 85.

[89] MRS1, 249 (quoting *MDM*, 188-9).

[90] *PCR*, 262.

did not say. Nor are these isolated statements; other passages to the same effect can be found with minimal effort. So how is it that Christ missed them?

The answer seems to be that once again Eliade's accuser was unfamiliar with the bulk of his writings; in fact, all of Christ's citations of Eliade came from a single work, *A History of Religious Ideas*.[91] She attempted to justify this narrow focus by claiming that the *History* was "understood by Eliade to be the culminating work in which he would distill and summarize the insights of a scholarly career that spanned more than fifty years."[92] But she cited no evidence that this was in fact Eliade's intention; and Eliade himself stated a somewhat different purpose. The *History* was meant, he said, to offer a concise, accessible introduction to the panoramic sweep of religion through the ages, thereby revealing "above all the *fundamental unity* of religious phenomena and at the same time the inexhaustible *newness* of their expressions"--especially "the crises in depth" and "the creative moments of the different traditions"--all of which he hoped would "elucidate the major contributions to the history of religious ideas and beliefs."[93] As a work for the lay audience, it was not intended to be either historically exhaustive or methodologically deep, and it is certainly not a sufficient basis on which to judge the entirety of Eliade's enormous scholarly output. Nor are Christ's accusations sufficient, even if every one of them were justified, to conclude as she does that:

> The history of religion which Eliade tells is distorted by dualism, Idealism, and false universalization of male experience. The guiding principle of his work is at once a longing for the transcendent and a glorification of bloodshed and warfare. Once this bias is unmasked, we can never again

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[91] Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, 3 volumes, tr. Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978). Even Christ's lone citation from Eliade's *The Quest* turns out to be a quotation of a quotation in the preface of *History*.

[92] Christ, 79.

[93] *HRI1*, xiv-xv.

> read his work, or others like it, as a "true" or "objective" telling of the history of religion.[94]

Nor can it justify her accusation that Eliade glorified "brute conquest and destruction of whole peoples"[95] nor her implicit endorsement of Adriana Berger's charge that Eliade was a "fascist". Nor indeed can it justify her sneering description of Eliade's supporters in the 1988 meetings of the American Academy of Religion, who "defended the great scholar and teacher with tears in their eyes and catching in their throats."[96]

Again we have to ask--why the venom? Why the bitterness? And once again we encounter the suggestion of anti-Christian prejudice:

> Eliade leaves the reader with the impression that aside from a few indecipherable "figurines," Paleolithic religion was a male affair, an interaction between (male) hunters and a (male) Lord of the Wild Beasts ... Could this be because Eliade finds the alleged symbols of hunting religion, including the projectile weapon, sacrificial death, blood communion, and worship of the male supreme being repeated in later patriarchal religions, most especially in Christianity?[97]

In short, most of Christ's objections to Eliade's scholarship boil down to the fact that he did not see fit to endorse her personal mythology with sufficient vigor, and that (in her view, at least) he had a personal mythology of his own which she found repugnant. This hardly constitutes an impeachment of Eliade's scholarly credentials, although it may well constitute an impeachment of Christ's.

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[94] Christ, 94.

[95] Ibid., 88n-89n.

[96] Ibid., 89n.

[97] Christ, 85.

The Verdict: Not Guilty

We could go on indefinitely--Eliade had a great many enemies, and they produced a great many attacks on his scholarship as well as his character--but it is time to move on. Most of Eliade's other critics have repeated some variation of the methodological or personal attacks which we have already seen; only a handful (e.g., Jonathan Z. Smith[98] and Frank J. Korom[99]) have tackled specific factual issues, and then only within a very narrowly circumscribed range.

Like every human being, Mircea Eliade had his flaws; like every scholar, he produced work which occasionally fell short of perfection. A survey of his chief critics, however, reveals a pattern which tells us more about them than about him. Consistently we have found that his most vehement critics have failed to understand what he was about, wasted their time picking at nits, attacked him for things he was not guilty of, committed ad hominem or genetic fallacies, or were angry because he failed to support *their* personal biases. With the possible exception of the issue of "psychic unity" and Eliade's alleged "Jungianism" (which we will address shortly) not a single substantive charge against Eliade's methodology has withstood examination. Even worse, many of his critics have shown themselves to be harboring substantial prejudice against the Christian faith which they *presumed* that Eliade adhered to. The irony is that Eliade was so consummately careful not to allow his personal beliefs to intrude upon his scholarship that very few people--even those who knew him well and worked with him on a daily basis--ever had any idea

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[98] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 88-128.

[99] Korom, 103-125.

what he really *did* believe, and Eliade scholars are still bitterly divided on the issue.[100]

In short, Eliade's critics seem to have fallen into the pit described so well by Claude Bernard:

> But it quite naturally happens that those who believe too much in their own theories do not sufficiently believe in the theories of others. Then the dominant idea of these condemners of others is to find fault with the theories of the latter and to seek to contradict them. The setback for science remains the same. They are doing experiments only in order to destroy a theory instead of doing them in order to look for the truth. They also make poor observations because they take into the results of their experiments only what fits their purpose, by neglecting what is unrelated to it, and by very carefully avoiding whatever might go in the direction of the idea they wish to combat. Thus one is led by two parallel paths to the same result, that is to say, to falsifying science and the facts.[101]

This sort of thing has happened before. Perhaps the closest parallel, adduced by friends and enemies alike, is with Sir James Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough.* Like Eliade, Frazer had a long and highly productive career which led to overwhelming acclaim during his lifetime; like Eliade, Frazer "was seen by his contemporaries as exploring the unitary experience of the human race."[102] Like Eliade, Frazer was severely criticized as an "armchair anthropologist" and a "library mole". And, like Eliade, Frazer's reputation suffered a severe decline after his death. But, as Stanley Tambiah and Mary Douglas have pointed out, "The eclipse of Frazer is as much due to his ornate style and his prolixity ... as to the untenability of his major thesis."[103] Even Edmund Leach noted the irony that "a change of fashion has made the 'plain straightforward way' of Frazer's victims [i.e., his sources] a more desirable stylistic

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[100] *Ordeal,* 188; D. Allen, "Defenders," 338-342.

[101] Claude Bernard, cited in Pierre Duhem, "Physical Theory and Experiment," in *RPS,* 236.

[102] Tambiah, 51.

[103] Tambiah, 52.

model than that of Frazer himself."[104] In other words, Frazer disappeared from the intellectual landscape not because he was wrong so much as because he fell out of favor; in today's vocabulary, he became "politically incorrect" in the eyes of his successors. Insofar as a similar fate has befallen Eliade, it appears to have happened for similar reasons. Once the smoke is cleared away, Eliade's synthesis still stands.

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[104] Leach, "Twig," 375.

CHAPTER 4

ELIADE AND JUNG

I don't know exactly what I owe to Jung. I have read a good many of his books, notably The Psychology of Transference. *I had long conversations with him at Eranos. He believed in a kind of fundamental unity of the collective unconscious, and I likewise consider that there is a fundamental unity underlying all religious experience.*

—Mircea Eliade

As we have seen, one of Edmund Leach's complaints against Eliade was that he was a "Jungian". And, indeed, there is a long-standing dispute among scholars as to whether or not Eliade was influenced by Jung, and if so to what degree. Much of the conflict centers around the question of how their respective understandings of symbolism are related to one another, and especially around their respective conceptions of the "archetype". Since the structure and functioning of symbol systems are central to Eliade's methodology, it is essential that we have a solid understanding of just what Jung and Eliade meant by the term "archetype", and how the concept functioned in each one's analytical scheme.

Jung followed Freud, his teacher and mentor, in dividing the human mind into three distinct sub-units, each with its own characteristics and function. He further agreed with Freud that some of the mind's contents are not directly accessible to normal consciousness, and hence can be described as "unconscious". There the

similarity ends, however. In Jung's formulation, the three components of the mind are not the familiar Freudian id, ego, and superego, but rather the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious--which, together, constitute the entirety of the human Self.[1]

The ego is the center of all individual activity and experience, the "point of reference for the field of consciousness",[2] the "subject" for which all other things are "objects". It is built up out of the individual's interaction with that which is "not ego"--i.e., with external physical reality and with the unchangeable or uncontrollable aspects of the individual's internal reality, both physical and mental.

The *personal* unconscious is that component of the unconscious mind which was first recognized by Freud. It contains those elements of individual experience which are no longer immediately available to consciousness; that is, they once formed a part of the consciousness of which the ego is the center, but do so no longer because they have been forgotten or repressed. They can often be accessed directly by the ego through deliberate recall, or may make themselves available to it through spontaneous eruption into consciousness. Both consciousness and the personal unconscious are unique to each individual, since they consist entirely of things which that particular person has experienced.

The *collective* unconscious, on the other hand, is the "common psychic substrate ... which is present in every one of us."[3] It is inherited, impersonal, and

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[1] Jung expounds his notions of archetypes, individuation, the collective unconscious, and the Self in: "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 2nd edition, tr. R.F.C. Hull, Collected Works 9i, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 3-41; "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious," Ibid., 42-53; "Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation," Ibid., 275-289; "The Ego," *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*, 2nd edition, tr. R.F.C. Hull, Collected Works 9ii (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 3-7; and "The Self," Ibid., 23-35.

[2] Jung, "The Self," *Aion*, 6.

[3] Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *Archetypes*, 4.

"more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals".[4] Its internal structures function in the life of the mind as instincts do in the life of the body--i.e., as patterns of behavior which are designed to increase one's chances of survival. These structures, or "archetypes", act upon the ego as if they were independent, external forces rather than internal components of the individual personality. And unlike the sense data of conscious experience and the memories of the personal unconscious, the constituent elements of the collective unconscious are *never* directly available to consciousness. Rather, they manifest themselves spontaneously and unexpectedly through symbolic imagery, usually when the psyche is under stress or has lost its normal equilibrium.

The effect of the archetypes' emergence is to force the integration of unconscious contents into consciousness, thereby giving the ego greater equilibrium and a wider range of capacities. Through this dialectical process, which Jung called "individuation", consciousness gradually enlarges itself to include more and more of what had once been unconscious, thereby forging "an indestructible whole"--an integrated Self.[5]

It would have been almost impossible for Eliade not to have been influenced by Jung. He freely admitted his deep admiration for Jung, whom he compared to "a Chinese Sage ... still rooted in the Earth Mother yet close to Heaven at the same time."[6] They read each other's books, worked together in the Eranos conferences, met socially and professionally on numerous occasions, and held in common the Frazerian notion of the "psychic unity" of mankind. And given the disparity in their

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Jung, "Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation," *Archetypes*, 288.

[6] *Ordeal*, 162-163.

ages,[7] it is only natural that most of the influence should have been from Jung to Eliade and not vice versa.

Nevertheless, as careful observers have noted, Jung's influence on Eliade only extended to certain basic ideas such as the Self, the ego, the personal and collective unconscious, and some aspects of the nature and function of archetypes; it did not extend to Jung's characteristic doctrines regarding the anima, personality types, and so forth.[8] On the other hand, these few basic ideas actually amount to a great deal, when one considers how central they are to both Jung's and Eliade's systems of thought.

Eliade's early conceptions of the psyche clearly had their roots in his Indian sojourn when he was still a young man.[9] Having immersed himself for three years (1928-1931) in Sanskrit, yoga, and Indian culture, he emerged with a distinctly "eastern" formulation of the structure and functioning of the human mind, which he elaborated in his *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*.[10] None of this posed any barrier to the subsequent "Jungianization" of Eliade's psychological conceptions, however; in fact, much of Jung's technical vocabulary can be correlated more or less closely with the Sanskrit vocabulary of eastern psychology--the ego with the *ahamkâra*, the Self with the *purusha*, the personal unconscious with the *vâsanâs*, the collective unconscious with *âlayavijñâna* or "stored consciousness"--and Eliade did not hesitate

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[7] Jung was born in 1875 and died in 1961; Eliade was born in 1907 and died in 1986.

[8] Mac Linscott Ricketts, "The Nature and Extent of Eliade's 'Jungianism'," *Union Seminary Quaterly Review* 25#2 (Winter, 1970), 211-234.

[9] Dudley, 105-118.

[10] Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom* , tr. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958; second edition, 1969). The earliest recension of this work was published in 1936.

to do so.[11] Indeed, after their first meeting in 1950, when Eliade was invited to address the Jungian "Eranos" conference at Ascona, the two men had a long and fruitful professional relationship in which each borrowed heavily from the other in both concepts and terminology, as well as highly recommending each other's works to third parties.[12]

Their relationship was not without its difficulties, however. In 1954 Eliade sent Jung a copy of *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom.*, which Jung acknowledged in a subsequent letter as a "kind and generous gesture".[13] In one paragraph of the book, however, Eliade trespassed on Jung's turf--an experience he would never forget. After describing how Jung's patients had spontaneously produced *mandala* diagrams, which play an important role in yogic meditation, Eliade wrote:

> The spontaneous rediscovery of *mandalas* by the unconscious raises an important problem. We may well ask if the "unconscious" is not in this case trying to imitate processes by which "consciousness" (or, in some cases, the "transconscious") seeks to obtain completeness and conquer freedom.[14]

This seemingly innocent comment made Jung furious, as his letter to Eliade shows:

> I was somewhat surprised ... to find that you had not been able to grant me normal intelligence and scientific responsibility. As you know, I received my scientific education in the field of the natural sciences, whose principle is *nihil est in intellectu quod non antea fuerit in sensu* ["there is nothing in the mind which was not previously in the senses"]. So you can imagine my astonishment when I encountered associations of ideas ... for which no models could apparently be found. ... *[T]he unconscious reacts instinctively, and instinct never imitates, it*

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[11] For the equation of ego and *ahankara*, see *Yoga*, 23; for Self = *purusha*, see pp. 16-17 and 99; for personal unconscious = *vâsanâs*, see p. 44; for collective unconscious = *âlayavijñâna*, see p. 225n.

[12] Ricketts, "Jungianism," 218-224; Carl Jung, *Letters*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 82 and 144. See also Franco Michelini Tocci, "Gli Archetipi in Eliade, Jung e Scholem," *Atti del convegno sul tema: Mircea Eliade e le Religioni Asiatiche*, ed. Gherardo Gnoli. Serie Orientale Roma LXIV (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed stremo Oriente, 1989), 147-161.

[13] Jung, *Letters*, vol.2, 210-212.

[14] *Yoga*, 226.

> *reproduces without a conscious model*, it follows its biological "behavior pattern." This is exactly what happens with my individual mandalas; they are produced instinctively and automatically, without models or imitation. ... To attribute the qualities of the conscious psyche to the unconscious is quite a serious error. I do not commit it, nor am I so stupidly ignorant that I cannot recognize the instinctive character of the unconscious. Above all, you have only to leaf through my works to assure yourself that I identify the archetype with the "patterns of behavior." You have used the term "archetype" too, but without mentioning that you mean by this term only the repetition and imitation of a conscious image or idea. The real "ape" in us is consciousness; it is our consciousness that imitates and repeats. But the unconscious, being instinctive, is very conservative and difficult to influence. ... [Y]ou seem to consider me so idiotic as never even to have thought about the nature of the unconscious. How have I merited this ill-will?[15]

Eliade graciously responded to Jung's outburst with an apology--and continued apologizing for the rest of his life. In his 1958 preface to *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, he wrote:

> In using the term "archetype," I neglected to specify that I was not referring to the archetypes described by Professor C. G. Jung. This was a regrettable error. For to use, in an entirely different meaning, a term that plays a role of primary importance in Jung's psychology could lead to confusion. I need scarcely say that, for Professor Jung, the archetypes are structures of the collective unconscious. But in my book I nowhere touch upon the problems of depth psychology nor do I use the concept of the collective unconscious. As I have said, I use the term "archetype," just as Eugenio d'Ors does, as a synonym for "exemplary model" or "paradigm," that is, in the last analysis, in the Augustinian sense. But in our day the word has been rehabilitated by Professor Jung, who has given it a new meaning; and it is certainly desirable that the term "archetype" should no longer be used in its pre-Jungian sense unless the fact is distinctly stated.[16]

And again in *Ordeal by Labyrinth* in 1978, long after Jung's death:

> I was wrong to subtitle my *Myth of the Eternal Return* "Archetypes and Repetition." There was such a danger of confusion with Jung's terminology. For him, archetypes are structures of the collective

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[15] Jung, *Letters*, vol.2, 210-212.

[16] *CH*, viii-ix. Similar sentiments were expressed in *Ordeal*, 162-164; *Auto2*, 162; and probably elsewhere as well.

> unconscious. I was using the term with reference to Plato and Saint Augustine. I gave it the sense of "exemplary model," revealed in myth and reactualized through ritual. I should have said "Paradigms and Repetition."[17]

But what is really at issue here? Judging from their own words, it would appear that Jung and Eliade had assigned radically different meanings to the term "archetype", and that both of them recognized that they had done so. One would assume that they, of all people, knew what they were talking about. But did they?

As we have seen, Eliade traced his meaning of the term "archetype" through St. Augustine to Plato.[18] Ironically, Jung did the same for his own sense of the term.[19] In fact, Jung's and Eliade's descriptions of what they meant by the term "archetype" reveal an astonishing number of similarities for two supposedly distinct concepts:

- Archetypes are patterns of human behavior which arose out of mankind's earliest encounters with the cosmos, especially situations of existential crisis.[20]
- The domain of the archetypes is timeless and unchanging.[21]
- The archetypes always present a sacred or numinous quality to human consciousness, and their manifestation always has religious significance.[22]

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[17] *Ordeal*, 164.

[18] Ibid.; *CH*, 34-35, 123.

[19] Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *Archetypes*, 4-5.

[20] *PCR*, 32, 433-4; *SP*, 210; Jung, "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious," *Archetypes*, 42-43, 48.

[21] *IS*, 120-121; *PCR*, 32; Carl Jung, "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious," *Archetypes*, 43; Carl Jung, "On The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation," *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, 2nd ed., tr. R.F.C. Hull, Collected Works 11 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 490.

[22] *CH*, 36, 95, 105; *SP*, 209-210; Jung, "A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity," *Psychology and Religion*, 148-149.

- The archetypes are often manifested through archaic symbolism.[23]
- Every ritual and every "meaningful" act involves the expression of an archetype.[24]
- Living according to archetypal patterns restores a sense of sacrality, authenticity, and coherence to a life which would otherwise be profane, meaningless, and chaotic, and thereby allows man to realize himself as an integrated being.[25]
- There is a continuous pressure upon human consciousness to "realize" the archetypes by manifesting archetypal patterns of behavior in everyday life.[26]
- The spontaneous rediscovery of archetypes is a common occurrence and occurs irrespective of race and historical circumstance.[27]
- The archetypes cannot be escaped; they shape all human behavior and culture, even in those who think they are free of them.[28]

Clearly there is a tremendous overlap here. In fact, despite his life-long protestations to the contrary, from 1950 onward Eliade seems to have fallen more and more under Jung's spell, and to have gradually adjusted his own concepts and

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[23] *IS*, 35; Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *Archetypes*, 5; Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *Archetypes*, 39-40.

[24] *PCR*, 429; Jung, "A Psychological Approach to the Dogma of the Trinity," *Psychology and Religion*, 148-149.

[25] *IS*, 35-36; *PCR*, 32, 371-2; *CH*, 91-92; Jung, "Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *Archetypes*, 40; "Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation," *Archetypes*, 288; "Transformation Symbolism in the Mass," *Psychology and Religion*, 294-5.

[26] *PCR*, 384-5, 408; Jung, "Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation," *Archetypes*, 282-288.

[27] *IS*, 34-35; Jung, *Letters*, vol. 2, 210-212.

[28] *PCR*, 433; Jung, "Concerning the Archetypes and the Anima Concept," *Archetypes*, 58.

terminology regarding the archetypes to make them more compatible with Jung's formulations.[29] One senses a certain autobiographical element in Eliade's exultant proclamation that:

> By directing attention to the survival of symbols and mythical themes in the psyche of modern man, by showing that the spontaneous rediscovery of the archetypes of archaic symbolism is a common occurrence in all human beings, irrespective of race and historical surroundings, depth-psychology has freed the historian of religions from his last hesitations.[30]

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that Eliade simply adopted even this portion of Jungianism without change or exception. Quite the contrary, in fact. While accepting Jung's useful formulations about the collective unconscious as a repository of archetypes, Eliade continued to adhere to his "eastern" model of the mind in direct contradiction to Jung's "western" model. It is here that we will find the real difference between Jung and Eliade; their differing conceptions and uses of the archetype concept are merely symptomatic of this deeper, more fundamental chasm.

As we have seen, for Jung the Self consists of ego, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. For Eliade there is (at least) a fourth element: the *transconscious*, which is a plane of consciousness as much *higher* than normal consciousness as the unconscious is *lower*. The transconscious is "the plane of 'purest' spiritual activity", the plane of "metaphysics and mysticism".[31] It is the proper domain of the yogin, who

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[29] Ricketts, "Jungianism," 218-224.

[30] *IS*, 34-5.

[31] *MDM*, 118-120.

> works on all levels of consciousness and of the subconscious, for the purpose of opening the way to transconsciousness (knowledge-possession of the Self, the *purusha*).[32]

Further,

> Through *samâdhi*, the yogin transcends opposites and, in a unique experience, unites emptiness and superabundance, life and death, Being and nonbeing. Nor is this all. Like all paradoxical states, *samâdhi* is equivalent to a reintegration of the different modalities of the real into a single modality--the undifferentiated completeness of precreation, the primordial Unity. The yogin ...realizes a dream that has obsessed the human spirit from the beginnings of its history--to coincide with the All, to recover Unity, to re-establish the initial nonduality, to abolish time and creation (i.e., the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the cosmos).[33]

Not surprisingly, this process extends to the internal structures of the psyche as well:

> Yoga believes that the subconscious can be dominated by asceticism and even conquered through employing the technique for unification of the states of consciousness.[34]

Thus Eliade, looking east, distinguishes "transconscious" from "unconscious" and believes that the latter can be "conquered" and integrated by mystical/ascetic technique.

What, then, of the archetypes themselves, which Jung located in the unconscious? For Eliade this was unthinkable; as sacred patterns based on ancient hierophanies, the archetypes *must* come "from above"--i.e., from the transconscious, not the unconscious. On the other hand, the data seem to indicate that these same archetypes do in fact operate quite comfortably in the other components of the Self as well--as Eliade himself was forced to admit:

> Provisionally, then, let us accept the hypothesis that at least a certain zone of the subconscious is ruled by the archetypes which also dominate and

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[32] *Yoga*, 99.

[33] Ibid., 98-99.

[34] Ibid., 46.

> organise conscious and transconscious experience. Hence we are entitled to regard the multiple variants of the same complexes of symbols ... as endless successions of "forms" which, on the different levels of dream, myth, ritual, theology, mysticism, metaphysics, etc., are trying to "realise" the archetype.[35]

What we have then, in Eliade's formulation, is a universal symbolic logic which originates from above but is capable of operating equally well in *all* spheres of the psyche, from the highest to the lowest.[36] Or, alternately, he suggested that perhaps the functioning of the archetypes in the lower spheres is simply a copying or imitation of their functioning in the higher spheres--a degeneration or degradation of the archetypes which he called "infantilism".[37] Either way, Eliade was emphatic that the archetypes--or at least *his* archetypes--could not have their origin in that boiling mass of primordial chaos which is the collective unconscious. To admit such a thing would constitute a reversal of his entire schema, for it would root the paradigmatic patterns of sacred space and time in the very chaos which they are supposed to abolish.

Jung, on the other hand, looking always to the west, would have none of this. In an obvious slap at Eliade, he wrote:

> There are dreams and visions of such an impressive character that some people refuse to admit that they could have originated in an unconscious psyche. They prefer to assume that such phenomena derive from a sort of "superconsciousness." Such people make a distinction between a quasi-physiological or instinctive unconscious and a psychic sphere or layer "above" consciousness, which they style the "superconscious." As a matter of fact, this psyche, which in Indian philosophy is called the "higher" consciousness, corresponds to what we in the West call the "unconscious." ... It makes no difference whether they call our unconscious a "universal consciousness"; the fact remains that in their case the unconscious has

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[35] *IS*, 120.

[36] *IS*, 119-121.

[37] *PCR*, 454.

> swallowed up ego-consciousness. They do not realize that a "universal consciousness" is a contradiction in terms, since exclusion, selection, and discrimination are the root and essence of everything that lays claim to the name "consciousness".[38]

As for the extraordinary sense of "oneness" in mystical experience, he wrote:

> [This] is a common experience in all forms of "mysticism" and probably derives from the general contamination of [unconscious] contents, which increases as consciousness dims. ... In contrast to the clear distinction and differentiation of forms in consciousness, unconscious contents are incredibly vague and for this reason capable of any amount of contamination. If we tried to conceive of a state in which nothing is distinct, we should certainly feel the whole as one. Hence it is not unlikely that the peculiar experience of oneness derives from the subliminal awareness of all-contamination in the unconscious.[39]

And finally, driving the point home:

> It must be reckoned a psychic catastrophe when the ego is assimilated by the self. The image of wholeness then remains in the unconscious, so that on the one hand it shares the archaic nature of the unconscious and on the other finds itself in the psychically relative space-time continuum that is characteristic of the unconscious as such. ... If, therefore, the ego falls for any length of time under the control of an unconscious factor, its adaptation is disturbed and the way opened for all sorts of possible accidents.[40]

Here, then, is a fundamental difference between Eliade and Jung. Eliade valued the experience of undifferentiated oneness and timelessness as a great good. Jung, to the contrary, deprecated this same experience as worthless, and in fact destructive, seeing it not as an elevation into a higher state of consciousness, but rather as the surrender of the ego to the unconscious, resulting in a pathological state of "psychic inflation".[41]

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[38] Jung, "Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation," *Archetypes*, 282-283, 287-288.

[39] Jung, "On the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation," *Psychology and Religion*, 491.

[40] Jung, "The Self," *Aion*, 24.

[41] Ibid., 23-25.

In either case, the critical question for us is not whether the archetypes come "from above" a la Eliade, or "from below" a la Jung, but whether in fact they exist at all. If they do not, then the entire Jungian system--including "psychic unity"--collapses, and Eliade with it.

It is, therefore, a relief (at least from our standpoint) to find that the archetypes are not a matter of speculation or hypothesis but a demonstrated fact of human experience. As Jung indicated in his letter to Eliade, it was the spontaneous emergence of symbolic imagery during psychosis and psychoanalysis which led Jung to postulate the collective unconscious in the first place. Time and again his patients described dreams, visions, and obsessive ideas whose contents were identical, even in the smallest details, with the characters and events of ancient myths and the symbolism of religious rituals and mystical practices. Since in many cases it was virtually impossible for his patients to have encountered these myths and practices either in their reading or in their own personal experiences, Jung was forced to conclude that this shared symbolic imagery had a common source in invariant structures which lay deep within the mind itself. There was simply no other place for them to come from.[42]

To sum up: Was Eliade a "Jungian"? At least with respect to the structures of the human mind, and the existence of innate archetypes which shape human behavior, we would have to say he was. Does this invalidate his methodology? Not in the least. As we have already noted, Jung and Eliade did not agree on everything, and in fact there were some marked differences of interest and emphasis between

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[42] See, for example, Carl Jung, "Psychology and Religion," *Psychology and Religion*, 50; *Letters*, vol. 2, 210-212; "Approaching the Unconscious" in *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 18-102; "Concerning the Archetypes, with Special Reference to the Anima Concept," *Archetypes*, 58; and especially "The Concept of the Collective Unconscious," *Archetypes*, 42-53. Jung made reference this phenomenon in passing throughout his works, especially in his discussions of the collective unconscious.

them.[43] But on the issue with which we are concerned--i.e., "psychic unity", or the existence of psychological universals which operate regardless of the particular circumstances of history or culture--the consistency between Jung and Eliade serves only to strengthen the case for Eliade's approach. Once again, when all the facts are in, Eliade's methodology stands.

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[43] One notable difference lies in their attitudes toward historicism. According to those who knew him, Eliade always sought to ground individual facts in their particular cultural and historical context before using them in support of a broader synthesis, even if he did not always take care to make this explicit in his published works. Jung, on the other hand, seems to have had little use for this kind of contextualization, and tended to treat most psychological phenomena as if they could have manifested themselves equally well in any place or time, regardless of the cultural or historical situation.

CHAPTER 5

ELIADE AND EGYPT

The faithful repetition of divine models has a two-fold result: (1) by imitating the gods, man remains in the sacred, hence in reality; (2) by the continuous reactualization of paradigmatic divine gestures, the world is sanctified. Men's religious behavior contributes to maintaining the sanctity of the world.

—Mircea Eliade

If Eliade's methodology is valid, then we should be able to apply it to the religious systems of the ancient Near East--a task which Eliade himself suggested was long overdue.[1] Specifically, we should be able to apply Eliade's methodology to the cosmogonies, rituals, and architecture of the New Kingdom period of Ancient Egypt. Because these are now known in considerable detail, and yet at the same time are so foreign to our own ways of thinking, they should serve as a useful "test case".[2]

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[1] *Quest*, 73-74.

[2] There are a vast number of works on the religion of ancient Egypt. Some of the better ones include: James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (New Haven: Yale University, 1988); S. G. F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963); Henri Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1948); Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, tr. John Baines (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, tr. Ann E. Keep (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); Geraldine Pinch, *Magic in Ancient Egypt* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Stephen Quirke, *Ancient Egyptian Religion* (London: British Museum Press, 1992); Byron E. Shafer, ed., *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths, and Personal Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University

Recall that Eliade's methodology is grounded in the desire of archaic man to live in sacred space and time, in the role of ritual as the way to actualize sacrality, and in the role of cosmogonic myth as the "exemplary model" by which effective ritual must be conducted. With that in mind, we can immediately locate "sacred space" in the architecture of the major cult temples, "sacred time" in the major religious festivals and ceremonies, "ritual" as the rites connected with the temples, festivals, and ceremonies, and "cosmogonic myth" as the stories which the Egyptians told about the creation of the world.

Egyptian Cosmogony

Like most peoples, ancient or modern, the Egyptians had definite ideas about what happened *m sp tpy*--"in the First Time". Unfortunately for us, they did not have a single, authoritative cosmogony to which all Egyptians adhered, nor did they make much of an effort to record their multitude of cosmogonies in any systematic way. This means that what we know (or think we know) about Egyptian cosmogony is a patchwork tapestry, woven together by many hands out of many contradictory sources.

To a surprising extent, every major city of Ancient Egypt had its own gods, its own rites and traditions, and presumably (if one may even use the term in an Egyptian context) its own theology. The Egyptians were intensely conservative; so instead of creating a single, coherent theological system as we might be inclined to do, they were for the most part content with a syncretistic chaos of competing and contradictory beliefs and practices. Furthermore, since most elements of Egyptian religion had their roots in the dim reaches of the predynastic era, they were to a surprising extent opaque even to the Egyptians themselves, who preserved these

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Press, 1991); Vincent Arieh Tobin, *Theological Principles of Egyptian Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

cultural fossils not because they made sense to them but simply because they were known to be old. (In fact, it is probable that some aspects of Egyptian religion are actually better understood by modern Egyptologists than they were by their ancient adherents.)

The most successful and most widely attested cosmogonies of ancient Egypt were those associated with powerful political centers. Four of them, in particular, stand out in the course of Egyptian history: the cosmogonies of Horus (Edfu), Ra (Heliopolis), Thoth (Hermopolis), and Ptah (Memphis). We will examine each one in turn.

The Edfu Cosmogony

The first "official" Egyptian cosmogony appears to be the one centered around the falcon god Horus; not only was he the divine protector of Pharaoh, but also, in some sense, he *was* Pharaoh. Ironically, most of our information about the Horus cosmogony comes from the walls of the Ptolemaic-era Temple of Horus at Djeba (known to the Greeks as Apollinopolis Magna, now called Edfu), which was constructed some three millennia after the worshippers of Horus first came to power. From the evidence of the texts themselves, however, we can be reasonably sure that they represent doctrines which derive from the predynastic era.

The Horus cosmogony is a fantastically complicated and internally contradictory mess which Egyptologists are only beginning to untangle. What is clear, however, is that in this cosmogony the creation began with a dark, reed-covered island in the midst of the primordial waters; and upon this island a company of primordial gods created an enclosure and a "perch" for the falcon-god Horus--the prototype of the first temple. It was also during this time that the primordial mound was attacked by a cosmic serpent, who was repelled by Horus

with the magical assistance of a god named Tanen (who, as we shall see, is also known as Ptah) and a host of other "helpers".[3]

The Heliopolitan Cosmogony

Without doubt the most important cosmogony of Ancient Egypt was that of the city of Annu (more properly Iwnw, known to the Hebrews as On and the Greeks as Heliopolis). Beginning with the Fourth Dynasty and continuing until the end of Egyptian paganism, the adoration of the sun god Ra was the glue which held Egyptian religion together--and Heliopolis was the seat of his worship.

In the Heliopolitan Cosmogony, creation began with the god Atum residing alone in the dark, primordial waters of Nun. Then, just as land emerges from the annual inundation when the Nile begins to recede, so a mound appeared within the waters of Nun. (This mound, of course, was held to be the very ground on which Heliopolis itself would later stand.) From the shallows surrounding this mound--or, perhaps, from a pool upon the mound itself--a lotus emerged; and upon this lotus Atum manifested himself for the first time as Ra, the god of the sun.

Atum generated two hypostases from himself: Shu, the principle of "dry air" (and therefore of stability and preservation), and his sister Tefnut, the principle of "moist air" (and therefore of change and decay). Shu and Tefnut then proceeded to give rise to Geb (earth) and Nut (sky), whom Shu separated by placing four pillars between them. Thus arose the world as we know it: land beneath, sky above, air and moisture between, and surrounding all (above and below) the primordial waters of chaos.

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[3] Reymond, E. A. E. *The Mythical Origin of the Egyptian Temple* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1969), 32, 35-6, 195-6.

Geb and Nut had four children: Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys. Together with Atum, Shu, Tefnut, Geb and Nut, they constituted the nine gods or "Ennead" of Heliopolis.

The Hermopolitan Cosmogony

Another ancient cosmogony was that of the city of Khemmenu (known to the Greeks as Hermopolis, modern Ashmunein). As before, we begin with the primordial waters, within which were four pairs of deities: Amun and Amaunet (who represent hiddenness), Hehu and Hehaut (who represent boundlessness), Keku and Kekaut (who represent lightlessness), and Tenem and Tenemet (who represent directionlessness).[4] These four pairs of deities, collectively known to Egyptologists as the Ogdoad, gave rise to a cosmic egg, which was placed upon the now familiar primordial mound that emerged from the waters (although of course this time it was at the future site of Hermopolis rather than Heliopolis); and from this egg was born the creator deity. In early times the creator god may have been Thoth; later, under the influence of the ascendant power of Heliopolis, the name of Atum was substituted.

The Memphite Cosmogony

Our final cosmogony was that of the city of Mennefer (known to the Greeks as Memphis), which was founded in the First Dynasty and remained an important city into the Late Period. The Memphite Theology was centered on Ptah--a patron deity of craftsmen who was now exalted as the Craftsman par excellence. As in the

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[4] The names of the chaos gods vary from text to text. In some versions Nun and his consort Naunet are a part of the Ogdoad rather than being the medium within which the Ogdoad came into existence. In other versions Tenem and Tenemet are replaced with Gerh and Gerhet, signifying repose or cessation. Other variants are also attested.

Heliopolitan Cosmogony, Atum created the gods--but it was Ptah who created Atum. In fact, in this version Ptah was equated with Tanen (also known as Tatenen), who was the primeval mound itself (this time located in Memphis), from which all other things came into existence. Unique to this cosmogony is the mode of creation; for unlike the creator deities of the other cosmogonies, Ptah creates merely by speaking things into existence. As the Memphite Cosmogony states, "For every word of the god came about through what the heart devised and the tongue commanded."[5]

The Common Substrate

Until recently there was a strong presumption among Egyptologists (probably as a result of their discipline's pervasive evolutionary preconceptions) that the disparate beliefs represented by these various cosmogonies arose independently in the city-states of the predynastic period, and were then imperfectly merged by eclectic borrowing or deliberate systematization once political unification was achieved around 3000 B.C.

If that is the case, the results (at least from our modern standpoint) were somewhat less than satisfactory. A classic example of the resulting confusion is Chapter 17 of the Book of the Dead, in which a spell from the Coffin Texts is peppered with parenthetical explications in an almost Talmudic style:

> I am the Great God, the self-created ...
>
> (Who is this? The Great God, the self-created, is water; he is Nun, father of the gods. Otherwise said: He is Ra.)
>
> ... he who created his names, Lord of the Ennead.

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[5] Adapted from James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 2nd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), 5.

(Who is this? It is Ra, who created his names and his members; it means the coming into existence of those gods who are in his retinue.)

I am he who is not opposed among the gods.

(Who is this? He is Atum who is in his sun disk. Otherwise said: He is Ra when he rises in the eastern horizon of the sky.)

and so on for page after page.[6]

Not surprisingly, each of our four cosmogonies spotlights a different city and a different deity or deities; but there are nevertheless striking similarities which seem to go beyond what one would expect from simple eclecticism. This has led more recent scholars to suggest that there existed a kind of pan-Egyptian orthodoxy in the predynastic period, which received different emphases and coloration as it was elaborated over time in the individual nomes, but nevertheless remained largely true to the original inspiration.[7]

In any case, it does seem that the competing theologies of the Egyptians were, despite their opacity and their contradictions, all somehow thought to be more or less equally true; and certainly there is a common substrate of conceptions upon which all Egyptian mythology is premised. It would seem reasonable, therefore, to focus on this common substrate--what was "believed everywhere and always by everyone"--instead of on the areas of difference; and it is precisely this which we would expect to find elaborated in the architectural structures and ritual practices that were common to Egypt as a whole.

Stripped to its bare essentials, the substrate must have gone something like this:

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[6] Adapted from Faulkner, R. O., et al., *The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1994), plate 7.

[7] Ironically, this "new" approach is strongly reminiscent of the ideas of the much-maligned Wallis Budge, who (like others of his day) postulated a kind of primitive monotheism from which all later Egyptian religion descends. Nobody takes Budge seriously anymore. The fate of this new hypothesis remains to be seen.

> In the beginning was Nun, the primordial waters; and within Nun dwelt the four mated pairs of the gods of chaos. Together these eight fashioned an egg, and placed it on the primordial mound Tatenen which arose out of the waters. And when the egg grew hot, from it burst Atum, the creator. From his own substance Atum generated a son and a daughter: Shu, the principle of air, and Tefnut, the principle of moisture. And they dwelt together with Atum in Nun.
>
> Then Shu and Tefnut gave rise to Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky; and Shu separated Geb and Nut, so that the earth was below, and the sky above, with the waters of Nun circling all around.
>
> But Atum found no place to rest. So the eight chaos gods created a dwelling for Atum on the mound; they hacked the earth and built an enclosure for him, and he rested there. Within the enclosure was a pool, and out of the pool grew a lotus. Then from the Lotus emerged Atum in the form of Ra, the sun. It was the first sunrise. Thereafter, Ra traveled by day across Nut in his day barq, and by night he traveled through the Otherworld in his night barq, circling and circling for millions of years.
>
> Geb and Nut had four children: Osiris, the first king; Isis, the sister-wife of Osiris; Set, the author of evil; and Nephthys, the sister-wife of Set. Set was jealous of Osiris and killed him, chopping his body to pieces and throwing it into the river. But Isis and Nephthys gathered the pieces and bound them together; then with the help of Thoth they brought him to life again. Then the resurrected Osiris impregnated Isis and she gave birth to Horus, who avenged himself against Set and took back the throne of his father.

This is a tale with which every knowledgeable Egyptian would most likely have concurred; and as we shall see, it lies behind the most important elements of Egyptian religion in the New Kingdom.

Egyptian Rituals

If Egyptian religion had any single, central idea it was the notion of *maat*, or cosmic order. *Maat* was not just the concern of the gods, but also of men; the gods decreed *maat*, but it was the duty of human beings to reciprocate by doing *maat* themselves and offering it back to the gods. This included not only what we would describe as moral strictures, but also the performance of sacred rituals. The Egyptians called them *heqa*; we would probably characterize them as "magic". But

this magic was intended to protect and support the gods in their performance of *maat*; and failure to perform it resulted not only in serious consequences to the individual, but also to society and even to the cosmos as a whole. In the worst case, failure to do *maat* could result in the unraveling and collapse of the entire cosmic order.[8]

Pharaoh was absolutely central to the notion of "doing *maat*". As the occupant of the throne, he was identified with Horus, the son and rightful heir of Osiris, the first king. But he was also the son of Ra, figuratively in earlier times and later quite literally (through divine impregnation of his mother the queen).[9] Thus Pharaoh stood in a unique relation to the separate worlds of men and gods; he was both human and divine, and therefore possessed the necessary requisites to act as mediator between heaven and earth--both during life, when he sat upon the throne and acted as the virtual high priest of every cult, and after death when he ascended to become one of the gods himself.

Coronation Ceremonies

As the link between gods and men, as the high priest of every cult, and as the one who performed *maat* so that the cosmic order could continue, Pharaoh was everything to Egypt; hence his death plunged the whole land (and, symbolically, the whole cosmos) into chaos. It was crucial, therefore, that the throne not only be re-occupied as quickly as possible, but also that it be occupied by the right person. Set

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[8] In addition to the works on Egyptian religion already cited above, see Miriam Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1992).

[9] For details, see Joyce Tyldesley, *Hatshepsut: The Female Pharaoh* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 101-106.

had momentarily triumphed; now Horus must rise up, avenge his father, and take his lawful place as ruler.[10]

This process began with the selection of the old Pharaoh's successor--ideally his first-born son, but in any case someone who could make a credible claim to the royal blood line. In some cases the old Pharaoh had designated his successor years before and even ruled with him as co-regent; in others, the successor was selected "by the gods" through some revelatory act. If the royal line had failed for some reason, an outsider could be grafted in through marriage to one of the Pharaoh's daughters; and in extreme cases, an entirely new line could be begun through the convenient fiction of discovering a claimant's direct descent from a god. Regardless of the mechanism employed, it was critical that the new Pharaoh be perceived as having a divine right to rule.

The new Pharaoh's ascent to the throne came in two stages. The first, designated by scholars as the "accession", took place (at least ideally) on the day after the old Pharaoh's death, in order to minimize the length of the chaotic interregnum. But whether immediate or delayed, the accession always took place at sunrise. This timing had deep symbolic significance; for by taking the throne with the rising of the sun, the new Pharaoh was repeating the primordial act of Ra himself, when he rose for the first time above the primeval hill and thereby became ruler of the cosmos.

The second stage came later--sometimes much later--with the "coronation" ceremony. This could not be scheduled arbitrarily, but had to be synchronized with one of the major festivals of renewal--ideally with one of several "New Year's Days"

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[10] For studies of Egyptian kingship and its associated coronation ceremonies, see Shafer, *Religion*, 58-73; Tobin, 89-102; C J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals: Enactments of Religioius Renewal* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), 91-123; Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *Divine Kingship in Ghana and Ancient Egypt* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960); and especially Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

which were scattered through the Egyptian civil and religious calendars. At the very least, sufficient time had to be allowed for the new Pharaoh to make a circuit of the major cities and temples, where he performed offerings to the gods and participated in a "mystery play" dramatizing the story of Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys, with himself in the starring role as Horus.

As part of this play, a symbolic connection was forged between the harvest and the experiences of Osiris in the First Time. Just as Osiris was beaten by Set, so the grain is trampled by animals. Just as Osiris was carried away by Set, so the grain is carried on their backs. Just as Osiris was buried in the ground, so the grain is planted. Just as Osiris rose again from the dead, so the grain sprouts into new life. Just as the death of Osiris produced a flow of tears from those who loved him, so the fermentation of the grain produces a flow of beer to comfort them. Finally the ceremony ended when food and drink--the gifts of Osiris--were shared with his people in a sacred banquet.[11]

Time also had to be allowed for the mummification of the previous Pharaoh and the performance of the appropriate burial rites, which were timed so as to be completed the day before the new Pharaoh's coronation. In these rites (preserved in part by the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom), the dead Pharaoh was homologized to Osiris, the son of the sky-goddess Nut, while the new Pharaoh was once again identified with Osiris' son Horus:

> Nut, this is your son, Osiris,
> Of whom you said, "He has been born to your father."
> You have wiped his mouth;
> His mouth has been opened by his son Horus, whom he loves.

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[11] All of this is strongly reminiscent of a comment by Eliade: "This first murder basically changed the mode of being of human life. ... The body of the immolated divinity was changed into food; its soul descended under ground, where it established the Land of the Dead." (*SP*, 101) Ironically, Eliade was referring to beliefs found in New Guinea, not Egypt.

His limbs are counted by the gods.[12]

By virtue of this ritual, the dead Pharaoh was, like Osiris, restored to life, and his soul ascended into the heavens to be with the gods for all eternity.

The next morning, the new Pharaoh's coronation ceremony took place. If at all possible, the coronation took place in Memphis, the first capital of united Egypt, and the coronation ceremonies repeated the coronation of Menes, the first Pharaoh. There were three required elements: First, the new Pharaoh approached in turn each of two crowns--the white crown of Upper Egypt and the red crown of Lower Egypt--pacified them (for the crowns were considered to be goddesses, and possessed of immense magical power), and placed them on his head; then he was seated for a time on the throne of each of the "two lands". Second came the "union of the two lands" ceremony, in which priests representing Horus and Seth confirmed the Pharaoh's right to rule over both parts of Egypt. And finally came the "circuit of the walls" ceremony, in which the Pharaoh circumambulated the walls of Memphis itself, thereby taking possession of the ancient capital and, by extension, the whole of Egypt.

The ceremony ended with the transfer of the crook--the symbol of royal power--into the new Pharaoh's hand as the priests chanted:

> Stand over this land which has come forth from Atum ...
> Be king over it, be high over it, that your father may see you,
> That Ra may see you ...
> Let him grasp the heavens, and receive the horizon ...
> Give the crook into his hand,
> That the heads of Lower and Upper Egypt may be bowed.[13]

To this, it has been suggested, the people replied with a hymn expressing their joy that chaos had been averted:

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[12] Adapted from Frankfort, *Kingship*, 112.

[13] Adapted from Frankfort, *Kingship*, 109.

How happy is the day! Heaven and earth rejoice,
For you are the great lord of Egypt!
They that had fled have come again to their towns;
They that were hidden have again come forth.
They that hungered are satisfied and happy;
They that were thirsty have drunk.
They that were naked are clad in fine linen;
They that were dirty have white garments.
They that were in prison are set free;
He that was in bonds is full of joy.
They that were in strife in this land are reconciled.[14]

In short, Pharaoh's on his throne; all's right with the world. As a god among men, he could now take up his responsibilities both for the implementation of the divine mandates among men, and for offering a human contribution to the maintenance of that order among the gods. In the former role he ruled over the machinery of state, enforced justice, personally slew wild animals which threatened human safety, and defended the land from the onslaught of foreign invaders. In the latter role he saw to the establishment of the cult temples and presided over the proper execution of the temple rituals. In fact, the two highest priorities of every Pharaoh were the building of his own tomb (through which his immortality was assured and therefore his eternal protection of Egypt guaranteed) and the establishment of temples throughout the land so that the rituals for the maintenance of cosmic order could take place as required.

Founding a New Temple

Just as Pharaoh theoretically owned every square inch of Egyptian soil and held in his hand the life of every one of its inhabitants, so also he was theoretically the high priest of every cult and the officiant at every ceremony. In reality, of course, none of this was practicable; and so just as the daily affairs of state were

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[14] Adapted from Frankfort, *Kingship*, 60.

administered in Pharaoh's name by a plethora of bureaucrats, so also the daily affairs of the temple cult were administered in his name by the priesthood. Nevertheless, on special occasions the Pharaohs did in fact perform temple rites in person; and no occasion was more special than the laying out of a new temple.[15]

The ritual for founding a new temple drew explicitly on the events and imagery of the founding of the first temple in the "First Time", beginning with the planning stage. One did not simply draw up temple blueprints out of nothing; it was necessary to consult ancient books such as *The Sacred Book of the Temples* and *Specification of the Mounds of the Early Primeval Age*, both of which are mentioned on the walls at Edfu.[16]

When the designs were complete, Pharaoh himself took the first concrete step with a ceremony called "the stretching of the cord", in which a knotted rope was used to measure off and mark the four corners of the new temple complex. He did this not in his own person but rather as Tatenen, the god of the primordial mound, with the assistance of the queen as Seshat (goddess of writing), and two others who represented Thoth (god of measurement) and Ptah (god of craftsmanship). Not surprisingly, the identification of the temple site with the primordial mound was explicitly made at the very start of the process, either by its location on an already

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[15] See Georg Steindorff, *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians* (New York: G. P. Putnam and Sons, 1905), 74-84; Alexander Badawy, *Ancient Egyptian Architectural Design: A Study of the Harmonic System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); Byron E. Shafer, ed., *Temples of Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 1-9; Dimitri Meeks and Christine Favard-Meeks, *Daily Life of the Egyptian Gods*, tr. G. M. Goshgarian (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 124-126; and especially Reymond, *op. cit.*

[16] Reymond, 1-11. Note Eliade's comment: "Construction rituals likewise presuppose the more or less explicit imitation of the cosmogonic act. For traditional man, the imitation of an archetypal model is a reactualization of the mythical moment when the archetype was revealed for the first time. Consequently, these ceremonies ... suspend the flow of profane time, of duration, and project the celebrant into a mythical time, *in illo tempore*." (*CH*, 76)

existing rise of ground or by the scattering of sand over the site to homologize the earth of the site with the sand of the primordial mound.

Next came the ceremony of "hacking up the earth", in which a furrow was dug around the boundaries of the new temple just as the Ogdoad had done in the First Time. This was followed by other ceremonies in which the first mud bricks were cast and laid, and the first stone set. In addition, foundation sacrifices were made, including construction implements and the heads of a goose and bull. Once the core structures of the temple were in place (which of course might be many years later), the temple was purified and "brought to life" by the application of the "Opening of the Mouth" rituals described below.[17] Then the fully functioning temple was handed over by "Tatenen" to the particular deity who was to live there, as the latter--carried in joyous procession--entered his new residence accompanied by his priests and followers. Finally a banquet was held as a kind of "house-warming party" for the god in his new home.

Temple Architecture

Ancient Egypt was littered with temples, from the small niche shrine in private homes to the massive Temple of Amun at Karnak, and they exhibited a bewildering array of styles over the centuries. But from the standpoint of Egyptian theology, the most important temples were the large cult temples of the major gods, where Pharaoh was (in theory at least) always the high priest, daily rituals were conducted,

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[17] Again this brings to mind one of Eliade's observations: "The theory that these rites imply comes down to this: nothing can endure if it is not "animated," if it is not, through a sacrifice, endowed with a "soul"; the prototype of the construction rite is the sacrifice that took place at the time of the foundation of the world. ... To assure the realty and the enduringness of a construction, there is a repetition of the divine act of perfect construction: the Creation of the worlds and of man. As the first step, the "reality" of the site is secured through consecration of the ground, i.e., through its transformation into a center; then the validity of the act of construction is confirmed by repetition of the divine sacrifice." (*CH*, 20.)

and public festivals were celebrated; and in the New Kingdom there emerged a single "standard" design which was embodied in almost all the cult temples of the period.[18]

Perhaps the closest analogy in modern life to the role of the cult temple in Egyptian life is the modern nuclear power plant. Just as the power plant provides the electricity which energizes all the mechanisms of a technological society, so the cult temple provided the magic which energized all the mechanisms of the cosmic order.[19] In fact, as we have seen, the temple was conceived as a living being--a stone entity magically brought to life just like a stone statue of the deceased in a tomb. It was also, however, a microcosm of the whole of creation--and, in particular, a reiteration of the primordial world of the First Time.

A typical New Kingdom cult temple lay within a mud-brick enclosure wall which calls to mind the enclosure of the falcon perch in the Horus cosmogony. Also within the enclosure was a sacred lake, reminiscent of the primordial pool from which the first lotus arose. The temple itself was fronted by a pair of massive rectangular pylons with sloping walls; these represented the mountains of sunrise on the eastern horizon, between which the sun was believed to rise each day. Before the pylons there often stood obelisks, whose pyramid-shaped caps symbolized the "benben" stone upon which the Phoenix--a symbol of the sun--was supposed to have landed in primordial Heliopolis. Between the pylons lay the temple gates, upon which was carved a representation of the god who dwelt within--a position

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[18] For details of New Kingdom temple architecture and its symbolism, see (in addition to works already cited): Alexander Badawy, *Architecture in Ancient Egypt and the Near East* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966); Alexander Badawy, *A History of Egyptian Architecture, Vol. III: The Empire (The New Kingdom)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 154-371; Richard H. Wilkinson, *Symnbol and Magic in Egyptian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 66-68; Rosalie David, *A Guide to Religious Ritual at Abydos* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1981), 1-10.

[19] Quirke, 70. As Eliade put it: "Since the temple is at once the holy place par excellence and the image of the world, it sanctifies the entire cosmos and also sanctifies cosmic life." (*SP*, 75)

which, in the hieroglyph for "horizon" (), was occupied by Ra himself. Further, temples were generally aligned at right angles to the Nile. Since generally speaking the Nile flows south to north (regardless of how it may meander locally) a temple so aligned can be considered to have a "virtual" east-west orientation; as a result, the main axis of the temple symbolically corresponded to the path of the sun across the sky. Thus, it would seem, at some level every temple was considered to be a temple of the sun.

Like most New Kingdom construction, the cult temples were designed around a tripartite division of a simple rectangular design.[20] The first area one encountered upon passing through the temple gates was the forecourt, which the Egyptians simply called "The Open". And indeed it was open--open in the sense of being spacious (essentially an empty area surrounded by columns), open to the sky because (unlike the rest of the temple) it lacked a roof, and open to the public on special occasions (the only part of the temple which was). This was the area where public festivals, healings, and oracles took place, and its walls were adorned with representations of the historical achievements of Pharaoh rather than religious depictions; these latter were reserved for the private inner areas of the temple. Moving inward from the forecourt, one ascended a short ramp or staircase into the second main division, the "hypostyle" or pillared hall. The ascent symbolized the elevation of the primordial mound, while the forest of pillars--shaped like papyrus, lotus, and palm--represented the plants which grew in the shallows around it. This was further reinforced by the fact that the bases of the pillars were often painted blue, and decorated with water signs and the flora and fauna of the marshes. Finally, the closer quarters, low roof, and dim light (exclusively from tiny clerestory

[20] This is precisely the same pattern found in New Kingdom domestic architecture, and for good reason. The temple was in fact conceived and described as  , which means "god's house".

windows near the ceiling) served to reminded the visitor of the darkness in which the primordial mound lay--as well as the fact that he was approaching the sacred precincts of the god.

Past the hypostyle hall one came to the sanctuary area, which was the true home of the deity. Here all was dark and quiet, and entry was allowed only to Pharaoh himself or his designated representatives. Here, at the center of the temple which represents the primordial island, we find the locus of the god, just as the "perch" of Horus occupied the center of that island in the Edfu cosmogony. At the back of the sanctuary area was typically located the holy of holies, a small room containing the naos, a stone shrine wherein the statue of the god resided. The naos was apparently a shrunken version of the original shrine-hut of predynastic times, probably originally conceived as a representation of Anubis; later the form became much more subtle and highly stylized, but the similarities can still be detected. In the New Kingdom temple the naos was at first a free-standing stone structure; in later times it was often reduced in size and placed on a divine barq. And it was here that the thrice-daily ritual of the cult was carried out. But before we can describe that ritual, we must explain the far older one upon which it was based.

Opening of the Mouth

The single most common ritual in ancient Egypt was the "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony. This peculiar ritual had its beginnings in the funerary rites of the Egyptians, which were designed to bring life to the dead--specifically, to the mummified body of the deceased and the statue which would serve as a substitute for the body if the latter were somehow destroyed. In time, however, its use was extended to other, more exotic purposes.

The particular rites of the "Opening of the Mouth" were closely bound up with the story of the death and resurrection of Osiris. In fact, it was clearly understood by the Egyptians that the ceremony was first implemented by Isis and Horus (under the divine direction of the god Thoth) for the specific purpose of raising the dead Osiris to life again; all subsequent performances of the Opening of the Mouth were therefore understood as repetitions of that first ritual. This was made explicit throughout the text of the ceremony, in which the deceased was repeatedly addressed as "Osiris", while at one point a priest took on the role of Horus and said, "O Osiris, I have come to embrace you. I am your son, I am Horus."

As elaborated in the New Kingdom texts, the Opening of the Mouth ceremony had no less than thirty distinct procedures.[21] In summary form, they consisted of:

(1) Construction of a mound of sand (symbolizing, once again, the primordial mound of creation) and the placing of the statue of the deceased on the mound, facing south (i.e., toward the sources of the Nile).

(2) Censing of the statue with burning incense.

(3) Sprinkling the statue four times each with water from two different kinds of vessels (thereby perhaps symbolizing purification by the eight gods of the Ogdoad).

(4) Circumambulation of the statue four times each with three different kinds of incense dissolved in water.

(5) Another censing.

(6) Smiting of the statue, presumably to homologize the statue to the body of Osiris which was smitten by Set.

(7) Sacrifices of a bull, gazelles, and geese, all of which are presented to the statue. (These involved the ripping out of hearts and the severing of limbs

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[21] Budge, E.A. Wallis. *The Book of Opening the Mouth*, vol. 1 (London, 1909), 9-147.

and heads, all symbolic of the destruction of the enemies of the deceased, who are homologized to the minions of Osiris' enemy Set.)

(8) Opening of the mouth and eyes with an adze, thereby allowing the soul of the deceased to enter and animate it.

(9) Painting of the lips red (symbolizing the return of warmth and life), followed by rubbing the lips with milk (symbolizing, perhaps, a "first meal" of milk such as one would give a newborn child).

(10) Sacrifice of a second bull and presentation to the deceased.

(11) Another censing.

(12) Dressing of the statue: headdress; white, green, and red robes; collar.

(13) Anointing of the mouth with oil.

(14) Anointing of the eyelids with paint. (No self-respecting Egyptian went out in public without his eye shadow!)

(15) Presentation of two sceptres and a mace, symbolizing the return of the deceased's power to act in his own defense.

(16) Another censing.

(17) Presentation of additional food offerings: bread, beer, meat, cakes, wine, water, honey, fruit. (Since these are the traditional foods of the Egyptian and were continually offered at the tomb long after the deceased was buried, these presumably represent provisions for his journey to and occupation of his domain in the other world.)

(18) Placement of the statue in its permanent shrine by nine bearers (perhaps symbolic of the nine gods of the Ennead).

The meaning of this ritual is clear: By his identification with the dead Osiris, and the performance of the same rites which were performed to raise Osiris from the dead in the First Time, the deceased also attained a kind of revivification, second

birth, and subsequent immortality in the world which Osiris ruled. What is especially interesting, however, is how a rite which is so clearly funerary in origin was then generalized to other circumstances in which dead things are brought to life--in the one instance (as we have already seen) a stone temple, and in the other (as we are about to see) a stone statue of the god who lived in that temple.

The Daily Cult

As we have already noted, Pharaoh was theoretically the high priest of every cult, with the right to preside over the cult ceremonials any time he chose. Most of the time, of course, Pharaoh had better things to do, so a high priest acted on his behalf in the daily cult. In either case, the central ritual of the cult was the thrice-daily tending of the deity whose home the temple was.

Ever rational in their own way, the Egyptians understood that the three-foot-tall stone statue perched in the naos at the back of the temple was not "really" the god whom they worshipped; the statue was merely a symbol of something huge and powerful and strange beyond hope of material representation. This left them with a dilemma--how to bring the statue to life so that the god would be truly present in order to be worshipped? The obvious solution, which they readily adopted, was to borrow a magical ritual which was already known to be effective in summoning a spirit to inhabit an inanimate object: the Opening of the Mouth ceremony.

While it is still much disputed among Egyptologists as to whether the daily ritual of the cult temples was in fact developed in this fashion, a simple comparison of the two leaves little room for doubt. For example, the daily cult ritual of Ra-

Harakhty, as shown in the great Temple of Seti I at Abydos,[22] went something as follows:

(1) After standing before the door of the sanctuary and announcing his intention to enter, the priest breaks the clay seal, pulls back the bolt of the doors, and enters.

(2) Incense is offered to the fire-breathing uraeus serpent which sits upon the brow of the god.

(3) The doors of the naos are opened and incense is offered.

(4) The priest prostrates himself before the naos and kisses the ground.

(5) The priest offers more incense and sweeps the ground before the naos with a cloth.

(6) Food offerings are censed and sprinkled with water.

(7) The priest anoints the uraeus with ointment.

(8) The clothing of the god is removed.

(9) The statue of the god is censed four times.

(10) The god is arrayed in white, green, and red clothing, and a collar, alternating with four different kinds of incense.

(11) Additional food offerings are made.

(12) The double crown is placed on the god's head, symbolizing his rulership of the two lands which constituted Egypt.

(13) The god is offered a sceptre, crook, and flail, symbolizing his power and might.

(14) The god is offered ten or twelve different ointments and unguents, including those for the eyelids.

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[22] David, 62-71. See also Serge Sauneron, *The Priests of Ancient Egypt*, tr. Ann Morrissett (New York: Grove Press, 1960), 77-110; Meeks, 187-198.

(15) The priest scatters sand before the shrine.

(16) The priest circumambulates the shrine four times while offering incense.

(17) The priest withdraws from the sanctuary, erasing his footprints as he goes, then closes the doors and draws the bolt.

(18) The priest makes a final offering of incense.

There are obvious differences between the daily cult ritual and the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, but the similarities are just as obvious. Yes, some of the events take place in a different order; but this is hardly a telling objection, since in fact we are not at all sure how the events of the daily cult are to be ordered, as they are represented in wall reliefs rather than in a papyrus text as was the case with Opening of the Mouth ceremony. Other differences--the prostration, the differences in the kinds of sceptres, the substitution of a crown for the headdress--are obvious responses to the fact that one is confronting here a god rather than a deceased human being.

What is most important for our purposes, however, is to observe that even the ritual of the daily cult is not made up out of nothing, but rather is based on a far older ritual that has its roots in the events of the First Time.

The Destruction of Apep

As already mentioned, the sun god Ra was believed to sail through the heavens by day in his day boat, and to travel through the Otherworld by night in his night boat. This was not a casual journey, however, even for one as powerful as Ra. There were dangers to be overcome every day--at sunrise when Ra was raised into the sky to start his daily journey; at noon when he paused for a time directly overhead; at sunset when he finished his travels and sank beneath the horizon; and most

especially during the darkness of the night, when his radiance was extinguished and he had to be towed by others through the dangers of the other world.

At times like this, it was to the advantage of both men and gods to pitch in toward the common cause, adding their own touch of magical power to insure that the cosmic order continued on its way according to the dictates of *maat*. In the temples this took the form of an execration ritual in which the enemies of Ra--and most especially the evil serpent Apep--were bound, rendered powerless, and destroyed so that they could not carry out their malign schemes. Today this ritual, formally known as "The Book of the Overthrowing of Apep", reads like a scene from a bad horror movie; but to the Egyptians it was a critical contribution toward the maintenance of the cosmic order. For our purposes, it is an excellent example of ritual repeating the pattern of primordial events. For just as in the First Time the attack of a cosmic serpent was repelled by Horus (who is also Ra) with the magical assistance of his "helpers", so now the friends of the sun god come to his aid in repelling the cosmic serpent every day.[23]

The ritual began with the fabrication of a wax crocodile upon which the name "Apep" was inscribed in green paint; this was wrapped in a papyrus envelope and tied with black hairs. Then the package was thrown to the ground and stomped into a shapeless mass by the priest, after which it was hacked to pieces with a flint knife, and finally burned in a fire of sacred herbs which was extinguished with crocodile urine.

While all this was going on, magical texts were to be recited which brutally described and enhanced the treatment to which the wax figure was being subjected:

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[23] Budge, E.A. Wallis. *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 516-521. See also Pritchard, 6-7, 417; Reymond, 3536.

> You are cursed! You are destroyed! You are repulsed! You are flayed! Blows are rained on you, dismemberment and slaughter are performed on you! Your soul is wrenched from its shadow, your name is destroyed, your spells are impotent! Never more shall you emerge from your den! Down on your face, Apep, enemy of Ra! For the flame of the Eye of Horus is coming to you, and it brings death to your soul!

After this and a lot more, attention is turned to the other enemies of Ra:

> O you multitudinous enemies of Ra who have rebelled, you malicious fiends, you spawn of inertness, you impotent rebels, you nameless filth, for whom pits of blazing fires have been prepared by the command of Ra, down on your faces! You are overthrown, your heads are crushed, you are destroyed, annihilated, gashed with flints, made an end of; your windpipes are cut, the joints of your backs are rent apart! The fire of the Eye of Horus is upon you, burning you, grilling you, scorching you, stabbing you, spearing you, eating into you, consuming you, roasting you, setting you on fire, burning you to ashes, destroying every trace of you!

Then back to Apep again:

> Down on your face, Apep, enemy of Ra. Be drowned, be vomited upon! Your children go to the block of slaughter. Be sick over the mention of your own name!

And then, finally:

> I slice his flesh from his bone. I fetter his feet. I cut off his hands and arms. I stop up his mouth and lips. I smash his teeth. I cut out his tongue. I carry away his speech. I block up his eyes. I remove his ears. I tear out his heart. He, his name, his offspring, his kinfolk and friends, his heir, his seed, his bones, and his skin shall never exist again!

Clearly it is not a good thing to be an enemy of Ra! But more important, this rite exemplifies in a rather dramatic fashion the role that human beings played in maintaining the cosmic order; even Ra, mightiest of the gods, father of gods and men, creator of the universe, needed the daily magical assistance of human beings in order to make his appointed rounds safely.

The "Overthrowing of Apep" also demonstrates yet again the interrelationships in ancient Egypt between sacred space and time, cosmogony, myth, ritual, and royalty. The book begins with an injunction that its ritual be performed in the

Temple of Amen-Ra at Karnak, and ends with a specification of the times at which it is to be carried out; the text proper begins with a recitation of the Heliopolitan creation story and other associated myths of the First Time; the bulk of the text is a ritual based on those myths; and throughout, it homologizes Pharaoh to the king of the gods, and the enemies of Pharaoh to the enemies of Ra. This is about as close a match to the Eliadean model as one could reasonably hope for.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

I cannot carry with me the irreversibly negative bias of the 'rigorously scientific' mind, with its presumption as to what the true order of nature ought to be. I feel as if, though the evidence be flimsy in spots, it may nevertheless collectively carry heavy weight. The rigorously scientific mind may, in truth, easily overshoot the mark. Science means, first of all, a certain dispassionate method. To suppose that it means a certain set of results that one should pin one's faith upon and hug forever is sadly to mistake its genius, and degrades the scientific body to the status of a sect.

—William James

We have touched on just a few of the many and varied forms which myth and ritual took in ancient Egypt, but one must stop somewhere. One thing is clear: In ancient Egypt, hardly anything of importance could be accomplished without ritual, and that ritual was almost always based on the events of the First Time--i.e., on the cosmogony. Further, the purpose of Egyptian ritual was, at least in part, to construct sacred centers and actualize sacred time, just as Eliade's methodology would lead us to expect. We have the "symbolism of the Center" in the primordial mound; we have the cult temple, explicitly framed as an instance of that primordial Center, and itself functioning as the Center of the city and the state; we have the rituals of temple foundation, personal immortalization, daily divine cult, and repulsion of the cosmic serpent as deliberate repetition of primordial acts. It is hard to imagine a more convincing validation of Eliade's thesis than this.

In fact, the match between Eliade's model and the data from Egypt and is so close, one might suspect that the latter served as the primary inspiration for the former. This does not seem to be the case, however; surprisingly, a perusal of Eliade's major works shows very little Egyptian material at all. For example, in *From Primitives to Zen*, Eliade's "thematic sourcebook" of sacred writings, only nineteen of the 306 texts have anything to do with Egypt, and of these only a handful are relevant to any of our themes.[1] In *Patterns in Comparative Religion* there are three and a half pages on Egyptian sun cults,[2] a paragraph on images of Hathor as the Tree of Life,[3] and three paragraphs speculating on a possible relationship between agricultural sacrifices and the cult of Osiris;[4] none of these have much to do with our topic. In fact, in all of Eliade's major writings before 1976, only one passage bears directly on our research; this is a single paragraph in *Myth and Reality*, which briefly relates Egyptian coronation ceremonies to creation and the repulsion of Apep.[5] But even this is treated in summary fashion, and is drawn entirely from a single secondary source.[6] In the rest of Eliade's works there are scattered references to this or that Egyptian datum as one brief example among many, but seldom more than a

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[1] *FPZ*.

[2] *PCR*, 138-141. It is interesting that in this passage Eliade twice refers to the center of Egyptian sun worship as "Hieropolis" (spelled "Hierapolis" in the index). This cannot be right; there was indeed a famous city named Hierapolis in the ancient world, but it is to be found in Syria, not Egypt. Eliade's "Hieropolis" is almost certainly an error for Heliopolis, perhaps by way of confusion with another Egyptian city which the Greeks called Hierakonpolis. Since Heliopolis was one of the most important and well-known cities of Egypt, the fact that such a fundamental error could be made at all (unless perhaps it was introduced by the translator) argues against Egypt as a primary source for Eliade's thought.

[3] *PCR*, 283-284.

[4] *PCR*, 363-365.

[5] *MR*, 40.

[6] Frankfort, *Kingship*, 150.

single sentence and often just a word or two. It was not until his *History of Religious Ideas*,[7] published in the twilight years of his life, that he presented a sustained analysis of Egyptian material; this suggests that while Egypt was an object of his methodology, it could not have been the source of it.

A more tantalizing question is whether Eliade's methodology is ultimately based on a false universalization of Mesopotamian data, whose historical affinities with Egypt could skew the methodology's application to Egyptian data, even if the latter were not directly used by Eliade in his formulations. Unfortunately, as we have noted before, there have been few attempts to refute Eliade--or even to engage him--at this level, which makes evaluation of this possibility extremely difficult.[8] This could be a productive direction for future research, but it would carry us too far afield to enter into it here.

We also need to ask whether the Egyptian materials are so protean that support could be found in them for *any* theory, no matter how far-fetched. This does not turn out to be the case either. Durkheim, for example, held that the essence of ritual lay in its social and moral consequences.[9] And indeed this may well be true of certain aspects of Egyptian religion. In particular, one is reminded of the "passion

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[7] *HRI1*, 85-113.

[8] In the specific case of the *axis mundi*, it has been argued by J. Z. Smith (*Map is Not Territory*,) and F. J. Korom ("Of Navels and Mountains") that Eliade borrowed his ideas from the now-discredited Pan-Babylonian school, and that this brings the whole idea of the "sacred center" into question. The conclusion, however, does not follow from the premise. It may well be that Eliade's original inspiration for the *axis mundi* came from the Pan-Babylonians; and it may well be that the Pan-Babylonians grossly misinterpreted the Mesopotamian data and arrived at conclusions which can no longer be supported. Nevertheless, rejecting an idea because of its origin rather than upon its own merits is a well-known fallacy, and Eliade has adduced a sufficient mass of data from other sources to justify the *axis mundi* concept on other grounds. As Frazer once noted, "Fortunately for the world many a sound conclusion is reached from inadequate or even totally irrelevant premises, otherwise it is to be feared that for most men the chances of arriving at the truth would be infinitesimal." (*Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1918), 359.)

[9] Emile Durkheim, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 414-415.

plays" which were regularly held in honor of Osiris at Abydos, complete with gods in full costume, beautiful virgins portraying the laments of Isis and Nephthys over the dead Osiris, and so forth. The social functions of such behavior are obvious; the re-enactment of one of the primary myths of the culture before a huge audience can certainly serve to create a social bond and to perpetuate the politico-religious order which is based on that myth. One can also shoehorn the funerary "Opening of the Mouth" ceremony into Durkheim's paradigm, since this was a public event which helped to allay the Egyptians' deep fear of death and dissolution; and so also the temple foundation ceremonies, which were equally public and reinforced the social position of Pharaoh as mediator between men and gods.

But what is one to make of the daily cult ritual of the Egyptian temple? Here we have a ritual which was conducted by the high priest alone, in a darkened sanctuary which only he had the right to enter, surrounded and instructed by reliefs which only he might see. It is difficult to envision a social purpose to such a proceeding, since hardly one Egyptian in a thousand had ever witnessed it. Here Durkheim's formulation fails utterly.

A more modern theorist is Frits Staal, with his infamous conclusion that ritual is meaningless. Ritual performers he claimed, were "self-contained and self-absorbed", concerned only with "proper execution of their complex tasks"; ritual itself, then, "has no meaning, goal or aim."[10] Staal, of course, was basing his analysis largely on his observation and study of the modern survivals of particular Vedic rituals, and perhaps what he said is true within that context. But I strongly suspect the Egyptian ritualist would be absolutely horrified at Staal's analysis. The priest who "opens the mouth" of the deceased was not only perfectly clear in his

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[10] Frits Staal. "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," in Ronald J. Grimes, *Readings in Ritual Studies* (Prentice-Hall, 1996), 484, 487.

own mind why he was doing so (i.e., in order to bring the mummy to life so that the soul of the deceased could inhabit it); he was also fully cognizant of the symbolic significance of what he was doing, as evidenced by his repeated salutation of the deceased as "Osiris" and the many references throughout the ritual to various events in Osiris' life, death, and resurrection. Similarly, the priest who crushed a wax statue of Apep at midnight and cursed it with every curse in the book knew exactly what he was doing and why: He was adding his own small portion of *heqa* to that of all the other priests who were doing the same thing, and collectively they were assisting the sun god in his night journey so that he could rise again the next day.

No doubt there were some elements of Egyptian ritual whose meaning had been lost or distorted over the course of time, and these puzzled the Egyptians as much as they do us. On the other hand, they never lost sight of the overall scheme--and, in fact, they were constantly re-interpreting the meaning of their rituals and constantly fiddling with them in order to bring them into closer alignment with their evolving understanding of what they represented. This is not the behavior of people who merely "do this because this is what we do".

It does not seem to be the case, then, either that Eliade's methodology has been "fudged" to comport with the Egyptian data, or that the Egyptian data can be adduced in support of every theory that comes along. We may at least tentatively conclude, therefore, that Eliade's model is what he believed to be: a synthesis of universal applicability.

We began with a quest for a method which would allow us to "fill the gaps" in the religious data of the ancient Near East; now it would appear that we have found it. Not only does the close match between ancient Near Eastern material and Eliade's model serve to further validate that model. It also allows us to conclude

that in Egypt, at least, the elements we have examined--temple architecture, coronation ceremonies, and a host of other practices--are all intimately related to the cosmogonic myths of that culture. This enables us to view these elements not as isolated phenomena, but as part of a religious and cultural complex built around a single, all-inclusive central idea. It should therefore be possible, at least in theory, to use the cosmogonies, the architecture, the ceremonies, and the rituals to illustrate and elucidate one another--i.e., to fill some of the many holes which currently exist in our understanding of them all. This is a powerful and much-needed result.

But we do not need to stop there. It would be very interesting to apply Eliade's methodology to the other cultures of the ancient Near East--especially to ancient Israel, which shares so many similarities (and, at the same time, so very many differences) with the religion and culture of ancient Egypt. Just to take one example among many, the design of Solomon's Temple has never been adequately explained either within the context of Israel itself or within the broader context of the Near East as a whole. Just what *is* the relationship between Israel's temple architecture, its sacred rituals, and its cosmogony? An Eliadean analysis of Israel's religion might not only allow us to fill some of the many gaps which plague that topic, but also point the way to an understanding of how some of Israel's similarities to ancient Egypt came about.

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