RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS AND THE WORLD OF NATURE
IN ANCIENT EGYPT
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IN ANCIENT EGYPT

By

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: This dissertation has two major aims. The first is to achieve a fresh understanding of the relationship between the natural environment and religious conceptions in ancient Egypt. The second is to demonstrate that religious studies have to be both more consciously interdisciplinary and more deliberately comparative. The foundations for the inquiry are laid by a critical analysis of the theories put forward by J. H. Breasted, Henri Frankfort, and John A. Wilson concerning the relationship between nature and ancient Egyptian religion. The general assumption of these three scholars that nature directly influenced Egyptian religious beliefs is found to be untenable. The analysis also reveals the dangers of ignoring comparative material and the great need for an interdisciplinary perspective. Certain selected ideas of Peter L. Berger, a sociologist, are then used to open up a new approach to the problem under investigation. A distinction is made between nature-as-it-is and "the world of nature" created by the ancient Egyptians, and evidence is provided to show how Egyptian religious beliefs were affected by the latter.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To express my thanks in a formal way to those who have guided me in this study is extremely difficult. No words can adequately express my gratitude to Dr. Eugene Combs, Dr. George Grant and Dr. Richard Slobodin, who have given me the benefit of both their scholarship and their friendship. My hope is that our association will not cease now that this particular study has been completed.

I would also like to thank Mrs. Lena Smyrniw and Mrs. Susan Paterson, who turned my scribbles into a readable typescript. Finally, I would like to thank my wife for her steady encouragement throughout the difficult years of graduate study. Here words are completely inadequate and I can say only:

"Tusen takk for moralsk og økonomisk støtte"!
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In their collection of extracts from writings on religion published under the title of Reader in Comparative Religion, William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt\(^1\) include the first part of the final chapter from The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, a book based upon a series of lectures given by H. and H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, and William A. Irwin.\(^2\) The last chapter of the book was written by the Frankforts, and Lessa and Vogt introduce their extract from it\(^3\) with the following


\(^2\)H. Frankfort et al., The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946). According to the preface, the lectures were "given as a public course in the Division of the Humanities of the University of Chicago" (page v). The book was later abridged by the elimination of Irwin's lectures on the Hebrews and published as a paperback with the new title of Before Philosophy (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1949). All subsequent references in this dissertation will be to the 1963 reprint of this abridged edition -- as in the next note.

This masterful selection from the Frankforts characterizes in bold and sweeping strokes the similarities and differences in world view among the religions of ancient man in the Near East -- Egyptians, Mesopotamians, and Hebrews -- and then sketches in some detail the possible interrelationships between the natural environments and the differences in religious conceptions.\(^4\)

Lessa and Vogt are intrigued by the idea that the physical environment may influence the form of religious beliefs and suggest that

The hypothesis is an interesting one that needs further exploration in the Near East, as well as in other areas of the world, as research on the dynamics of religion is pursued in the future.\(^5\)

This dissertation is a response to Lessa and Vogt's call for further research and focuses upon the question of how the natural environment and religious conceptions were related in ancient Egypt.\(^6\) First, the notion that geography had some kind of direct effect upon ancient Egyptian religious thought is critically examined and tested.\(^7\) Then, a fresh


\(^6\) The reasons for limiting the inquiry to Egypt are set out below. See pp. 7-12.

\(^7\) Wilson was responsible for the lectures on ancient Egypt in *Before Philosophy* and his belief that geography
attempt is made to lay bare the essential character of the relationship between nature and religious conceptions in ancient Egypt.

That a general confusion has existed for a long time amongst writers on religion concerning the relationship of the physical environment to religious beliefs will become apparent from the selection of examples provided in the next chapter. The tendencies are that either a relationship is assumed on the grounds of extremely slender evidence or that individual religions are treated as if they were merely directly influenced ancient Egyptian religion appears to have been in part derived from J. H. Breasted (see below) and in part encouraged by his co-authors who argued that Mesopotamian and Hebrew religion were similarly shaped.

Note should be taken that the question of whether or not natural environments exert an influence upon religious conceptions is only one small aspect of the whole problem of the relationship between geography and religion. David E. Sopher discusses the relationship under four main headings in his book Geography of Religions (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967):

(1) The significance of the environmental setting for the evolution of religious systems and particularly religious institutions; (2) the way religious systems occupy and organize segments of earth space; (3) the different ways whereby religious systems occupy and organize segments of earth space; (4) the geographic distribution of religions and the way religious systems spread and interact with each other. (Ibid., p. 2).

This study concentrates upon only one question within the general area of investigation outlined by Sopher under category 1.
a series of philosophical concepts. The geographical setting, together with other aspects of the milieu in which religions grow up, is to a large extent ignored. Neither of these approaches is satisfactory. Unproven opinions do not form a solid base and may lead succeeding generations of students astray, while the predominantly philosophical analysis of religious ideas often results in the realities of religious life being overlooked.10

A secondary purpose of this dissertation is therefore to make some contribution to the methodology of religious studies. Although the study of religion is not yet accepted everywhere as a separate discipline in its own right,11 many

9For further elaboration of this point see below, pp. 14-16.


11The modern study of religion should be clearly distinguished from the study of Christian theology which at least in Europe is one of the traditional university subjects. For a succinct analysis of the basic difference between these two approaches and also for reasons why universities should have departments of religion, see G. P. Hubbard (ed.), Scholarship in Canada, 1967 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), pp. 59-68. For a survey of contemporary trends and emphases in the academic study of religion, see the two reports produced by Claude Welch -- Graduate Education in Religion: A Critical Appraisal (Missoula: University of Montana Press, 1971) and Religion in the Undergraduate
universities now have a Department of Religion and with the growth of interest in the subject the necessity of paying attention to methodology becomes greater. In this dissertation an attempt will be made to demonstrate that religious studies have to be both more consciously interdisciplinary and more deliberately comparative. That is, the student of religion should take into account results reached through other disciplines and also comparative data from religions other than the particular religion or religions with which he is concerned.


The term "student of religion" should be understood to include not only those working within a Department of Religion but also those who study religion under other auspices e.g. anthropologists, psychologists, etc.

For an excellent discussion of methodology in religious studies (or "religiology"), see Robert A. McDermott, "Religion as an Academic Discipline", Cross Currents, XVIII (1968), 11-33. I was particularly interested in McDermott's recommendations, because as a result of the present investigation I had independently reached very similar conclusions. McDermott maintains that "the systematic inquiry into things religious should be interdisciplinary, comparative or contextual, and scientific" (p. 33). Cf. also Claude Welch, "Identity Crisis in the Study of Religion? -- A First Report on the ACLS Study", Journal of the American Academy of Religion, XXXIX (1971), 15-17.
That this approach confronts the student of religion with the almost impossible task of acquainting himself with a large number of diverse subjects is fully recognized. At the same time, such a method can produce insights into problems, which for a long time have vexed scholars working within the limits of a traditional discipline such as Ancient Near Eastern Studies. Furthermore, the student of religion should not feel that this demand for a wide breadth of knowledge places upon him a unique burden because some other disciplines are equally exacting. As the following statement from an introduction to the study of geography suggests, the modern geographer is in a very similar predicament:

Herein lies the peculiar virtue, or as some hold, the inherent vice of geography regarded as a "subject". It fuses the results, if not the methods, of a host of other "subjects" and in its full latter-day development seems to require a knowledge of a larger range of ancillary studies than almost any other science or art. The man, it might seem, who, with his brief span of three score years and ten, sought to qualify as a geographer would perish, like Browning's Grammarians, long before he reached the end of his interminable academic trail and certainly before he reached geography. Hence... the extreme pessimism of a Polish geographer who was afraid to devote all his life to the study of geography lest he find at the end that, as a science, it did not exist!14

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Thus the student of religion who adopts the inter-
disciplinary and comparative approach can take heart, for
others also face seemingly impossible tasks. In the study
of religion to ignore the conclusions reached in other
disciplines is to run the risk not only of allowing unwarranted
assumptions to go unchallenged but also of being considered
academically naïve. During this investigation, data and
conclusions from the fields of anthropology, geography,
psychology, and sociology have proven particularly useful,
but this list should not be considered exhaustive because
an eye has also been kept on other disciplines such as history
and philosophy.

The original suggestion of Lessa and Vogt that the
hypothesis of a relation between natural environments and
the differences in religious conceptions should be "further
explored in the Near East, as well as in other areas of the
world" provides the outline of a complete programme of

15Those who are concerned with the study of religion
at the university level and who have difficulty in securing
recognition of it as an independent discipline can also be
encouraged by the fact that "for many years, in Britain at
least, the learned world refused to admit that such a subject
(as geography) could exist in any real or valuable sense" (Ibid.).

16See above, p. 2.
research rather than the subject of a single study. A prior interest in the Ancient Near East together with the need to limit the scope of the investigation led the writer to decide at first to concentrate upon the same area as the authors of Before Philosophy, but to test their general hypothesis by using both tools from other disciplines and comparative material from other societies. However, the scope of the investigation still proved too large, and so a further decision was taken to study in detail only the effect of geography upon religion in ancient Egypt.

The choice of ancient Egyptian religion for close examination is admittedly arbitrary, and whether or not it is sufficiently representative to be taken as a test-case may be disputed. However, certain factors influenced the decision.

One factor was the discovery that Wilson, who gave the lectures on ancient Egypt in Before Philosophy, was not the first modern scholar to stress the influence of Egypt's geography upon her religion. A similar emphasis appears in the works of his teacher J. H. Breasted, who was the founder

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17 I.e. the religions and cultures of ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Israel.
of the Oriental Institute in Chicago. To go back to Breasted and to study what he says about the question therefore seemed logical. The realisation that Henri Frankfort -- co-author of the chapter from which Lessa and Vogt took their extract -- also devotes a large amount of attention to Egypt in his writings and that, like Breasted and Wilson, he too had been connected with the Oriental Institute made his inclusion equally logical. Indeed, from one point of view this inquiry might be regarded as an investigation of the writings of a particular "school". However, this aspect is not given much weight, for, although the approaches of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson are in some ways very similar, they are in other respects radically different.

While these connections were being established, inquiry into the situation of ancient Egypt revealed that it possessed certain distinct advantages for the type of investigation proposed. By a happy coincidence of circumstances,

18 For Wilson's description of his reverent attitude towards Breasted, see John A. Wilson, Signs & Wonders Upon Pharaoh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), esp. p. 142. As well as studying under Breasted, Wilson also later became a member of the faculty at the Institute.

the outside influences upon Egyptian culture appear to have been minimal in comparison with, for example, the forces that continually disturbed and disrupted Mesopotamian culture. As Breasted points out, the fact that Egyptian culture was not -- like Mesopotamian culture was -- exposed to pressures stemming from "the constant influx of foreign population" meant that the Egyptians developed a very distinctive style of life.\textsuperscript{20} For long periods, Egypt was able to live a life that was essentially her own.\textsuperscript{21}

The assumption that the isolation of ancient Egypt was simply a result of geographical circumstances will be

\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt} (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1959), p. 3. In order to facilitate the tracing of references, recent reprints of books by Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson have been cited wherever possible and, even when citations are given in an abbreviated form, the printing dates have been included. Thus, the above book will be cited hereafter as Development (1959). This procedure also has an incidental value in that it demonstrates -- through the recent date of the reprints -- the continued wide use of most of the books discussed in this study.

\textsuperscript{21}The exceptions, of course, were the two Intermediate Periods and the Syrian interregnum between the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties. During these times of confusion, alien peoples moved in and, to varying degrees, disrupted Egyptian life.
examined in the course of this investigation. For the present, the reasons for her isolation are not important but the historical fact that she was isolated\textsuperscript{22} is valuable to those who wish to study a subject such as the relationship between geography and religion. Egypt's isolation produced a remarkable continuity of life and the lack of intrusive elements ought in theory at least to facilitate the separation and evaluation of factors. Unfortunately, on account of the limitations of the data available, the various factors at work within an ancient civilization can in practice seldom be separated satisfactorily or their relative influence assessed fully.\textsuperscript{23} Yet, the attempt to understand the dynamics


\textsuperscript{23}In his article "Ikhnaton: The Great Man vs. The Culture Process" (\textit{Journal of the American Oriental Society}, Vol. 68 (1948), 91-114), Leslie A. White tries to argue that "history and ethnography provide the social scientist with the equivalent of the laboratories of the physicist" and that ancient Egypt in particular provides "an excellent laboratory in which the social scientist can test many theories" (p. 92)
of ancient cultures like that of Egypt still has to be made, for no exactly equivalent culture exists today.

The isolation of Egypt, together with the wealth of material that has survived, furnishes conditions which, if not ideal, are perhaps the best provided by any civilization as old. Hence, the view originally put forward by Breasted that ancient Egypt is "an isolated social laboratory"\textsuperscript{24} contains much truth, but needs careful qualification because the situation cannot be controlled as in a scientific laboratory or as in modern sociological research on a contemporary society. At the same time, relative to other ancient cultures, Egypt does possess very real advantages as a testing ground.

The starting point for this dissertation is therefore a critical examination of the theories of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson on the geographical conditioning of religious consciousness in ancient Egypt, for in different ways each of these three scholars argue that the peculiar geography of Egypt exerted a crucial influence upon Egyptian religion.

\textsuperscript{24}The Dawn of Conscience (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), p. 7. This reprint will be cited hereafter as Dawn (1968).
Although the role of other factors will be discussed, attention will be focused upon geography and no attempt will be made to present a complete analysis of all the factors that produced the unique religion of ancient Egypt.

That much time is spent analysing the ideas of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson and that a great part of this dissertation is negative may appear unusual. However, certain circumstances peculiar to the study of some aspects of ancient Near Eastern religions and also to the subject of the relationship between geography and religion in ancient Egypt warrant this extraordinary stance.

The unusual stage to which the study of ancient Near Eastern religions has come in some areas is perhaps best illustrated by A. Leo Oppenheim's treatment of Mesopotamian religion in his book *Ancient Mesopotamia*. Instead of providing a general chapter on the subject, he explains at length why "a systematic presentation of Mesopotamian religion cannot and should not be written" and then deals only "with three specific aspects" of religious life in ancient Mesopotamia. He asserts that the usual presentations of Mesopotamian


26 Ibid., pp. 172-183.
religion -- which may appeal to readers because they are "apparently well-rounded and pleasingly complete"\textsuperscript{27} -- miss the whole point of Mesopotamian religion and that a new start must be made. The details of his arguments do not need elaboration here, for he concerns himself almost exclusively with Mesopotamian religion. What is noteworthy, however, is that at this present juncture he feels the necessity of tearing down part of the impressive edifice that has previously passed for "Mesopotamian religion" and of putting in new foundations.

The same need for adopting a negative approach at this time is evident when the subject of the relationship between geography and religion in ancient Egypt is approached. Few would dispute that -- in North America at least -- Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson are considered to be three of the leading experts on ancient Egyptian culture and religion. Their names occur in most discussions of ancient Egypt and, to a greater or lesser extent, scholars from other disciplines depend upon their writings for knowledge of ancient Egyptian civilization.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{27}Oppenheim, \textit{Ancient Mesopotamia}, pp. 171-72.

\textsuperscript{28}See, for example, the bibliography given by Lawrence Krader in his book \textit{Formation of the State} (Englewood Cliffs,
Under these circumstances, the general agreement amongst Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson that ancient Egyptian religion was in part shaped by geographical factors becomes of crucial importance, because, if their assertions are unjustified, then other scholars who turn to them as authorities can easily be led astray.

A great number of scholars working in the area of ancient Near Eastern studies have been persuaded to accept two fundamental assumptions. The first is that, by contrast with nature in Mesopotamia, nature in Egypt was essentially beneficent. The second assumption is that many of the basic differences between the two civilizations sprang directly from the difference in natural conditions. Thus, Denis Baly, for example, in the introductory chapter to his book *The Geography of the Bible* argues that in Egypt the environment was less "severe" than in Mesopotamia and on this basis explains the fact that Egypt was "the first to be able
to exercise control over the Levant Coast."\(^{29}\) In a similar way, S. H. Hooke in his book *Babylonian and Assyrian Religion* claims that "in both Egypt and Mesopotamia the pattern of civilization was mainly determined" by the differing flood action of their respective rivers. In particular, the Nile's "quiet regular flooding, controlled and distributed by a central authority, ....gave an element of stability to the religious pattern of Egypt which is wanting in Mesopotamia."\(^{30}\)

Another compelling reason for adopting a negative approach is that, if the programme of research proposed by Lessa and Vogt is to be undertaken, the ground must first be cleared of debris, for -- as will be shown in the next chapter -- many writers have in the past made sweeping pronouncements on the subject of the relationship between geography and religion and have provided little or no evidence in support. The scepticism aroused by these previous attempts the Gods and Before Philosophy together with only two other books to provide himself with "the background of the history of ideas" for his treatment of "The Cosmological Order of the Ancient Near East" -- see the list given in the footnote on p. 15 -- and four out of the eight additional "general works" which he employs for his chapter on Egypt are also by Breasted, Frankfort, or Wilson -- see his footnote on p. 52.


provides a valuable counterbalance to the obvious enthusiasm of Lessa and Vogt for the theories contained in *Before Philosophy*. Indeed, when dealing with the subject of geography and religion, a healthy scepticism would appear to be vitally necessary for the very fact that too often in the past unwarranted assumptions have been allowed to go unchallenged because of undue credulity.

A rigorous scrutiny of the ideas of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson would thus appear to be valuable. As will be seen, the predominantly negative method of the first part of this dissertation produces positive results. The analysis of the views of the three scholars provides the opportunity for making clear distinctions which are basic to an understanding of the connection between geography and religion. Furthermore, although many of their assumptions and theories prove untenable, certain of their ideas appear to warrant closer inspection. These ideas are taken up in the final part of the study, where the emphasis is explicitly positive and the question of geography and religion is attacked from a different angle.

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31 For example, the distinction between "coloring" and "stimulation" -- see below, esp. pp. 54-61.
The plan of this dissertation is as follows. The next chapter will be devoted to the clarification of terms and to a general discussion of efforts that have been made in the past to show the influence of geography upon religion. In the following three chapters, the basic hypotheses of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson concerning the relationship between geography and religion in ancient Egypt will be closely studied. Then in the last three chapters, an attempt will be made to open up new approaches to the problem. In these concluding chapters, particular use will be made of insights obtained in sociology and psychology.

As will emerge, a relationship does exist between geography and religion but the relationship is very different from that generally envisioned by Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson. The conclusion is reached that religious beliefs are influenced by a people's view of nature rather than by nature-as-it-is. This hypothesis, which is an extension of certain selected ideas of Peter Berger, appears to elucidate the interrelationship between nature and religious conceptions in ancient Egypt. Not only does it avoid the difficulties produced by the theories of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson, but it also provides solutions to other problems which have hitherto puzzled students of ancient Near Eastern religions.
In addition, it uncovers new areas into which future research might fruitfully be directed.

This study is intended to be only the initial stage in a full re-examination of the interrelationship between geography and religion. Furthermore, Berger's ideas are used and developed only within the particular context of ancient Egyptian religion. The results of the inquiry, therefore, cannot yet be considered generally applicable to all religions. The next stage will be to spread the circle wider and to test the findings in other contexts.
CHAPTER II

DESCRIPTIONS AND DANGERS

In this chapter the intention is, first, to provide a firm basis for subsequent discussion and, secondly, to indicate some of the difficulties involved in assessing the effect of geography upon religious conceptions. With these aims in view, an attempt will be made to fix what is meant by geographical agencies and also to indicate the general character of ancient Egyptian religion in relation to other religions. Three common fallacies in geographical hypotheses, which have been put forward in the past, will then be discussed, and illustrations provided. Finally, an outline will be given of the method that will be used in the analysis of the ideas of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson.

A Definition of Geographical Environment

In order to achieve as great a degree of precision and objectivity as possible, a working definition is needed of what Lessa and Vogt describe as "the natural environment".¹

¹See above, p. 2.
and others call "physical environment", 2 "nature", 3 or simply "geography". 4

One definition is that provided by Pitirim A. Sorokin who holds that by geographical environment is meant all cosmic conditions and phenomena which exist independent of man's activity, which are not created by man, and which change and vary through their own spontaneity, independent of man's existence and activity. 5

This definition is, however, not entirely satisfactory. Firstly, it is somewhat repetitive -- for example, the phrase "independent of...man's activity" appears twice. Secondly, the term "cosmic" can easily be misinterpreted because it can be used both to refer to the universe as a whole and to denote heavenly in

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2 Cf. for example, C. Daryll Forde, Habitat, Economy, and Society (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1970), p. vi. As the title of his book indicates, Forde also uses the term "habitat".

3 "Nature" is the term most commonly employed by Breasted and Frankfort -- cf., for example, Development (1959), p. xix or AER (1961), pp. 14ff.

4 The term "geography", together with derivative phrases like "geographic security", is used in this sense by Wilson -- cf., for example, Before Philosophy (1963), p. 39.

5 Pitirim A. Sorokin, Contemporary Sociological Theories Through the First Quarter of the Twentieth Century (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 101. Sorokin devotes a complete chapter to an examination of the whole range of geographical theories. As he says,

there scarcely is any physical or psychical trait in man, any characteristic in the social
contrast to terrestrial phenomena. Sorokin's definition does not make clear which meaning of "cosmic" is intended.

A more concise working definition for this study would be:

all non-human phenomena which exist and change independently of men's existence or activity.

This brief definition would seem to provide a general, common-sense basis for understanding what is meant by phrases like "geographical environment", "natural environment", or "physical environment" as well as others that employ the same adjectives but different nouns -- for example, "geographical agencies", "natural conditions", "physical factors". The definition also covers what is meant by the terms "nature" or "geography" when the context shows that they are being used to indicate the physical environment. Above all, the definition makes clear that, for the purpose of this discussion, man is not included in nature.

Within this definition are included all the phenomena on Sorokin's list, namely

...climate, temperature, soil, relief of surface,

organization of a group, any social process of historical event, which has not been accounted for through geographical factors. (Ibid., p. 100).

6 Cf. The Oxford English Dictionary.
distribution of water and water courses...flora and fauna,...changes of seasons and geophysical processes, the phenomena of gravitation, storms, earthquakes, sea-currents and so on, as far as they exist and change regardless of man's existence and activity.7

In other words, any aspects of the physical environment that are altered through human activity are excluded and do not come under the heading of geographical agencies. For instance, all artificial modifications of the landscape for the purposes of cultivation, habitation, or communication as well as artificial soils or artificially induced changes in the climate fall outside this definition.

The physical environment in fact provides part of "the raw material" for human existence. For the sake of clarity and in order to separate physical factors from other social and cultural factors, qualifying adjectives like physical, natural, or geographical will be used throughout this study.9

7 Sorokin, Contemporary Sociological Theories, p. 102. The lacunae in the quotation indicate where Sorokin employs the adjective "natural". The term, however, is otiose in view of the final qualifying statement and its use also leads to confusion when the list is being used - as it is here - to define "nature" and "natural environment".

8 Forde, Habitat, Economy, and Society, p. 464.

9 In line with this practice, the term "environment" will be qualified when the reference is solely to physical conditions. By contrast, if the total environment of an individual or a community is meant -- that is, all the conditions
Each of these adjectives should be interpreted in the light of the definition already given and careful note should be taken that, like the terms nature and geography, they will be employed without inverted commas. The reason for this practice will become apparent later when a distinction is made between nature and "the world of nature" constructed by a particular society.

The Character of Ancient Egyptian Religion

In his book *Geography of Religions*, Sopher maintains that religions can be divided "into two broad groups", namely ethnic religious systems and universalising religious systems. Systems which fit neither of these designations he puts in a supplementary group under the heading of segmental religious systems. Within the first group he also distinguishes three subgroups:

(1) simple ethnic or tribal systems; (2) compound ethnic or national systems; and (3) complex ethnic systems associated with a major civilization.

(including the physical conditions) by which they are surrounded or affected -- then the term will be used without qualification.

10Cf. Chapter I, note 8.

11Sopher, *Geography of Religions*, p. 4.
Like all such theoretical schemes, this method of ordering religions should be regarded only as a useful organizational device and not as a full or complete description of religious realities. At the same time, such a scheme is helpful because it provides a rough guide as to where ancient Egyptian religion stands in relation to other religions. According to Sopher's classification, ancient Egyptian religion is a compound ethnic religious system and he characterizes such a religion as follows:

A compound ethnic religious system, one that is peculiar to a nation or state, reflects the complexity of economic and political organization found among its

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12 Other schemes are outlined in Anthony F. C. Wallace, *Religion: An Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966) and Robert N. Bellah, "Religious Evolution", *American Sociological Review*, 29 (1964), 358-374. Wallace separates religion into four main "types" -- namely, shamanic, communal, Olympian, and monotheistic. Bellah suggests that religious development may be divided into five ideal "stages" -- namely, primitive, archaic, historic, early modern, and modern. According to Wallace's scheme, ancient Egyptian religion belongs to the Olympian type (*op. cit.*, p. 88), while according to Bellah it falls under the category of archaic religion (*op. cit.*, p. 364). For comment about the similarity between these schemes and that of Sopher, see note 21 below.

13 Cf. Bellah's remark about his own scheme in the article cited above:
What I shall present is not intended as a procrustean bed into which the facts of history are to be forced but a theoretical construction against which historical facts may be illuminated. (*op. cit.*, p. 361).

14 Sopher in fact specifically mentions "the religious system of ancient Egypt" as an example of a compound ethnic
followers. Compound ethnic systems are generally associated with societies that at least have written legal and religious codes and economic specialization of the order involved in the genesis of towns. Like the religion of tribal societies, a compound ethnic religion has strong ties to a particular place and people. It is almost exclusively the religion of a country or a culturally homogeneous people, and an outsider enters the system only through a process of naturalization or acculturation -- by coming to be of the land or of the people.15

The placing of ancient Egyptian religion within a general classificatory framework like that of Sopher has several specific advantages. Firstly, it provides some idea of which religions might have the same general characteristics and hence might be useful for the purposes of comparison. The categorization of Egyptian religion as a compound ethnic religious system suggests that the closest parallels will be found amongst other ethnic systems -- whether simple, compound, or complex. Conversely, Sopher's method of classification discourages the drawing of hasty and superficial comparisons between ancient Egyptian religion and Christianity, for the latter is designated as one of "the major universalizing systems" and hence falls within the opposite "broad group" to that in which Egyptian religion is put.

15 Sopher, Geography of Religions, p. 5.

16 Ibid., p. 7.
The description of Egyptian religion as an ethnic religious system also helps to make clear that ancient Egyptian religion is very closely related to its cultural setting. It is the religion of a culture which flourished in a particular geographical area during a particular historical period. Although the Egyptians took their religion with them when they extended their control over neighbouring areas and foreigners might appropriate some of their gods,\textsuperscript{17} Egyptian religion as a whole remained peculiar to Egypt.

Finally, careful note should be taken that Egyptian religion falls within the second subgroup of ethnic systems. This classification pinpoints the fact that Egyptian religion during dynastic times had moved beyond the stage of a simple ethnic system. It was the successor and to a great extent

\textsuperscript{17} As a result of the religious and cultural interchange between the Egyptians and other peoples in the ancient Near East, various gods were equated. For example, Shamash was identified with Re, Baal with Seth, and Ba'alat Gubla ("the Lady of Byblus") with Hathor -- cf. William Foxwell Albright, \textit{From The Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process} (Second Edition; Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1957), p. 212. Much later on, Egyptian gods were worshipped even further afield, and the cult of Isis and Serapis (Osiris) in particular achieved tremendous popularity throughout the Roman Empire -- cf. Samuel A. B. Mercer, \textit{The Religion of Ancient Egypt} (London: Luzac & Co. Ltd., 1949), pp. 425-27.
a combination of earlier more local religious systems, some of which retained their close links with particular places in Lower and Upper Egypt. The general result is that Egyptian religion during the period under review is a complicated mixture and has several levels. A variety of earlier beliefs, whose history is often unknown, continue in force alongside dogmas that apparently crystallized after the unifying of "the Two Lands". Furthermore, the social setting in which the former arose is not the same as the latter, and the close connection between religious ideas and social reality typical of more "simple" religious systems, is lacking in a composite religion like that of dynastic times.

This brief outline of the character of Egyptian religion should have made clear that this study focuses not only upon a particular religion but also upon a particular kind of religion -- or, as Sopher would like to put the matter, a religion which belongs to a group of religious

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18 For a list of the most important cult centres in ancient Egypt and of the principal gods worshipped in each place, see R. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt (London: Thames and Hudson, 1959), p. 22. Another useful list is provided in Barbara Mertz, Red Land, Black Land: The World of the Ancient Egyptians (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 254-255.

19 For example, the dogma of divine kingship.

20 This important fact is emphasized by Roland Robertson in his discussion of what Wallace calls "the
systems that display a "certain strong and persistent pattern" in their relationship to "the world outside". Hence, although conclusions reached in this investigation may provide some insights into the general relationship between geography and religion, the applicability of these conclusions to all other religious systems should not be assumed. Each religion has first to be treated as a separate case.

Mechanism, Oversimplification, and 'Post Pactum' Interpretations

The question, to which the ideas put forward by Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson gives rise, is how far the observable variations in religious conceptions are -- directly or indirectly -- influenced, conditioned, or controlled by


Sopher emphasizes that his grouping of religions "is not to be thought of as a typing of religious systems" (Geography of Religions, p. 4). However, the practical distinction between his classification of religions and the schemes of Wallace and Bellah (cf. note 12 above) is hard to see. The main difference would appear to be simply that he uses different criteria.

Theoretically, geographical conditions may affect religious conceptions in an immediate fashion or they may affect particular aspects of the culture or society in which a religion is set and these aspects in turn may influence the shape of religious ideas -- cf. Sorokin, Contemporary Sociological Theories, p. 102-103.
geographical factors. However, as has already been said, great caution is necessary when assessing the effect of geography upon religion, because the dangers of misinterpretation are many. In this section, the intention is merely to outline a few of the most obvious pitfalls.

As Chester C. McCown says, "Two major errors in

23 The verb "determined" was deliberately avoided, because "determinism" has been understood in many different senses. For a discussion of the confusion surrounding the notion, see J. A. May, Kant's Concept of Geography and Its Relation to Recent Geographical Thought (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 179-183, cf. also pp. 39-45. May draws particular attention to two articles which deal specifically with the use of the concept in geographical studies:


24 In no way is the discussion meant to constitute a complete résumé of theories which have been put forward in the past concerning the effect of various natural conditions upon religious conceptions. General surveys -- which deal with theories that relate the natural environment not only to religion but also to a multitude of other aspects of culture, society, individual psychology -- have been provided by others. The survey by Sorokin has already been mentioned in note 5 above. Another outstanding discussion is provided by Lucien Febvre in his book A Geographical Introduction to History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925). C. Daryll Forde considers Febvre's book to be "by far the most masterly critique of the whole problem (of environmental relations)" -- see Habitat, Economy, and Society, p. 490. Other surveys and discussions which deserve mention are given in: Morris R.
attempts to relate geographic environment to history have been mechanistic explanations and oversimplification".\textsuperscript{25}

In the first instance, the mistake lies in taking over the assumption of the "natural sciences" that causation can be reduced to mathematical formulae and applying it, directly and uncritically, to the study of culture and society. The part played by "the often apparently irrational human factor" has to be taken into account when examining cultural and social processes.\textsuperscript{26} In the second instance, the mistake is that geography or even just one geographical agency is emphasized to the exclusion of most, if not all, other factors.\textsuperscript{27}


\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 234.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
providing post factum interpretations. The mistake here is that a cultural or social development is attributed to the influence of geographical conditions just because the development took place or that some aspect of culture or society is thought to have been the direct result of the geographical environment because a seemingly appropriate geographical agency happens to be at hand. In other words, jumping to the conclusion that the connection between a particular cultural or social phenomenon and the geographical environment is causal, whereas closer examination reveals that the reasons for the phenomenon are in fact entirely different. 29

An extreme example of the mechanistic approach is cited by Lucien Febvre in his book A Geographical Introduction to History 30 and, although the reference to religion is not explicit, it provides a good illustration. Febvre reports that the philosopher Victor Cousin made the following claim in his Introduction à l'Histoire de la Philosophie:

28 Of course, certain hypotheses may be unacceptable for more than one of these three reasons or for other reasons not discussed here.

29 Sorokin cites the example of historians who say that "the development of navigation by the Phoenicians was due to the favourable sea-shore environment" when in fact the shore-line was naturally unfavourable -- Contemporary Sociological Theories, pp. 117-18.

30 Cf. note 24 above.
Yes, gentlemen, give me the map of a country, its configuration, its climate, its waters, its winds, and all its physical geography; give me its natural productions, its flora, its zoology, and I pledge myself to tell you, a priori, what the man of that country will be, and what part that country will play in history, not by accident but of necessity; not at one epoch, but in all epochs: and, moreover, the idea which it is destined to represent!  

Such an approach makes man a mere puppet of nature.

Although Montesquieu was not so rigorously mechanistic in his interpretation of history, he too believed that people were directly influenced by their physical environment and his conviction that especially climate had a powerful effect on both political institutions and religion led him to some extraordinary conclusions in The Spirit of the Laws.  

For example, he argues that specific religions "agree" with specific climates and that "it seems to all human appearance as if climate had prescribed the bounds of the Christian and the Mahommedan religions." However, his theory is

31Feuvre, A Geographical Introduction to History, p. 10. The same passage is also quoted in Wooldridge and East, The Spirit and Purpose of Geography, p. 32 and May, Kant's Concept of Geography, p. 40.


34Ibid., Bk, XXIV, 26 -- cf. Vol. II, p. 43.
disproved by the spread of both these religions subsequent to his time.

Montesquieu's explanation of the Reformation is equally naïve. Faced with the fact that Protestantism had spread in northern Europe whereas Catholicism had retained its hold in the south, he declares that

The reason is plain: the people of the north have, and will forever have, a spirit of liberty and independence, which the people of the south have not; and, therefore, a religion which has no visible head is more agreeable to the independence of the climate than that which has one.\textsuperscript{35}

In other words, the climate had produced the independent attitude of northern Europeans. Such an interpretation of the Reformation ignores entirely the parts played by the individual reformers as well as the various political, social, and economic issues involved -- to say nothing of the inadequate account which it provides of the varying characteristics and temperaments of the different peoples in northern Europe.\textsuperscript{36}


\textsuperscript{36} Cf. the following comment by Robert M. Adams:

History is not a mathematical exercise in the application of 'laws', and the meaning of human experience is not to be found by suppressing its rich variety in the search for common, implicitly deterministic, denominators.
The second major error to which McCown draws attention is oversimplification. Understandably, mechanism and oversimplification very often go hand in hand and the examples from *The Spirit of the Laws* given above might equally well have served as illustrations of oversimplification.

Perhaps, the most extraordinary instance of oversimplification is the hypothesis that basalt directly influences religious belief. Unfortunately, rival proponents of this theory arrive at completely opposite conclusions!

The conflict is clearly brought out in the following summary by George Tatham:

Compare for example the German dictum quoted by Kirchoff 'Basalt is conducive to Piety' with the quotation from Abbé Giraud Soulavie's *Histoire Nationale de la France Méridionale*: 'The inhabitants of basaltic regions are difficult to govern, prone to insurrection, and irreligious. Basalt appears to be an agent though hitherto unacknowledged in the rapid spread of the Reformation.'

Oversimplification is also evident in the explanation which Alan W. Watts provides for the contrast between Hindu and Chinese techniques of meditation. He suggests that China having a colder and less fertile climate than India was not conducive to a purely


37 Tatham, "Environmentalism and Possibilism", in *Geography in the Twentieth Century*, p. 130.
contemplative spirituality requiring long periods of absence from external consciousness. 38

In a similar manner, A. C. Bouquet asserts that the heat of India played a significant part in shaping Vedic religion. After declaring that one of the striking features of the Vedas is "the existence of a class of human beings who experience ecstasy", he says:

The final consequences of this ecstasy, coupled with the effects of the hot climate, is to induce an attitude which Schweitzer has called 'world and life negation'. 39

That the climate has had an effect upon the forms of Indian and Chinese spirituality may or may not be true. However, the connection is not -- as the unsupported statements of Watts and Bouquet imply -- immediately obvious and has yet to be proved. What is certain is that religion in both India and China has been affected by many other factors -- for example, the scientific study of language and the use of logic in India 40 or the intermingling of politics and religion

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39 A. C. Bouquet, Comparative Religion (Sixth Edition: Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 123 -- for other effects which he attributes to the climate and the physical environment in India, see ibid., p. 119.

in China.  

The third major trap into which the unwary may fall when attempting to relate geography to religion is that of post factum interpretation. Even McCown, who in other ways approaches the subject with commendable caution, would seem to be unconscious of this danger.

McCown contends that both the landscape and the climate of Palestine are "stimulating". He apparently means to imply that the wide difference in terrain and in climate within a very small area somehow stirred the Hebrews of Biblical times into action and hence were responsible for the dynamic character of the Hebrew culture and religion. However, this conclusion would seem to owe much more to McCown's knowledge about the Hebrews from other sources than to a dispassionate investigation of the evidence.

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41 A classic instance is provided by the takeover of Formosa by the Manchu government in the seventeenth century. The imposition of Confucianism constituted a major part of the pacification programme and, in order "to improve the customs" of the Taiwanese, lecturers from the mainland were sent to "any city, town, village, or hamlet....where people gather,...to instruct and enlighten ignorant men and women and make them realize the happiness of doing good" -- see Hisayuki Miyakawa, "The Confucianization of South China", in Arthur F. Wright (ed.), The Confucian Persuasion (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 69), pp. 43-44.

Significantly, he offers no proof that comparable correlations can be made between other peoples' energy and the character of their physical environment. Nor does he take into account the fact that the Arabs, who made Palestine their home for over a thousand years prior to the establishment of the modern state of Israel, were not "stimulated" to high levels of culture by the very same landscape which he maintains inspired the early Hebrews.

Not only does McCown claim that the physical environment of Palestine is "stimulating", but also that the inhabitants of Judea developed unique qualities because of the distinctive terrain in the area where they lived. He argues that, as a result of their physical surroundings, the people of Judea "could not but be different from their own fellow-countrymen and from the rest of the world". Such a conclusion would seem again to be influenced by hindsight -- in particular, the knowledge that during the course of history the Jews have proved themselves to be a unique people. Also, to attribute their uniqueness to the physical peculiarities of Judea is ignore a great mass of social, political, economic and theological factors. Geography by itself cannot account

for such episodes as the emergence of Yahwism, the Exodus, the prophetic movement, or the Exile: yet, these and other similar events played a significant part in moulding the Jews into a distinctive people.

Much more could be said about the dangers of misinterpretation. Emphasis has been laid upon only a few crucial points. Like all other hypotheses linking geography and cultural phenomena, theories about the relationship between geography and religion have to be subjected to "a most rigorous analysis and sifting of what is valid and what is childish".

The Method of Analysis Employed in This Study

In the next three chapters, the aim is to examine the theories of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson concerning the relationship between geography and ancient Egyptian religion. Attention will be paid both to their basic hypotheses and to the evidence provided in support.

A critical undertaking of this type, however, involves certain dangers, and one of the foremost is that important issues become blurred in a general account.

The ideas of each scholar will therefore be treated separately in order to show clearly what their respective theories have in common and where the differences lie.

Another danger is that, when a particular hypothesis is investigated, its main features are obscured through being submerged in the investigator's commentary and the full, original force of the hypothesis is lost. To say the least, such a result is unfair to the scholar whose theory is being examined. In this study, each author's ideas will first be outlined as accurately as possible, and only after this presentation has been completed will any comments be made.
CHAPTER III

THE IDEAS OF J. H. BREASTED

James Henry Breasted was a prolific lecturer and writer, and one of the marks of his genius was that he produced books, lectures, and articles for three entirely different audiences.¹ Not only did he produce important scholarly works for academics,² but he also wrote ancient

¹For a complete list of his most important publications, see John A. Wilson, "Biographical Memoir of James Henry Breasted 1865-1935, National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A. Biographical Memoirs, XVIII, 115-121. For a more general account of Breasted's life and achievements, see the biography by his son Charles Breasted, Pioneer to the Past (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943).

²The terms "academics" is used in a wide sense to cover both specialists in Egyptology and interested students in other academic disciplines. The category of "academic writings", therefore, includes such books as A History of the Ancient Egyptians (which appeared in a series for "Bible Students") or Development of Religion and Thought (which was based on lectures given to seminarians), in addition to such works as A History of Egypt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905) or Ancient Records of Egypt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906-7). These last two publications will be cited hereafter as History (1905) and Records.
history textbooks for high school students and turned out books, lectures, and articles for the general public.

A History of Egypt, published in 1905, constituted Breasted's first major attempt to describe the development of ancient Egyptian civilisation. In this work can be seen the seeds of his theory of geographical influence, which was later presented in its full form in Development.

Breasted begins his history with a description of "The Land". He emphasises how the effective natural barriers of Egypt reduced to a minimum outside interference in the country's life and enabled "the natives slowly to assimilate" the few peoples who managed to force their way in. He also


4 The Conquest of Civilisation (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926) was produced specifically for "the man in the street" (p. viii). The book was an expanded version of Ancient Times.

5 See note 2 above.

6 See below, pp. 49ff.

7 History (1905), p. 7.
feels that the elongated form of Egypt ought to be taken into consideration, for "it will be evident that the remarkable shape of the country must powerfully influence its political development." The Nile was important, not only because it made communication easier and agriculture possible, but also because, in the effort to control its flood, the Egyptians developed a high degree of mechanical skill. "If", says Breasted, "Egypt became the mother of the mechanical arts, the river will have been one of the chief natural forces to which this fact was due."  

For the purposes of this study, however, Breasted's direct statements about the influence of Egypt's geography upon the thought and religious outlook of the ancient Egyptians are the most interesting. In the same introductory chapter from which the above series of ideas and quotations were taken, he asserts that the peculiar characteristics of the Nile valley--in particular, its monotonity and the startling contrast between "its unparalleled fertility" and "the lifeless deserts" on either side--played a significant part in shaping the ideas of the Egyptians.

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"Such surroundings", he says, "reacted powerfully upon the mind and thought of the Egyptian, conditioning and determining his idea of the world and his notion of the mysterious powers which ruled it."  

Thus, for example, "the illimitable solitudes of the desert...tinctured with sombreness his (i.e. the ancient Egyptian's) views of the great gods who ruled such a world."  

In a later chapter entitled "Early Religion", Breasted also maintains that the sun was accorded a prominent role in Egyptian worship, because in Egypt the sun obtruded itself upon the consciousness of the inhabitants in a special and compelling way. He writes:

In a land where a clear sky prevailed and rain was rarely seen, the incessant splendor of the sun was an insistent fact, which gave him the highest place in the thought and daily life of the people. His worship was almost universal...."  

The value of A History of Egypt is that it shows clearly the direction in which Breasted's mind was moving and the tremendous importance which he placed upon geography right from the beginning of his career. The question now is whether or not he provided sufficient evidence in

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11 History (1905), p. 10. The emphasis is mine.
12 Ibid., p. 11.
13 Ibid., pp. 58-59.
A History of Egypt to support his claims that the peculiar geography of Egypt "conditioned" and "determined" the beliefs of the ancient Egyptians.  

In the opening chapter, Breasted enthusiastically promotes the notion that geography was a major conditioning factor in ancient Egypt and his initial emphasis upon this theme inspires a hope that later in the book he will develop his intriguing ideas. Regretably, this hope remains unfulfilled. Breasted merely repeats his initial statements, altering only the phraseology and adding nothing new. For example, later in the book, he states categorically, about the ancient Egyptian, that "long ages of confinement to his elongated valley, with its monotonous, even if sometimes grand scenery, had imposed a limited range on his imagination." However, beyond an extremely cursory comparison with the ancient Greeks, he makes no effort to demonstrate how either the long confinement or the peculiar character of the Nile valley accounted for the distinctive way in which the ancient Egyptians looked at the universe. In this later statement, Breasted in fact only repeats in slightly different words his original unsupported assertion in the first chapter.

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14 Cf. esp. History (1905), p. 10 - full quotation given above on p. 44.

15 History (1905), pp. 53-54.
that "the prospect" of the Nile Valley was "somewhat monotonous" and that this monotony along with other alleged characteristics of the valley "reacted powerfully upon the mind and thought of the Egyptian." 16

In an introductory chapter that attempts to provide a general background, categorical statements are often unavoidable, but the mere repetition of such initial general statements in the body of a work does not constitute proof. The reader has the right to expect some solid evidence, but unfortunately -- as in the typical instance given above -- Breasted makes little or no attempt to back up his initial contentions.

Breasted appears to believe that the influence of geographical facts upon patterns of thought is a self-evident truth. As a result, he bluntly asserts that a connection existed between a certain geographical feature and a particular aspect of thought, but provides no evidence in support. An extremely crucial and classic instance of this simplistic type of approach is Breasted's attempt to account for the importance of sun-worship in ancient Egypt. His explanation that the sun gained "the highest place in the thought and daily life of the people", because its "incessant

16History (1905), p. 10 -- see above, p. 44.
splendor...was an insistent fact"\textsuperscript{17} is totally inadequate. His phrasing implies that a direct correlation can be established between the sun's physical power and presence (which presumably would have to be measured in terms of sun-hours, temperature, type of rays, etc.) and the place given to the sun in worship. Such, however, does not appear to be the case.

For example, the sun has been given an important place in worship in countries where its "splendor" is neither "incessant" nor "insistent". In Scandinavia, the sun can be seen only under ideal conditions and its warmth is both seasonal and considerably less than in Egypt. However, according to the evidence of the rock-carvings in southern Norway and Sweden, the sun played an important part in the worship of the farmers who lived there in the late Bronze Age.\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, the sun became the symbol of Odin, the

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{History} (1905), p. 59 -- see above, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{18} I have myself examined some of these carvings in Østfold, Norway. The sun appears in numerous contexts, and the deduction that sun-worship played a large part in the lives of these early farmers appears fully justified. For a scholarly treatment of these rock-carvings see Sverre Marstander's two volume work Østfolds Jordbruksristningser (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1963) and also a useful article by Knud A. Larsen entitled "Solvogn og Solkult" and published in the Danish archaeological journal \textit{KUM} in 1955. To my knowledge, the only extensive study in English during recent years is that by Peter Gelling and Hilda Ellis Davidson, \textit{The Chariot of the Sun and Other Rites and Symbols of the Northern Bronze Age} (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1969).
chief of the Nordic gods. Again, two peoples living in the same region and enjoying the same amount of sunshine may give the sun different weight in their worship. Thus, the Hopi and the Zuni live in contiguous areas in Arizona, but the cult of the Sun is "more conspicuous" amongst the Zuni than amongst the Hopi.

Many examples like these could be cited to show that no relation appears to exist between the place given to the sun in worship and the degree of its physical prominence. However, the onus of proof does not lie on the reader but on Breasted, and in this instance --as in the others cited above-- he fails to provide the necessary evidence to substantiate his statement. Admittedly, in A History of Egypt, the notion is introduced almost incidentally, but the manner of its presentation is instructive, for even when the notion later formed part of the very foundation of Breasted's theory of geographical

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19 The sun-symbol is found on a tremendous number of runic stones, picture stones, and gravestones. See, for example, the illustrations on pp. 385 and 396 in the English translation of the Larousse World Mythology (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1965).

Breasted did little more than he does in *A History of Egypt* -- namely make a blunt statement of the connection and then move on to describe the characteristics of Egyptian sun-worship.

To make this criticism is not to imply that Breasted was either arrogant or dogmatic. He seems merely to be carried away by his enthusiasm, which leads him to overlook the need for justifying his conclusions.

As has been previously stated, Breasted presented his theory of geographical influence in its full form in *Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt*, which was published in 1912. The book was based upon his Morse Lectures to students at Union Theological Seminary early in the same year.

In his preface, Breasted claims that no systematic effort has yet been made to trace from beginning to end the leading categories of life, thought, and civilization as they successively made their mark on (Egyptian) religion, or to follow (Egyptian) religion from

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21 See below, esp. pp. 51-52.
22 New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
age to age, disclosing especially how
it was shaped by these influences, and
it in its turn reacted on society.24

This omission he aims to repair, and in particular he wants
to establish the order in which the
different influences which created
Egyptian religion successively became
the determining forces.

The emphasis on order should be noted. Breasted
maintains that nature made its greatest impact upon religion
in the early stages of man's social and cultural development,
but that, as civilisation progressed in Egypt other forces
exerted a more determining influence. Consequently, for

25 Ibid., p. xvi. Although in Dawn -- published
twenty years after Development -- Breasted modified his
theory of successive dominating influences in some of its
details, Development remains the best source for the very
reason that his main concern in the book was with the forces
that allegedly shaped Egyptian religion and thought. In
Dawn -- as the full title suggests -- the emphasis was more
upon the ideas of conduct that grew up than upon the
influences which helped to produce them (cf. Breasted's
description of the purpose of the book on p. xxvi). The
exposition in this section is, therefore, built mainly
upon what Breasted said in Development. At the few places
where a difference exists between the latter and Dawn, the
fact will be indicated.

26 This does not mean that, once these other forces
came into play, nature ceased to have an effect -- Breasted
realises that "no...influence works at any time to the
exclusion of all others" (p. xvi). His aim in Development
is "not...to trace each category from beginning to end"
(p. xvi), but to show how, during each period, one
particular force exerted a greater influence than others.
the purposes of this investigation, Breasted's analysis of the origins and early development of Egyptian religion is of most interest.

In the opening lecture, Breasted starts by emphasizing that the geographical isolation of Egypt means that

in all the categories of human life: language, arts, government, society, thought, religion -- what you please -- we may trace a development in Egypt essentially undisturbed by outside forces. 27

Hence, by and large, the sources of all these various aspects of Egyptian civilization have to be sought within the Nile valley itself.

Egyptian religion, in particular, was a product of the peculiar geography of Egypt. "Two great phenomena of nature", Breasted maintains, "had made the most profound impression upon the Nile-dwellers." 28 The first of these was the sun, which he feels dominated the Egyptian scene in the past as much as it does today. "The all-enveloping glory and power of the Egyptian sun," he says, "is the

27 Development (1959), p. 3.
28 Ibid., p. 8.
most insistant fact in the Nile Valley," and -- as a result -- the sun was worshipped in many "local forms".\textsuperscript{29}

The second great natural phenomenon, which had a tremendous influence on the religious imagination of the early Egyptians, was the Nile. At least, it was the Nile according to his introductory statement,\textsuperscript{30} but later, when he begins to talk about Osiris, he modifies this statement and suggests that the spectacle of vegetable growth also had a significant effect. The second "phenomenon" then was a composite one: the overall impression derived from watching, each year, the waters flooding the fields, the soil producing plant life, and the vegetation growing.\textsuperscript{32}

In consequence, Breasted words his conclusion extremely carefully. He says that "the Nile was but the source and visible symbol of that fertility of which Osiris was the

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Development} (1959), p. 9. The reader, who is unacquainted with Breasted's statements in \textit{History} about the sun's physical dominance and its prominence in worship, might feel that Breasted was not implying a connection in this passage. However, the argument in the rest of the lecture indicates clearly that the sense here is essentially the same as that of the passage on the sun from \textit{History}, quoted above on p. 44.


\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 18ff.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 23.
personification."\textsuperscript{33}

The influence of geography, however, did not end with the sun and the Nile or vegetation. Breasted also feels that the conditions in Egypt had affected Egyptian beliefs about the dead. His own experience there leads him to believe that the ancient Egyptians' "insistent belief in a hereafter" was greatly favored and influenced by the fact that the conditions of soil and climate resulted in such a remarkable preservation of the human body as may be found under natural conditions nowhere else in the world.\textsuperscript{34}

Furthermore, he considers that the early belief in the stellar hereafter arose because the stars shine so brilliantly in the clear night sky of Egypt. He writes:

\begin{quote}
In the cloudless sky of Egypt it was a not unnatural fancy which led the ancient Nile-dweller to see in the splendor of the nightly heavens the host of those who had preceded him.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{33} Development (1959), pp. 23-24. Interestingly, in Dawn, Breasted prefers to start from the idea of vegetable life rather than from the Nile. He singled out "sunshine and verdure" as the most "insistent, natural manifestations" and hence the two obvious candidates for divine supremacy (p. 43, cf. also pp. 94-99 and 105). However this apparent shift in emphasis is not significant and amounts to no more than a clarification and reworking of the discussion in Development.

\textsuperscript{34} Development (1959), p. 49.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 101.
The ancient Egyptian also pictured the hereafter in terms of the life which he enjoyed so much on earth. Thus, amongst other things, the climate and topography of the heavenly realm mirrored the climate and topography of ancient Egypt. Breasted makes this point in his usual poetic manner:

As the cool Nile breezes and the picturesque life of the refreshing river were the central picture in his (i.e. the ancient Egyptian's) earthly life, so he looked forward to finding the celestial Nile the source of the same joy in the life hereafter. 36

Indeed, the life that an Egyptian king hoped to enjoy beyond the grave almost exactly paralleled the type of life he lived on earth. The main difference was that the gods, instead of his subjects, danced before him and acted as his servants. 37

Such, then, are the main outlines of what Breasted says about the effect of geography upon religion in Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt. In some cases, his analysis is sound. For example, his conviction

37 Ibid., pp. 89-90.
that Egyptian religious beliefs were "colored" by both the physical and social circumstances in which they grew up may be upheld. An instance of such "coloring" was the way in which the ancient Egyptian pictured the hereafter in terms of the life that he knew on earth. Similar instances of "coloring" occur in other religions and, according to Sorokin, sufficient evidence exists to prove that

the art, the literature, and the beliefs of a people are somewhat 'colored' with the images, figures, and forms most often taken from the geographical environment in which such a people live. 39

Breasted in fact has amassed a tremendous bulk of material which demonstrates the "coloring" of ancient Egyptian religion by the contemporary social, political, and economic circumstances as well as by the local geography. The basic

38 Cf. Breasted's comment on the descriptions of the hereafter in the Pyramid Texts:

To be sure these are depicted as incidents of the life beyond the grave, but the subject-matter and the colors which it is portrayed are drawn from the life here and the experience here.

_Development_ (1959), p. 89. The emphasis is mine).

In History, the idea of "coloring" is adumbrated but not developed -- see, for example, _History_ (1905), pp. 30 and 60.

39 Sorokin, _Contemporary Sociological Theories_, p. 170. Interestingly, Breasted also sees the connection between literature and religious thought -- see _Development_ (1959), p. 88.
reason for such "coloring" is not hard to find -- namely that, if religious images, symbols, or metaphors are to be effective vehicles of meaning, they must bear some relation to a people's experience. That the Egyptians' picture of the celestial life was painted in "colors" familiar to them is, therefore, understandable. Furthermore, as one of the elements in the total situation, the geography of Egypt might be expected to be reflected -- at least to some degree -- in both these and other religious descriptions.

A crucial difference, however, exists between "coloring" and what might be called "stimulation", and Breasted fails to make the distinction clear. The terms and images in which

40 Cf. R. H. Whitbeck, "The Influence of Geographical Environment upon Religious Beliefs", Geographical Review, V (1918), 317 -- "In the very nature of things any system of religious belief, in order to grow into acceptance as a belief, must be in some sort of harmony with the mode of life, the economic interests, and the geographical environment of the people."

41 The term "stimulation" was suggested by the passage in Development given below in note 42.

42 Both the notion of "coloring" and the notion of "stimulation" are present in Development. A passage, in which Breasted uses the word "colors" was quoted above (see note 38 above) and in the following passage he employs the verb "stimulated":

The surprising perfect state in which he (i.e. the ancient Egyptian) found his ancestors whenever the
religious beliefs are expressed may, in general, reflect a people's peculiar circumstances of life, but the conclusion does not follow that a given circumstance (or series of circumstances) inevitably will be reflected in a people's religious beliefs or that it will produce a certain type of belief in a predictable way. When Breasted argues that the sun was worshipped throughout Egypt because of its "all-enveloping glory and power" or that the stars were associated with the dead because of "the splendor of the nightly heavens" or that belief in an afterlife was encouraged by the process of natural mummification, he is implying that certain features of digging of a new grave disclosed them, must have greatly stimulated his belief in their continued existence.

(Development (1959), pp. 49-50. The emphasis is mine).

However, the mere use of the words "colors" and "stimulated" does not mean that Breasted is employing them deliberately as specific terms to denote two different processes (as is done in this paper). Nowhere does he define them as terms and nowhere does he make the distinction explicit.

43 Cf. above, p. 51.

44 Cf. above, p. 53.

45 Ibid.
in the physical environment directly "stimulated" certain beliefs. 46

Already in the discussion of A History of Egypt reasons have been given to show why Breasted's contention that the sun was worshipped because of its physical power is unjustifiable. 47 His suggestion that the early Egyptian belief in a stellar hereafter arose because the stars shine so brightly in the night-sky of Egypt is merely another variation on the idea that a geographical feature inevitably influences, or is given a role in, a religion because of its prominence. A discussion of this theory, therefore, would just repeat the main lines of the discussion on sun-worship, for the same types of comparative arguments may be advanced against it. Finally, Breasted's hypothesis that the ancient Egyptians' belief in an afterlife was encouraged by the fact that after death the human body was naturally preserved is interesting, but requires proof. In order to support such a notion, a correlation would have to be established between rates of body decay and the strength of belief in a hereafter in many

46 See also his remarks about nature making an "impression" on the religious faculty (Development (1959), p. 4) and of it being one of the "determining" forces or influences that "created" Egyptian religion (ibid., p. xvi cf. "Epitome of Development" p. xix).

47 See above, pp. 47-48.
different areas of the world. Breasted's own "experience" is not an adequate basis.

Difficulties arise, however, when the influence of the Nile has to be assessed, for the Nile and the complete dependence of the Egyptians upon the inundation is a unique phenomenon. Nowhere else in the world is there an exactly comparable situation. Hence, Breasted's assertions about the Nile and its influence cannot be tested in the same way as his assertions about the sun.

That the Nile played -- and still does play -- a prominent part in Egyptian life is beyond dispute, and Breasted's statement that "the obvious dependence of Egypt upon the Nile made it impossible to ignore this agency of life" contains much truth. Indeed, the remarkable fact is that, if geography directly influences religion in the manner in which Breasted suggests, the Nile was not the supreme object of worship in ancient Egypt, for its physical presence was pervasive and the life of the whole land was built around it.

48 Development (1959), p. 333. Breasted makes this comment in connection with the religious reforms of Ikhnaton.

49 This dependence has been recognised by both ancient and modern authors: cf., for example. Herodotus who describes Egypt as "a gift of the river (Nile)"--Herod. ii.5--or Hermann Kees who says that "For Egypt, the Nile is its source of life
To this fact must be added another circumstance, namely that the Nile as Osiris was associated with the wider phenomenon of growth or verdure,\textsuperscript{50} for which men appear to have developed a special intensity of feeling when they turned from food-gathering and hunting to agriculture.\textsuperscript{51} Hence, the crucial influence was not simply the existence of the Nile or of the life-producing power in the waters, the soil, and the vegetation, but the early Egyptians' "discovery of a mystical solidarity"\textsuperscript{52} between themselves, the waters, the soil, and the vegetation when they began to cultivate the rich black land of the Nile Valley.


\textsuperscript{51}Cf. Dawn (1968), pp. 94-95. In these two crucial pages, Breasted seems to be moving towards the position of Mircea Eliade (see note 52 below), but his repetition of other mechanistic statements from Development elsewhere in Dawn suggests that he is here still thinking in terms of "cause" rather than "condition".

\textsuperscript{52}The phrase is Mircea Eliade's -- cf. "Structures and Changes in the History of Religion", in City Invincible, p. 359. Eliade carefully distinguishes "causes" and "conditions":

The revolutionary changes brought about in the economic realm and in social organization as a result of the development...of proto-agriculture
Although Breasted maintains that nature directly shaped ancient Egyptian religion, he succeeds in demonstrating only that Egyptian religious beliefs were given a particular flavor by the natural environment. He does not see the vital importance of distinguishing between color and stimulus. The great stress placed upon the natural setting in fact obscures his account of religion in ancient Egypt because, although the reader's interest is undoubtedly aroused by his descriptions of the physical surroundings, the reader is at the same time misled into a belief that environmental factors played a direct part in producing Egyptian religion. Breasted, however, fails to prove that nature was directly influential.

did condition the new religious valorizations of the world, but they did not 'cause' them in the deterministic sense of the term. It is not the natural phenomenon of vegetation which is responsible for the appearance of mythico-religious systems of agrarian structure but rather the religious experience occasioned by the discovery of a mystical solidarity between man and plant life.

CHAPTER IV

THE IDEAS OF HENRI FRANKFORT

Professional associates of Breasted for many years, both Henri Frankfort and John Wilson built upon the foundations which Breasted had laid.\(^1\) Thus, Frankfort in *Ancient Egyptian Religion*,\(^2\) for example, took up the work of interpreting Egyptian theology, while Wilson in *The Burden of Egypt* -- published later as *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*\(^4\) -- continued

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\(^1\) Details of Frankfort's and Wilson's connections with Breasted and the Oriental Institute have been given above in Chapter I, notes 18 and 19. For a list of Frankfort's publications, see Johanne Vindenas, "Bibliography of Henri Frankfort", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XIV (1955), 4-13.


\(^3\) The similarities between *AER* and *Development* are succinctly set out by James B. Pritchard in *Crozer Quarterly*, XXV (1948), 278.

\(^4\) *The Burden of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951) is clothbound and *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) is the paperback edition. All subsequent references in this dissertation will be to the paperback reprint of 1965 -- as in the next note.
the inquiry into the "significance" of ancient Egypt and the values inherent in her culture.  

Both Frankfort and Wilson also took over many of Breasted's ideas on the effect of geography upon ancient Egyptian religion. However, to set out what each of them says book by book would involve needless repetition. The best method would seem to be to summarize their thought and to set out just the main lines of their theories.

In this section, Frankfort's ideas will be examined, and attention will be concentrated upon the series of interpretative studies of ancient Near Eastern civilization, which he began to publish towards the end of his career and which he appears to have regarded as the consummation of his archaeological work. After collaborating with other scholars from the University of Chicago in The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, he produced three studies on his own. First

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5 *Culture* (1965), esp. 4-6.

6 See Pinhas Delougaz and Thorkild Jacobsen, "Henri Frankfort", *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XIV (1955), 2, and Frankfort's own statement about the need for "the Egyptologist, Assyriologist or Hittitologist...to see his chosen field in its wider, proper setting" after he has made himself familiar with "primary sources" -- "The Ancient Near East as an Historical Entity", *History*, XXXVII (1952), 200. Cf. also *City Invincible*, p. 297.

7 For details of publication see Chapter I, note 2.
came Ancient Egyptian Religion\textsuperscript{8} and Kingship and the Gods\textsuperscript{9} in 1948, and then The Birth of Civilization in the Near East in 1951. These three books\textsuperscript{10} will be used as a basis for the investigation of his views about the role played by geography in shaping the religious ideas of the ancient Egyptians.\textsuperscript{11}

Frankfort carefully makes a distinction between "the roots" and "the trunks" of both civilizations and ideas.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{8}For details of publication see note 2 above.


\textsuperscript{11}Although Frankfort took a leading part in the production of Intellectual Adventure, the book cannot be used as a basis for an inquiry into his ideas, because (i) he makes no separate individual contribution -- his wife shared the work of writing the Introduction and Conclusion (ii) no clear indication is given how far the Introduction and Conclusion are statements of what the Frankforts think as opposed to summaries of what the contributors as a group think.

\textsuperscript{12}Since the present inquiry is concerned primarily with Egyptian religion, the sections on Mesopotamian civilization in both Kingship and Birth will be largely ignored.

\textsuperscript{13}Although Frankfort admits that "the terms 'civilization' and 'culture' count as synonyms in general usage", he prefers -- at least in Birth -- to use the word "civilization" rather than the word "culture" to describe the mature societies that emerged in Egypt and Mesopotamia towards the end of the fourth
He considers that the historian can never lay bare "the roots" of a particular civilization and discover what "forces" brought it into being.\textsuperscript{14} Attempts "to explain" the genesis of civilization on the basis of "such changes as an increase in food-production or technological advances" he dismisses as "quasi-philosophical" and "pseudo-scientific."	extsuperscript{15}

Frankfort also believes that the origins of a particular myth, cult, or religious custom cannot be explained and in support cites G. Van der Leeuw and Henri Bergson.\textsuperscript{16} Commenting

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{Birth} (1956), p. vi.
\item \textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}.
\end{itemize}
upon the difficulties of interpreting ancient Egyptian religious practices, he writes:

The clue to the understanding of many individual gods, cults, and usages is lost. If divinity was power, the form in which power was recognised was a matter of personal experience which had to be accepted by the community and established by tradition: in this manner the details of the cults originated. We lack the data required to reconstruct this process and thereby to explain it.

\[17\] As an example both of the part played by personal experience and also of some important factors that might be involved in the origin of religious practices, Frankfort likes to quote Van der Leeuw's story of a West African negro who stumbled over a stone while on an important expedition and, because of his emotional tension, invested the stone with supernatural significance -- see Kingship (1948), pp. 377-378, notes 1 and 2, and p. 162. See also AER (1961), pp. 4-5 and cf. G. Van der Leeuw, Religion in Essence and Manifestations, trans. J. E. Turner (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1963), I, 37. In the course of explaining the concept of \textit{mana}, Bishop Codrington uses a similar illustration:

A man comes by chance upon a stone which takes his fancy; its shape is singular, it is like something, it is certainly not a common stone, there must be \textit{mana} in it. So he argues with himself, and he puts it to the proof; he lays it at the root of a tree to the fruit of which it has a certain resemblance, or he buries it in the ground when he plants his garden; an abundant crop on the tree or in the garden shews that he is right, the stone is \textit{mana}, has that power in it. (R. H. Codrington, The Melanesians: Studies in Their Anthropology and Folklore (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), p. 119).

\[18\] Kingship (1948), p. 143. Frankfort follows up this statement with a quotation from Henri Bergson's, \textit{Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion}, in which Bergson
Only "the trunks" of religions, like "the trunks" of civilizations, can be profitably discussed.

Another significant element in Frankfort's approach to both civilizations and religions is his reluctance to admit the effect of outside influences. In his treatment of civilizations, he places tremendous emphasis upon the notion of a civilization being born "undeveloped but potentially a whole." Although he sets out the theoretical principle that change takes place "partly as a result of inherent factors -- development -- partly as a result of external forces -- historical incidents," he tends in practice to stress most the unfolding of what was potentially present in the original "form." Thus, he claims that the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia were integrated wholes from the time of their "birth" and that these two cultures had -- amongst

emphasizes the part played by "le caprice de l'homme et le hasard des circonstances."

19 *Birth* (1956), p. 3.


21 Cf. his statement about Mesopotamian civilization: "Yet notwithstanding all the changes, Mesopotamian civilization never lost its identity..." (*Birth*, p. 52) or "Mesopotamian culture...possessed a pronounced character of its own, unusually resistant to historical accident." (*Kingship*, p. 225.)

22 Whereas in *Birth* Frankfort talks about civilizations having a "form", in *Kingship* he speaks of the earliest Egyptian...
the cultures of the Ancient Near East -- a unique capacity for assimilating foreigners without their original "form" being changed. 23

Frankfort approaches religious ideas in much the same way. The keystone of the argument in *Kingship* is his contention that the differing notions of kingship found in Egypt and Mesopotamia each achieved their "characteristic ... form" at the "birth" of these civilizations. 24 The subsequent history of kingship in the two centres constituted mainly the attempt to formulate in rites and language the essential content of these original notions. 25

The effect of placing a limited value on history is that nature is given prominence in Frankfort's thought. In his view, nature provided a constant background to life in the ancient world and obtruded itself upon the consciousness of the people. As a result, they sought to relate themselves to nature through religious institutions like that of kingship.

and Mesopotamian civilizations being "truly autochthonous" and of possessing "deep-rooted cultural continuity" (p. 225), but the meaning is essentially the same.


25 Cf. his comment about "seeing inconsistencies in texts" in *Kingship* (1948), p. 41.
"The ancients", says Frankfort,

experienced human life as part of a widely spreading network of connections which reached beyond the local and the national communities into the hidden depths of nature and the powers that rule nature....Whatever was significant was imbedded in the life of the cosmos, and it was precisely the king's function to maintain the harmony of that integration.26

According to Frankfort, several consequences flowed from this intimate relationship with nature. It influenced, firstly, men's basic attitude to life. The Egyptians' feeling that the universe was essentially stable and orderly was, Frankfort maintains, due to two main factors: one, "the rich Nile valley lies isolated and protected (from attack) between the almost empty deserts on either side" and, two, the Nile on whose inundation Egypt depends for her prosperity, "never fails to rise."27 By contrast, a "feeling of insecurity, of human frailty" pervaded "every manifestation of Mesopotamian culture,"28 and Frankfort attributes this different attitude to the fact that the physiographical conditions were the reverse of those in Egypt -- not only

26Kingship (1948), p. 3. Note also that this book was subtitled "A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature."

27Kingship (1948), p. 4.

28Ibid.
was the area periodically invaded because it lacked "clear boundaries", but both the climate and the Tigris were unpredictable and often extremely violent.  

Frankfort, in fact, often argues on the basis of a reconstruction of ancient man's psychology and of his reactions to nature. For instance, Frankfort claims that the ordinary people would most probably have joined in the bewailing of Osiris, because, when the Nile was at its lowest, "the fearsome scarcity of water upon which they depended would inevitably call up the specter of famine and urge participation by some rite." In a similar way, he asserts elsewhere that "the periodicity of nature" came to be invested "with a particular significance" because of "the vulnerability of the primitives, exposed to unpredictable natural forces."  

Men's intimate relationship with nature also led them to recognise "the great powers in nature" as gods, and

29 Kingship (1948), p. 4.
31 Ibid., p. 192.
32 Ibid., p. 103.
Frankfort sometimes appears to be maintaining that the choice of "the great cosmic gods" in ancient Egypt was not only logical but predictable. For example, after stating that all Egyptians worshipped "sun and earth; sky and air; and water", he declares:

If the gods are powers who reveal themselves, it would surely be absurd to assume that the great powers in nature would not have been recognised as gods by all Egyptians from the beginning. 33

Nature, too, helped the Egyptians both to articulate and find solutions to crucial problems of order such as the problem of justice or of survival after death or even of the meaning of existence itself. 34 Cautiously, Frankfort sets out what he implies:

I do not mean to suggest that the mere observation of the sun, for instance, raised the problem of spontaneous creation or of rebirth after death; but it would be equally incorrect, I think, to assume that such problems were articulate in man's mind before he projected them in the sky. When the sun was an object, not of observation but of contemplation, the problems we mentioned became articulate in the conception of the cosmic god; and the attributes of the god -- as distinct from the natural phenomenon -- implied the recognition of such problems. 35

That is, the answers to questions about order in society and in individual existence were shaped and formed as the cosmic gods of ancient Egypt revealed the intrinsic order in the universe that they dominated.  

In their attempts to solve various problems of human existence, the ancient Egyptians correlated particular problems with particular natural phenomena. Sometimes several phenomena were considered significant for one and the same problem; for instance, the problem of life and death is correlated with the sun's daily rising, but also with the circumpolar stars which never set, and, yet again, with the annual sprouting of the grain.  

The converse may also happen, and "one single natural phenomenon may be significant for several distinct problems."  

Once these correlations were made, nature provided the basic proofs for theology. So, for example, when the sun's setting and rising was linked to the problem of death, the dawn became "a surety of resurrection."  

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36 "Cosmic phenomena such as the course of sun or moon, or the changeless rhythm of the seasons, reveal not only transcendent power but also order." (Ibid., p. 15).  


38 Ibid., cf. pp. 19ff.  

appear naïve and completely inadequate to modern critics, but because "the Egyptians lived in very close contact with nature"\textsuperscript{40} this type of intuitive inference\textsuperscript{41} possessed a persuasive power. "We must allow", says Frankfort, "for their (i.e. the Egyptians') deep emotional involvement in such natural phenomena as the sun's course or the rise and fall of the Nile."\textsuperscript{42}

Frankfort also points out how closely the course of the official year "reflected the natural rhythm of the seasons" in both Egypt and Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{43} Thus, "in Egypt, where the inundation made the difference between famine and prosperity, New Year's celebrations were co-ordinated with the Nile."\textsuperscript{44} Given the basic belief in the need for the integration of nature and society, linking the communal religious calendar to the natural cycle was a logical step. Furthermore, when the connection had been established, nature by its seasonal changes had a decisive effect upon the pattern of the community's

\textsuperscript{40}AER (1961), p. 121.
\textsuperscript{41}The relevancy of the natural phenomena to human problems is a matter of direct experience, not of intellectual argument. It is an intuitive insight, not a theory. It induces faith, not knowledge." (\textit{Ibid.}, p. 109).
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{43}Kingship (1948), p. 4.
\textsuperscript{44}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 314.
religious life, and religious celebrations "took place in response to objective conditions" \(^{45}\) within the natural world.

The above summary of Frankfort's thought should have made clear that his approach to the problem of the relation between geography and religion is very much more sophisticated than that of Breasted. At the same time, he takes over many of Breasted's ideas virtually whole -- in particular, the notion that the contrast between the outlook of the peoples of Egypt and Mesopotamia was "curiously in keeping with the physiographical differences between the two countries." \(^{46}\)

Even the logical form of some of Frankfort's arguments is disconcertingly similar to that of Breasted's arguments. A comparison of the following passages, which concern the association of the dead with the stars and the sun, reveals a close similarity of approach. In Development, Breasted had written:

In the cloudless sky of Egypt it was a not unnatural fancy which led the ancient Nile-dweller to see in the splendor of the nightly heavens the host of those who had preceded


\(^{46}\)\textit{Kingship} (1948), p. 4 cf. above, pp. 69-70.
him; thither they had flown as birds, rising above all foes of the air, and there now swept across the sky as eternal stars.  

In Kingship, Frankfort writes:

In an almost cloudless land like Egypt the obvious proof of the permanence of the processes of nature is found in the sky. The sun in his daily course and the stars.... suggested immortality in the primitive sense of an endless continuation of life as it is known. And thus the desire was felt, and soon formulated, to join either sun or stars and pass with them through the sky....

The parallelism in the logical sequence and structure of these two passages is startling and suggests Frankfort's acceptance -- at least, in part -- of the notion of "stimulation"

48 Kingship (1948), p. 117.
49 Similar parallels appear in Wilson's work and the following passage is again concerned with the association of the dead with the starts:

In the clear Egyptian air the stars stand out with brilliance. Most of the stars swing across the sky with a scythe-like sweep and disappear below the horizon. But one section of the skies employs a smaller orbit, and there the stars may dip toward the horizon but never disappear. Those are the circumpolar stars swinging around the North Star.... These undying stars they took as the symbol of the dead.... Visibly there was no death there; therefore, it must be the place of the eternal blessedness for which Egyptians longed.

(Before Philosophy (1963), pp. 56-57).
which is inherent in Breasted's theories.  

A crucial difference between Frankfort and Breasted lies in their respective views of when nature had an effect. Breasted believes that nature was a dominant influence at first, but that later -- though it continued to exert some influence -- social and political circumstances became the determining forces which shaped Egyptian religion. Frankfort rejects the notion of a succession of influences. He argues that nature was a constant factor in the religions of both Egypt and Mesopotamia and that as such it remained equally important throughout the ancient period.

He thinks, too, that the effect of secular developments upon religion is often exaggerated, and that rationalistic explanations of religious phenomena based upon "postulated developments in other spheres such as politics" are sterile, because they ignore the "reality in religious life" and the

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50 However, an unresolved ambiguity and tension exists in Frankfort's writings between the notion of "stimulation" and the notion of selection -- see below pp. 80-81. For a discussion of the use of the notion of "stimulation" by Breasted, see above pp. 56-59.


"peculiarities which are of the essence" of ancient religious institutions like that of kingship. However, as one reviewer said, although Frankfort's objection to positivistic explanations is "useful as a counterweight", it "need not mean that all such reasoning must be dropped". Unfortunately, in his enthusiasm to bring out the constants in Egyptian and Mesopotamian religion, Frankfort undervalues the part played by non-theological factors and external circumstances. For this imbalance, he has been rightly brought to task by other

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56 Frankfort maintains that the passage of time brought about only "insignificant modifications" of religious concepts cf. Kingship (1948), especially pp. vii and 224.

57 Cf. the comment by Wilson on Frankfort's methodology in AER:

In his preface, Frankfort insisted that his search for unity in Egyptian religion must not be distracted by 'local and temporal differences'. This was honest, but it is not so easy for others to ignore the erosive force of two thousand years of historical process.

scholars and their able criticisms need not be repeated here, especially since this investigation is concerned primarily with his view of nature. In a strange way, Frankfort's cavalier attitude towards history mirrors the attitude of the ancients, because like the latter he tends to ignore the passage of time. However, the academic study of religion demands that a confusion is not made between how the ancients thought about history and the actual effect that historical events had upon their life. At the same time, Frankfort is correct both in his main contention that for the ancients nature, rather the passage of historical time, provided the backcloth to existence and in the corollary that the part

58 For an excellent discussion of the weaknesses of Frankfort's "phenomenological" approach see M. I. Finley in Political Science Quarterly, LXIII (1948), 275-81 cf. also Rushton Coulibourn in Ethics, LVIII (1948), 307-309 and Eric Voegelin, Order and History, Vol. 1, Chapter 3 -- especially pp. 56-57.

59 The revolt of premodern or "traditional" societies against "history" has been amply documented by Mircea Eliade, who after examining the religious systems of archaic societies concludes that "in the last analysis, what we discover in all these rites and all these attitudes is the will to devalue time" -- Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1959), p. 85.

60 Cf., for example, the following statement by Braidwood on the relationship of men to nature:
It seems to me that the long view of prehistory... suggests an obviously more direct man-nature relationship at the beginning. As time went on
played by nature in religion ought to be examined more closely.

In many cases, the same charge that was brought against Breasted must also be brought against Frankfort -- namely, that he fails to provide evidence for many of his statements. A connection may well have existed between the stability of natural conditions in Egypt and the calm secure outlook of the ancient Egyptians, but the connection has to be proved by establishing correlations between natural conditions and the general attitude of people in many other cultures. Comparison with just one other culture is suggestive but far from conclusive, and the risk of oversimplification is great. Frankfort rightly feels that "studying a religion in isolation reduces one's chances of understanding it", but he fails to appreciate that many of the dangers of misinterpretation remain if only two religions -- both of them ancient and both coming from the same general area -- are compared and at the same time the assumptions underlying the study of these religions

and technology gave man more control of nature, the relationship began to acquire more 'human' proportions....Perhaps a great part of human history could be said to be concerned with the developing subtleness of balance between man and nature as the dimensions of culture increase. (Robert J. Braidwood, "Prelude to Civilization", in City Invincible, p. 311).

have not been examined in the light of conclusions reached in other disciplines.

Speculations about the psychological attitudes of "the ancients" without the support of adequate correlative material are also perilous and unacceptable. Furthermore, as Frankfort himself pointed out in a lecture delivered a few months before he died, the notion of typical or universal reactions has to be carefully handled, for "in their concrete reality even fundamental experiences are very rarely universally human." 62

Again, the suggestion must be rejected that, if the ancient Egyptians regarded the gods as "powers who reveal themselves", the worship of the sun, earth, sky, air, and water by them was predictable. 63 Even if a people holds a basic assumption like that, the result does not necessarily follow that all "the great powers in nature" are worshipped and in fact, as Wilson observes, the moon -- which in other societies has been revered as one of "the great powers" 64 --

62 "The Archetype in Analytical Psychology and the History of Religion," Journal of the Warburg and Courtault Institutes, XXI (1958), 169. This lecture was delivered in German to the Joachim-Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften in Hamburg on January 27, 1954 and was published posthumously.


64 For example, in Mesopotamia under the names of Nanna and Sin.
received very little attention in ancient Egypt. Frankfort's statement smacks of mechanism and -- like his assertions about the relation of the outlook of the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians to the physiographical conditions of their countries or on the sun and the stars providing "obvious proof" of an essential permanence in the universe -- contrasts with other passages in which he emphasizes the part played by cultural selection. Elsewhere he shows that he understood how each culture selects elements from an "arc" of possibilities and how the choice depends upon many factors, including chance. Nevertheless, the mechanistic tendency in many of his statements is indisputable, and Frankfort lays himself open to the same criticisms as those levelled above against Breasted for his speculations about sun worship in Egypt.

Despite these defects, Frankfort's interpretative work is extremely valuable, for he approaches old problems

65 See Before Philosophy (1963), p. 56 and below, p. 142.
67 Cf. ibid., p. 117 and above, p. 75.
69 AER (1961), pp. 4-5 cf. note 17 above.
70 Cf. above, pp. 47-48.
in fresh and even audacious ways. At the same time, he usually pays considerable attention to method, and his insightful definition of a vexing problem often enables him to go straight to its heart. The distinction that he makes, for example, between "the roots" and "the trunks" of both cultures and ideas is very useful. He is right to stress that, in the absence of historical data, the origin of a particular cult cannot be demonstrated, for the subsequent development of a cult very often gives little or no indication of how it arose in the first place. Here Frankfort's

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\[71\] Cf. the comment by Jean Sainte Fare Garnot in a review of AER:

Il s'en prend aux idées reçues avec une franchise et, souvent, une audace, qui peuvent déconcerter mais, quand bien même on refuserait de suivre l'auteur sur toutes les pistes où il nous entraîne, intrépidement--ou du moins où l'on hésiterait à le suivre jusqu'au bout, nous voici contraints à méditer, à reviser certaines des valeurs que nous étions habitués à considérer comme intangibles, et c'est beaucoup.

(Bibliotheca Orientalis, VI (1949), 97).

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\[72\] These difficulties are accentuated when the religious life of primitive or prehistoric peoples is studied. In his paper "Structures and Changes in the History of Religion", Mircea Eliade similarly stresses the impossibility of uncovering the "roots" of religious traditions, for "we do not have at our disposal any documents" and also the religious heritage of a community is continually modified or enriched by new influences and new experiences -- City Invincible, p. 352. E. E. Evans - Pritchard in Theories of Primitive Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966) also provides
emphasis on the part played by individual religious experience is also worthy of note. He sees very clearly the relation between individual inspiration and community acceptance.

One of Frankfort's ideas that deserves further consideration is his theory that, as the characteristics of nature were revealed by the cosmic gods, the ancient Egyptians were led both to articulate and find solutions to problems of human existence. This hypothesis is exceedingly provocative, because it points to the presence of a dynamic reciprocal relationship between nature and the consciousness of the ancient Egyptians. In addition, the effect of correlating particular problems with particular phenomena ought to be investigated more closely, for not only might the choice of a certain geographical symbol influence the shape of an answer, but it might also in some way have a continued effect long after a problem has been "articulated" and a solution "found". These two possibilities together with the relationship between nature and consciousness will be examined in Chapter VI.

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a stimulating account of the many fruitless attempts made in the last hundred and fifty years to "explain" the genesis of religions and/or religious cults.

73Cf. above, pp. 71-72.

74Cf. above, pp.72-73.
Perhaps Frankfort's greatest contribution is that he moves the inquiry into ancient religions away from the sterile debate about origins and directs attention to the consequences of making a connection between religious questions and aspects of the natural environment. Frankfort is also placing the emphasis on consequences when he suggests that, once men came to believe that an intimate relationship existed between nature and society, they could be expected to organize the religious life of their community in harmony with the natural cycle of seasons. Here again he is concerned primarily with the observable results of this belief rather than with conjectural causes of its adoption.

Although, as has been pointed out earlier, Frankfort at times fails to provide evidence for his statements about the relation of geography to religion, the above hypotheses certainly warrant further examination, because he makes strenuous efforts to avoid mere theorizing. Later, the possibilities of progress, along the lines indicated in this chapter, will be investigated.
CHAPTER V

THE IDEAS OF JOHN A. WILSON

John A. Wilson studied under Breasted and also became one of his intimate friends. He has therefore -- as he himself admits -- "some difficulty in being objective" about Breasted and even "after forty years" has "some sense of apology" if he cannot accept one of Breasted's ideas. Not surprisingly his approach to geography and its effect on culture and religion is very similar to that of Breasted. In essence, it consists of a restatement and modification of Breasted's theory of successive influences.

Like Frankfort, Wilson maintains that the work of the archaeologist and the student of the Ancient Near East does not end with the salvaging or cataloguing of source materials.

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but includes the attempt "to see the story in the large." To date, Wilson's major interpretative studies have been the public lectures on Egyptian thought published in The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man and his book The Burden of Egypt. Another study which is valuable for the purposes of this present investigation, but which is briefer, is the paper entitled "Civilization without Cities" that Wilson gave to the symposium on Urbanization and Cultural Development in the Ancient Near East, held at Chicago in December 1958.

2 John A. Wilson, "Archaeology as a Tool in Humanistic and Social Studies", Journal of Near Eastern Studies, I (1942), p. 9, cf. the article which Wilson wrote in collaboration with Thorkild Jacobsen on the work of the Oriental Institute and in which the authors maintain "that the Institute, during its thirty years' activities, has been conscious of responsibilities under both of the two major aspects of its program -- salvaging of evidence and synthesis", Journal of Near Eastern Studies, VIII (1949), 239.


5 Wilson's paper, together with a detailed account of the discussion that it provoked, was later printed in the report of the symposium's proceedings edited by Carl H. Kraeling and Robert M. Adams and published under the title City Invincible -- cf. Chapter II, note 36.
Since these interpretative studies are spread out over a period of thirteen years, they ought to provide good evidence for Wilson's views. However, the possibility that he may modify his ideas in the future is not at all precluded, for he is extremely open-minded and quick to see the weaknesses in his own arguments. 6

By his own confession, Wilson believes in "a kind of geographic determinism", 7 but sometimes he catches himself being too "deterministic" and hastens to qualify his position. In The Culture of Ancient Egypt, for example, after devoting the whole of the first chapter to a discussion of "the geography of Egypt...in terms of the influence of the environment upon the inhabitants", 8 he writes in the concluding paragraph as follows:

We should not like to leave the impression that physical environment was here considered the sole determinant of cultural expression, or even the major determinant. Geographic factors are easy to see and describe and certainly are influential

6 Cf. A. Leo Oppenheim's comment about Wilson at the Chicago Symposium: "Whenever I hear him talk on Egypt I am conscious that his views change, that he continually seeks a new synthesis, that he grapples openly with his problem" (City Invincible, pp. 139-140).

7 Ibid., p. 149.

8 Culture (1965), p. 17.
forces playing upon peoples. There are also psychological and spiritual forces which are strong shaping factors.\(^9\)

Thus, geography provided a constant backdrop to Egyptian history, but it was only one amongst the many "visible determinants of historical change."\(^{10}\)

The importance of the "the geographic factors of the land" also varied from period to period, because they interacted with other factors. In early historical times,\(^{11}\)


Geography is not the sole determinant in matters of cultural differentiation, but geographic features are subject to description which is practically incontrovertible, so that a consideration of the geographic uniqueness of Egypt will suggest easily some of the factors of differentiation.

\(^{10}\) *Culture* (1965), p. 36. The emphasis here -- as in the main quotation in the text above -- is to some extent on visibility, for Wilson feels that "the totality of our visible observations would still leave us short of a historical or sociological answer "to the phenomenon of cultural change, because "the mind and the spirit of man" is always "an unknown value" (ibid). He is reported to have made a similar comment during the discussion which followed the delivery of his paper at the Chicago Symposium. Speaking of Professor Parker and himself, he said "Certainly neither of us believes in this (deterministic) approach as having any full and ultimate validity. We believe that there must be unseen things which are very difficult to state and can only be guessed at." (City Invincible, p. 149).

\(^{11}\) Following Wilson, the change "from prehistory to history" is linked to the establishment of the First Dynasty (cf. *Culture* (1965), p. 43). To some extent, this division is an arbitrary one because "for perhaps four hundred years
the deserts to the west and east, the Mediterranean in the north, and difficult territory to the south of the First Cataract combined to make Egypt both isolated and secure. These physical barriers cut off the Egyptians almost completely from other peoples and "strained out" any threats of attack. However, the security of Egypt was "relative to the time and place." In that early period, the Egyptians were firstly never threatened by any great movement of peoples -- as they were later by the Hyksos and the Sea Peoples -- and secondly they were undoubtedly secure compared with "their contemporary neighbors", because "any potential threat could be seen at a considerable distance." Hence, "the complacent sense of security" which then permeated Egyptian thought stemmed from a fortunate conjunction of geographical and historical conditions.

after the founding of the First Dynasty, the culture of final predynastic times continued" (ibid., p. 44). However, by the Third and Fourth Dynasties the historical "Egyptian" culture had reached maturity (cf. ibid., pp. 44 and 78).

12 Wilson describes the Nile Valley as "a tube, loosely sealed against important outside contact" -- Culture (1965), p. 11.

13 Ibid., p. 12.

14 Ibid.


16 Ibid., p. 12.
Along with the sense of security went "a sense...of special election," a "feeling...of unimpaired destiny."\textsuperscript{17} This feeling was fostered in a similar way by a happy combination of geographical and historical factors. Thanks to her rich black soil and the Nile, Egypt was extremely prosperous and the assured character of her inhabitants' existence, as well as her wealth, tended to be underlined "by the contrast of the harsh and meager life" in the adjacent deserts.\textsuperscript{18} Egypt's immediate neighbours -- the Libyans, the Nubians, and the Asiatic Bedouins -- "were clearly inferior in cultural development",\textsuperscript{19} and she appeared to have no equal, for other sophisticated cultures, like those in Babylonia and the Hittite region, "were too distant for proper comparison."\textsuperscript{20} All these circumstances encouraged the ancient Egyptian to believe "that his land was the one land that really mattered."\textsuperscript{21}

The pervading sense of security and of special election expressed itself in a multitude of ways and, as he deals

\textsuperscript{17} *Culture* (1965), p. 145.
\textsuperscript{19} *Before Philosophy* (1963), p. 42.
\textsuperscript{20} *Ibid.*
\textsuperscript{21} *Ibid.*
with specific attitudes or beliefs, Wilson frequently argues that "the geographic security" of Egypt was an important conditioning factor. In general, the feeling of security bred in the ancient Egyptian an essential optimism about his career in this world and the next, and it permitted a marked element of individual freedom for the ordinary Egyptian.\textsuperscript{22}

In particular, "the geographic security of the land" encouraged the acceptance of the dogma of divine kingship.\textsuperscript{23} "The geography of Egypt", maintains Wilson, "supplied a propensity toward acceptance of divine kingship,"\textsuperscript{24} and he considers that the notions of divine kingship and of ma'at were both "natural to Egypt."\textsuperscript{25} "Geographic security" also possibly played an important part in the growth of the feeling "that life could not end but must go on eternally."\textsuperscript{26} However, as pointed out earlier, the security of Egypt was always relative

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Culture} (1965), p. 13 cf. p. 145. By contrast, "unquestioning discipline had...characterized Mesopotamia -- a less secure land geographically -- from the beginning" (\textit{ibid.}, p. 304).
\item \textsuperscript{23} Cf. \textit{Culture} (1965), pp. 45-47 and p. 145.
\item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 46.
\item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 49. Wilson believes that the early dynasties were responsible merely for "articulating" the two concepts which "had already been present in Egyptian consciousness before the dynasties".
\item \textsuperscript{26} \textit{City Invincible}, p.126.
\end{itemize}
to the historical situation, and with the "invasion" and rule of the Hyksos "the previous self-assured emphasis on immortal life was replaced by a sense of insecurity and peril." 27

In Wilson's opinion, the Egyptians' belief in an afterlife -- a belief which, though it took different forms, remained strong throughout the ancient period -- was stimulated by the "periodicity" of the Nile and the sun. "The Nile," says Wilson, "never refused its great task of revivification", and, even though it "might fall short of its full bounty for years of famine," eventually the inundation always returned "with full prodigality." Not only did the "periodicity" of the Nile promote the Egyptian's general feeling of confidence, but its regular annual "rebirth" also "gave him a faith that he too, would be victorious over death and go on into eternal life." 29 Similar convictions were nourished by "the periodicity of the sun." The sun's "conquest of death every night and its brilliant rebirth every morning" both supported and matched


29Ibid.
the annual cycle of the Nile, \(^{30}\) and "out of these miracles (of rebirth) the Egyptians drew... their assurance that renewed life may always be victorious over death."\(^{31}\)

The effect that both the sun and the Nile had upon the consciousness of the ancient Egyptian is frequently emphasized by Wilson. Like Breasted, Wilson has been impressed by the power and continual presence of the sun in Egypt, and in his writings the reader can detect an echo of Breasted's idea that the sun came to occupy a high place in Egyptian thought largely because of its physical prominence. For instance, Wilson contends that the ancient Egyptian saw the sun as "the source of his life" and worshipped the personification of the sun's power as "the supreme god and the creator-god", because "in a country essentially rainless the daily circuit of the sun is of blazing importance."\(^{32}\) He suggests, too, that during early prehistoric times sun-worship was "more important in the north" than in the south, because in "the broad stretches" of the Delta the sun would be a more important phenomenon than "in the trough of Upper Egypt".\(^{33}\)


\(^{31}\) *Before Philosophy* (1963), p. 44.

\(^{32}\) *Ibid.*, p. 43 cf. *Culture* (1965), p. 14: "The sun was the great governing factor of his (i.e. the ancient Egyptian's) day-by-day life."

In the south, the Nile was "the dominating feature of the land" and Wilson puts forward the ingenious hypothesis that the reason why the ancient Egyptian "'australized' himself toward the source of the Nile" but emphasized the east in his theology was that the very early inhabitants of Lower and Upper Egypt took their directions from different geographical features. The former, he suggests, looked east toward the rising of the sun and the latter faced south toward the source of the Nile. The subsequent commixture of these "two separate searchings for direction" led, he maintains, to the situation in historic times when the points of the compass were named according to their relation to a person who stood facing the Nile's source (e.g. east was "left" and west was "right"), whereas theological images were related to the sun's course (e.g. the east was "the region of birth and rebirth" and the west was "the region of death and life after death ").

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34 Before Philosophy (1963), p. 52.


36 Ibid., p. 52. Wilson conjectures that this commixture may have taken place "in some prehistoric conquest of the south by the north."

37 Ibid., p. 51.

38 Ibid., p. 52 cf. p. 57.
Although Wilson's opinion about the respective importance of the Nile and the sun as factors in shaping Egyptian thought is difficult to deduce, the way in which he continually puts the Nile alongside the sun in descriptions suggests that he believes the Nile to be as influential as the sun,\textsuperscript{39} and here again the shadow of Breasted is evident, for he too considered these two phenomena to be the most important influences and placed equal emphasis upon each. Wilson declares that "the triumphant annual rebirth" of the Nile was one of "the two central features of the Egyptian scene" -- the other being "the triumphant daily rebirth of the sun."\textsuperscript{40} As has been already mentioned, he also argues that the annual action of Nile stimulated both the Egyptians' sense of confidence and their belief in an afterlife. He holds further that their ideas about the character of the life that awaited them beyond death were coloured by the peculiar circumstances of life in the Nile valley. The heavenly realm was believed, for example, to have a "Nile" that was navigated in exactly the same way as its earthly

\textsuperscript{39} Wilson's statement (on p. 44 in \textit{Before Philosophy}) that the Nile "could not compete with the sun for position" appears to refer to the relative status of the Nile and the sun in the formulated theology and not to their alleged influence upon Egyptian thought in general.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Before Philosophy} (1963), p. 44.
counterpart, and the dead were provided with two boats -- one with the sail down for travelling north with the current and one with "the sail up for sailing south with that north wind which must be normal in any proper existence, here or hereafter." Wilson considers that other theological images too were influenced in the same manner by the Nile's pattern of flooding, and he attributes the notion of the "primeval hillock" to the fact that, as the waters of the annual inundation recede, the first pieces of land to appear are "isolated peaks of mud, refreshed with new fertile silt." In such ways, the Nile, according to Wilson, helped to shape the thinking of the people who lived along its banks and who depended upon the river for their very existence. Later

41Before Philosophy (1963), p. 46. Natural phenomena in other countries were likewise construed in terms of the special geographical conditions in Egypt, and the rain on which foreign peoples depended was thought by the Egyptians to come from "the Nile in the sky." (Ibid).


43Wilson also suggests in Before Philosophy (pp. 49-50) that the Egyptian's love of balance and symmetry, which was reflected in his "cosmology and his theology" as well as in art and literature, might be a consequence of the "bilateral symmetry" of the Nile valley (i.e. "east bank balancing west bank, and eastern mountain range balancing western mountain range). Later, however, in Culture (p. 17) Wilson modifies this idea, for he had come to doubt whether "the Egyptian love of counterposition or of dualism" could be completely explained by it. "Perhaps," he says, "the duality
Wilson's views about the "challenge" provided by the agricultural potentiality of the Nile valley will be reviewed as well.  

As Oppenheim rightly pointed out at the Chicago symposium, Wilson has always been eager to reopen a question and to approach it from a different angle. Such openmindedness is refreshing but sometimes the variety of Wilson's answers is confusing and the reader is unsure whether a later solution was intended to supersede earlier ones or whether they were meant to be combined. This difficulty arises in an acute form when Wilson's explanations for the ancient Egyptian tolerance of divergent concepts are examined.

On some occasions, Wilson attributes the Egyptians' great tolerance to the warmth of the sun. For example, he declares:

Unlike their Asiatic neighbors, Babylonians and Hebrews, the Egyptians made little attempt to systematize a coherent scheme, with separate categories for distinct phenomena. Under a warmer sun Egyptians blandly blended phenomena which might have been kept resolutely apart. They were lazily tolerant and catholic-minded.  

of 'the Two Lands' was a stronger factor...Perhaps there were other elements just as strong."


45 Cf. note 6 above.

46 *Culture* (1965), p. 46 -- the emphasis is mine -- cf. ibid., p. 75 where Wilson speaks of "the sun-given tolerance of the ancient Egyptian...."
On other occasions, Wilson traces the easygoing attitude of the ancient Egyptians to their freedom from fear, which, he argues, was fostered by the relative geographical security of Egypt and its relative wealth. To these factors, he adds the density of the population and claims that living "cheek by jowl" contributed to the development of "an early sophistication, which expressed itself intellectually in tendencies toward catholicity and syncretism." On still another occasion, Wilson asserts that "the two factors of insulation from strong outside influence and of wide internal variety help to explain the tolerant flexibility and genial sophistication" of the ancient Egyptians. Together Lower, Middle, and Upper Egypt formed "a single oasis"—that is,


48 See above, pp. 89ff.

49 Before Philosophy (1963), p. 41 cf. Culture (1965), p. 14. The people who inhabited the nearby deserts were different, implies Wilson, because they were "subject to the great conservative control of the Arabian Desert." As a result, they were "fierce and puritanical" and also rigid in outlook (Before Philosophy, pp. 40-41). In a similar manner, Wilson characterizes Yahweh as "a god of desert simplicity" (Culture, p. 256).

50 City Invincible, p. 134.

51 Ibid.
they constituted a single geographical unit because of their common dependence on the Nile and isolation from other cultures. Yet at the same time the various regions of Egypt were strikingly different and, in Wilson's view, this combination of "unity and disparity" within one community encouraged tolerance. This last explanation is, in fact, the latest in date since it appears in Wilson's paper for the Chicago Symposium. However, which of the above explanations or compound of explanations -- for they are not necessarily exclusive -- Wilson would finally prefer is difficult to decide.

As the above description will have shown, Wilson cites the wealth of Egypt and its large population as factors which helped to shape the outlook of the ancient Egyptians. These factors, in turn, he traces back to the agricultural potentiality of the Nile valley, and so sets up a loose chain of cause and effect, making the outlook of the ancient Egyptians -- at least in part -- a consequence of the environmental


\[54\textit{City Invincible}, \textit{p. 134.}\]
conditions. "In Toynbee's terms of an environmental challenge and a human response," says Wilson, "there were problems to be met progressively." 55 First, the Egyptians were faced with the "challenge" of developing "the full potentiality of climate, water, and soil." 56 Then, when after tremendous labour they "won great richness of crops", they had to meet the "new challenges" of "the resultant large population... and the surplus of wealth", 57 and "the social and governmental responses" to these conditions became, Wilson believes, essential elements in the general psychology of the ancient Egyptians.

However, although Wilson accepts that Toynbee's notion of "Challenge and Response" contains "an important principle", he points out that it left "a number of unanswered questions", for not only do similar environments produce different responses but a people will also suddenly "respond" to an environment whose "challenge" they have previously ignored. 59 Wilson doubts indeed if either the emergence of a

55Culture (1965), p. 11.
57Culture (1965), p. 11.
58Ibid., p. 32.
59Ibid., cf. p. 36.
particular civilization or differences between civilizations can be explained solely in terms of series of phenomenal determinants, for he feels that "certain spiritual imponderables at which we can only guess"\(^60\) play a crucial part and that "every equation (using visible determinants) would contain an unknown value, the \(x\) of the mind and spirit of man."\(^61\)

Such then in outline are Wilson's most important ideas about the role that geography played in shaping Egyptian thought. His analysis is at times compelling and suggestive, but as with Breasted and Frankfort the crucial question is whether or not he has proved his case, for the onus is on him to provide the evidence to support his hypotheses.

The major weakness in Wilson's treatment undoubtedly lies in the lack of corroborative evidence from outside Egypt. The credibility of his theory that the "relative geographic

\(^{60}\) \textit{Culture} (1965), pp. 35-36.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 36 cf. p. 40. See also comment in note 10 above. Fortunately, such statements counteract the impression -- sometimes given elsewhere in Wilson's writings -- that he is a complete "determinist". Occasionally, he seems to go to extremes in his endeavour to find environmental explanations, and on reexamination some of his theories appeared untenable even to himself -- for example, cf. note 43 above.
security" of Egypt in the early historical period was to a very large degree responsible for the contemporary feeling of confidence would have been greatly enhanced if he had produced examples of corresponding correlations in other cultures. As it stands, the theory is certainly interesting, but it cannot be accepted on the basis of the evidence provided by Wilson. Two matters need to be examined: one, how far the security of other societies depends upon their geographical situation; two, the extent to which the general disposition of other peoples can be related directly to geographical factors.

62 Cf. above, pp. 89ff.

63 Interestingly, in his introduction to Culture, Wilson himself stresses the necessity to test conclusions based upon Egyptian material "against evidence known from other peoples and cultures" -- Culture (1965), p. 4. His writings, however, provide little evidence that he carried out this good intention.

64 Jacobsen speaks about the different "moods" of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations -- Before Philosophy (1963), p. 137 -- but the term "mood" was not employed here because it carries overtones of capriciousness, fitfullness, and instability whereas Wilson is concerned to emphasise that the Egyptian feeling of confidence was deep-rooted and remained constant over a long period of time. The phrase "dominant psychological attitude" which is used by Robert M. Adams when referring to the notion has much to recommend it except that the word "attitude" needs some explanation -- cf. "Early Civilizations, Subsistence, and Environment", in City Invincible, p. 271.
In order to investigate these questions, use was made of Guy E. Swanson's cross-cultural researches in *The Birth of the Gods*. One of the codes which he develops in this book is concerned with "the degree of threat from armed attack by alien societies" and, on the basis of an ascending scale of zero, 1, 2, each of the societies in his random sample is coded. Out of a total of fifty societies, eight are given the code of zero on the grounds that they face little or no likelihood of armed attack or could easily ward off attacks which may occur. These eight peoples are the (Mountain) Arapesh, the (San Blas) Cuna, the Egyptians (of the Middle Kingdom), the Iban, the Ifaluk, the Lozi (of North-Western


66 The relevant column in the print-out (on pp. 214-17 in *The Birth of the Gods*) is Column 3, and Swanson's instructions for coding the degree of threat (pp. 197-98) are reprinted in full below in Appendix 1. At the time when he wrote up his researches, Swanson felt that the coding of this variable was unreliable (cf. pp. 39 and 226). However, since then Mark Abrahamson of Syracuse University has employed the code together with other parts of Swanson's material and obtained reasonable results -- see Mark Abrahamson, "Correlates of Political Complexity", *American Sociological Review*, 34 (1969), 690-701. Hence, the coding would appear to be more dependable than Swanson originally thought. During the course of the present study, this conclusion was confirmed for the eight societies under scrutiny, because in each case the code of zero seemed appropriate.
Rhodesia), and the Todas.  

The fact that the ancient Egyptians are included in Swanson's original sample and also appear amongst the eight societies coded zero provided an assurance of relevance at the beginning of the investigation, but since the purpose was to discover the effect of geographical factors in other societies, the ancient Egyptians were ignored temporarily and attention was concentrated upon the other seven societies. When the literature on these societies was scrutinized in order to assess which factors underlay their security, some interesting facts emerged.

The first fact which emerged was that only in the situations of two peoples, namely the Mountain Arapesh and the Todas, does geography appear to have played a significant role. The country inhabited by the former is, according to Margaret Mead, composed of "mountains so infertile that no neighbour envies them their possession, so inhospitable that

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67 The additional descriptions given in parentheses are included in order to provide more precise identification of the societies concerned than Swanson supplies. However, these identifications are often implicit either in his text or in his bibliography.

68 Swanson's bibliography was employed as a base, and in addition the following books were used:

no army could invade them and find enough food to survive".  

The Todas are similarly fortunate because they live on a high plateau surrounded by steep and precipitous hills. However, in both cases other factors are equally important and perhaps more important than the geographical ones. The mutual acceptance and co-existence of the Mountain Arapesh with the Beach Arapesh and the Plains Arapesh in the first instance and of the Todas with the Kotas and the Badagas in the second instance are fundamental conditions of their security. In the case of the Mountain Arapesh, too, the protection of the Pax Britannica is a factor because in former days they often had to fight the people on the beach when they "went down to obtain sea-water salt". That fear of witchcraft enters into the situations of


Tom Harrisson (ed.), The Peoples of Sarawak (Distributed by the Curator, Sarawak Museum, 1959).

69 Mead, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies, p. 13.


71 Mead, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies, passim.

72 Rivers, The Todas, p. 6 and Chapter XXVII.

73 Mead, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies, p. 9.
both the Mountain Arapesh and the Todas is also interesting.

The second fact which emerged from an examination of the seven societies was that for at least five of them one of the major factors contributing to their security is the peace imposed by some higher level of government. As mentioned before, the Arapesh benefited from the Pax Britannica. The San Blas Cuna, previously conquered by the Spanish, are now living within the independent state of Panama.74 Although amongst the Iban "clan feuds and head-hunting raids continued until fairly recently",75 they have been generally protected from outside threats since 1841 when James Brooke formally became governor of Sarawak and its dependencies.76 Between 1890 and 1900, the Lozi accepted the protection of the British.77 The island of Ifaluk lies in the Central Carolines which are


77 Max Gluckman, "The Lozi of Barotseland in North-Western Rhodesia", in Elizabeth Colson and Max Gluckman (eds.), Seven Tribes of British Central Africa (Manchester: University Press, 1961), pp. 5 and 56.
a protectorate of the United States.\footnote{78} The two remaining societies, the Arunta and the Todas, also live under a protective rule but this circumstance has not materially affected the degree of threat for they were not threatened before -- though, of course, a higher level of government interested in encouraging peace between the peoples within its jurisdiction can reinforce an existing peace.

The third fact which emerged was that a major factor in the security of the seven societies is simply the lack of enemies who either want or are able to make armed attacks which are frequent and/or pose a serious threat.\footnote{79} To a large extent, this category overlaps with the second category because the five societies whose enemies are held in check by a higher level of government might also have been classified as societies whose enemies are unable to make frequent or serious attacks. However, other reasons may prevent enemies


\footnotetext{79}{Careful note should be taken that in assessing the degree of threat Swanson gives considerable weight to "the frequency of armed conflict, and the uncertainty of its outcome" (\textit{The Birth of the Gods}, p. 226).}
launching a serious attack and a major one is obviously the superior military capacity of the threatened society. Thus societies who are very much more powerful than their neighbours would have been included in this group had any occurred amongst the seven societies examined.

The other subsidiary group of societies, namely those whose neighbours have no desire to make serious attacks is represented in the sample by the Arunta and the Todas. Although the Arunta certainly have quarrels with their neighbours, they are fundamentally secure on their ancestral lands and need never fear subjugation because of a traditional understanding between the aboriginals that the boundaries of each tribe are fixed and also the complete absence of lust for territorial conquest amongst them. The relations of the Todas with their neighbours are entirely peaceful and weapons "which were, no doubt, formerly in use" are employed now

80 Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, The Northern Tribes of Central Australia, p. 13. Interestingly, a line of mountains called the Macdonnell Ranges, which an alien observer might expect to form a physical barrier, actually lie in the centre of the area occupied by the Arunta "instead of intervening between two tribes" (ibid.).

81 Rivers, The Todas, Chapter XXVII.
only in ceremonies.  

In short, a major factor in the security of all seven societies turned out to be simply the lack of enemies who either want or are able to make frequent or serious attacks. Although the fact that Swanson employs only a limited sample and that only seven societies were subjected to detailed examination in this investigation should not be overlooked, this remarkable consensus carries considerable weight.

Overall, the examination of the seven societies showed that non-geographical factors are often decisive and more important than geographical factors. Only in two out the seven societies does geography appear to play a significant part and then it does not necessarily provide the major factors.

The results of the inquiry in fact suggest that one of the factors which contributed most to the security of the ancient Egyptians was the lack of nearby enemies who could match their military might. The inferiority of Egypt's immediate neighbours was emphasized by Wilson in connection with "cultural development".  

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82 Rivers, The Todas, p. 586.

seem to have been equally significant in relation to Egyptian security, but he does not take them into account. He places the emphasis on the strength of the barriers which in his view "strained out" the threats from outside. However, these barriers did not prevent the Hyksos from conquering Egypt nor did they deter the Egyptians when they themselves decided to expand. Strong and daring enemies can usually circumvent physical barriers and only threats of weak enemies can be handled "as a police problem".

The view that the military inferiority of Egypt's neighbours was a crucial factor is supported by an analysis of the peoples around her. In the south were the Nubians but, although they might sometimes be troublesome, the Egyptians do not appear to have feared them and indeed regarded them as cowards. The western desert was sparsely populated and in the early historical period the people who lived there may

\[84^{\text{Culture}} (1965), \text{p. 12.}\]

\[85^{\text{The phrase is Wilson's -- cf. ibid.}}\]

\[86^{\text{Although allowances have to be made for the usual degree of exaggeration, the following Middle Kingdom description of the Nubians would suggest that the Egyptians did not feel at all threatened by them. The description appears on a stela erected by Set-Usert III to record "his majesty's making the southern frontier at Semneh" (i.e. at the Second instead of...}}\]
have annoyed the Egyptians by making sporadic raids but they were undoubtedly too few in number to constitute a serious threat. In the north was the Mediterranean but only in comparatively late times did sea-going adventurers become a potential menace.

The Nubian hears (only) to fall at a word: the answering of him causes him to retire. If one is aggressive against him, he shows his back; if one retreats he falls into aggression. They are not people of worth; they are caitiffs broken of heart.


In "the Story of Si-nuhe" which dates from the Twelfth Dynasty, reference is made to an Egyptian army being sent "to the land of the Temeh-Libyans" (*ANET*, p. 18). The reasons for this expedition are not given but similar expeditions were undertaken in later times to punish the Libyans for their raids, one of the most serious of which was made by a coalition of peoples from that area during the reign of Mer-ne-Ptah (cf. the so-called "Israel Stela").

According to Gardiner, the total population of the five oases in the western desert is now only a "little above 40,000" -- *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, p. 35.

In this case, because the sea is the main physical factor, the interrelation between geographical and non-geographical factors can perhaps be seen more clearly than on Egypt's other frontiers, for the security of Egypt's coastline during the early period depended to a large extent upon other peoples' inability to launch large scale attacks by sea (cf. the statement of Lucien Febvre concerning isolation and navigation -- quoted below on p. 117).
Where the Egyptians did have difficulty was in the north-east, because for one reason or another the peoples who lived near this frontier were constantly threatening Egyptian security. The problems were, first, to keep a watch on the nomadic Bedouin tribes and, second, to maintain some degree of control over the princelings of Palestine and the adjacent areas for although individually these petty rulers were not dangerous they could become a menace when they formed alliances -- one of the regular aims of the numerous "Asiatic" campaigns undertaken by the Egyptians was to bring to heel any "rebels" among these rulers. Advantage was quickly taken of any lapse in the usual Egyptian vigilance, and the prophecy of Nefer-rohu describes what happened when the north-eastern frontier was not properly defended:

Foes have arisen in the east, and Asiatics have come down into Egypt.... No protector will listen.... Men will enter into the fortresses. Sleep will be banished from my eyes, as I spend the night wakeful. THE WILD BEASTS OF THE DESERT will drink at the rivers of Egypt and be at their ease on their banks for lack of someone to scare them away.

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90 The main line of defence was a series of fortresses and during the Middle Kingdom the fortifications were strengthened by the building of "The Wall of the Ruler, made to repel the Setyu (Asiatics) and to crush the Sand-farers" -- Gardiner, Egypt of the Pharaohs, p. 36 cf. Culture (1965), p. 140.

91 Cf. the account of "Asiatic Campaigns Under Pepi I" left by a career official of the time -- ANET2, pp. 227-28.

92 ANET2, p. 445.
Fortunately, the remainder of the eastern flank was not threatened, for to the south "there was no people powerful enough to force an entry." 93

Thus, the peoples on most of Egypt's frontiers appear to have been militarily weak and, although the Nubians or the Palestinians might sometimes challenge the Egyptian armies, in the end they were no match for them since Egypt's military potential was considerable. 94 Such a situation can obviously be upset by developments in military technology and an enemy who develops superior weapons and/or new methods of warfare becomes a serious threat. The entry of the Hyksos on to the scene conclusively demonstrated the importance of military factors and how much the Egyptians had previously depended for their security upon their military superiority over other peoples in the area. In short, the Hyksos proved

93 Gardiner, _Egypt of the Pharaohs_, p. 37.

94 Egypt's wealth meant that the provisioning and equipping of her armies usually presented no difficulties. In addition, the practice of using a large number of foreigners as soldiers increased the size of her armies and solved the problem of manpower -- most of these foreigners were captives who had been drafted into the army and, according to Wilson, the practice of using foreign troops went back to the time of the Old Kingdom (cf. _Culture_ (1965), p. 138.)

95 Interestingly, when he discusses the new arms and tactics which enabled the Hyksos to defeat the Egyptians,
themselves better soldiers than the Egyptians and so were able to establish their rule over Egypt. 96

That the physical barriers by which Egypt was surrounded also played a part in her general defence is not denied. However, barricades have to be manned or stormed, and the respective capacities of the defenders and the attackers are important factors as well as the way the barricades are constructed. To talk as Wilson does about the "geographic security" of Egypt is therefore basically misleading, for the emphasis then falls primarily on the geographical factors and other factors which may be equally important are obscured. Admittedly Wilson does stress the relative character of Egypt's

Wilson talks of "the proud superiority of Egypt over all her previous opponents" (Culture (1965), p. 163). Yet, he never mentions Egyptian military superiority as a factor when he analyses the reasons for early Egyptian security.

96 Josephus believed that the Hyksos were "a people of obscure origin from the east" and that they "invaded" Egypt (Contra Apionem 1:75). However, Josephus is a comparatively late writer and the dependability of Manetho, whom he claims to be quoting, has been disputed by modern scholars. Thus, Gardiner maintains that "we find that Manetho's account as retailed by Josephus to contain truth and falsity in almost equal measure" (Egypt of the Pharaohs, p. 170). At the same time, considerable debate has taken place about which aspects of the account are true and which false. For example, Gardiner rejects the view that the Hyksos were a special race and that they literally invaded the Delta. He contends that the term Hyksos "refers to the rulers alone" (ibid., p. 156) and that instead of an invasion "one must think rather of an infiltration
"geographic security" and points to the absence of any great movements of people in the early period as a factor, but he does not analyse the non-geographical factors in any detail. The overall result is that -- in spite of what he tries to plead to the contrary -- the impression is left that geography was the supreme influence.

Egypt's security during early historical times depended in fact upon a number of interrelated factors of which the following would seem to be the most significant:

1) The extent of Egypt's own military potential.
2) The military weakness of Egypt's immediate neighbours.
3) The fact that potential enemies who might have challenged Egypt on equal terms were far distant and otherwise occupied -- for example, had Babylonia

by Palestinians" (ibid., p. 157). By contrast, Wilson is prepared to accept Josephus' assertion that the Hyksos were "conquering easterners of unknown race" (Culture (1965), p. 159).


98 See, for example, Culture (1965), p. 17 or Before Philosophy (1963), p. 39.

99 No importance should be attached to the order in which these factors are given nor should the list be considered exhaustive.
been nearer, the armies of Sargon of Akkade (Agade) would undoubtedly have been a threat.

4) The absence of any great movement of peoples like the Hyksos or the Sea Peoples.

5) The physical barriers by which Egypt was surrounded.

Of these factors, one is purely "geographical" (i.e. number 5) and in two others the geographical factor of distance is a contributory element (i.e. numbers 2 and 3). The remainder are completely non-geographical factors.

This discussion about the factors underlying the security of ancient Egypt has a direct bearing on the subject of her "isolation", which according to Wilson was almost entirely the product of physical circumstances. However, the conclusions of Febvre concerning isolation have to be taken seriously. He devotes a chapter to examining carefully some of the hypotheses put forward about "islands" — whether

100 Towards the end of the third millennium B.C., Sargon of Akkade founded an empire which "stretched from the mountains of present-day Iran in the East across the fertile plains of Iraq and Syria to the shore of the Mediterranean in the West". Thorkild Jacobsen, "Early Political Development in Mesopotamia", reprinted in Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 132-56.

101 See above p. 89 cf. Culture (1965), pp. 11-13. Although Wilson blended together the notions of Egyptian
surrounded by sea or land barriers like deserts. Amongst these hypotheses is the theory that "islands" are inevitably isolated and Febvre comes to the result that

Isolation is a human fact, but not a geographical one, where men are concerned. By sea, in the case of the islands, it depends on navigation, which is certainly not a natural fact. By land it depends very often on the will of man -- on his ideas and traditions.

That is, even when the physical barriers are great, the initiative still lies with men and whether or not a particular people is isolated is largely a matter of choice, for as Febvre shows the cultures of societies who live on wide open plains and not on an "island" can also be isolated.

If the isolation of ancient Egypt is examined afresh in the light of both Febvre's judgement and the conclusion reached above about the factors involved in Egyptian security, the crucial part played by the ancient Egyptians themselves becomes plain. They appear to have taken advantage of the possibilities offered by their geographical situation and isolation and Egyptian security, for the sake of clarity the two ideas have been kept separate in the analysis undertaken here.

102 Febvre, A Geographical Introduction to History, pp. 201-35.
103 Ibid., p. 235.
104 Ibid., pp. 234-35.
used the physical barriers surrounding the Nile Valley to
seal it off\textsuperscript{105} -- partly for reasons of security and partly
because they felt self-sufficient and content with the world
that they had made for themselves.\textsuperscript{106} Put differently: they
did not have isolation thrust upon them. They deliberately
cut themselves off from other peoples. In turn, once this
isolation became an established fact, the belief of the ancient
Egyptian "that his land was the one land that really mattered"\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} Cf. the following statement by Febvre:

There are no necessities, but everywhere possibilities: and man, as master of the
possibilities, is the judge of their use. This, by the reversal which it involves,
puts man in the first place -- man, and
no longer the earth, nor the influence
of climate, nor the determinant conditions
of localities.
(A Geographical Introduction to History,
p. 236).

\textsuperscript{106} As Wilson points out, the Egyptians considered
that only they were truly "people" -- Before Philosophy (1963),
p. 41 cf. "The Admonitions of Ipu-wer", ANET\textsuperscript{2}, p. 441 (i:9
and iii:1) -- and they were so convinced that the way in
which nature worked in Egypt was the norm that they explained
the rain which fell in other countries as coming from a "Nile
to the Aton", ANET\textsuperscript{2}, pp. 370-71.

\textsuperscript{107} See above, p. 90 cf. Before Philosophy (1963),
p. 42.
would be reinforced because of the lack of outside contact.

The second question about the extent to which the general disposition of a people is dependent upon geographical factors may be answered more briefly. Isolation may undoubtedly give either an individual or a community the illusion of superiority or even uniqueness. Add to this circumstance, the fact that no one has ever challenged that superiority and a powerful basis obviously exists for a feeling of confidence similar to that which existed in ancient Egypt. Again, however, the geographical factors are only some of the network of interlocking factors that arise out of the social, political, and economic circumstances, and in none of the seven societies examined was the general disposition of the members directly related to geographical factors by the observers. To take two contrasting examples: neither the gentle, responsive, and co-operative nature of the Arapesh nor the extreme bellicosity of the Iban appear to be related directly to their respective geographical situations, but are traditions in which the members of these tribes are brought up. Hence, to relate

108 The series of articles by Margaret Mead on "The Mountain Arapesh" published in *Anthropological Papers of the*
the general confidence of the ancient Egyptians specifically to their "geographic security" appears unjustified.

Comparison with ancient Mesopotamia bears out this conclusion for "the fear of war and its ravages" which, according to Thorkild Jacobsen, was one of the main elements in Mesopotamian psychology does not derive simply from geographical factors. As pointed out above, the threat of armed attack is related to a combination of circumstances including factors like the military capacity of the societies involved or perhaps the traditional relationships between them as well as geographical factors such as distance. The balance of power between the various city-states in ancient Mesopotamia shifted continually and the military and political uncertainties must have been manifold. In such a situation,

American Museum of Natural History (Vol. 36, pt. 3; Vol. 37, pt. 3; Vol. 40, pt. 3; Vol. 41, pt. 3) together with her description of the tribe in Sex and Temperament provide innumerable instances of how the community trains and conditions its members -- for example, Arapesh initiations are "kindly and benevolent in tone", yams and coconut trees are cared for on a co-operative basis, correct emotions are strongly emphasized, and the violent are treated as insane.


110 Cf. the following description of Mesopotamia during the third millennium by Jacobsen and note both the relativity
the proximity of powerful city-states to each other could only increase the fear of war, but geographical factors did not so dominate the scene in ancient Mesopotamia that one could justifiably talk about "geographic insecurity".

Just as the general confidence of the ancient Egyptians cannot be related directly to geographical factors, the establishment of the dogma of divine kingship cannot be attributed simply to "the geography of Egypt". Such statements as "the geography of Egypt supplied a propensity toward acceptance of divine kingship" are dangerous and of the previous isolation and the part played by political factors:

As the settled areas of the country grew and joined, the protection that had been afforded by relative isolation was no longer there and fear of enemy attack, death, or slavery became a part of life ever present in the depth of consciousness. The intensity of the danger and of the fear it engendered can be gauged by the great city-walls that arose around the towns in this period and the staggering amount of labor that must have gone into them. For a shield against danger men looked to the now vitally important institutions of collective security, the great leagues and their officers, and particularly to the new institution of kingship as it took form and grew under the pressures of these years.

(Toward the Image of Tammuz, p. 43).

\[111\] Cf. above, p. 91.

\[112\] Culture (1965), p. 46.
misleading oversimplifications. Even if the geographical character of Egypt did play a part in producing the sense of security which in turn encouraged the acceptance of the dogma of divine kingship, the geography of Egypt cannot therefore be said to have stimulated the development of the doctrine in a direct fashion.

Already the lack of corroborative evidence from elsewhere has been shown to be a major weakness in Wilson's approach. This defect is also apparent when he talks about "the security of Egypt, perhaps a geographic security," encouraging the belief in continuance of life after death. Such a suggestion should have been supported by some evidence that in other cultures comparable connections can be established between a feeling of security and belief in a life after death. In fact, a quick survey of other societies reveals that in some instances a feeling of insecurity appears to be encouraging belief in an afterlife. As Milton Singer pointed out in the discussion after Wilson had read his paper at the Chicago Symposium, "in the case of India...the interest in afterlife and in nirvana is generally connected with a sense of insecurity and escape from the evils of this life."114

113Cf. above, p.91.

114City Invincible, p. 156.
Within the narrow confines of Egyptian history, a hypothesis may seem convincing but, if it implies or ultimately depends upon some underlying principle, the general validity of that principle must be established, for otherwise its application in the Egyptian situation cannot be upheld.

The need for a more controlled and scientific approach to the subject of influence also arises because on different occasions Wilson provides alternative explanations of the same phenomenon. The extraordinary variety of explanations that he puts forward to account for the conceptual tolerance of the early Egyptians illustrates the confusion that may result if strict control is not exercised.

The tolerance of contradictory or divergent ideas in fact appears to be a characteristic of most primitive and ancient religions. Thus, a primitive society such as the Mountain Arapesh or a more sophisticated society such as the Romans are alike in the manner in which they accept syncretism in religion. To say this is not to imply that all archaic

115 Cf. above, pp. 97-99.

116 Close parallels exist between the ancient Romans and the ancient Egyptians, and in thirty out of the thirty-nine indicators used by Swanson the two societies are given the same code.

117 According to Margaret Mead, the Mountain Arapesh readily accept change and innovations in every sphere including
societies are equally tolerant, for in some cases -- as with the Arunta or the Todas for example -- a conservative tradition tends to discourage the acceptance of new doctrines or rites.

The lack of clear-cut categories, like the tolerance of divergent ideas, also appears to be a general characteristic of archaic societies. For example, E. E. Evans-Pritchard reports that Azande ideas about Mbori, one of the leading supernatural figures in their religion, are extremely hazy and vague so that the character and functions of Mbori tend to overlap with those of ghosts. Different members of a tribe may also hold diverse opinions about the meaning of their religion -- see her articles in Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History, especially the first two which are entitled respectively "An Importing Culture" (Vol. 36, pt. 3) and "Supernaturalism" (Vol. 37, pt. 3). The syncretism of ancient Roman religion needs no elaboration here.

Amongst the Arunta, changes and innovations in their all important religious ceremonies have to be approved by the inner council of older men, who are also responsible for putting them into effect -- see Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, The Arunta (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1927), vol. 1, pp. 11-13. The Todas, too, are extremely conservative and Rivers describes them as "slaves of their traditions and of the laws and regulations which have been handed down to them by their ancestors." (The Todas, p. 445).

a particular rite as G. W. B. Huntingford discovered when he inquired why the Nandi put up a post with a tin on top of it when a neighbour dies.  

The fluidity of concepts and the lack of rigidity that Wilson discerns in Egyptian religion is in fact not an extraordinary phenomenon amongst ancient and primitive societies. Students of archaic societies who came from a modern Western background have to be aware, firstly, of their cultural predilection for consistent systems of ideas and tidy theologies and, secondly, that this bias owes much to the ancient Hebrews and the ancient Greeks who in their different ways became unique amongst archaic societies and whose mentalities therefore were to a large extent alien to the rest of the ancient world as well as to more primitive

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121 As well as causing modern Western observers to be astonished at the tolerance of archaic religions, this predilection may also lead them to give to the description of a primitive theology more consistency than the theology actually has -- cf. Pritchard's criticism of previous commentators on Zande religion in his article "Zande Theology" (see note above) and his very honest comment about his own presentation of Zande beliefs and rites in his book Witchcraft, Oracies, and Magic Among the Azande (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937): "The Zande cannot analyse his doctrines as I have done for him." (p. 70).
societies. By comparison with the religious exclusiveness of the Hebrews, the philosophical precision of the Greeks, or the narrower demands of more modern religions and ideologies, the religious and conceptual tolerance of the ancient Egyptians is certainly unusual, and the contrast between any of the former attitudes and that of the Egyptians may be just what Wilson is trying to impress upon his readers. However, he never outlines his purpose and never provides the criteria by which the tolerance of the Egyptians should be measured. The need for more exact definition is therefore obvious.

Greater attention too should be paid to exceptions. It is indeed "curious" that the Egyptians gave so little credit to the beneficial north wind. The fact that during prehistoric times the moon was most probably as important in worship as the sun also has to be explained if one of the major reasons for sunworship in later times was the sun's

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124 Cf. ibid., p. 56.
"blazing importance".

In maintaining that the sun came to occupy a high place in Egyptian religion because of its physical prominence, Wilson lays himself open to the same criticisms as Breasted who argued along similar lines and to repeat these criticisms would appear to be both tedious and unnecessary. Like Breasted too, Wilson fails to make a distinction between "stimulation" and "coloring". As was seen in the discussion of Breasted's ideas, religious imagery often reflects, or is "colored" by, the local conditions and the belief in a heavenly Nile which was navigated in the same fashion as the earthly Nile illustrates this phenomenon.

The question of "stimulation" is entirely different. Wilson's theory that the regular annual rebirth of the Nile "gave...a faith" to the individual Egyptian that he too would live again after death involves more than the notion of "coloring". The implication is that the action of the Nile

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125 Cf. above, p. 93.
126 Breasted's arguments were examined above on pp. 47-48.
127 Cf. above, pp. 55-56.
128 Cf. above, pp. 95-96.
129 Cf. above, p. 92.
stimulated or created the belief in some direct manner, but such an idea must be rejected for the same reasons as comparable ideas of Breasted were rejected. Some theory of reinforcement would seem to offer a better solution here -- namely, that the idea of human rebirth was connected with the annual action of the Nile and then, once the link was generally accepted, the phenomenon of inundation thereafter sustained the belief by providing the "proof" for it. Similarly, the sun's daily disappearance and reappearance had first to be associated with the problem of human life and death before its "periodicity"-together with that of the Nile -- could inspire in the individual Egyptian a "confidence that he, too, would conquer death."  

That a belief in rebirth has not been fostered everywhere the sun rises and sets would suggest that making the connection between the sun's cycle and the problem of life and death is a crucial step.

The great strength of Wilson's presentation is his recognition that geographical factors are in continual interaction with other factors. He replaces Breasted's

130 Cf. above, especially pp. 56ff.

theory of successive dominating influences by a theory of changing factorial relationships. He is undoubtedly right to emphasize the relative and contingent character of the "geographic security" that bolstered the confidence of the Egyptians during the early formative period of their history, and the element of relativity might help partly to explain why in later times the situation changed radically even though the geographical conditions remained the same.

At the same time, he follows a little too closely in Breasted's footsteps and by devoting, for example, the whole of the opening chapter of The Culture of Ancient Egypt to "geographic factors" he gives the impression that geography was a more important influence than in fact it was.

Like Frankfort, Wilson appears to dislike closed systems of rationalistic explication and he provides a valuable corrective to overmechanistic approaches by stressing that man's "mind and spirit" is a crucial factor of "unknown value" -- though he employs this idea only in the context of the emergence of civilizations. As will be seen later, similar unknown personal "forces" would seem to operate in

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133 Cf. above, pp. 100-101.
the process of religious symbolization.

Some of Wilson's arguments and ideas, together with those of Breasted and Frankfort, will be taken up again in the next chapter. One important consequence of the examination of these three writers has been that the fallacy of assuming direct connections between natural phenomena and certain Egyptian religious beliefs has been exposed. Intuition is not enough and statements implying that the connection between a particular aspect of nature and a particular facet of Egyptian religion should be obvious to any observer do not constitute proof. All three scholars -- Breasted and Wilson in particular and Frankfort to a lesser extent -- tend to indulge in such unsubstantiated theorizing and this weakness vitiates the rest of their work. The foregoing investigation has made plain the need for a stricter and more controlled approach to the problem of geography and its influence upon religion in ancient Egypt. It has also revealed the necessity of bringing to bear upon Ancient Near Eastern Studies evidence and insights from other disciplines.
CHAPTER VI

THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN VIEW OF NATURE

Heretofore, the emphasis in this study has been upon the task of examining and criticizing hypotheses about the relationship of geography to religion put forward by Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson. Keeping in mind the problems raised by these analyses, the attempt will now be made to open up some new approaches to the whole question of the relationship between geography and religion and the processes at work in ancient Egyptian religion will be examined afresh.

The starting point for this aspect of the inquiry is certain selected ideas put forward by Peter Berger and, in order to lay the foundation for later discussion, a brief review and outline of these ideas will be undertaken first.

In his book The Sacred Canopy, 1 Berger argues that

a dialectical relationship exists between society and men and that three distinct moments are discernible in the process whereby the relationship is set up and maintained. These three moments he terms "externalization", "objectivation", and "internalization." In the first moment, men pour their "being" into the world outside of themselves through their physical and mental activity. In the second moment, the products of this activity confront men "as a facticity external to and other than themselves." In the third moment, men reabsorb the structures of this objectivated world into consciousness. The net result of this process is that the humanly produced world becomes "something 'out there'" which "acts back upon its producer" so that, for example, "a plow may compel its users to arrange their agricultural activity, and perhaps also other aspects of their lives, in a way that conforms to its own logic and that may have been neither intended nor foreseen by those who

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2 Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, p 3

3 Ibid., p. 4.

4 Ibid., p. 9.

5 Ibid., p. 3, cf. p. 41.
originally devised it."\(^6\) As to the essential character of this world, it is, says Berger, "above all, an ordering of experience". When a society constructs a world for itself, "a meaningful order, or nomos, is imposed upon the discrete experiences of individuals."\(^7\)

\(^6\) Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p.9.

\(^7\) Ibid., p. 19.

The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset in his book which is translated into English as Man and Crisis (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1962) follows a line of thought very similar to that of Berger. He maintains that "man is born a fabricator of universes" and "if we cut into the human past at any particular date we always find man installed in a particular world, as in a house which he has made to shelter himself from the elements."

(p. 136) He also emphasizes the autonomy of these worlds and says that each "has a peculiar character not possessed by the world of individual beliefs; namely, it is valid for itself regardless of and sometimes despite our acceptance of it." (p. 39). His account of what Berger terms the third moment differs slightly from that of Berger. His description of the process is similar, namely that "from the moment of birth man goes on absorbing the convictions of his time". (p. 40). However, his notion that a humanly produced world is like a wall "which will not let me pass through it, but obliges me to seek the door or else spend a portion of my life demolishing it" (p. 39) carries more passive and negative overtones than Berger's similes and metaphors. Berger's use of the phrase "act back upon" and the occurrence of statements like "the individual keeps 'talking back' to the world that formed him and thereby continues to maintain the latter as reality" (p. 19) imply that men give to the worlds that they construct a pseudo-reality which appears to have a positive and sometimes directive force. As will be seen in the examination of, for example, the concept of ma'at, Berger's metaphors highlight this aspect of the process which should not be ignored because
After setting out his general argument, Berger moves to a consideration of religion. Following Otto and Eliade, he defines religion as "the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established"\(^8\) and maintains that "the unique capacity of religion" is "to 'locate' human phenomena within a cosmic frame of reference" and so to "legitimate" them.\(^9\) The irony is that "religious legitimations arise from human activity, but once crystallized into complexes of meaning that become part of a religious tradition they can attain a measure of autonomy" and "may then act back upon actions in everyday life, transforming the latter, sometimes radically."\(^10\)

At the same time, this autonomy is not absolute because particular world views are constructed by particular societies and "each world requires a social 'base' for its continuing it has profound psychological effects.

For the purpose of this investigation, the important fact is that both Ortega and Berger agree that men construct worlds in order to shelter themselves "from the elements" and/or to give meaning to their existence, and that, when these worlds are established, they influence and to a considerable extent control people's thoughts and actions. For similar theories put forward by anthropologists and psychologists see below pp.136-138 and the appropriate notes.

\(^8\) Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, p. 25.


existence as a world that is real to actual human beings."\(^{11}\) This social 'base', on which a world view depends, Berger calls "its plausibility structure" and asserts that a religious world would remain "objectively and subjectively real" only so long as its plausibility structure "remained intact."\(^{12}\) By using and extending these ideas of Berger, a new approach to the relationship of geography to religious symbolism may be opened up. However, a fundamental difference between a culture like that of ancient Egypt and a modern society must be made clear.

Berger argues that in modern society social institutions achieve an objective reality and stand over against the individual. When discussing the "cosmological" cultures of the ancient world, he also says -- quite rightly -- that within a culture such as that of ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia, "the sharp modern differentiation between the human and non-human (or 'natural') spheres of empirical reality" is not made.\(^{13}\) Thus, within a "cosmological" culture\(^{14}\) the apprehension

\(^{11}\) Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 45.

\(^{12}\) Ibid., p.25.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p.133, cf. Before Philosophy (1963), p. 12: "When we turn to the ancient Near East....we notice that the realm of nature and the realm of man were not distinguished".

\(^{14}\) Berger uses the term "cosmological" in the same
of "the world of social objectivations" and "the apprehension of the world of nature" are not different.\textsuperscript{15} The distinction made between the two worlds is modern. In a "cosmological" culture, "the world of nature" is part of the total objectivated world which confronts the consciousness of the individual and which in turn can be "internalized" by him.

At this point, the question may be raised about the use of Berger's terms to describe the relationship of ancient man to "the world of nature". The objection may be made that "the world of nature" is not a product of man. At the same time, people in different cultures have different views of nature and, according to many anthropologists and psychologists, these views of nature are cultural products. For example, Ralph Linton, an anthropologist, maintains that:

> Even the natural environment provided by a particular geographic area impinges upon the individual only after it has been filtered through the screen which culture interposes between man and nature.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15}By contrast with modern society -- cf. Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 14. Wilson compares the universe of the ancient Egyptian to "a spectrum in which one colour blends off into another without line of demarcation, in which, indeed, one colour may become another under alternating conditions" -- Before Philosophy (1963), pp. 71-72.

In a similar way, psychologists say that "perception involves an act of categorization" and agree with anthropologists that "the carving of experience out of the physical universe... is dependent on culture." Of particular interest to this study are Wayne Dennis' researches into animistic thinking because in the 1950's he made a study of animistic beliefs amongst modern-day students in the Near East. A considerable number of the college and high school students who answered Dennis' questionnaires believed that natural objects like the sun, the wind, and the sea were "living in the same way that...

"Culture acts as a buffer between man and his habitat" -- Cultural Anthropology (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 105; or Franz Boas: "Environment always acts upon a pre-existing culture, not on an hypothetical cultureless group" -- The Mind of Primitive Man (Revised edition; New York: The Free Press, 1965), p. 175; or Ruth Benedict who maintains that a culture is composed of elements selected from "a great arc on which are ranged the possible interests provided either by the human age-cycle or by the environment or by man's various activities" -- Patterns of Culture, p. 24.


18 Ibid., p. 22.

animals and plants are living", 20 and the frequency of animistic thinking among these Near Eastern students proved to be "much higher than... among American students of comparable educational placement". 21 Such a study highlights the part played by cultural background and perhaps also the effect of popular religious traditions -- though Dennis himself disputes the power of the latter. 22

People do not in fact see or experience nature just as it is, but are conditioned by their culture to apprehend nature in a certain way. They construct their own particular "world of nature" out of the natural phenomena around them. This "world" is at the same time both dependent and independent. It is dependent to the extent that it is constructed by men and it expresses their "being". It is independent to the extent that its raw materials are real, physical objects which exist separately from men. 23

In general -- as had been intimated above -- modern

20 Dennis, "Animistic Thinking Among College and High School Students in the Near East", 193.


22 Cf. ibid., 197.

23 "The world of nature" is obviously not the only "world" which a society will construct. Nor is it ever entirely independent of other "worlds".
man's view of nature has changed radically from that of ancient man. In a modern society, "the world of nature" is given a different status of reality to society and Berger argues that the crucial distinction between the two realities lies in "participation". Modern man cannot -- or feels that he cannot -- participate in the reality of nature in the way that he can participate "in the collective activity by which the reality of society is ongoingly constructed." Consequently, modern man can "internalize" the meaning only of events that take place "within the social world". "The world of nature" is simply "apprehended" as "an external facticity" and the step of "internalization" is not made.

That Berger does not discuss ancient man's view of nature in detail is not surprising because he is concerned primarily with modern society. An examination of materials within the Ancient Near East shows however that ancient man constructed a personal "world of nature"("externalization"), that this "world" in turn confronted his consciousness as an independent personal reality ("objectivation"), and that

24 See above, pp. 135-136.
25 Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 82.
ancient man re-absorbed into his consciousness elements within this "world of nature" ("internalization").

Evidence for the first two moments in this dialectic is provided by the contributors to Before Philosophy. In the opening chapter of this composite work, the Frankforts outline the thesis that ancient man "confronts a living 'Thou' in nature"\(^{27}\) and in the subsequent chapters John Wilson and Thorkild Jacobsen endeavour to show how this insight illuminates some of the attitudes inherent in the literary material that has survived from ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Thus, Wilson for example maintains that the many roles given to the sun-god in Egypt should occasion no surprise because individuals always have a many-sided personality.\(^{28}\)

The point that the Frankforts in the opening chapter omit to emphasize is that ancient man "personalized" nature -- the term "personified" is deliberately avoided. Nature was not by its constitution personal or 'Thou' -- it was apprehended as personal because ancient man made it personal.\(^{29}\)


\(^{28}\) Ibid., p. 58.

\(^{29}\) The term "personalize" or the phrase "make personal" are more useful than the term "personify" because they cover a wider field. Even though Wilson does not employ the former
This was one aspect of the externalizing and objectivating process. Another aspect was, for example, the construction of a hereafter that mirrored the conditions of contemporary Egyptian life.  

Specific proof that the Egyptians did not see or experience nature just as it is, but constructed a "world of nature" out of the natural phenomena around them is provided unintentionally by Wilson in his comments upon phenomena, which failed to make an impression upon Egyptian religious thought but which according to his mechanistic terminology, the difference between "personalize" and "personify" is clearly set out in the following passage in which Wilson describes the attitude of the ancient Egyptian to "the extra-human":

It was not necessary that the object become finally superhuman and be revered as a god before it might be conceived in terms of 'Thou'.... The Egyptian might -- and did -- personify almost anything: the head, the belly, the tongue, perception, taste, truth, a tree, a mountain, the sea, a city, darkness, and death. But few of these were personified with regularity or with awe; that is, few of them reached the stature of gods or demi-gods. They were forces with which man had the 'Thou' relation.

(Before Philosophy (1963), p. 49).

30 Cf. above, pp. 54 and 95-96.
assumptions ought to have done so.\(^{31}\) For example, he is puzzled that "the moon has curiously little weight in Egyptian mythology",\(^ {32}\) but the fact that in the very next paragraph he follows Breasted's argument that the stars became symbols of the dead because "in the clear Egyptian air the stars stand out with brilliance"\(^ {33}\) demonstrates the source of his puzzlement. In the light of his conviction that nature directly influenced Egyptian beliefs, he cannot understand why the moon, which presumably also shone brilliantly in the Egyptian night-sky, was not given greater importance in Egyptian theology. In a similar way, Wilson is mystified why the north wind did not occupy a more prominent place. After talking about the supremacy of the sun-god, he goes on:

> It is curious that the Egyptians gave relatively little credit to another force -- the wind. The prevailing wind in Egypt comes from the north, across the Mediterranean and then down the trough

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\(^{31}\) For examples and a discussion of Wilson's assumptions, see above, esp. pp. 126-128.

\(^{32}\) *Before Philosophy* (1963), p. 56 cf. a similar comment by W. Max Müller: "It is remarkable that the moon, which was so important, especially in Babylonia, never rivalled the sun among the Egyptians" -- see "Egyptian (Mythology)", in Louis Hebert Gray (ed.), *The Mythology of All Races* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1964), Vol. XII, p. 33.

\(^{33}\) *Before Philosophy* (1963), p. 56.
of the Nile Valley. It mitigates the unceasing heat of the sun and makes Egypt an easier place in which to live; it contrasts with those hot dry winds of late spring, which bring sandstorms and a brittle heat out of Africa to the south. This north wind was good, and the Egyptians expressed their appreciation and made it into a minor divinity; but, relative to the all-pervading power of the sun, the wind was practically ignored. 34

Again, Wilson's assumptions can be seen at work. The difficulties produced by the lowly places given to the moon and the north wind disappear once the observer realizes that the relation between the physical environment and religious thought is not a mechanical one and that in the process of constructing their particular "world of nature" cultures may "select out" certain natural phenomena and give others especial importance. 35

On several occasions, Frankfort gives hints that he realizes that ancient religious thought did not reflect nature directly. For example, while comparing the creation myths of Egypt and Mesopotamia he says:

It is a mistake to see in the contrast of physiological conditions the basis of the difference between the myths. The Mesopotamians could have built from their material -- had they been so

34Before Philosophy (1963), p. 43.

35At this point, the analogy might be useful. A "world of nature" such as that of the ancient Egyptians might be compared to a picture in which through the judicious
inclined -- a story as serene as that of Atum's appearance in Egypt.\textsuperscript{36}

Frankfort also shows that he understands how cultural selection is made from an "arc" of possibilities and how the choice depends upon many factors including chance.\textsuperscript{37} Unfortunately, he does not develop these fruitful insights in a consistent manner and elsewhere he follows the same line of thought as Breasted and Wilson -- namely that "the contrast in outlook (between the cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia) is curiously in keeping with the physiographical differences between the two countries.\textsuperscript{39}

The third moment of the dialectic outlined by Berger is "internalization" and abundant evidence of the internalization use of spotlights certain elements have been made to stand out, other elements have been masked by the imposition of a cut-out stencil on top of the original, and over all has been placed a tinted glass which makes the greater part of the picture appear alive. Of course, this analogy is imperfect because nature changes but a painting or photograph remains the same. However, so long as this difference is recognized, the comparison should help to explain the distinction between nature-as-it-is and a "world of nature".

\textsuperscript{36}Kingship (1948), p. 233.

\textsuperscript{37}Cf. above, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{38}Cf. above, Chapter IV, note 17, and p. 81.

\textsuperscript{39}Kingship (1948), p. 4.
of "the world of nature" is provided by the Pyramid Texts where the dead were represented as joining the Sun-god in his daily circuit. Indeed, the dead were often depicted as "even becoming the Sun-god himself." Two examples are sufficient to illustrate this notion. In the first, the dead man was simply associated with the Sun-god:

Thou risest and settest, thou goest down with Re,\(^{41}\)
 sinking in the dusk with Nedy;
Thou risest and settest, thou risest up with Re, and ascendest with the great reed float;\(^{42}\)

In the second example, the dead man, King Unis, was closely identified with the Sun-god:

O King Unis, thou hast not at all departed dead, thou has departed living!...Thy arm is Atum, thy shoulders are Atum, thy belly is Atum, thy back is Atum, thy rear is Atum, thy legs are Atum...\(^{43}\)


\(^{41}\) Re and Atum -- the name given to the sun-god in the second example below -- represented different phases of the sun and in some instances were merged as Re-Atum, cf. Culture (1965), p. 209.

\(^{42}\) The first part of a text is cited by Frankfort in AER (1961) cf. Kingship (1948), pp. 121-22 where a longer quotation from Pyr. 207-12 (Kurt Sethe, Die altägyptischen Pyramidentexte -- Leipzig, 1908-22) is given in a slightly different translation.

\(^{43}\) ANET\(^2\), p. 32 cf. Pyr. 134-35. Another example of identification occurs in the introduction to "The Story of Si-nuhe":
To regard these texts as simply magical would be to miss their import. They reflect the view of the ancient Egyptian that the individual, society, nature, and the gods were part of a single cosmic continuum\textsuperscript{44} and that he could apprehend his own identity in terms of a natural phenomenon as well as in terms of a social role.\textsuperscript{45} The parallel between the above texts and Berger's illustration of how an individual may "discover himself" as an uncle is close.\textsuperscript{46}

\textit{Year 30, third month of the first season, day 7. The god ascended to his horizon; the King of Upper and Lower Egypt: Sehetep-ib-Re was taken up to heaven and united with the sun disc. The body of the god merged with him who made him. (ANET\textsuperscript{2}, p. 18)}

\textsuperscript{44}Cf. \textit{Before Philosophy} (1963), pp. 71-80.

\textsuperscript{45}For the ancients "nature and man did not stand in opposition and did not, therefore, have to be apprehended by different modes of cognition" -- \textit{Before Philosophy} (1963), p. 12.

\textsuperscript{46}Berger describes the process whereby the individual internalizes "the objective facticity of the social world" as follows:

For example, the individual appropriates as reality the particular kinship arrangements of his society. \textit{Ipso facto}, he takes on the roles assigned to him in this context and apprehends his own identity in terms of these roles. Thus, he not only plays the role of uncle, but he \textit{is} an uncle...His attitudes toward others and his motives for specific actions are endemically avuncular. If he
The difference is that the modern individual "discovers himself" only in a social role whereas the ancient Egyptian could also "discover himself" -- especially after death in "the world of nature". Just as a motivation and meaning for life can be found in being an uncle, significance can be found also in the belief that in both life and death the aim is to live in harmony with, and to participate in, the eternal order of "the world of nature". In life, the ideal Egyptian lived by ma'at and in death his wish was "to be absorbed in the great rhythm of the universe".

lives in a society which has established unclehood as a centrally significant institution... 
........., he will conceive of his whole biography...........in terms of his career as an uncle........Uncles, sisters, nephews exist in objective reality, comparable in facticity to the species of animals or rocks. But this objective world is also apprehended now as subjective meaningfullness. .....The individual may now look within himself and in the depths of his subjective being, may 'discover himself' as an uncle.

(The Sacred Canopy, pp. 17-18).

47 "Underneath the endless details of diverging local usages, traditions, and beliefs, there is essential unity in the conviction that man can find immortality and peace by becoming part of one of the perennial cyclic rhythms of nature." -- AER (1961), p. 107.

48 For a discussion of Ma'at see below, pp. 150-157 and 178ff.

49 AER (1961), p. 106 -- "Whether the dead man's aim is the solar circuit, or that of the circumpolar stars, or the life of Osiris, the essential wish is the same."
Enough should now have been said to show that within ancient Egypt "natural" phenomena achieved the same status of reality as Berger maintains social institutions do in a modern society. The ancient Egyptian appeared to be able to make genuine, significant, meaningful identifications with geographical phenomena. The question may therefore be asked whether a geographical phenomenon can enforce "the logic of its being" upon men in the same way that "a plow may compel its users to arrange their lives, in a way that conforms to its own logic."\(^{50}\)

The probability that a geographical phenomenon can indeed "act back upon" men living in a culture such as that of ancient Egypt is strong, because the previous argument in this section has shown that the ancient Egyptian internalized elements from the objectivated "world of nature" which confronted him and, according to Berger, in the course of internalization the individual "is shaped" by aspects of an objectivated world -- as well as identifying

\(^{50}\) Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, p. 9, cf. above, p. 132.

\(^{51}\) Cf. above, p. 132.
Attention will therefore now be given to this property of "shaping" which Berger, on the basis of modern data, finds to be inherent in the act of internalization.

One of Frankfort's ideas that appeared worthy of further consideration was his theory that, as the characteristics of nature were revealed by the cosmic gods, the ancient Egyptians were led both to articulate and find solutions to existential problems. This hypothesis suggested that a dynamic relationship existed between nature and the consciousness of the ancient Egyptian. The existence of such a relationship between "the world of nature" of the ancient Egyptian and his consciousness has been demonstrated above, and the aim now will be to discover whether or not, and to what extent, the structures of that "world of nature" shaped the structures of his religious thought.

That the relationship between a "world of nature" and religious thought is a reciprocal process and that the structures of religious thought may in turn influence the apprehension of nature is recognized, but for the sake of clarity emphasis will be laid in the present instance on the action of "natural" symbols upon religious thought. The

52 Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 15.
53 Cf. above, p. 83.
purpose will be to isolate and study one particular aspect of the dialectical relationship in which the ancient Egyptian was involved with "the world of nature" that confronted him -- namely, the effect from "the world of nature" upon his religious consciousness.

A basic constituent of the ancient Egyptian "world" was ma'at. C. J. Bleeker's description of ma'at in Egyptian Festivals gives an idea of both its importance and its various connotations:

It can be said without any exaggeration that Ma-a-t constitutes the fundamental idea of ancient Egyptian religion....Ma-a-t is both a concept and a goddess. As a concept ma-a-t represents truth, justice and order in corporate life, three ethical values which upon closer inspection prove to be based on the cosmic order. The task of upholding the supremacy of Ma-a-t is entrusted to the pharaoh, who, being the son of the sun-god, possessed the necessary power to do so. In his government policy he follows the example of the sun-god who established Ma-a-t at the time of creation. Thus the structure of the polity is not a product of the human brain but a reflection of the cosmic order. As a goddess Ma-a-t personifies the order which governs the life of the sun-god Re. She also manifests herself in those natural phenomena the lord of which is Osiris, viz. vegetation and consequently, also water and earth. The order of divine life periodically conquers death. He who lives in accordance with Ma-a-t is wise; both his virtue and his salvation depend on this....At the judgement of the dead man is vindicated, if the quality of his life
is in harmony with Ma-a-t. 54

In short, the ancient Egyptians tried to model both their society and their own individual lives upon the basis of an order and stability, which they apprehended in the universe. 55

54 C. J. Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals: Enactments of Religious Renewal (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967), p. 7 cf. also his monograph De beteekenis van Egyptische godin Ma-a-t, 1929 (which he cites in the former book). According to Frankfort, Bleeker studied under W. B. Kristensen "and it was the latter who was the first to interpret maat as a concept with cosmological as well as ethical implications" -- Kingship (1948), p. 359, note 4. Frankfort and Wilson would seem to be in general agreement with Bleeker that ma'at is "at one and the same time...a social, an ethical, and a cosmological conception" -- AER (1961), p. 63 cf. Culture (1965), p. 48. Breasted's view of ma'at is somewhat idealized. In particular, he argues that ma'at was the source of the notion of social conscience which the ancient Egyptians then handed on to other peoples -- see especially Dawn. Present day Egyptologists have generally rejected this view -- cf. Culture (1965), pp. 314-315. However, Breasted would seem to be correct in maintaining that ma'at had a definite moral dimension -- cf. Mertz, Red Land, Black Land, pp. 363-364.

55 The Egyptian view of the universe appears to have parallels in the ancient Chinese thought. Although different, both Confucianism and Taoism place great emphasis upon the idea of harmony in the universe. The Confucian "Way" is to consider Man, Heaven and Earth as a triad. Heaven "dictates" its laws to men, who have to realize them and thus achieve harmony. Emphasis is on human action. The Taoist "Way" is more comprehensive. Men are part of the great whole and only by imitating the pattern laid down by the universe can they become virtuous and wise. See, Fung Yu-Lan, History of Chinese Philosophy, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) and Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China (Cambridge: University Press, 1956), Vol. 2. I am grateful to Professor Julian Pas of the Department of
The moments of externalization, objectivation, and internalization are clearly visible in Bleeker's account.

Wilson provides a very similar description of *ma'at* in *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* and during the course of it pinpoints the type of political motivation that encourages religious legitimation:

*Ma'at* then was a created and inherited rightness, which tradition built up into a concept of orderly stability, in order to confirm and consolidate the *status quo*, particularly the continuing rule of the pharaoh.  

The corollary of this endeavour to undergird the authority of the pharaoh was a belief that the pharaoh had to take especial care to fulfil the requirements of *ma'at* and his failure to do so led to anarchy.  

The prophet Ipu-wer

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Far Eastern Studies at the University of Saskatchewan for providing me with the information about ancient China contained in this footnote and footnote 57 below.

56 *Culture* (1965), p. 48 cf. the following comment by Frankfort:

The conception of Maat expresses the Egyptian belief that the universe is changeless....Such a belief...excludes ideals of progress, utopias of any kind, revolutions, or any other radical changes in existing conditions.

(AER (1961), p. 64).

57 Once again, similarities exist between Egyptian and Chinese thought. In ancient China, the ruler received his "mandate" from Heaven because of his virtue. He was therefore called "Son of Heaven" and, as long as he remained
could blame the King for the social disorder of his day:

...Authority, Perception, and Justice (ma'at) are with thee, (but) it is confusion which thou wouldst set throughout the land, together with the noise of contention. 58

Conversely, King Meri-ka-re, who was not completely secure on the throne, appears to have advertised his aim to perform ma'at in order to win the allegiance of his subjects. 59

That ma'at was above all a view of the physical universe should not, however, be forgotten. Even though the ancient

virtuous i.e. obeyed the mandate, he retained power. If he neglected virtue, Heaven would strike. First, natural catastrophes would be sent as warnings and then later, if these warnings were disregarded, a new ruler would be appointed with authority to overthrow the current dynasty. In fact, the success or failure of rebellions decided the question of who had received "the Mandate of Heaven" and the theory could be used either by a ruling house to justify its continuance in power or by an usurper to legitimate his claim to the throne. See, Herrlee Glessner Creel, The Birth of China: A Study of the Formative Period of Chinese Civilization (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1937) and John C. H. Wu, "Chinese Legal and Political Philosophy", in Charles A. Moore (ed.), The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967), pp. 213-219.

58ANET, p. 443.

59The Instruction for King Mer-ka-Re purports to be a letter from King Kheti II to his successor but in fact seems to be a propaganda document written during the reign of King Meri-ka-Re himself. Under the cover of this literary device, King Meri-ka-Re sets out his main political aims, one of which is to perform and establish ma'at in Egypt -- see Ronald J. Williams, "Literature as a Medium of Political
Egyptian did not make "the sharp modern differentiation between the human and non-human (or 'natural') spheres of empirical reality", to some extent he did hold them apart and consciously tried to bring society into line with the cosmic order as it was revealed through "the world of nature".

Frankfort emphasizes this point when he says:

> Cosmic phenomena such as the course of sun or moon, or the changeless rhythm of the seasons, reveal not only transcendent power but also order. In this lies their relevancy to the affairs of man. 62

Ma'at thus provides an example of what Berger called "religious legitimation". 63 Once "the world of nature" was

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60 Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*, p. 113 cf. above, p. 135.
61 Cf. Voeglin's general comment:

> Consubstantiality not withstanding, there is the experience of separate existence in the stream of being, and the various existences are distinguished by their degrees of durability... societies pass while the world lasts. And the world not only is outlasted by the gods, but is perhaps even created by them. (Order and History, I, p. 3).

63 Cf. above, p. 134.
apprehended as orderly and stable, this apprehension "acted back upon" Egyptian society so that a deliberate effort was made to bring conditions within the society into line with the ideal of order and stability that was revealed by "nature". The circular aspect of the process is evident.64

Under such circumstances, the general acceptance of the view that nature was essentially orderly and stable was a crucial factor, for once this basic apprehension was accepted it shaped the subsequent attitude of the Egyptians to nature. In this context, Frankfort's notion of ideas crystallizing and achieving a "characteristic...form" during a particular period is useful -- though Frankfort's further assumptions that the effect of later historical events is

64 In Mesopotamia, as Voeglin has previously observed, the dominant perception of political order produced a similar effect and interaction:

Mesopotamian political culture went far beyond cosmological symbolization in the strict sense and even reversed the direction of symbolization. To be sure, political order was understood cosmologically, but the cosmic order was also understood politically. Not only was the empire an analogue of the cosmos, but political events took place in the celestial sphere. (Order and History, I, p. 39).

However, in view of what has emerged from the present inquiry into Egyptian attitudes, issue must be taken with Voeglin's assertion that "the mutuality of analogical illumination... is peculiar to Mesopotamia." Note should also be taken of
negligible and that even over an extended period ideas remain static and do not change or develop in any significant way cannot be upheld. As has been emphasized previously, the "roots" of an idea before it develops a "form" are often lost in obscurity and this fact holds true for the Egyptian apprehension that nature was essentially orderly and stable. When or how this insight originally arose cannot now be easily pinpointed or "explained". However, although the "roots" of the idea are hidden, its "trunk" was clearly visible from the beginnings of historical times in Egypt and it achieved its essential "form" at the "birth" of Egyptian civilization. Throughout the period covered by Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson, the notion remained a distinctive characteristic.

the fact that the divine pattern of government did not exactly reflect the contemporaneous pattern of earthly government in Mesopotamia -- see Chapter VII, note 66 and Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia", reprinted in Toward the Image of Tammuz, pp. 157-170.

65 See above, pp. 77-78.

66 See above, pp. 65-67 and 82.

67 According to Wilson, the concept of ma'at was already well established during the First Dynasty and he maintains that, like the concept of divine kingship, it "gave stability and authority to the new state" -- Culture (1965), pp. 47-48.
That it did so over an extremely long span of time demonstrates how once a particular view of nature is "accepted by the community and established by tradition" it will most probably continue to dominate the attitude of a people to the physical environment so long as the "plausibility structure" (which according to Berger underlies every constructed "world") remains substantially intact.

The high place held by the sun in the Egyptian religious pantheon during the historical period shows the same principle at work. Once the sun was recognized as the most important element in nature and the supreme deity, it remained in the same official position in spite of the fact that from time to time its divine name and attributes changed. During the Old Kingdom, the sun was worshipped as Re-Atum in Heliopolis. When Thebes became an important centre of

68 Kingship (1948), p. 143 -- the phrase is taken from the passage quoted above, on p. 66.


70 The worship of the sky-god Horus and the sun-god Re in fact seems to go back far into prehistoric times -- see Walter B. Emery, Archaic Egypt (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963), pp. 120-122.
political power during the Middle Kingdom, Re was linked with the local god of Thebes, Amon, and Amon-Re became the supreme national deity. Next the sun's disc was worshipped as Aton during the reign of Amen-hotep IV (Akh-en-Aton), but after the latter's death the traditional cult of Amon-Re was re-established and the situation remained virtually unchanged until the end of the Twentieth Dynasty. That this summary covers a period of over fifteen hundred years during which the sun remained supreme is evidence of the stability in Egyptian attitudes to the sun -- a stability that derived in the main from the remarkable stability of the Egyptian culture which survived several periods of civil

71 Although Amen-em-het I had a strong connection with Thebes, the city was not in fact made the political capital by the rulers of the Twelfth Dynasty -- Gardiner, Egypt of the Pharaohs, pp. 126-27.

72 "Up to then...the principal deity of the Theban nome had been the warlike falcon-god Mont, but with the advent of the new dynasty the human-headed Amun quickly gained predominance over him, soon to be assimilated to the sun-god Re, and ultimately to become the principal national divinity under the name 'Amen-Re, King of the Gods'." (Ibid.)

73 On the accession of Har-em-hab to the throne, "every doctrinal trace of Atonism" was wiped out and "the reactionaries established the domination of the gods, particularly Amon-Re, over the pharaoh for the next four centuries" -- Culture (1965), p. 235.
159

strife and anarchy as well as the invasion of the Hyksos.74

Thus, once a particular perception of nature is established, it can "act back upon" religious thought over a long period. Furthermore, the constant underlying factor in Egypt was not -- as Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson all imply at different times -- primarily a basic stability in the Egyptian environment itself, but a basic stability in the Egyptian society.75

In the next chapter, the far reaching effects of the Egyptian traditional view that nature was orderly and stable will be illustrated more fully. For the present,

74 To say this is not to deny that Egyptian culture changes over the course of time (as Frankfort did). For example, during the First Intermediate Period, Egyptian culture acquired in Voeglin's phrase "a new dimension of skepticism". Yet "the cosmological culture of Egypt never was broken effectively" and, one might add, neither was the Pharaonic institution -- cf. Order and History, I, p. 57.

75 Voeglin's separation of political institutions from "the socially predominant experience of order" as two distinct variables is valuable and his criticism of Frankfort is valid, because Frankfort failed to make this very necessary distinction -- cf. Order and History, I, pp. 56-57. However, at the same time, the socially predominant experience of order does not exist in a vacuum and, even if it is independent to the extent that it may survive the disintegration of political institutions (as in the First Intermediate Period), it is as Berger points out, ultimately dependent
therefore, this subject will be left on one side and attention will be focused upon other ways in which the Egyptian view of nature subtly "acted back upon" the consciousness of the ancient Egyptian. Frankfort draws attention to one of the hidden effects when he observes that, by contrast with the gods of Sumer who "are fully developed and coherent characters", the gods of ancient Egypt were "imperfect as individuals". However, Frankfort appears puzzled that this difference existed, because the Sumerian gods, like the Egyptian gods, were "cosmic powers" and yet the former were not "captives of their own spheres of manifestation" in nature as the latter were.77

The solution to this enigma seems to lie in the closeness of the association between a natural phenomenon and a god, for a general comparison of the Egyptian and Sumerian gods reveals that their relationship to physical

upon the society in which it arose and it will remain "objectively and subjectively real" only so long as "its plausibility structure" remains intact. Thus, the complete disintegration of political institutions will remove the social base for a world view (as when the Incas in Peru were conquered by the Spanish) -- cf. The Sacred Canopy, p. 45.

77 Ibid.
phenomena was essentially different. In Egypt, the gods were generally, as Frankfort rightly says, "immanent in nature" and the identification was extremely close. In Sumer -- at least in the latter half of Early Dynastic times -- the relation of the great gods to their natural "spheres of manifestation" was usually not so close and the gods were generally conceived as superhuman beings "in charge of" particular aspects or elements in nature.

Although a movement towards the humanization of the gods

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79 S. N. Kramer (contra Jacobsen in Before Philosophy) maintains that there is no reason to believe that the Sumerian thinkers conceived such entities as the sky, earth, sun, moon, river, pickaxe, etc., as "somehow alive" with "wills of their own"; all the available evidence clearly indicates that it was not the sky that was thought of as alive, but the human-like being in charge of the sky;..........

(Journal of Cuneiform Studies, II (1948), 45).

Jacobsen's view is that during Early Dynastic times a change occurred in the relationship of the Sumerian gods to natural phenomena. He maintains that in the Protoliterate period natural phenomena were regarded as invested with numinous wills, but that in the Early Dynastic period many of the divine powers began to "transcend the limits" of the phenomena with which they were identified and took on distinct and separate human forms (see "Formative Tendencies in Sumerian Religion", his article in Encyclopaedia Britannica (1963), II, 972-8 -- both reprinted in Toward the Image of Tammuz, pp. 1-38 -- and his paper in City Invincible, pp. 62-70). However, both he and Kramer would agree that in later times
appears to have taken place in both cultures, the movement did not go as deep or as fast in Egypt as in Mesopotamia.\textsuperscript{80} The result was that up to late times the "more usual" forms of the Egyptian gods were their animal forms and, even if the gods were given a human body, they were seldom given a human head.\textsuperscript{82} By contrast, the Mesopotamian gods were "ordinarily...represented" in human form after the Early the leading Sumerian gods were regarded as human-like beings who were merely associated -- and not identified -- with certain physical phenomena.

\textsuperscript{80} For the humanization of the gods in Mesopotamia, see the articles cited in the note immediately above. For the process in Egypt, see Jaroslav Cerny, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Religion} (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1952), pp. 27ff.

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. for example Aldred's comment on a painted limestone relief in the temple of King Sethos I at Abydos which has been given the approximate date of 1303 B.C. -- Cyril Aldred, \textit{The Egyptians} (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), p. 256.

\textsuperscript{82} Cerny, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Religion}, p. 29. Of course, an exception must be made for (late?) Egyptian gods like Atum and Amun who never had an animal form and are always represented in human form. The human form of gods like the ithyphallic Min -- who appears to go back to a primitive period -- is essentially a natural form, for Min never developed an individual character and was worshipped simply as a symbol of procreation -- cf. \textit{AER} (1961), pp. 25-26.
Dynastic period, and also acquired human-like personalities.

This view that the association between the gods and elements in nature was basically different in Egypt and Sumer in fact receives circumstantial support from Frankfort himself. When Frankfort -- in *Kingship and the Gods* -- discusses the relation of the king to "the powers of nature" in Egypt and Mesopotamia respectively, he claims that the two cultures had an entirely different "frame of reference."

Consequently, whereas in Egypt the King was a god and the image of the sun upon earth, in Mesopotamia "the essential

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84 In Sumerian literary compositions belonging to the period 200 - 1750 B.C., the portraits given of the gods were often very unflattering. They love, hate, scheme, and get drunk just like mortals. For example, when Inanna travelled to Eridu to secure "the arts of civilization" (the *me*'s) for the city of Erech, she cunningly waited until Enki was the worse for drink and then persuaded him to give her the divine laws -- see "Inanna and Enki: The Transfer of the Arts of Civilization from Eridu to Erech", in Samuel Noah Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology: A Study of Spiritual and Literary Achievement in the Third Millennium B.C.* (Revised Edition; New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1961), pp. 64-68 cf. *History Begins At Sumer* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 101-3.


86 Cf. ibid., pp. 148-150.
distinction between the earthly prince and the sun-god" was always maintained so that when a Mesopotamian king was compared with the sun, the comparison was used "quite clearly as a metaphor without claiming identity." In other words, the tendency in Egypt was to identification whereas the tendency in Mesopotamia was more to association.

The different "frames of reference" which Frankfort notes in his investigation of kingship seem also to have affected the relationships that the Egyptian and the Sumerian gods had with physical phenomena, and their different degree of association with nature appears to be one of the factors that influenced their respective developments. The close identification of most Egyptian gods with a natural phenomenon gave them a form, and the possession of a natural form appears to have restricted the development of their individuality with the result they remained essentially "forces of nature" and did not become -- at least in the official theology -- "blown-up human beings." As Frankfort points out, this principle can be

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87 Kingship (1948), p. 309.
88 Kingship (1948), p. 308.
89 Cf. above, p.160.
90 R. T. Rundle Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt p. 12.
seen operating both in the case of a lesser Egyptian god like Sobek who was "manifest in the crocodile" and also in the case of a great god like Re or Amon-Re, who was described almost exclusively in natural images.

What Frankfort does not see is that from the latter half of the Early Dynastic period onwards the Sumerian gods were less closely linked with natural phenomena than the contemporary Egyptian gods and hence were not "cosmic powers" in the same sense as the latter were. However, according to Jacobsen, before Early Dynastic times the Sumerian gods too were immanent in nature and the fact at that time they were incomplete as personages confirms the principle which

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92 Ibid., pp. 26-28. In fact popular tales about the gods and official theology in ancient Egypt usually may be distinguished on this basis. In the popular tales, the gods were humanized (e.g. the description of Re in "Deliverance of Mankind from Destruction" -- ANET², pp. 10-11), whereas in the priestly descriptions the emphasis was laid on the manifestations of the gods in nature (cf. AER (1961), p. 127). Personality features also crept in when Re was associated with Atum, because the latter was always represented in human form.

93 Cf. note 79 above.

94 In their early forms, the Sumerian gods appear to have been very much bound to a phenomenon. Jacobsen describes this condition as "intransitivity" and says that
Frankfort observed at work amongst the Egyptian gods -- namely that immanence restricts the development of individuality.

Additional evidence that a relationship existed between the degree of association with nature and the development of divine personality in the Ancient Near East is provided by the full character development of Yahweh, for amongst all the Ancient Near Eastern gods, Yahweh was the least closely associated with nature and acquired the most fully-rounded personality. Hence, a generalized scale of divine personality might be set up with the early Sumerian

It is found typically in such figures of the Mesopotamian pantheon as Nissaba, the goddess of the reeds; Sumukan, god of the wildlife in the desert; Nintu, goddess of birth; Ninkasi, goddess of beer; and many others. These deities are little more than active principles underlying certain specific forms, numinous powers for certain things to be, reeds, animals, births, beer; they act not, they suffer not, they appear, are, and vanish only.

("Formative Tendencies in Sumerian Religion", in Toward the Image of Tammuz, pp. 2-3).

Although the great Sumerian gods eventually acquired anthropomorphic forms, some gods retained their intransitive character to late times and never transcended the phenomena with which they identified -- cf. Jacobsen's comments on Tammuz in the title article of Toward the Image of Tammuz, esp. pp. 74-76.

95 Cf. Kaufmann's statement about the relationship of Yahweh to nature:
gods and the Egyptian gods at one extreme, the later Sumerian gods in the centre, and Yahweh at the other extreme. Of course, within such a generalized scale, exceptions can occur. For example, as Frankfort notes, the Egyptian goddess Isis possessed an individuality comparable to that of a Sumerian god. In fact, the case of Isis provides further proof of the principle outlined above, for Isis was not connected with a natural phenomenon but from the time of the First Dynasty at least was regarded primarily as the mother of the king. Thus, Ramses IV

The natural spectacles that serve in biblical imagery to accompany theophanies are not considered aspects of God's life, but external adjuncts of his self-revelation in the world. YHWH does not live in the processes of nature: he controls them, and through them displays his might to man. No more than in the creation story is it anywhere assumed that there is a natural bond between God and nature. But nature is the stage and its phenomena the vehicles of his manifestations.


96 AER (1961), p. 26. The individual personalities of Osiris and Seth are also developed -- cf. review of AER by Jean Sainte Fare Garnot in Bibliotheca Orientalis, VI (1949), 97-8. The fact that Isis, Osiris, and Seth are closely associated together in Egyptian mythology may be significant.
declared:

I am a legitimate ruler, not an usurper, for I occupy the place of my sire, as the son of Isis, since I have appeared as King on the throne of Horus.  

Even when the Egyptian gods acquired anthropomorphic forms in wall-paintings, in statuary or in the illustrations of papyri, the figures had an impersonal quality and the anthropomorphic forms provided little more than a covering shell for a god who was apprehended primarily in terms of a natural phenomenon. Although Min was depicted as an ithyphallic man, he remained basically "the generative force of nature" and never developed anything approaching a human personality. Similarly, Nut, Shu, and Geb were given human forms in papyrus illustrations representing the separation of heaven and earth, but the figures were stereo-

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97 Text quoted in Kingship (1948), p. 44. The emphasis is mine. Frankfort believes that Isis was originally the deified throne -- cf. AER (1961), pp. 6-7.


99 Cf. note 82 above. Cerny makes the interesting observation that "Min and Ptah always appear as statues on pedestals, with legs joined together and hands hardly protruding from the body" whereas anthropomorphic gods like Atum and Amun "are represented walking with legs and hands well articulated" -- Ancient Egyptian Religion, p. 30. The lack of real human form would appear to indicate not only antiquity (as Cerny claims) but also an emphasis on function rather than on personality. Significantly, too, "there is not a single myth" connected with Min of Koptos -- Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 19.
typed and lack of life.\textsuperscript{100}

In ritual, too, the Egyptian gods were "static figures"\textsuperscript{101} and, although the festivals must have given an impression of grandeur, the acts of the cult did not fill out their personalities and on the whole the gods appear as divine "emblems" rather than as \textit{dramatis personae}.\textsuperscript{102} Thus, the festival of Sokaris clearly delineated his functions but did not build up a picture of him as a person or superperson beyond the basic fact that he was "the mysterious austere prince of the underworld,"\textsuperscript{103} and "the god of the potential life of death."\textsuperscript{104}

Finally, the terse, short statements of the early myths produced by the Egyptians reveal the same impersonal quality. In the period before the Ninth Dynasty detailed myths comparable to the myths of contemporary Sumer are

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{100} Cf. photographs in Clark, \textit{Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt}, plate 3 and in \textit{Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible}, Vol. II, p. 57.
  \item \textsuperscript{101} Bleeker, \textit{Egyptian Festivals}, p. 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{102} Cf. for example, the representation of the gods at the festival of Sokaris at Medinet Habu -- see Bleeker, \textit{Egyptian Festivals}, esp. pp. 86-90.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} Bleeker, \textit{Egyptian Festivals}, p. 88.
  \item \textsuperscript{104} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 89.
\end{itemize}
lacking almost completely while later Egyptian myths never reached the dramatic heights of Mesopotamian myths like "Enuma elish". Indeed, scholars like Bleeker would doubt whether any Egyptian myths existed in a detailed or coherent form before Plutarch arranged "the constituent elements of the myth of Osiris so as to form a unity".  

That the overall impersonal quality of the Egyptian gods may have been encouraged by other factors as well as by their close association with natural phenomena is not denied. For example, the fact that ritual played a larger part than myth or dogma in Egyptian religion  may have led to an emphasis on the functions of the gods rather than on

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105 Cf. the following observation by Clark:

In the earlier ages of Egyptian history.... there are no sagas. These make an appearance, in rather primitive form, in the texts of the Ninth Dynasty....Most early Egyptian myths are quite short episodes and can be told in one or two sentences. They are not long involved relations like those which have been recovered from the contemporary Sumerians.


107 "The ancient Egyptian religious consciousness did not manifest itself in a wealth of mythical ideas, but in the pathos of the cultic act" -- Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 12.
their personalities -- to a large extent, the Sumerian gods acquired their substantial forms and individual identities through the colorful stories about their superhuman doings. Again, the artistic representation of the Egyptian gods was undoubtedly affected by the general "anti-functional tendency in Egyptian art."\textsuperscript{108} That the close association of the Egyptian gods with nature was exerting a similar influence at the same time is not thereby precluded. Indeed, an interrelation would appear to exist between Mrs. Frankfort's theory of Egyptian art, Bleeker's theory about the importance of ritual within Egyptian religion, and the view developed here about the effect of the Egyptian gods' close association with nature, for the "anti-functional" trend in art, the emphasis on ritual rather than myth, and immanence in nature, would all tend to separate the gods from personal and social categories and to place the emphasis on their cosmic context and functions.

To sum up, then, comparison of the Egyptian gods with both the Sumerian gods and with Yahweh has suggested, firstly,

that in the Ancient Near East a relationship existed between the degree of association with nature and the development of divine personality and, secondly, that the extremely close association of the Egyptian gods with natural phenomena "acted back upon" the religious consciousness of the ancient Egyptians by limiting the development of anthropomorphic and personal traits.

Not only did an extremely close association with natural phenomena affect the development of the Egyptian gods, it also "acted back upon" theological thought when particular problems were linked with particular phenomena. Frankfort indicates that to some extent he understands the effect of such correlations, for he points to the consequences of linking the sun to the problem of death. "Where the sunset is inseparable from the thought, "he says, "the dawn is a surety of resurrection." Here Eliade's investigations into "the patterns" in religion are significant, because he concludes that "we have...every reason to speak of a 'logic of symbols', in the sense that symbols, of every

kin, and at whatever level, are always consistent and systematic."\textsuperscript{110} That is, an object consistently symbolizes certain things and is also limited in what it can symbolize.\textsuperscript{111} An illustration of this principle is provided by a physical object like the sun which in primitive and ancient societies did not stand for just anything. The cross-cultural investigation carried out by Eliade reveals that the symbolic qualities or powers of the sun are definitely circumscribed -- for example, the sun has "never in any sense" symbolized "becoming,"\textsuperscript{112} as the moon constantly has. Hence, to link


\textsuperscript{111} This principle is not necessarily applicable outside the boundaries of Eliade's investigations though the researches of some psychologists like Jung suggest that there is "a community and a constancy of content in the basic symbols man uses" -- Daniel J. Sullivan, "Symbolism in Catholic Worship", in F. Ernest Johnson (ed.), Religious Symbolism (New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, 1955), p. 46. However, the fact that Eliade draws his evidence mainly from primitive and ancient societies and that a great number of natural objects are employed as symbols in these societies makes his investigations especially useful in the present inquiry. The question whether or not the principle enunciated above would hold true for all symbols, including those used within a modern, secular, industrialized society, lies beyond the scope of this study.

\textsuperscript{112} Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, p. 154.
the sun to the problem of death is to place the latter within a particular symbolic "system" and, once this connection is established, the sun-symbolism "acts back upon" the interpretation of death to the extent that it places limits upon the interpretation. In particular, the sun is never thought of as "dying" and so death, for those initiated into the secrets of the sun, tends to be regarded merely as an interruption and life after death is looked upon as a continuance of life on earth. By contrast, within the lunar symbolic "system" death is seen as "a change... of one's level of existence" and the dead are reborn into a new life. Put differently and in very general terms, the difference between the solar and the lunar approaches to the problem of death may be said to be that the former holds out the promise of immortality and the latter holds out the promise of rebirth or resurrection. The line between the two approaches is often very fine but nevertheless it is distinct.

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113 Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion, p. 449.
114 Ibid., p. 136.
115 Ibid., p. 171.
116 Indeed, the conflict within Christianity between the belief in the immortality of the soul and the belief
That the ancient Egyptians intuitively realized their symbols possessed limitations is suggested by their adoption of a "multiplicity of answers" to a single problem.\textsuperscript{117} By placing the same experience within a variety of symbolic "systems" in turn, more and more of its facets were revealed, and in this way the apprehension of the experience was extended. Thus, the experience of death was placed within many different symbolic "systems" and in the text of a blessing quoted by Frankfort in Ancient Egyptian Religion three of these "systems" were employed in quick succession:

\begin{quote}
I grant thee, that thou mayest rise like the sun, rejuvenate thyself like the moon, repeat life like the flood of the Nile.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

Very obviously the three symbolic "systems" represented in this quotation are -- according to Eliade's analysis --

\begin{quote}
in the resurrection of the body (cf. Oscar Cullmann, Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? -- London: The Epworth Press, 1958) could be regarded as a conflict between two symbolic "systems" i.e. a solar symbolism derived from the Greeks and a lunar symbolism that had carried through from early Hebrew times.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{117}\textsuperscript{AER} (1961), pp. 19-20.

\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., p. 107.
those of the sun, the moon, and water. By such a close juxtaposition of images, the limits of the separate symbols were overcome to a certain extent and one of the basic motivations for providing a "multiplicity of answers" would appear to be an intuitive recognition that individual symbols when used in isolation failed to convey an experience either fully or completely.

Careful note should be taken of three results which have emerged from the investigation undertaken in this chapter on the basis of Berger's theories. First, a way has been found out of the old impasse between the contention that the natural environment influences religion directly and the contention that "the natural environment serves as no more than a backdrop" to both culture and religion.

119 Amongst other capacities, water is thought to possess creative life - giving power and so can ensure eternal life through regeneration -- cf. Eliade. Patterns in Comparative Religion, pp. 193-197.

120 When an attempt is made to analyze the factors that led to the integration of Egyptian religion over the course of time, the impulse provided by the inadequacy of local symbolic "systems" or of local understanding of the divine should not be ignored. Generally, scholars tend to concentrate upon the parts played by political and economic factors (cf. for example, Cerny's analysis of the earlier periods in Ancient Egyptian Religion) and to overlook the religious or psychological motivation supplied by the limitations of local theologies.

The foregoing analysis of Egyptian religious thought would suggest that, once nature is invited in, it affects the shape of theology in a profound fashion. The second result that has emerged is that connection with natural phenomena conditions both the understanding of the divine and the approaches made to the various problems of human existence. Finally, the investigation has demonstrated that, once a particular way of looking at nature has been generally accepted and established by custom, it exerts a powerful effect upon religious thought. In the next chapter the tremendous strength of the traditional apprehensions of nature in both Egypt and Mesopotamia will be further examined.
CHAPTER VII

ORDER AND PERMANENCE

In the last chapter, an attempt was made to show how, once the traditional Egyptian view of nature had been built up, it "acted back upon" the consciousness of the ancient Egyptian in certain particular ways. In this chapter, the concept of ma'at — which has already been briefly discussed¹ — will be further examined. In addition, the effect of the lack of tension between nature and society and the divine and the human within the Egyptian total view of the universe will be investigated.

The following statement by Bleeker indicates the important role that ma'at played in Egyptian thought:

The Ancient Egyptian lived in the unshakable faith that Ma-a-t, the order instituted by the sun-god in prehistoric times, was, despite periods of chaos, injustice and immorality, absolute and eternal. Therefore, the ancient Egyptian view of

¹Cf. above, pp. 150-157.
history was, in sharp contrast to that of modern man, not dynamic, but static: he believed in a divine order which is stable and holds its own in spite of the fact that from time to time chaotic situations arise.  

Although this description of the effects that followed from the ancient Egyptian's belief in ma'at refers specifically to its influence in the social sphere, a similar type of comment might be made about the Egyptian attitude towards natural events, for ma'at was also "the divine order of nature as established at the time of creation".  

The dominating and all-pervasive effect of the Egyptian traditional view that nature was orderly and stable may first be illustrated by comparing the Egyptians' attitude to natural events with that of the Mesopotamians. In Egypt natural events like all other events were generally interpreted in the light of the order embodied in ma'at and, because they were explained on the basis of an assumption that the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{2}}\text{Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 8.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\text{AER (1961), p. 54. The link between ma'at in society and ma'at in nature can be seen particularly in the ancient Egyptian theology of kingship -- cf. Kingship (1948), pp. 51-60.}\]
universe was essentially orderly, beneficial events tended to reinforce the established view while disasters failed to destroy it. By contrast, in Mesopotamia natural events were interpreted on the basis of an assumption that the universe was essentially disorderly and that men were at the mercy of gods who might at any time and perhaps for very trivial reasons unleash the terrible forces of nature. As a result, disasters tended to reinforce the view that the order which did exist in the universe was precarious, imposed, and could not be depended upon, while series of beneficial events never managed to reverse this belief. Some examples may demonstrate the influence exerted by such commonly accepted assumptions.

From time to time famines of varying severity occurred both in Egypt and Mesopotamia. In ancient Egypt famine was,

4Cf., in particular, "Enuma Elish" through which runs the idea that order has to be imposed upon a basically chaotic universe.

5According to the version of the Flood Story given in the "Atrahasis Epic", Enlil decided to eliminate mankind because he was being kept awake at nights by the noise that they were making -- cf. ANET2, p. 104. Compared with the specifically moral grounds given for Yahweh's decision to send the Flood -- cf. Gen. VI:5 -- the reason put forward for Enlil's action appears completely trivial and reflects the Mesopotamian belief that their gods often acted on a mere whim.

6Recognition is taken of the fact that the degree of famine can vary considerably. However, both Egypt and Mesopotamia had bad famines and the famines in Egypt could be
as Wilson says, "always a lurking possibility" and Jacques Vandier in his book _La Famine Dans L'Égypte Ancienne_ collects together a considerable number of texts which expressly mention one or more years of famine. These texts range in date from the end of the Old Kingdom to the time of the Ptolemies and demonstrate that famine -- which might be very severe indeed -- for example, the famine that occurred between the end of the Sixth Dynasty and the start of the Ninth Dynasty cf. Barbara Bell, "The Dark Ages in Ancient History. I. The First Dark Age in Egypt", _American Journal of Archaeology_, 75 (1971), 1-26.


8Cairo: L'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale, 1936.

9Vandier excludes the large group of texts that contained simply the traditional phrase: "I gave bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, and clothes to the naked" on the grounds that the use of the phrase without qualification was not a proof of famine -- cf. _La Famine_, pp. xiv-xv.

10The two earliest texts cited by Vandier come from tombs belonging to the end of either the Sixth or Eighth Dynasty -- cf. _La Famine_, p. 2. Interestingly, both these texts are antedated by a relief which was found on the interior wall of the Temple Causeway of King Unis, the last king of the Fifth Dynasty, and which depicts a group of emaciated people dying of hunger. The group includes men, women, and children, and some of them are so weak that they have to be supported by others. Unfortunately, the identity of the people depicted is uncertain, and they may be either Egyptian peasants or Bedouin. However, the relief is important because of its early date -- cf. "Discoveries At Saqqara: A Valley Temple and Vth Dynasty Tombs", _Illustrated London News_, February 26, 1944, Vol. 204, p. 249; _Culture_ (1965), fig. 2d; Aldred, _The Egyptians_, plate 17.
caused by either a too low or too high Nile\textsuperscript{11} was a constant threat throughout this period. Thus, an inscription in the tomb of a nomarch of the First Intermediate Period\textsuperscript{12} provides evidence of a famine that had lasted some years. Boasting about his efficient administration, the owner of the tomb asserts that

When all the people in Upper Egypt were dying because of hunger and were eating their own children, I made sure that no-one died from hunger in this nome. I gave a loan of grain to Upper Egypt ..... I kept alive both the house of Elephantine and Iat-negen during these years -- after the towns of Hefat and Hor-mer had been satisfied.\textsuperscript{13}

In a similar manner, an inscription from another tomb of a

\textsuperscript{11}Cf. Vandier, \textit{La Famine}, pp. 45-48. Vandier also emphasizes the part played by civil wars because they usually led to the dikes and canals being neglected -- cf. \textit{ibid.}, pp. 48-51. To calculate exactly the magnitude of the inundation during a particular year or series of years is extremely difficult, because few records have survived and, even when the measurements of the flood-heights at a certain place have been preserved, the zero-point often cannot be established -- cf. Barbara Bell, "The Oldest Records of the Nile Floods", \textit{Geographical Journal}, 136 (1970), 569-572 and Kees, \textit{Ancient Egypt}, pp. 51-52. Comparisons between periods are even more complicated because sometimes different scales of measurement were used and sometimes the measurements were idealized -- cf. \textit{ibid.}, pp. 50-51.

\textsuperscript{12}The tomb is that of Ankhtifi-Nakht who, according to Vandier, administered the nomes of Edfou and Hierakonpolis and died between 2060 and 2020 B.C. -- cf. \textit{La Famine}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{13}Cf. Vandier, \textit{La Famine}, p. 205. The lacuna in the quotation indicates the absence of three lines (19-21). Line
later period\footnote{The tomb is that of Bebi at El-Kab. Although Brugsch had previously ascribed the tomb to the time of the Seventeenth Dynasty, Vandier argues that it belongs to the period of the Thirteenth Dynasty -- cf. La Famine, pp. 18-19.} provides evidence of successive "hungry times", for the occupant claims

\begin{quote}
I was a man who garnered grain, who loved kindness, and who was vigilant in winter time. When hunger occurred -- as it did in many years -- I gave grain to my town every time there was hunger.\footnote{Cf. Vandier, La Famine, p. 115.}
\end{quote}

Court documents like "The Admonitions of Ipu-wer"\footnote{Cf. Vandier, La Famine, pp. 4-5 and Bell, ".....The First Dark Age in Egypt", American Journal of Archaeology, 75 (1971), 11-14.} or "The Decree of Canopus"\footnote{Cf. \textit{ibid.}, pp. 33-34 and pp. 126-28. The decree was promulgated by Ptolemy III in 238 B.C.} as well as temple texts emphatically

\begin{quote}
19 has been omitted in the translation given here because the original is difficult to read -- Vandier reconstructs the line on the basis of another text. Lines 20-21 are not given by Vandier in \textit{La Famine}. I am indebted to Dr. N. B. Millet, Associate Curator of the Egyptian Department, Royal Ontario Museum, for providing me with literal translations of both this inscription and the one from the tomb of Bebi. My intention is to preserve the sense of the original text through an idiomatic rendering. Other English translations of this text are given by Wilson in \textit{ANET\textsuperscript{2}}, p. 31, note 1, and by Bell in ".....The First Dark Age in Egypt", American Journal of Archaeology, 75, (1971), 9.
\end{quote}
and ritually denying the existence of famine also attest to the ever-present fear.

Perhaps, the best known Egyptian text relating to the subject is the so-called "Famine Stela" which is attributed to King Djoser of the Third Dynasty but which in fact may have been composed during the Ptolemaic period. This inscription describes the distress brought about by a low Nile and has caught the attention of scholars because, as in the Biblical story of Joseph, seven years of famine are mentioned. The text is in the form of a letter from King Djoser to the Governor of Elephantine, and the King is alleged to have written as follows:

To let thee know. I was in distress on the Great Throne, and those who are in the palace were in heart's affliction from a very great evil, since the Nile had not come in my time for a space of seven years. Grain was scant, fruits were dried up, and everything which they eat was short. Every man robbed his companion. They moved without going (ahead). The infant was wailing; the youth was waiting; and the heart of the old men was in sorrow, their legs were

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19 Vandier discusses the problem of the date and authenticity of this inscription at length (*La Famine*, pp. 40-42), but Wilson says that the question "cannot be answered in final terms" (*ANET*², p. 31).

bent, crouching on the ground, their arms were folded. 21

In view of the other evidence of recurrent famines throughout the ancient period, the question whether or not this inscription preserves an original and genuine tradition of a severe famine which occurred during the Third Dynasty is for the purposes of this study unimportant. What is both relevant and significant is that those who had the inscription carved during the Ptolemaic period believed that famines were a part of Egyptian life from the time of the Old Kingdom. Yet in spite of the fact that famine was always a possibility, the constant threat seemingly never destroyed the Egyptians' overarching sense of confidence, 22 whereas according to Jacobsen the fear of starvation in Mesopotamia lay "at the very roots of existence" and contributed greatly to the general feeling of insecurity and human frailty. 23

Again, both the Nile and two great rivers of Mesopotamia -- the Tigris and the Euphrates -- could bring disaster and destruction. The Nile, says Wilson, is "antic

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21 ANET2, p. 31 -- the translation of the words underlined is uncertain and the word "ahead" was inserted in order to make the sense clearer.


and unpredictable, if it rose too high, it "would sweep away dikes and canal banks and bring mud-brick villages tumbling down." The description of an abnormal inundation during the Twenty-Third Dynasty gives an idea of the ruin and the terror that the excess of water produced:

The whole village became like a sea; the temples were invaded by the waves; the people were like water-fowl, or swimmers in a torrent.

The only defence was to build protective dikes and Herodotus gave an indication of the perennial fear aroused by the river when he wrote that "even today, under Persian rule, special attention is paid to these dikes, and they are carefully strengthened every year." Like the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates were unpredictable and might burst through their banks at any time.

The fear with which the flooding rivers were regarded in

24 ANET, p. 31.
26 Quoted in Alexandre Moret, The Nile and Egyptian Civilization, p. 32.
27 Quoted ibid.
Mesopotamia is clearly conveyed in a passage put into an English poetic form by Mrs. Frankfort and quoted by Jacobsen:

The rampant flood which no man can oppose,
Which shakes the heavens and causes earth to tremble,
In an appalling blanket folds mother and child,
Beats down the canebrake's full luxuriant greenery,
And drowns the harvest in its time of ripeness.

Rising waters, grievous to eyes of man,
All-powerful flood, which forces the embankments
And mows mighty mesu - trees,
(Frenzied) storm, tearing all things in massed confusion
With it (in hurtling speed). 29

Of course, comparison of natural features can seldom be exact, for physical phenomena never repeat themselves in detail. However, the resemblances between the Nile on the one hand and the Tigris and the Euphrates on the other are sufficient to warrant a general comparison, and the conclusion is forced upon one that the similarities between the great rivers are as great as the differences emphasized by Breasted and Frankfort. The latter stress the differences in an effort to demonstrate that the contrast in outlook between the cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia was directly related to the differing geographies of the two areas, but the root of the difference in Egyptian and Mesopotamian attitudes would appear in fact to lie in their different apprehensions of nature.

29 Before Philosophy (1963), p. 139.
Thus, extremely similar natural events are looked upon differently in different cultures, and nature tends to wear the dress that the host society expects or wants it to put on. In Egypt, the fundamental assumption was that nature was orderly and stable, and hence all natural events were interpreted on the basis of this tradition. Unlike the Mesopotamians, the Egyptians never apparently held state festivals in response to sudden crises, for they had a firm conviction that bad times could not last and that the good order which constituted the very essence of existence would ultimately be re-established.

In a lecture delivered only a few months before he died, Frankfort speaks about how each summer the Mesopotamians were confronted with heat, drought, dust-storms, and disease. Commenting upon their mood of apprehension at that time every year, he says:

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30 Cf. Frankfort, "State Festivals in Egypt and Mesopotamia", Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, XV (1952), 1-2. Although the death of a king and the accession of his successor was "one occasion" when "anxiety prevailed even in Egypt" (ibid., p. 8), the changeover of rulers is not counted by Frankfort as an exceptional event, presumably because it was part of the regular pattern of life within Egyptian society.

31 Cf. also Kingship (1948), pp. 314-315.
Whenever nature is experienced as animated and the idea of "natural law" does not exist, men live through such a period of dearth in anxiety. For they can never be quite certain whether or not the autumnal rains will put an end to their misery.³²

The discussion of the differing reactions of the Egyptians and the Mesopotamians to famine should have made clear that among the latter uncertainty and consequently deep-rooted anxiety were the norm. Hence, this description of the Mesopotamians' reaction to the dearth brought by summer comes as no surprise. At the same time, according to the evidence accumulated above and during the course of this study, the ancient Egyptians do not in general appear to have been unduly

³²"The Archetype in Analytical Psychology and the History of Religion", Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, XXI (1958), 172. As a result of a long and complicated history, the phrase "natural law" is unfortunately extremely ambiguous. However, to judge from the context in which the phrase is used and also from the general line of argument in the lecture, Frankfort is referring primarily to the physical "laws of nature" by which certain societies explain the regularity of seasonal changes, the daily progress of the sun, etc. In short, he is making the observation that some societies view nature as being controlled by a type of "law" whereas others do not and is pointing out one of the important consequences. This core idea that the presence or absence of "law" in "the world of nature" has a particular effect would seem to be valuable and is taken up here with reference to Egyptian as well as Mesopotamian thought. Under these circumstances, the exact meaning of the phrase "natural law" is not of immediate concern.
anxious when faced by times of dearth, famine, or social upheaval. As already suggested, the reason appears to be that the Egyptians derived confidence from their belief in ma'at as a primary constituent of the universe and the guarantor of its order. Hence, in ancient Egypt the concept of ma'at would seem to have fulfilled a function very similar to that which Frankfort suggests is fulfilled by "natural law" in other societies.

As a belief which involved the notion of a universe governed by a set of rules, ma'at encouraged an overall trust both in the Pharaonic institution and in existence as a whole, because even the gods lived according to ma'at\textsuperscript{33}. It also gave assurance by its eternal character.\textsuperscript{34} Since nature was believed to be ruled by ma'at, the Egyptians never considered the possibility that nature could come to an end or be threatened by extinction. They had no real anxiety that some day the forces of evil and death in nature might triumph, and the difference in the general atmosphere of Egyptian and Mesopotamian rituals appears to stem partly from the fact that

\textsuperscript{33}Although present in earlier theology, the notion that the gods "lived on ma'at" received particular emphasis during the latter half of the Eighteenth Dynasty -- cf. Culture (1965), p. 218.
the Egyptians, by contrast with the Mesopotamians, never doubted that nature would continue as it always had.\textsuperscript{35}

Hence, although the sun-god Re had to repulse the dragon Apophis every night,\textsuperscript{36} the continued triumph of the former -- aided by the rituals carried out by men -- never seems to have been in question. The sun might be obscured by storm-clouds or darkness, but it still followed its set course and would eventually emerge again.

Under the auspices of ma'at, the regularity of nature -- for example, in the daily circuit of the sun just mentioned or in the annual cycle of the Nile -- became evidence of the orderly and eternal character of the universe and hence emotionally supportive. That is, once the traditional Egyptian "world of nature" was established, the view that nature was essentially orderly and eternal interacted with the view that the sun and the Nile, because of their "periodicity",\textsuperscript{37} exhibited these properties, and the two views sustained each other. Apparently conclusive proof of the orderly and eternal character of the universe was thus provided, and drawing

\textsuperscript{35} Cf. below, pp. 202-203.

\textsuperscript{36} See, for example, the texts relating to "the Repulsing of the Dragon" given in ANET\textsuperscript{2}, pp. 6-7 and 11-12.

\textsuperscript{37} The term is used by Wilson cf. above, pp. 92-93.
comfort and assurance from this "fact", the ancient Egyptian became confident that he too -- if he lived by ma'at -- would enjoy a harmonious and eternal existence. As will be shown later when further comparison is made with the ideas of the Mesopotamians, the recurring rhythms of nature are not by themselves necessarily supportive. They became supportive in ancient Egypt because of the Egyptian view of nature. In short, the overall ideational context was crucial. As a result of the belief that nature had orderly and eternal dimensions, the regular processes of nature attracted attention and then became evidence that nature and hence also Egyptian society and, if he chose, the individual -- because ma'at was the ruler and guide of them all -- possessed these attributes.

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38 Contrary to what Wilson implies -- cf. above, pp. 92-93.

39 A comparison might be drawn here with everyday life where also the context of an action can govern the interpretation put upon it. The same action performed under different social circumstances is often construed entirely differently and according to the particular situation in which it is carried out.

40 Careful note should be taken where the argument in this paragraph differs from that put forward by Wilson. He tries to maintain that in ancient Egypt the actions of physical phenomena -- including the actions of the sun which rises and sets regularly each day in many other countries -- were especially and uniquely regular. The argument here is that the regularity of nature was highlighted in ancient Egypt because the established view of nature emphasized order and permanence.
The close link between nature and society and between the divine and the human in ancient Egyptian thought in fact had important consequences, for it meant that juxtaposing nature to society or the divine to the human for the purposes of comparison was not normally done and questions about the superiority or inferiority of the one to the other were seldom raised. The consubstantiality of the divine and the human was made manifest in a visible fashion through the person of the Pharaoh who as a god lived in and ruled over a human society. Furthermore, as a result of the belief that he was a god, he was in practice regarded as the exemplar of ma'at and hence the ultimate authority. As Wilson playfully says:

Since the king was himself a god, he was the earthly interpreter of ma'at and -- in theory at least -- was subject to the control of ma'at only within the limits of his conscience, if a god needs to have a conscience.

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41 This statement relates specifically to the period before 1300 B.C. According to Wilson who discusses the matter of "consubstantiality" at length -- cf. esp. Before Philosophy (1963), pp. 71-8 and Culture (1965), pp. 46-7 -- in the later period "a gulf developed between weak, little man, and powerful god" -- Before Philosophy (1963), p. 78.


43 Culture (1965), p. 50.
Only in extreme crises -- as for instance during the First Intermediate Period -- does an appeal seem to have been made to 'ma'at as a higher level of authority and the actions of the Pharaoh measured against the divine ideal in a critical fashion. 44

The close affinity between the divine and the human can also be seen in the Egyptian concept of sin and in their ritual. Although the ancient Egyptian accorded the gods a higher place than men in the universe and feared them because they punished misdeeds, he never regarded himself as basically unworthy or corrupt compared with the gods. 45 His sense of sin appears to have sprung not from 'a feeling of unholiness' but from a feeling 'that he has been foolish'. 46 To offend the gods or to fail to live by ma'at was sheer stupidity because, one, he would be punished, and, two, he could gain so much by being in harmony with the divine. At

44 See, for example, "The Admonitions of Ipu-wer", esp. sections xii-xiii -- ANET2, p. 443.

45 On the subject of the ancient Egyptian's sense of sin and guilt, see C. J. Bleeker, "Guilt and Purification in Ancient Egypt", Numen, XIII (1966), 81-7. Bleeker's paper provides a necessary corrective to Frankfort's view that amongst the ancient Egyptians the concept of sin was completely absent -- cf. AER (1961), pp. 73-80.

46 Bleeker, "Guilt and Purification..., 84-5.
the same time, when he realized that he had done evil, he showed sincere sorrow and had a genuine sense of being at fault.\(^{47}\) In general, then, the ancient Egyptian felt himself to be on the same side as the gods. Both he and they had the duty of maintaining ma'at.\(^{48}\) In fulfillment of this duty, the gods would discipline him if he was foolish and committed some misdeed. Conversely, he knew that, if he was wise and did right, he would be accepted by them and would join them after death. As will emerge later, the atmosphere of Mesopotamian religion was entirely different.\(^{49}\)

In ritual, too, the Egyptians approached the gods with confidence. The predominant theme and intent of Egyptian festivals was, according to Bleeker, renewal.\(^{50}\) Following

\(^{47}\) Cf. the texts quoted by Bleeker in "Guilt and Purification..., 83-84. The texts date from the 19th Dynasty and were "inscribed on....memorial stones from the Theban necropole" (ibid., 82).

\(^{48}\) Cf. Bleeker's comments about the assumptions underlying the judgement of Osiris -- ibid., 85-6. See also AER (1961), pp. 76-7.

\(^{49}\) So, too, is the atmosphere of biblical religion -- cf. AER (1961), p. 77.

\(^{50}\) Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, pp. 21-22.
Kristensen, he also maintains that the notion of "magic power" played an important role in ritual, and renewal is achieved both for gods and for men "through the magic effect of the rites performed". Thus, the festival of Sokaris seems to have been held to activate and renew the power of the god. The mysterious ḫb sd festival seems to have been aimed at renewal of the priestly dignity of the king. The intention of the funerary cult and the festivals of the dead was to renew the life of the deceased and elevate them to the status of "living divine beings". Through such rites, the magical power of the divine was generated and made available, and the process benefited both gods and men. Again, the contrast with Mesopotamian religion -- in particular, its emphasis on the necessity of propitiating the gods -- will be found to be great.

To sum up then: the Egyptian view of nature "acted back upon" the consciousness of the ancient Egyptian in that

51Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 44.
52Ibid., pp. 86-8.
53Ibid., p. 121.
54Ibid., p. 139.
55Cf. below, esp. p. 204.
it controlled his attitude particularly to disasters. The possibilities of permanent disorder or of nature itself not continuing as it always had were never admitted and, because society was indissolubly part of the universal order and stability which was exhibited by "the world of nature" and derived from **ma'at**, fears and anxieties about the continuance of Egyptian society were also allayed. Although the occasional writer might express pessimistic opinions about life⁵⁶ and the individual Egyptian might have misgivings about his own personal destiny especially his fate after death, the general confidence in an orderly, stable, benevolent, and eternal universe remained.⁵⁷

Add to these circumstances the fact that the Egyptians did not make so sharp a distinction between nature and society or the divine and the human as some other peoples have done and one has a situation in which comparisons -- and hence dissatisfaction or feelings of insecurity -- were actively discouraged. In short, the way in which the Egyptian "world of nature" was constructed together with the way in which it

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⁵⁶ Cf., for example, "A Dispute over Suicide" -- **ANET**², pp. 405-407.

was related to other elements in the Egyptians' total view of the universe tended to exclude ideas of disorder and so contributed to the general stability of Egyptian society. Indeed, Egyptian rulers appear to have used the concept of \textit{ma'at} for their own political ends and deliberately emphasized it in order to encourage social peace and acceptance of their authority.\textsuperscript{58}

The manner in which the traditional view of nature "acted back upon" the consciousness of the ancient Egyptian can be seen even more clearly when Mesopotamian ideas are examined. As has been already pointed out, Sumerian gods were both associated with natural phenomena and also developed human personalities.\textsuperscript{59} The introduction of definite human attributes into the sphere of nature had a significant effect. Natural phenomena were believed to be ruled by "wills"\textsuperscript{60} which, though superhuman, had the same general characteristics as human wills and, from mankind's point of view, one of most frightening characteristics was that of unpredictability.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{58}Cf. above, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{59}Cf. above, pp. 159-167.
\textsuperscript{60}This term is used by Jacobsen -- cf. articles cited in Chapter VI, note 79.
As a result, the processes of nature were never regarded as permanent or guaranteed. They were thought to be controlled directly by gods whose actions reflected simply their own inclinations, and E.A. Speiser's comment that the ancient Mesopotamians "endowed the powers of nature with most of the failings of mankind" neatly sums up the situation that the Mesopotamians created for themselves. No one could tell what the gods might do. In particular, no one could tell when they might unleash some of the terrible forces in nature and bring disaster on mankind.

This pessimistic outlook appears to be related directly to the fact that according to Mesopotamian belief not only did no universal divine order exist, but also no god was supreme and major decisions could be made only by "an assembly of all the gods." As Speiser says, this last

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62 Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia", reprinted in Toward the Image of Tammuz -- q.v., p. 164. The divine assembly, for example, gave Marduk "kingship over the universe entire" ("Enuma elish", IV, 14 -- cf. ANET\textsuperscript{2}, p. 66) and approved the grant of immortality to Utnapishtim and his wife ("The Epic of Gilgamesh", XI, 197-8 -- cf. ANET\textsuperscript{2}, p. 95).
restriction

served as an important buffer against absolutism, but it also made for uncertainty and insecurity, in heaven no less than on earth. The destiny of the universe had to be decided afresh each year. 63

How far the ordinary Mesopotamian stood in actual day-to-day fear of the gods is hard to gauge, 64 but the emphasis in the official religion is certainly upon "constant watchfulness and elaborate ritual," 65 as a protection against surprise moves by them. The lack of orderliness in the "cosmic order" in fact provides a remarkable contrast to the well-regulated "political order" established by kings like Hammurabi on the basis of law. 66


64 Oppenheim rightly emphasizes the necessity to separate "the royal religion from that of the common man, and both from that of the priest". Unfortunately, however, "the common man .... remains an unknown .... in Mesopotamian religion" -- Ancient Mesopotamia, p. 181.

65 Speiser, "Ancient Mesopotamia", in The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East, p. 44.

66 I am indebted to Rabbi Stanley Weber, a fellow graduate student at McMaster University, for drawing my attention to this fact. Voeglin maintains that in Mesopotamia "political order reflects cosmic order" -- Order and History, I, p. 26 cf. above Chapter VI, note 64. That the Mesopotamians saw in the divine pattern of government a prototype for the
The Mesopotamian approach to history both reflected and encouraged the view that the gods -- and hence nature -- were unpredictable. Unlike the Egyptians who usually magnified pleasant events and ignored disasters, the Mesopotamians were concerned to record all events in order to discover what Speiser terms "the formula of deliverance" -- that is, knowledge about the workings of the gods which might enable men to avoid arousing their wrath. The Mesopotamians recalled that in the remote past the gods had nearly eliminated pattern of government in human society is true. However, in certain important aspects the two societies differed. One difference was the lack of orderliness in the divine sphere. Another difference lay in the stage each had reached in the development of the typically Mesopotamian form of government. During the historical period, the earthly state was basically an autocracy but the society of the gods was still organized as a "primitive democracy" i.e. along the lines of the earlier form of government in Mesopotamia (cf. Jacobsen, "Primitive Democracy in Ancient Mesopotamia"). Thus, the divine society could be said to be "behind the times".

In Egypt, both kings and private individuals "took great pains" to record only events and facts "which would reflect credit upon them" -- Ludlow Bull, "Ancient Egypt", in The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East, p. 3. Furthermore, the Egyptians tended to stress what was typical or what conformed to the ideal and were not overly concerned with historical accuracy -- cf Culture (1965), p. 3 and AER (1961), pp. 47-50.

mankind through the Deluge and they always had a nagging fear that the gods might -- perhaps on a mere whim -- suddenly do something similar. Other disasters in more recent times reinforced this view of the unpredictability of the gods, and nature was studied for signs that might help men to anticipate and interpret the desires of their superhuman rulers.

The same general feeling of insecurity was also expressed in Mesopotamian ritual. The Mesopotamians were uncertain both about the actions of particular phenomena in nature, and about the continuity of life in nature as whole. They believed that on certain occasions the life of nature itself "stood in danger of extinction." Hence the gods' victory over chaos at the beginning of time was recited during the New Year's festival in order to "cast a spell of accomplishment over the hazardous and all-important renewal of the world."
of natural life in the present." At the festival, men joined with the gods in an attempt to overcome the demonic powers of chaos and restore the life of nature, but whether or not the attempt would be successful always remained uncertain. The fate of society was also doubtful and, even if nature revived, the future of those who had taken part in the festival was not necessarily secure and during the final stages of the ritual the gods apparently "determined the fate of society during the ensuing year."

As this description of Mesopotamian religion should already have made clear, a great gulf existed between the divine and the human in Mesopotamian thought. The Mesopotamians were acutely aware of the difference in substance between gods and men. The Epics dwelt upon the idea that mortal existence was transitory and uncertain. Men could do nothing that would last and they were doomed to die. Furthermore, the immortal gods kept them in ignorance about how long they had to live. This insistence upon the impermanence of human

74 Cf. above, pp. 189-190.
75 Kingship (1948), p. 333.
76 See, for example, "The Epic of Gilgamesh", Tablet X, col. vi, lines 26 ff -- ANET², pp. 92-93.
achievements and human life, combined with the belief that the gods were unpredictable, led to a predominance of propitiatory notions in Mesopotamian religion. This fact is rightly emphasized by Speiser who says:

Nothing was settled for all time, nothing could be taken for granted; hence the anxiety and the insecurity of the mortals, who must forever be intent on propitiating the gods in order to obtain a favorable decision. 77

The emphasis in Egyptian ritual was completely different. In Egypt, the gods were used rather than propitiated 78—and sometimes were even threatened. 79

The above very brief review of Mesopotamian religious ideas ought to have thrown into relief the elements of order and permanence in the Egyptian view of nature. The review should also have shown how in Mesopotamia nature is set over against society, the divine against human. As a result, comparisons were continually made and the belief that mortals were at the mercy of the natural phenomena through which the immortal gods exhibited their power is


78Cf. above, pp. 195-196.

79See, for example, the famous "Cannibal Hymn" to which Wilson refers in Before Philosophy (1963), p. 77.
fundamental to Mesopotamian religion. By contrast, the Egyptian "discovered himself" in his essentially orderly "world of nature" and hoped to join the gods in nature after death.  

Thus, the Egyptian and Mesopotamian "worlds of nature" were entirely different and the powerful influence that can be exerted by a particular view of nature, once it has been established, is apparent. The two-way relationship between these "worlds of nature" and other aspects of Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture should also be noted. Cause and effect became completely blurred as the respective ritual customs or the way of recording history "acted back upon" and helped sustain the view of nature, while the latter was at the same time "acting back upon" and influencing the former.

CHAPTER VIII

THE WAY AHEAD

To set out in detail here all the conclusions reached in this inquiry would appear to be both unnecessary and repetitious. However, especial mention will be made of three matters related to the discussion and in a final brief section the main lines of the argument will be summarized.

The first matter worthy of particular mention concerns the origins of the Egyptian's view of nature. In this dissertation attention has been focused upon what Frankfort calls the "trunk".\(^1\) Egyptian religious conceptions and the Egyptian view of nature have been studied during the period from the old kingdom to the fourteenth century, when the culture developed under the early dynasties began to disintegrate.\(^2\) From time to time reference has been made to the different stages in the development of both religious


ideas and the "world of nature", but the main concern has been to illustrate the relationship between religious conceptions and the natural environment in ancient Egypt during the period of her greatest power and greatest achievement. "The roots" of the Egyptian view of nature have been discussed only in general terms -- that is, in terms of "externalization", "objectivation", and "internalization". Evidence has been provided to show that the Egyptians gave certain natural phenomena an important place in religion but ignored others. The questions of why they chose the particular phenomena that they did and why they focused upon the regularity of nature have been left on one side.

Breasted and Wilson, in particular, try to explain the Egyptian selection of natural symbols on the basis of a theory of physical prominence. However, comparison with other cultures demonstrated that such a hypothesis could not be upheld. The notion that nature was intrinsically more regular in Egypt than elsewhere was also rejected. Evidence was provided to show that, for example, famines occurred frequently in both Egypt and Mesopotamia and that in spite of numerous "hungry times" in Egypt the Egyptians remained convinced of the orderliness and regularity of nature, whereas in Mesopotamia the frequent famines merely reinforced the
the general belief that nature was unpredictable.

Hence, the questions of why the Egyptians came to the conclusion that nature was essentially orderly and why they revered particular physical phenomena more than others remain unanswered. To investigate these specific problems concerning the Egyptian "world of nature" would require an entirely separate study and the possibility that no firm conclusions would be reached is high. The greatest obstacle is undoubtedly the paucity of religious texts from pre-dynastic times, for in written texts the religious assumptions that underlie religious customs are often made plain. However, now that this investigation has cleared the ground and has exposed some of the dynamics involved in the relationship between geography and religion, perhaps the question of how the Egyptian "world of nature" originally developed might be cautiously reopened. In other words, its "roots" have still to be examined.

The second matter which arises out of the investigation and to which attention needs to be drawn is the force of what may be termed a culture's "core conviction" about nature. As has been shown, in Egypt the core conviction was that nature.

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3Cf. Emery, Archaic Egypt, p. 119.
was essentially orderly and stable and the far-reaching effects of such a belief have been illustrated. However, the discussion was brief and not all the effects could be considered. For example, the emphasis or lack of emphasis upon divination would appear to be related directly to whether or not the regularity or irregularity of nature is highlighted. The diviner would seem to be interested mainly in unusual occurrences and hence divination could be expected to occupy an important place in cultures when nature is viewed as essentially irregular or chaotic. The religious pattern in Mesopotamia would seem to support this hypothesis, but whether or not the same relationship exists in other cultures needs to be investigated. Conversely, the religious practices in cultures where nature is viewed as essentially regular should be studied to discover if they form a distinctive pattern or have common elements.

The third matter which emerges out of the investigation and which needs to be examined in more detail is the effect of the separation or non-separation of different aspects of existence. In Egypt the dividing line between the gods and nature and between the gods and men was extremely thin. The

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great gods were identified with natural phenomena, and the
divine and the human shaded into each other like colours on
a spectrum. By contrast, at an early stage in Mesopotamian
history, many of the gods freed themselves from their bondage
to physical phenomena, and, though they remained associated
with nature, became independent superhuman figures. In
Mesopotamia too, an enormous gulf existed between gods and
men.

The effect of these differences on Egyptian and
Mesopotamian theology has been exposed, but the relationship
between particular views of nature and the shape of religious
thought in other societies needs to be examined also. Long
ago in a different context, Emile Durkheim -- referring to
the ideal religious world -- wrote that

sentiments, ideas, and images....once born obey
laws all their own. They attract each other,
repel each other, unite, divide themselves,
and multiply. These combinations are not
commanded and necessitated by the condition of
the underlying reality.5

More investigation into these "laws" is required, for this
inquiry has suggested that relational patterns do exist between

5Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious
ideas within religions. At the same time, this study should also have shown that the search for "laws" must be carried out extremely carefully and on a cross-cultural basis.

Such then would seem to be some of the avenues along which future research might be fruitfully directed. As a result of taking up Lessa and Vogt's plea for further research into the relationship between natural environments and differences in religious conceptions, a fresh understanding of the dynamics involved in the relationship has been achieved.

In order to limit the scope of the inquiry undertaken here, a decision was made at the beginning to concentrate upon ancient Egypt and the starting point was an analysis of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson's statements concerning the relationship between nature and ancient Egyptian religion. The general assumption of these three scholars that nature directly influenced Egyptian religious beliefs was found to be untenable. This conclusion stimulated an investigation into how ancient man actually viewed nature and, using the ideas of Berger as a base, a distinction was made between nature-as-it-is and "the world of nature" created by the ancient Egyptians. Evidence was then provided to show how
Egyptian religious beliefs were affected by this "world of nature", once it was generally accepted and established by custom.

In this dissertation the quarrel has not been with Breasted, Frankfort, or Wilson's knowledge of ancient Egyptian culture. They can undoubtedly be ranked with the greatest Egyptologists and their contribution has been both explicitly and implicitly recognized in the discussion here, because many of the facts and texts given by them have been cited again in conjunction with additional material from other leading scholars. The quarrel has been rather with the conceptual tools that Breasted, Frankfort and Wilson employed to interpret Egyptian religion -- in particular the assumption that nature-as-it-is directly affects or influences religious conceptions.

As both Frankfort and Wilson rightly maintain, the study of ancient cultures may be divided into two stages. The first is concerned with the salvaging of evidence and basic work on the primary sources. The second stage is concerned with interpretation -- with trying to see the culture as a whole, its origins, its particular thought forms,

6Cf. above, pp. 63 and 85-86.
its course of development in relation to other contemporary cultures. This second stage is the stage at which historians tend to introduce assumptions in order to make sense of the amorphous blur of facts and is the stage with which this dissertation has been concerned. The main aim has been to scrutinize carefully some of the assumptions imported by Breasted, Frankfort and Wilson to make sense of the facts.

To repeat what has been said previously: before the application of some general principle can be upheld in the Egyptian situation, its validity has to be tested in a wider setting. The great advantage of employing Berger's theory of a dialectical relationship, the researches of anthropologists, and the work of scholars in various other fields was that the hypotheses or conclusions had been tested in different contexts, before an attempt was made to see whether or not they helped to illuminate the processes at work within Egyptian religion. Such an approach provides a firmer foundation than one using the methodologies and materials from only one narrow area of study.

Indeed, the most disquieting fact that has emerged from this study is perhaps the ingrown character of most academic disciplines. Strangely each discipline appears to have to
make its own discoveries and to appropriate for itself knowledge that another discipline may have had for some time. For example, although the arguments based upon anthropological material and employed against Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson may not have been used by anthropologists in the specific ways that they are employed here, many of the arguments in their general form have been common currency within anthropological circles for a long time. Yet Frankfort and Wilson do not take them into account when they put forward their theories about the relationship of geography and religion in ancient Egypt. 7 (Breasted perhaps may be excused because he was writing at the time when nineteenth century theories of a mechanical relationship were still dominant).

That all three scholars are to a large extent locked within their own narrow disciplines is in fact their greatest weakness. At the same time, this weakness is a reflection of their tremendous strength in the field of Egyptian studies, for they devoted so much energy to unravelling the complexities

7That Frankfort and Wilson are not alone in this matter is clearly revealed by the report of the discussion at the Chicago symposium in December 1958. The subject of the relationship between geography and culture was significantly one of those which continually recurred throughout the symposium and other Orientalists beside Wilson played with notions of "determinism" -- see, in particular, the discussion which followed Wilson's paper and in which the term "determinism" was actually used -- City Invincible, pp. 136-164.
of ancient Egyptian culture and religion that the opportunity for investigating other cultures was correspondingly reduced, though Frankfort was also an expert on Mesopotamian culture. Hence, their failure to take into account evidence from outside their chosen field is understandable and must be viewed sympathetically. One cannot study the writings of Breasted, Frankfort, and Wilson without experiencing profound appreciation for what they have done in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies. Pioneers in many aspects, they bore the brunt of discovery -- digging, translating, and making available the primary sources. Others, relieved of this basic burden, can build upon their achievements, apply correctives where necessary, and test their conclusions against those reached by scholars in other areas.

This study ought to have made clear that future research into the relationship between geography and religion must be both comparative and inter-disciplinary. The task of interpretation demands a wide perspective -- especially when an appeal is made to some major factor such as geography. In recent years, intensive specialization has been the norm both in ancient Near Eastern studies and in religious studies. As a result, significant progress has been made in the understanding of texts and of other primary materials. However,
as Welch says,

we have come to the point where we can no longer afford the parochialism of restricting religious studies to a single tradition. The specialized investigations of the phenomena require the illumination provided by cross-cultural studies. 8

Furthermore, "the study of religion at all levels must involve a plurality of methodologies." 9

Ironically, in this instance, the wheel of scholarship has turned a full circle. In the Victorian era, scholars like Spencer and Frazer drew their inspirations from a wide field of learning and from a wide range of cultures. Then, as the emphasis upon scientific method led to greater specialization, the lines between different fields of study hardened and the comparative method of Victorian scholars fell into disrepute. Now the time would seem to be ripe for new attempts at synthesis -- not the superficial, subjectivist generalizations of the past, but careful scholarly collaboration based on the co-operative work of experts. In particular, the whole question of the inter-relationship between geography and religious needs to be pursued on a cross-cultural and multi-methodological basis.


9 Ibid.
APPENDIX I

Swanson's instructions for coding Column 3 of the print-out in The Birth of the Gods are as follows:

Col. 3: Degree of Threat from Armed Attacks by Alien Societies:
This estimate is a function of three considerations:
a) the likelihood of such attacks, b) the likelihood of their being successful, and c) the damage suffered from such attacks. More explicitly, societies vary in the probability that they will suffer armed attack from the outside, and in the ease with which they seem able to repulse such attacks. Damage suffered from attack also varies. For example, armed attacks may be only glancing raids, performed to "blood" warriors. At the other extreme are large campaigns resulting in many casualties, extensive property damage, and subjugation by a conquering invader. Take into account only attacks by other people who lack guns and other Western military technology.

o. Little or no likelihood of such attacks, or such attacks are easily warded off.
1. Some, but not certain, likelihood of such attacks and the success of warding them off is somewhat uncertain.

2. Considerable -- attacks are certain to occur and it is likely that they cannot be warded off successfully, or attacks may occur with uncertain success, but there is also possibility of large casualties, extensive property damage, or subjugation by an invader.

Uncodable.

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