RELIGIOUS CONCEPTIONS AND THE WORLD OF NATURE

IN ANCIENT EGYPT

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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

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ABBREVIATIONS

AER (1961)
> Henri Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion:
> An Interpretation (New York: Harper and
> Row, Publishers, 1961).

ANET[2]
> J. B. Pritchard (ed.), Ancient Near Eastern
> Texts Relating to the Old Testament
> (Second edition; Princeton, New Jersey:
> Princeton University Press, 1966).

Before Philosophy (1963)
> H. and H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson,
> and Thorkild Jacobsen, Before Philosophy.
> The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man:
> An Essay on Speculative Thought in the
> Ancient Near East (Harmondsworth,
> Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963).

Birth (1956)
> Henri Frankfort, The Birth of Civilization
> in the Near East (Garden City, New York:
> Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1956).

City Invincible
> Carl H. Kraeling and Robert M. Adams (eds.),
> City Invincible. (A Symposium on
> Urbanization and Cultural Development
> in the Ancient Near East held at the
> Oriental Institute of the University of
> Chicago, December 4-7, 1958. Chicago,
> Illinois: University of Chicago Press,
> 1960).

Culture (1965)
> John A. Wilson, The Culture of Ancient Egypt
> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
> 1951).

Dawn (1968)
> James Henry Breasted, The Dawn of Conscience
> (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968).

Development (1959) James Henry Breasted, <u>Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt</u> (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1959).

History (1905) James Henry Breasted, <u>A History of Egypt: From the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest</u> (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905).

Kingship (1948) Henri Frankfort, <u>Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature</u> (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948).

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In their collection of extracts from writings on

religion published under the title of <u>Reader in Comparative</u>

<u>Religion</u>, William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt[1] include the

first part of the final chapter from <u>The Intellectual</u>

<u>Adventure of Ancient Man</u>, 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

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[1]William A. Lessa and Evon Z. Vogt, <u>Reader in</u>
<u>Comparative Religion</u> (Second Edition; New York: Harper &
Row, Publishers, 1965).

[2]H. Frankfort <u>et al.</u>, <u>The Intellectual Adventure of</u>
<u>Ancient Man</u> (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 <u>Before Philosophy</u>
(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.

[3]Cf. <u>Before Philosophy</u> (1963), pp. 237-248.

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comment:

> 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

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[4]Lessa and Vogt, Reader in Comparative Religion, pp. 488.

[5]Ibid., p. 489.

[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.[8]

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

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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.

[8]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,[9] 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

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

[10]Cf. Henri Frankfort's comment about one particular group of scholars: "In reading their books you would never think that the gods they discuss once moved men to acts of worship." Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1961), p. vi. This book will be cited hereafter as AER (1961).

[11]The 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[12]

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.[13]

Curriculum: An Analysis and Interpretation (Association of American Colleges, 1971). Preliminary accounts of the findings are given by Welch in the address cited in note 13 below and in his article "Graduate Education in Religion: The ACLS Study", Bulletin of the Council on the Study of Religion, 2 (1971), 3-9.

[12]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.

[13]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 Grammarian, 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]

[14]S. W. Wooldridge and W. Gordon East, The Spirit and Purpose of Geography (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1955), p. 14.

Thus the student of religion who adopts the inter-disciplinary and comparative approach can take heart, for others also face seemingly impossible tasks.[15] 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"[16] provides the outline of a complete programme of

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[15]Those 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.).

[16]See 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 <u>Before Philosophy</u>[17] 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 <u>Before Philosophy</u>, 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.[18] To go back to

Breasted and to study what he says about the question there-

fore 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.[19] 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,

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[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.

[19] Frankfort was first officially connected with the
Oriental Institute in 1929 -- cf. Pinhas Delougaz and
Thorkild Jacobsen, "Henri Frankfort", Journal of Near
Eastern Studies, XIV (1955), 1.

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.[20] For long periods, Egypt was able to live a life

that was essentially her own.[21]

The assumption that the isolation of ancient Egypt

was simply a result of geographical circumstances will be

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[20]_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.

[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[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.[23] Yet, the attempt to understand the dynamics

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[22]Although they may give different reasons for her
isolation, nearly all students of the Near East accept the
notion that ancient Egypt was -- to use Denis Baly's phrase
-- "a world enclosed upon itself": cf., for example, Denis
Baly, Geographical Companion to the Bible (Toronto: Ryerson
Press, 1963), p. 102; Carleton S. Coon, Caravan: The Story
of the Middle East (Revised edition· New York: Holt, Rinehart,
and Winston, 1961), p. 20: Sir Alan Gardiner, Egypt of the
Pharaohs: An Introduction (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964),
pp. 33-37; Alexandre Moret, The Nile and Egyptian Civilization
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. 25 .

[23]In his article "Ikhnaton: The Great Man vs. The
Culture Process" (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"[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.

However, as William F. Edgerton rightly points out in
response to this article, the type of data available to
the historian is qualitatively different to that obtained
through "direct observation of the living by specially trained
and experienced observers" (ibid., p. 192).

[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.[25] 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"[26]and then deals only "with three specific aspects" of religious life in ancient Mesopotamia. He asserts that the usual presentations of Mesopotamian

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[25]A. Leo Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

[26]Ibid., pp. 172-183.

religion -- which may appeal to readers because they are "apparently well-rounded and pleasingly complete"[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.[28]

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[27]Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 171-72.

[28]See, for example, the bibliography given by Lawrence Krader in his book *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

New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968). He cites four books
in the "selected references" for the chapter on ancient Egypt.
The first is Henri Frankfort's Kingship and the Gods. The
second is Before Philosophy. The third is by Eduard Meyer.
The fourth is by Alexandre Moret and G. Davy. In a similar
way, Eric Voegelin in the first volume of Order and History
(Louisiana State University Press, 1956) uses Kingship and

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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

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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.

[29]Denis Baly, The Geography of the Bible (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957), pp. 12-13.

[30]S. H. Hooke, Babylonian and Assyrian Religion (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), pp. 12-13.

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 un-
warranted 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.[31] Further-
more, 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]

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[1] See 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.[6] 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.[8] 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]

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[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,[10] 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.[11]

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

[10] Cf. Chapter I, note 8.

[11] Sopher, Geography of Religions, p. 4.

Like all such theoretical schemes,[12]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.[13] 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[14] 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"[16] and hence falls within the opposite "broad group"

to that in which Egyptian religion is put.

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religious system.

[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,[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

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[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, 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, 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.[18] 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 uniting of "the Two Lands".[19] 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.[20]

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".[21]

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 Factum' 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[22] -- influenced, conditioned, or controlled by

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Olympian type" -- see Roland Robertson, The Sociological
Interpretation of Religion (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970),
p. 84.

[21]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.

[22]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.[23] 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.[24]

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

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[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:

1) A. C. Montefiore and W. M. Williams,
   "Determinism and Possibilism",
   Geographical Studies, II (1955), 1-11.
2) Gordon R. Lewthwaite, "Environmentalism and
   Determinism: A Search for Clarification",
   Annals, Association of American Geographers,
   LVI (1966), 1-23.

[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".[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.[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.[27]

To the two errors singled out for comment by McCown
should be added another common one, namely the error of

Cohen, The Meaning of Human History (La Salle, Illinois:
The Open Court Publishing Company, 1947), Chapter 5; June
Helm, "The Ecological Approach in Anthropology", American
Journal of Sociology, LXVII (1962), 630-39; George Tatham,
"Environmentalism and Possibilism" in Griffith Taylor
(ed.), Geography in the Twentieth Century (Second Edition;
New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), pp. 128-62.

[25]Chester C. McCown, "The Geographical Conditioning
of Religious Experience in Palestine" in Harold Willoughby
(ed.), The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 1947), p.233.

[26]Ibid., p. 234.

[27]Ibid.

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providing <u>post factum</u> interpretations.[28] 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 <u>A Geographical Introduction

to History</u>[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 <u>Introduction à l'Histoire de la Philosophie</u>:

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[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 -- <u>Contemporary
Sociological Theories</u>, 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![31]

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.[32]
For example, he argues that specific religions "agree" with
specific climates[33] and that "it seems to all human appearance
as if climate had prescribed the bounds of the Christian
and the Mahommedan religions".[34]   However, his theory is

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[31]Febvre, 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.

[32]For the effect of climate upon political institutions,
see mainly Books XIV - XVII - cf. Baron de Montesquieu, The
Spirit of the Laws, trans. Thomas Nugent (New York: Hafner
Publishing Company, 1949), Vol. 1, pp. 221-270.

[33]Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws, Bk. XXV, 11
-- cf. Nugent's translation Vol. II, p. 53.

[34]Ibid., 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.[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.[36]

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[35]Montesquieu, <u>The Spirit of the Laws</u>, Bk, XXIV, 4 -- cf. Vol. II, p. 31.

[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 over-
simplification 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 over-
simplification 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 Soulavié'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.'[37]

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

("Early Civilizations, Subsistence, and Environment", in
Carl H. Kraeling and Robert M. Adams (eds.), City Invincible
-- Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960 -- p. 292).

[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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[38]Alan W. Watts, The Supreme Identity (New York: The
Noonday Press, 1963), p. 175, note 2.

[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.

[40]Cf. Paul Younger, Introduction to Indian Religious
Thought (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), pp. 48-51.

in China.[41]

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".[42] 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.

[42]McCown, "The Geographical Conditioning of Religious Experience in Palestine" in The Study of the Bible Today and Tomorrow, pp. 237-39.

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".[43] 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

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[43]McCown, "The Geographical Conditioning of Religious
Experience in Palestine" in The Study of the Bible Today and
Tomorrow, p. 239.

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 mis-interpretation. 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".[44]

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.

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[44]Sorokin, _Contemporary Sociological Theories_, p. 101.

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

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[1]For 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).

[2]The 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[3]and turned out

books, lectures, and articles for the general public.[4]

A History of Egypt, published in 1905[5], 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.[6]

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.[7] He also

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[3]Breasted first collaborated with James Harvey
Robinson in writing a textbook entitled Outlines of European
History (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1914). Later, he wrote
one by himself -- Ancient Times: A History of the Early
World (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1916) -- and included in
it some of the material which he had already published in
Outlines (see Ancient Times, pp. vi and viii).

[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."[8] 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."[9]

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 monotony and the
startling contrast between "its unparalleled fertility"
and "the lifeless deserts" on either side[10] -- played a
significant part in shaping the ideas of the Egyptians.

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[8] History (1905), p. 7.

[9] Ibid., p. 9.

[10] Ibid., p. 10.

"Such surroundings", he says, "reacted powerfully upon the mind and thought of the Egyptian, <u>conditioning and determining his idea of the world and his notion of the mysterious powers which ruled it.</u>"[11] 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."[12]

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...."[13]

The value of <u>A History of Egypt</u> 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]<u>History</u> (1905), p. 10. The emphasis is mine.

[12]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 11.

[13]<u>Ibid</u>., 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. [14]

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 un-

fulfilled. 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."[15]

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

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[16]History (1905), p. 10 -- see above, p. 44.

splendor...was an insistent fact"[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.[18]Furthermore, the sun became the symbol of Odin, the

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[17]History (1905), p. 59 -- see above, p. 44.

[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 Jordbruksristninger (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1963) and also a useful article by Knud A. Larsen entitled "Solvogn og Solkult" and published in the Danish archaeological journal KUML in 1955. To my knowledge, the only extensive study in English during recent years is that by Peter Gelling and Hilda Ellis Davidson, 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.[19] 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 conspicious" amongst the

Zuni than amongst the Hopi.[20]

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).

[20] Elsie Clews Parsons, Hopi and Zuni Ceremonialism
(Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association, No. 39
/1933/. New York: Kraus Reprint Corporation, 1964), pp. 71-72

influence,[21]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.[22] The book was based upon his Morse

Lectures to students at Union Theological Seminary early

in the same year.[23]

> 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.

[23]Dawn (1968), p. xii and Development (1959), p. xiv.

> 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.[25]

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.[26] Consequently, for

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[24] _Development_ (1959), p. xv.

[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 emphasing

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 civilisation 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

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[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".[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,[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.[31] 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.[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

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[29] Development (1959), p. 9. The reader, who is
unacquainted with Breasted's statements in 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 History, quoted
above on p. 44.

[30] Development (1959), p. 8.

[31] Ibid., p. 18ff.

[32] Ibid., p. 23.

personification."[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.[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:

> 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.[35]

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[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.

[34]Development (1959), p. 49.

[35]Ibid., p. 101.

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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

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[36] Development (1959), pp. 121-22.

[37] Ibid., pp. 89-90.

that Egyptian religious beliefs were "colored"[38] 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

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[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.[40]   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",[41] and Breasted fails

to make the distinction clear.[42]   The terms and images in which

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[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"[43] or that the stars were associated

with the dead because of "the splendor of the nightly heavens"[44]

or that belief in an afterlife was encouraged by the process

of natural mummification,[45] he is implying that certain features

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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 unjustifi-
able.[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

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[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"[48] 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.[49]

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[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,[50] for which men appear to
have developed a special intensity of feeling when they
turned from food-gathering and hunting to agriculture.[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"[52] between themselves, the waters,
the soil, and the vegetation when they began to cultivate the
rich black land of the Nile Valley.

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and its chief means of transport" -- Ancient Egypt: A Cultural
Topography (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 47.

[50] Cf. C. J. Bleeker, "The Religion of Ancient Egypt",
in C. Jouco Bleeker and Geo Widengren (eds.), Historia
Religionum: Handbook for the History of Religions (Leiden:
E. J. Brill, 1969), Vol. I, p. 63.

[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".

[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.

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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.

See also Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The
Nature of Religion   (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World,
Inc., 1959), p. 17.

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,[3] 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.

[2] New York: Columbia University Press, 1948 -- reprinted as a Harper Torchbook in 1961 (cf. Chapter I, note 10).

[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.[5]

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 inter-

pretative 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.[6] After collaborating with other scholars

from the University of Chicago in The Intellectual Adventure

of Ancient Man,[7] 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 <u>Ancient Egyptian Religion</u>[8] and <u>Kingship and the Gods</u>[9] in 1948, and then <u>The Birth of Civilization in the Near East</u>[10] in 1951. These three books[11] 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.[12]

Frankfort carefully makes a distinction between "the roots" and "the trunks" of both civilizations[13] and ideas.

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[8] For details of publication see note 2 above.

[9] Chicago: University Press, 1948. Cited as <u>Kingship</u> (1948).

[10] London: Williams & Norgate/Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1951 -- reprinted in Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956. All references in this dissertation are to the paperback edition which is cited as <u>Birth</u> (1956).

[11] Although Frankfort took a leading part in the production of <u>Intellectual Adventure</u>, 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.

[12] Since the present inquiry is concerned primarily with Egyptian religion, the sections on Mesopotamian civilization in both <u>Kingship</u> and <u>Birth</u> will be largely ignored.

[13] Although Frankfort admits that "the terms 'civilization' and 'culture' count as synonyms in general usage ", he prefers -- at least in <u>Birth</u> -- 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.[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."[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.[16] Commenting

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millennium B.C. (Birth, page v). Following Frankfort's
usage the term "civilization" is employed in this chapter,
but the use of the term in this context should not be taken
to imply agreement that the term "culture" should be rejected.
Frankfort argues that the word "culture" carries with it
"overtones of something irrational, something grown rather
than made" whereas the word "civilization" places the emphasis
upon man as homo politicus. However, a culture does not
cease when civilization is achieved nor is homo politicus
necessarily in complete rational control of his destiny. One
suspects that Frankfort distinguishes between the two terms
in Birth in order to emphasize the idea of discontinuity
and to undergird his hypothesis that civilizations do not
arise slowly and gradually but are suddenly and dramatically
born as potential wholes. Interestingly, in Kingship he
employs and interchanges the terms without apparent restriction.

[14] Birth (1956), p. vi.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Kingship (1948), p. 143 and notes pp. 377-378
cf. AER (1961), pp. 4-5.

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.[17] We lack the data required
> to reconstruct this process and thereby
> to explain it.[18]

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[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 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 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 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, 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."[19]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,"[20]he tends in practice to

stress most the unfolding of what was potentially present

in the original"form".[21]Thus, he claims that the civilizations

of Egypt and Mesopotamia were integrated wholes from the time

of their "birth"[22]and that these two cultures had -- amongst

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

[19]Birth (1956), p. 3.

[20]Ibid.

[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.

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

[23] Kingship (1948), p. 337 cf. Birth (1956), pp. 51-52.

[24] Kingship (1948), p. 15 cf. Birth (1956), p. 94.

[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

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

[27]Kingship (1948), p. 4.

[28]Ibid.

was the area periodically invaded because it lacked "clear

boundaries",[29] but both the climate and the Tigris were

unpredictable and often extremely violent.[30]

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."[31] 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."[32]

Men's intimate relationship with nature also led them

to recognise "the great powers in nature" as gods, and

[29] Kingship (1948), p. 4.

[30] Ibid., p. 5, cf. Birth (1956), pp. 53-54.

[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]

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[33] AER (1961), pp. 14-15.

[34] Ibid., p. 15, cf. Kingship (1948), p. 157.

[35] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

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.[36]

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.[37]

The converse may also happen, and "one single natural
phenomenon may be significant for several distinct problems."[38]

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."[39] Such proofs may

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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).

[37]AER (1961), p. 16, cf. pp. 16-19.

[38]Ibid., cf. pp. 19ff.

[39]AER (1961), p. 109 cf. p. 16.

appear naïve and completely inadequate to modern critics,
but because "the Egyptians lived in very close contact
with nature"[40] this type of intuitive inference[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."[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.[43] Thus, "in Egypt, where the
inundation made the difference between famine and prosperity,
New Year's celebrations were co-ordinated with the Nile."[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

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[40] AER (1961), p. 121.

[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." (Ibid., p. 109).

[42] Ibid., p. 121.

[43] Kingship (1948), p. 4.

[44] 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

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[45]"The Archetype in Analytical Psychology and the History of Religion," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, XXI (1958), 178, cf. 176. Frankfort rejects the view of Jung and his school that in the ancient world religious celebrations took place "in response to 'intrapsychic' individual needs."

[46]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.[47]

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....[48]

The parallelism in the logical sequence and structure of

these two passages is startling[49] and suggests Frankfort's

acceptance -- at least, in part -- of the notion of "stimulation"

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[47]Development (1959), p. 101.

[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.[50]

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.[51] 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,[52]
because they ignore the "reality in religious life"[53]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.

[51] Cf. Development (1959), p xvi.

[52]Kingship (1948), p. 356, note 2 cf. p. 349, note 6.

[53]Ibid., p. 349, note 6 cf. AER (1961), p. vi.

"peculiarities which are of the essence" of ancient religious

institutions like that of kingship.[54]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".[55] Unfortunately, in his

enthusiasm to bring out the constants in Egyptian and

Mesopotamian religion,[56]Frankfort undervalues the part played

by non-theological factors and external circumstances.[57] For

this imbalance, he has been rightly brought to task by other

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[54]_Kingship_ (1948), p. vii.

[55]William Stevenson Smith in his review of _Kingship_ --
American Journal of Archaeology (1949), 210.

[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.
>> ("Egyptian Culture and Religion", in G. Ernest
>> Wright (ed.), _The Bible and the Ancient Near
>> East_ -- Garden City, New York: Doubleday and
>> Company, Inc , 1965 -- p. 410).

scholars and their able criticisms need not be repeated here,[58]

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.[59] 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[60] and in the corollary that the part

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[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 Coulbourn 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 devaluate 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",[61] 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

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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).

[61] The Problem of Similarity in Ancient Near Eastern Religions (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), p. /3/.

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 <u>all</u> "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]--

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[62]"The Archetype in Analytical Psychology and the History of Religion," <u>Journal of the Warburg and Courtault Institutes</u>, 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.

[63]Cf. <u>AER</u> (1961), pp. 14-15 and above, p. 71.

[64]For example, in Mesopotamia under the names of Nanna and Sin.

received very little attention in ancient Egypt.[65] 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[66] or on the

sun and the stars providing "obvious proof" of an essential

permanence in the universe[67]-- 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[68] and how the choice

depends upon many factors, including chance.[69] 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.[70]

Despite these defects, Frankfort's interpretative

work is extremely valuable, for he approaches old problems

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[65]See _Before Philosophy_ (1963), p. 56 and below, p. 142.

[66]Cf. _Kingship_ (1948), p. 4 and above, pp. 69-70 and p. 74.

[67]Cf. _ibid._, p. 117 and above, p. 75.

[68]_Birth_ (1956), p. 11 where he quotes with approval from Ruth Benedict's _Patterns of Culture_ (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934), pp. 23-24.

[69]_AER_ (1961), pp. 4-5 cf. note 17 above.

[70]Cf. above, pp. 47-48.

in fresh and even audacious ways.[71] 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.[72] 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
> entraine, 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).

[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.[73] 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[74] 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.

[73]Cf. above, pp. 71-72.

[74] Cf. 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 him-
self 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.[1] 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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[1]John A. Wilson, Signs & Wonders Upon Pharaoh, p. 142.
For a list of Wilson's publications, see Elizabeth B. Hauser,
"Bibliography of John A. Wilson" in Studies in Honor of John
A. Wilson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969).

but includes the attempt "to see the story in the large."[2]

To date, Wilson's major interpretative studies have been

the public lectures on Egyptian thought published in The

Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man[3] and his book The Burden

of Egypt.[4] 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.[5]

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[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.

[3] Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946. The
lectures by Wilson reappeared in full in the abridged paper-
back version of this book published by Penguin Books in 1949
under the title Before Philosophy, and the Pelican reprint of
1963 is cited throughout this study i.e. Before Philosophy
(1963). For further details about both the original edition and
the abridgement see Chapter I, note 2.

[4] Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951. This
book is also cited throughout this paper in its paperback
edition. The Culture of Ancient Egypt cf. Chapter IV, note 4.

[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

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[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 backcloth 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]

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[9]_Culture_ (1965), p. 17. Cf. Wilson's statement on p. 39 in _Before Philosophy_ (1963):

> 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[12] and "strained out" any threats of attack.[13]
However, the security of Egypt was "relative to the time and
place."[14] 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."[15] Hence, "the complacent sense of
security"[16] which then permeated Egyptian thought stemmed from
a fortunate conjunction of geographical and historical conditions.

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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.

[15]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[16]Ibid., p. 12.

Along with the sense of security went "a sense...of special election," a "feeling...of unimpaired destiny."[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.[18] Egypt's immediate neighbours -- the Libyans, the Nubians, and the Asiatic Bedouins -- "were clearly inferior in cultural development",[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."[20] All these circumstances encouraged the ancient Egyptian to believe "that his land was the one land that really mattered."[21]

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

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[17]Culture (1965), p. 145.

[18]Ibid., p.145 cf. Before Philosophy (1963), p. 40.

[19]Before Philosophy (1963), p. 42.

[20]Ibid.

[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.[22]

In particular, "the geographic security of the land" encouraged

the acceptance of the dogma of divine kingship.[23] "The

geography of Egypt", maintains Wilson, "supplied a propensity

toward acceptance of divine kingship,"[24] and he considers

that the notions of divine kingship and of ma'at were both

"natural to Egypt."[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."[26] However, as

pointed out earlier, the security of Egypt was always relative

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[22]Culture (1965), p. 13 cf. p. 145. By contrast,
"unquestioning discipline had...characterized Mesopotamia --
a less secure land geographically -- from the beginning" (ibid.,
p. 304).

[23]Cf. Culture (1965), pp. 45-47 and p. 145.

[24]Ibid., p. 46.

[25]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".

[26]City Invincible, p.126.

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."[28] 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

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[27]City Invincible, p 133 cf. Before Philosophy (1963),
p. 122.

[28]Culture (1965), p. 13.

[29]Ibid.

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]

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[30]Culture (1965), p. 14 and Before Philosophy (1963), p. 44.

[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."

[33]Ibid., p. 52.

In the south, the Nile was "the dominating feature of the land"[34] 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[35] 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"[36] 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")[37] 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 ").[38]

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[34]Before Philosophy (1963), p. 52.

[35]Ibid., p. 51.

[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,[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."[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

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[39]Wilson's statement (on p. 44 in 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.

[40]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."[41] 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."[42]

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.[43] Later

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[41]Before Philosophy (1963), p. 46. Natural phenomena
in other countires 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).

[42]Before Philosophy (1963), p. 59.

[43]Wilson 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.[44]

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.[45] 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.[46]

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

[44] See below, pp. 99-101.

[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[47] which, he

argues, was fostered by the relative geographical security

of Egypt and its relative wealth.[48] 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."[49] 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.[50] Together Lower,

Middle, and Upper Egypt formed "a single oasis"[51] --that is,

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[47]Culture (1965), p. 145 cf. p. 318.

[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.[52]

Yet at the same time the various regions of Egypt were

strikingly different[53] and, in Wilson's view, this combination

of "unity and disparity"[54] 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

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[52]Cf. Culture (1965), pp. 14-15.

[53]City Invincible, p. 134 cf. Culture (1965), p. 15
and Before Philosophy (1963), pp. 82-83.

[54]City Invincible, 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",[58] 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

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[55]Culture (1965), p. 11.

[56]Ibid., cf Before Philosophy (1963), p. 45.

[57]Culture (1965), p. 11.

[58]Ibid., p. 32.

[59]Ibid., 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

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[60] *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[62] would have been greatly enhanced if he had

produced examples of corresponding correlations in other

cultures.[63] 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[64] can be related directly to geographical

factors.

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[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.[65] 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.[66] 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

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[65]Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966.

[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.[67]

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.[68]

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:

Margaret Mead, Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd , 1935).

no army could invade them and find enough food to survive".[69]

The Todas are similarly fortunate because they live on a high

plateau surrounded by steep and precipitous hills.[70] However,

in both cases other factors are equally important and perhaps

more important than the geographical ones. The mutual acceptance

and co-existance of the Mountain Arapesh with the Beach Arapesh

and the Plains Arapesh in the first instance[71] and of the Todas

with the Kotas and the Badagas in the second instance[72] 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".[73] That fear of witchcraft enters into the situations of

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Baldwin Spencer and F. J. Gillen, _The Northern Tribes of Central Australia_   (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1904).

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.

[70]W. H. R. Rivers, _The Todas_ (London: Macmillan & Co.
Ltd., 1906), pp. 4-5.

[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

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[74]Cf. D. B. Stout, San Blas Cuna Acculturation: An
Introduction, Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology Number
Nine (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1947).

[75]A. J. N. Richards, "The Ibans", in Tom Harrisson
(ed.), The Peoples of Sarawak, p. 12.

[76]Cf. Edwin H. Gomes, Seventeen Years Among the Sea
Dyaks of Borneo (London: Seeley and Company Ltd., 1911), p. 24.

[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.[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.[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

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[78]Cf. Edwin G. Burrows and Melford E. Spiro, An Atoll
Culture: Ethnography of Ifaluk in the Central Carolines
(Second Edition; New Haven: Human Relations Area Files, 1957).

[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"
(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 under-standing between the aboriginals that the boundaries of each tribe are fixed and also the complete absence of lust for territorial conquest amongst them.[80] The relations of the Todas with their neighbours are entirely peaceful[81] and weapons "which were, no doubt, formerly in use" are employed now

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[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.[82]

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".[83] The same circumstances would

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[82]Rivers, The Todas, p. 586.

[83]See above, p. 90 cf. Before Philosophy (1963), p. 42.

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.[84] 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".[85]

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.[86] The western desert was sparsely populated and in

the early historical period the people who lived there may

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[84]Culture (1965), p. 12.

[85]The phrase is Wilson's -- cf. ibid.

[86]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[87] but they

were undoubtedly too few in number to constitute a serious

threat.[88] In the north was the Mediterranean but only in

comparatively late times did sea-going adventurers become a

potential menace.[89]

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of the First Cataract):

> 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
> > Sir Alan Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar (Third
> > Edition, Revised; London: Oxford University
> > Press, 1966), p. 361 cf. Culture (1965),
> > p. 137.

[87] 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^2, 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").

[88] 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.

[89] 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[90] 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.[91] 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 some one to scare them away.[92]

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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 -- ANET[2], pp. 227-28.

[92]ANET[2], 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.[95] In short, the Hyksos proved

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[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

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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,[97] 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[98]-- 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:[99]

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

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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).

[97] See above, p. 89 cf. Culture (1965), p. 12.

[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.[100]

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.[101] 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

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[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 landbarriers like deserts.[102] 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.[103]

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.[104]

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

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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[105]-- partly for reasons of security and partly

because they felt self-sufficient and content with the world

that they had made for themselves.[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"[107]

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[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).

[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[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
in heaven" -- Before Philosophy (1963). p. 46 cf. "The Hymn
to the Aton", ANET[2], pp. 370-71.

[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.[108] Hence, to relate

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[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[109] 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.[110] In such a situation,

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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.

[109] Thorkild Jacobsen, "Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: The Central Concerns", reprinted in Toward the Image of Tammuz, pp. 39-47.

[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".[111]   Such

statements as "the geography of Egypt supplied a propensity

toward acceptance of divine kingship"[112] are dangerous and

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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.[113]

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 in-

security and escape from the evils of this life."[114]

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[113]Cf. above, p.91.

[114]City 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[115] 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[116] are alike in the manner in which they accept syncretism in religion.[117] To say this is not to imply that all archaic

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[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.[118]

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.[119]Different members of a

tribe may also hold diverse opinions about the meaning of

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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.

[118]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).

[119]Cf. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, "Zande Theology" in
his Essays in Social Anthropology (London: Faber and Faber,
1962), pp. 162-203.

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.[120]

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[121] 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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[120] Cf. G. W. B. Huntingford, The Nandi of Kenya
(London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953), p. 151.

[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,
Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande (Oxford: Clarendon
Press, 1937): "The Zande cannot analyse his doctrines as I
have done for him." (p. 70).

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societies.[122] 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.[123] The fact that during

prehistoric times the moon was most probably as important

in worship as the sun[124] also has to be explained if one of

the major reasons for sunworship in later times was the sun's

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[122] For excellent discussions of the position of the
Hebrews and the Greeks within the Ancient Near East see
Frankfort, "The Ancient Near East as an Historical Entity",
History, XXXVII (new series, 1952), 193-200 and Before
Philosophy (1963), pp. 241-62.

[123] Cf. Before Philosophy (1963), p. 43.

[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.[125] 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.[126] 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[127] and the belief in a heavenly Nile which was navigated in the same fashion as the earthly Nile illustrates this phenomenon.[128]

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[129] 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.[130] 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, <u>once the link was generally</u>

<u>accepted</u>, 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."[131] 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

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[130]Cf. above, especially pp. 56ff.

[131]<u>Culture</u> (1965), p. 14.

theory of successive dominating influences by a theory of changing factoral 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.[132] 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.[133] As will be seen later, similar unknown personal "forces" would seem to operate in

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[132]Cf. above, pp. 88-92 and also pp. 109-116.

[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

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[1]Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a
Sociological Theory of Religion (Garden City, New York:
Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969).

a dialectical relationship exists between society and men[2]

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.[3] The net result of this process

is that the humanly produced world becomes "something 'out

there'"[4]which "acts back upon its producer"[5]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

[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]

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[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 regard-
less 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

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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 consider-
able 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.

[9]Ibid., p. 35.

[10]Ibid., p. 41.

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

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[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.[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.[16]

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sense as Voeglin whom he cites as his source -- The Sacred
Canopy, p. 202, note 20.

[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.

[16] Ralph Linton, The Study of Man (New York: Appleton-
Century-Crofts, Inc., 1936), p. 467 cf. Melville J. Herskovits:

In a similar way, psychologists say that "perception involves
an act of categorization"[17] and agree with anthropologists
that "the carving of experience out of the physical universe...
is dependent on culture."[18] 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.[19] 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.

[17]Harry C. Triandis, "Cultural Influences Upon
Cognitive Processes", in Leonard Berkowitz (ed.), Advances
in Experimental Social Psychology (New York and London: Academic
Press, 1964), I, 5 -- Triandis is citing a statement by J. S.
Bruner.

[18]Ibid., p. 22.

[19]Wayne Dennis, "Animistic Thinking Among College and
High School Students in the Near East", Journal of Educational
Psychology, 48 (1957), 193-198.

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

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

[21]Ibid., 198. Cf. W. Dennis, "Animistic Thinking Among College and University Students", Scientific Monthly, 76 (1953), 247-249.

[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.[24] 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".[25] "The world of nature"

is simply "apprehended" as "an external facticity" and the

step of "internalization" is not made.[26]

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

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[24]See above, pp. 135-136.

[25]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 82.

[26]Ibid., p. 14.

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]

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[27]Before Philosophy (1963), esp. pp. 12-14.

[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

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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.[30]

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

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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 physio-
graphical conditions the basis of the difference
between the myths. The Mesopotamians could have
built from their material -- had they been so

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[34]Before Philosophy (1963), p. 43.

[35]At 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.[36]

Frankfort also shows that he understands how cultural selection

is made from an "arc" of possibilities[37] and how the choice

depends upon many factors including chance.[38] 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."[39]

The third moment of the dialectic outlined by Berger

is "internalization" and abundant evidence of the internalization

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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".

[36]_Kingship_ (1948), p. 233.

[37]Cf. above, p. 81.

[38]Cf. above, Chapter IV, note 17, and p. 81.

[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."[40] 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]

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[40] *Development* (1959), p. 101.

[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
Pyrimadentexte* -- 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[44] and that he could

apprehend his own identity in terms of a natural phenomenon

as well as in terms of a social role.[45] The parallel between

the above texts and Berger's illustration of how an

individual may "discover himself" as an uncle is close.[46]

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[2], p. 18)

[44]Cf. Before Philosophy (1963), pp. 71-80.

[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" -- Before Philosophy (1963),
p. 12.

[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. 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 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[47]-- 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[48]and in death his wish was "to be absorbed in the great rhythm of the universe".[49]

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lives in a society which has established uncle-
hood 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"[51] 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

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[50] Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 9, cf. above, p. 132.

[51] Cf. above, p. 132.

with them.[52] 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.[53] 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

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[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]

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[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 inter-

nalization 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.[56]

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.[57] The prophet Ipu-wer

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 there-
fore 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

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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.

[58]ANET[2], p. 443.

[59]The 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",[60] to some extent he did hold them apart[61] 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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Propaganda in Ancient Egypt", in W. S. McCullough, The Seed of Wisdom (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), esp. p. 19.

[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).

[62] AER (1961), p. 15.

[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

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[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 cosmo-
> logically, but the cosmic order was also under-
> stood 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.[65] As has been emphasized previously, the

"roots" of an idea before it develops a "form" are often

lost in obscurity[66] 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.[67]

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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"[68] 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.[69]

The high place held by the sun in the Egyptian

religious pantheon during the historical period[70] 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

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

[69]Cf. Berger, _The Sacred Canopy_, p. 45 and above,
pp. 134-135.

[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,[71] Re was linked

with the local god of Thebes, Amon, and Amon-Re became the

supreme national deity.[72] 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.[73] 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

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[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 Pharoahs, 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.

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,

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[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".[76] 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

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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.

[76]AER (1961), pp. 25-26.

[77]Ibid.

phenomena was essentially different. In Egypt, the gods

were generally, as Frankfort rightly says, "immanent in

nature"[78] 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.[79]

Although a movement towards the humanization of the gods

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[78]AER (1961), p. 25.

[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.[80]

The result was that up to late times the "more usual" forms

of the Egyptian gods were their animal forms[81] and, even if

the gods were given a human body, they were seldom given a

human head.[82] By contrast, the Mesopotamian gods were

"ordinarily...represented" in human form after the Early

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the leading Sumerian gods were regarded as human-like
beings who were merely associated -- and not identified --
with certain physical phenomena.

[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, Ancient Egyptian
Religion (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1952),
pp. 27ff.

[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, The Egyptians (New York: Frederick A. Praeger,
1963), p. 256.

[82]Cerny, 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. AER (1961), pp. 25-26.

Dynastic period,[83] and also acquired human-like personalities.[84]

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."[85] Consequently, whereas in Egypt the King was a god and the image of the sun upon earth,[86] in Mesopotamia "the essential

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[83] Jacobsen, Toward the Image of Tammuz, p. 17.

[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.

[85] Kingship (1948), p. 307.

[86] Cf. ibid., pp. 148-150.

distinction between the earthly prince and the sun-god"

was always maintained[87] so that when a Mesopotamian king

was compared with the sun, the comparison was used "quite

clearly as a metaphor without claiming identity."[88] 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[89] with the result they

remained essentially "forces of nature" and did not become

-- at least in the official theology -- "blown-up human

beings."[90] 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"[91] and also
in the case of a great god like Re or Amon-Re, who was
described almost exclusively in natural images.[92]

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[93] and the fact at that time they
were incomplete as personages[94] confirms the principle which

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[91] AER (1961), p. 26.

[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" -- ANET[2], 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[95] 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 [96] 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.
    (Yehezkel Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel --
    Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960 --
    p. 70).

[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, <u>as the son of Isis</u>,
> since I have appeared as King on the throne of
> Horus.[97]

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"[98] and never developed anything approaching a human

personality.[99] 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 <u>Kingship</u> (1948), p. 44. The
emphasis is mine. Frankfort believes that Isis was originally
the deified throne -- cf. <u>AER</u> (1961), pp. 6-7.

[98]<u>AER</u> (1961), p. 26.

[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" -- <u>Ancient Egyptian Religion</u>, 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,
<u>Egyptian Festivals</u>, p. 19.

typed and lack of life.[100]

In ritual, too, the Egyptian gods were "static figures"[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 dramatis personae.[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,"[103] and "the god of the potential life of death."[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

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[100] Cf. photographs in Clark, Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt, plate 3 and in Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. II, p. 57.

[101] Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 12.

[102] Cf. for example, the representation of the gods at the festival of Sokaris at Medinet Habu -- see Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, esp. pp. 86-90.

[103] Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 88.

[104] Ibid., p. 89.

lacking almost completely while later Egyptian myths never

reached the dramatic heights of Mesopotamian myths like

"Enuma elish".[105] 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".[106]

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[107] 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.
>   (Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt, p. 263--cf.
>   Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 12).

[106]Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 16 cf. p. 19.

[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."[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,

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[108]H. A. Groenewegen Frankfort, Arrest and Movement:
An Essay on Space and Time in the representational Art of
the ancient Near East (London: Faber and Faber limited,
1951), p. 37.

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."[109] 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

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[109]<u>AER</u> (1961), p. 109 cf. above, p. 72.

kin, and at whatever level, are always consistent and

systematic."[110] That is, an object consistently symbolizes

certain things and is also limited in what it can symbolize.[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"[112] (as the moon constantly has). Hence, to link

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[110] Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958), p. 453.

[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.

[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"[113] 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"[114] 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"[115] 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.[116]

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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.[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:

> I grant thee, that thou mayest rise like the sun,
> rejuvenate thyself like the moon, repeat life like
> the flood of the Nile.[118]

Very obviously the three symbolic "systems" represented in

this quotation are -- according to Eliade's analysis --

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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.

[117]AER (1961), pp. 19-20.

[118]Ibid., p. 107.

those of the sun, the moon, and water.[119] 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.[120]

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.[121]

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[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.

[121] Cf. Adams, "Early Civilizations, Subsistence, and Environment", in _City Invincible_, p. 292.

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 discussed[1]-- 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

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[1]Cf. 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.[2]

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".[3]

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

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[2]Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 8.

[3]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[4] and that men were at the mercy of gods who might at any time and perhaps for very trivial reasons[5] 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.[6] In ancient Egypt famine was,

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

[5]According 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. ANET[2], 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.

[6]Recognition 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"[7]and Jacques

Vandier in his book La Famine Dans L'Égypte Ancienne[8] collects

together a considerable number of texts which expressly

mention one or more years of famine.[9] These texts range in

date from the end of the Old Kingdom[10]to the time of the

Ptolemies and demonstrate that famine -- which might be

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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.

[7]Culture (1965), p. 13.

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

[9]Vandier 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.

[10]The 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. 2b; Aldred, The Egyptians, plate 17.

caused by either a too low or too high Nile[11]-- was a constant

threat throughout this period. Thus, an inscription in the

tomb of a nomarch of the First Intermediate Period[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.[13]

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

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[11]Cf. Vandier, 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. 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", Geographical Journal, 136 (1970), 569-572
and Kees, 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. ibid., pp. 50-51.

[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. La Famine, p. 8.

[13]Cf. Vandier, La Famine, p. 205. The lacuna in the
quotation indicates the absence of three lines (19-21). Line

later period[14] provides evidence of successive "hungry times",

for the occupant claims

> 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.[15]

Court documents like "The Admonitions of Ipu-wer"[16] or "The

Decree of Canopus"[17] as well as temple texts emphatically

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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 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 ANET[2], p. 31, note 1, and by Bell in ".....The First Dark Age in Egypt", American Journal of Archaeology, 75, (1971), 9.

[14] 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.

[15] Cf. Vandier, La Famine, p. 115.

[16] Cf. Vandier, La Famine, pp. 4-5 and Bell,"....The First Dark Age in Egypt", American Journal of Archaeology, 75 (1971), 11-14.

[17] Cf. ibid., pp. 33-34 and pp. 126-28. The decree was promulgated by Ptolemy III in 238 B.C.

and ritually denying the existence of famine[18] 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 Ptolomaic period.[19] 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.[20] 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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[18]Cf. Vandier, La Famine, pp. 25-27 and pp. 139-49.

[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).

[20]Cf. Genesis 41:1-47:26.

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]ANET[2], p. 31 -- the translation of the words under-lined is uncertain and the word "ahead" was inserted in order to make the sense clearer.

[22]Cf. Culture (1965), p. 13.

[23]Jacobsen, "Ancient Mesopotamian Religion: The Central Concerns", reprinted in Toward The Image Tammuz, pp. 39-47.

and unpredictable"[24]and, if it rose too high, it "would

sweep away dikes and canal banks and bring mud-brick villages

tumbling down".[25] 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.[26]

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."[27]

Like the Nile, the Tigris and the Euphrates were

unpredictable and might burst through their banks at any time.[28]

The fear with which the flooding rivers were regarded in

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[24]ANET[2], p. 31.

[25]Culture (1965), p. 11.

[26]Quoted in Alexandre Moret, The Nile and Egyptian Civilization, p. 32.

[27]Quoted ibid.

[28]Cf. Kingship (1948), p. 5; Birth (1956), p. 53; and Jacobsen in Before Philosophy (1963), p. 138.

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.

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[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,[30] 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,[31] 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

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[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 refering 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[33]. It also
gave assurance by its eternal character.[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

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[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.[35] Hence, although the sun-god Re had to repulse the drag on Apophis every night,[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",[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

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[35] Cf. below, pp. 202-203.

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

[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.[38] They became

supportive in ancient Egypt because of the Egyptian view of

nature. In short, the overall ideational context was crucial.[39]

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.[40]

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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.[41] 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.[42] Furthermore, as a result of the belief

that he was a god, he was in practice regarded as the exemplary

performer 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.[43]

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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.

[42]cf. Culture (1965), p. 45 and Kingship (1948), pp. 5-6.

[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 be being in harmony with the divine. At

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[44]See, for example, "The Admonitions of Ipu-wer",
esp. sections xii-xiii -- ANET[2], 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

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[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".[51] Thus, the festival of Sokaris seems to have been held to activate and renew the power of the god.[52] The mysterious ḥb śd festival seems to have been aimed at renewal of the priestly dignity of the king.[53] 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".[54] 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[55] -- 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

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[51]Bleeker, Egyptian Festivals, p. 44.

[52]Ibid., pp. 86-8.

[53]Ibid., p. 121.

[54]Ibid., p. 139.

[55]Cf. 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 life[56]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.

[57]Cf. Kingship (1948), p. 332.

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 ma'at for their own political ends and deliberately emphasized it in order to encourage social peace and acceptance of their authority.[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.[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"[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.

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[58] Cf. above, p. 153.

[59] Cf. above, pp. 159-167.

[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"[61]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 manking.

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."[62] As Speiser says, this last

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[61]E. A. Speiser, "Ancient Mesopotamia", in Robert C. Dentan (ed.), The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 68.

[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[2], p. 66) and approved the grant of immortality to Utnapishtim and his wife ("The Epic of Gilgamesh", XI, 197-8 -- cf. ANET[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 watchfullness

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]

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[63] E. A. Speiser, "The Biblical Idea of History in
its Common Near Eastern Setting", in his Oriental and Biblical
Studies, edited by J. J. Finkelstein and Moshe Greenberg
(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967), p. 190.

[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 comman 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,[67]the

Mesopotamians were concerned to record all events in order to

discover what Speiser terms "the formula of deliverance"[68]

-- 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

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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".

[67]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.

[68]Speiser, "Ancient Mesopotamia", in The Idea of
History in the Ancient Near East, p. 70.

mankind through the Deluge[69]and they always had a nagging

fear that the gods might -- perhaps on a mere whim[70]--

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.[71]

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."[72] 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

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[69]Speiser, "Ancient Mesopotamia", in The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East, p. 50.

[70]Cf. note 5 above.

[71]Divination was extremely important in Mesopotamia -- see, for example, Oppenheim, Ancient Mesopotamia, pp. 206-227 and Kingship (1948), pp. 252-8.

[72]Kingship (1948), pp. 281 cf. "The Archetype in Analytical Psychology and the History of Religion", Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes, XXI (1958), pp. 171-2.

of natural life in the present."[73] 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.[74] 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."[75]

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.[76] This insistence upon the impermanence of human

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[73] Kingship (1948), p. 314 cf. p. 319.

[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 -- ANET[2], 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

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[77]Speiser, "Ancient Mesopotamia", in The Idea of
History in the Ancient Near East, p. 43.

[78]Cf. above, pp. 195-196.

[79]See, 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.[80]

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.

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[80]Cf. above, esp. pp. 146-148.

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

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[1]Cf. <u>Birth</u> (1965), p. vi and above, pp. 64-67.

[2]Cf. <u>Culture</u> (1965), p. 235.

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,[3] 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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[3]Cf. 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[4] 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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[4]Cf. Oppenheim's discussion of "The Arts of the
Diviner", in <u>Ancient Mesopotamia</u>, pp. 206-227.

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

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[5]Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 471.

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,[6] 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,

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[6]Cf. 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

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[7]That 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 sympathically. 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 under-

standing 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 [8]
> illumination provided by cross-cultural studies.

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.

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[8]Welch, "Identity Crisis in the Study of Religion?....,
Journal of the American Academy of Religion, XXXIX (1971), 16.

[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 sub-jugation by an invader.

X   Uncodable.

(Swanson, The Birth of the Gods, pp. 197-198).

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