General Approach

Introduction: The Seshat MSP Project

The rise and spread of “prosocial religions,” which emphasize moralistic supernatural punishment (MSP) of moral transgressions, is an evolutionary puzzle (Swanson 1960, Roes and Raymond 2003, Johnson 2005, Norenzayan and Shariff 2008, Wright 2009, Bellah 2011, Purzycki et al. 2016, Raffield, Price, and Collard 2019). Researchers have proposed multiple hypotheses attempting to explain why people in many societies obey an unseen being or force (e.g., a moralizing high god in Abrahamic religions or karma in Buddhism and Hinduism). One influential current in the evolutionary theorizing of religion connects the appearance of “Big Gods,” powerful, morally concerned deities who are believed to monitor and punish/reward human behavior, to the rise of large-scale complex societies (Swanson 1960, Roes and Raymond 2003, Johnson 2005, Norenzayan and Shariff 2008, Norenzayan 2013). In other theories warfare features as the most important factor in the evolution of prosocial religion (Alexander 1987, 1990, Roes and Raymond 2003, Turchin 2016). Yet other researchers proposed additional mechanisms: animal husbandry (Peoples and Marlowe 2012), resource scarcity and environmental instability (Botero et al. 2014), or, alternatively, greater affluence and material security (Baumard et al. 2015).

Various assumptions of theories attempting to explain moralistic religions have been tested in psychological experiments (Norenzayan and Shariff 2008, Henrich et al. 2010, Purzycki et al. 2016, Lang et al. 2019). Experimental approaches excel at probing individual motivations and intuitions underlying religious attitudes, as well as characterizing within-group variation in belief and behavior. Their weakness, however, is that they are not well suited to testing hypotheses about why groups and whole societies adopt a particular brand of religion, because such processes unfold over long periods of time and involve large numbers of people. Cross-cultural comparative analyses of such data compilations as the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (White 2008) and the Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock 1967) have attempted to address this issue, and have resulted in a number of insights (Swanson 1960, Peregrine 1996, Roes and Raymond 2003, Johnson 2005, Brown and Ef 2010, Peoples and Marlowe 2012, Botero et al. 2014). However, there are serious limitations of such repositories of cultural information that restrict its application in testing cultural evolution theories. One problem is that these databases seriously undersample large-scale complex societies. Even more important, synchronic or static databases, such as the SCCS and the Ethnographic Atlas, which code the characteristics of any particular society at a single point in time, cannot tell us how societies change with time, and have limited capacity to make inferences about causal mechanisms in cultural evolution (Turchin 2018).

Collectively historians, religious studies scholars, philologists, and archaeologists possess a tremendous store of knowledge about when, where, and how prosocial religions arose and spread in human history. One of the main goals of Seshat: Global History Databank, established in 2011, is to make this store of knowledge available for empirically testing theories about the evolution of complex societies, including the role of religion (Turchin et al. 2015, François et al. 2016). However, Seshat aims to reflect not only what is known about global history, but also what is unknown, or poorly known.
Thanks to the efforts of an ever-growing team of social scientists and humanities scholars, Seshat is a continuously growing dataset incorporating evolving interpretations, highlighting persisting controversies, and contextualizing enduring ambiguities. The quantitative data, suitable for statistical analysis, is buttressed by qualitative nuance embedded in descriptive paragraphs along with references to pertinent scholarship.

The goal of the Seshat MSP project is to apply and extend this approach to the puzzle of prosocial religion. Rather than limiting evidence supporting a particular coded value to a paragraph, or paragraphs of text, we now give a much greater weight to the descriptive aspect, in the form of “analytic narratives” (see the next section for details).

The overall empirical strategy relies on three steps:
1. Summarizing the salient features of religion in the Seshat sample of polities with analytic narratives.
2. Translating narratively presented information into machine-readable codes.
3. Statistically analyzing the resulting data.

Each of these steps has the potential of being controversial, and there can be multiple alternatives to consider. The methodological innovation that we propose is that we publish online in open access all three elements of this research program: analytic narratives, coded data tables, and R-scripts that perform the analysis. We make all components available at the same time that the article is submitted for publication in a journal (using one of the preprint servers, such as SocArxiv). Our goal is not only to make explicit all decisions and steps that led to the analytic results, reported in the article, but also to invite other scholars and analysts to propose alternative decisions and analyses with the goal of collectively investigating how such decisions affect the results.

Testing theories about cultural evolution and, especially, the role that religion played in it, requires a massively interdisciplinary approach. In particular, we need humanities scholars to add to, correct, or provide alternative opinions in the sections of the analytic narrative on which they have expertise. Similarly, we need social scientists to propose additional or alternative ways of encoding information in analytic narratives into coded data. Finally, we need computational and quantitative scientists to refine statistical approaches or use alternative methods of statistical analysis. That such a “transdisciplinary” collaboration is possible is evidenced by the track record of the Seshat research network, which merges the expertise of humanities scholars and social and quantitative scientists. Our goal in the MSP project is even more ambitious, as we propose to expand the scale of this collaboration beyond the Seshat project to explicitly include the critics of the specific choices we made at all levels (narratives, coded data, statistical analyses). In this way, we believe, critique and discussion will be channeled into productive directions and will result in an overall advancement of the field.

This Document: a Structured Analytic Narrative

Analytic Narratives (Bates et al. 1998, Bates et al. 2000) are formalized verbal accounts focusing on several (in our case, many) in-depth case studies. The goal of this methodology is to employ the specialized knowledge possessed by historians, archaeologists, anthropologists, and religious studies scholars, who have the understanding of the particular, for the purpose of testing theories that may apply more generally. General theory (which focuses on MSP in our case) imposes structure on verbal accounts by specifying which aspects of past societies we would like to get information on. This structure will be developed in the next section (MSP Dimensions).

The bulk of this document is devoted to analytic narratives addressing various MSP aspects of Seshat polities, which we define pragmatically as independent political units ranging in scale from villages (independent local communities) through simple and complex chiefdoms to states and empires (Turchin et al. 2018). The information is organized by space and time. First, each subsequent chapter addresses a particular world region (except the final chapter that reviews world religions). The selection
of regions to cover in this volume was primarily determined by the Seshat World Sample-30 (Turchin et al. 2018). Several additional regions have been added due to their importance for the questions addressed in this study. And we welcome further expansion of the geographical coverage as a result of additional scholars becoming involved in the project.

Second, within each regional chapter material is organized chronologically. Our focus is on agrarian societies, that is, the period between the Neolithic and Industrial Revolutions (with actual dates varying by the region). Rather than address each Seshat polity one at a time, we tend to group several of them together if they share similar religious features. However, we are also interested in reflecting in the narrative any changes within the period that may affect moralistic aspects of religion.

In each section that addresses religious developments in a particular region for a particular period of time, we ask the same set of questions. Our main goal is to determine when particular aspects of MSP (as detailed in MSP Dimensions) appear and disappear in the focal region. The temporal aspect (when) is of key importance in our subsequent analysis that evaluates various hypotheses about causation arrows potentially connecting MSP with social complexity and other predictors suggested by the hypotheses (the results of this analysis will be reported in the MSP article).

While the general structure and content of each analytic narrative is determined by the theoretical questions, the goal is not to impose a procrustean framework on the narrative. In fact, we are interested not only in capturing generic features of religion in each region (and time period), but also in characterizing variability between different societies, different continents, and different eras. As we emphasized above, we aim to reflect in the document evolving interpretations and persisting controversies. Such qualitative nuance provides a much needed counterbalance to the quantitative data, which by their nature strip it away.

Our goal is also to record not only what is known about religion in Seshat polities, but also what is unknown, uncertain, or disputed. Identifying gaps in our knowledge invites future research efforts to address such gaps. Highlighting knowledge gaps, areas of uncertainty, and controversial opinions and interpretations is important because it guards against overestimating what we know about the past. These limits to our current knowledge can be formally incorporated into the statistical analysis (see the MSP article).

As a final comment, it is worth emphasizing the tentative nature of analytic narratives in this document. Readers will immediately note that some chapters and sections contain much more text and references than others. There are multiple reasons for this. In some cases, there is so little information about particular societies that all we can say is that we can make no inferences about MSP in them. Then there are societies that have been studied by very large scholarly communities (e.g., Classic Greece). We do not wish to limit scholarly contribution to such “over-studied” regions and are happy to include opinions and ideas from many experts.

Finally, there are societies for which we haven’t yet been able to recruit experts. Our approach in such cases is to “prime the pump” by including an initial description, based on the reading of available sources and then invite expert feedback and elaboration on this initial text. The tentative nature of these analytic narratives is particularly visible in such cases, but it is important to emphasize that there are no “final and definitive” descriptions anywhere in this volume. This project is evolutionary in more than one sense—we expect that the content will constantly evolve as a result of involvement of additional regional experts. Most importantly, new approaches and interpretations constantly arise and we aim to incorporate such new knowledge in future iterations.
MSP: Some Definitions
For simplicity's sake, and to stay in general conformance with the established terminology, the two most important concepts that we use in this document are moralistic supernatural punishment (MSP) and supernatural agents/forces. Here we highlight some problematic issues associated with these terms and discuss possible alternatives.

“Punishment” is actually a short-hand for “punishment or reward”, as these two concepts can be subsumed under the same heading, but with opposite signs. It is also possible to talk about “moral enforcement” as a more generic term; however, “enforcement” still evokes punishment more than reward.

Many researchers consider “supernatural” as a problematic term, because it assumes a particular (modern and Eurocentric) notion of what is “natural.” McCauley and Lawson (ref) proposed that we use the term “culturally postulated superhuman” instead. An advantage of this use is that it makes clear that such agents are not idiosyncratic (e.g. pathological) or merely fictional, but widely acknowledged to intervene in human affairs.

The idea of supernatural (or culturally postulated superhuman) “agents” fits well such entities as deities, spirits, ancestors, etc. However, impersonal forces can also be involved in MSP. The best example is karma in Buddhism and Hinduism. Other examples include many (but not all) notions of Tian (Heaven) that describe it as an impersonal force, and several varieties of “magic” (as in “let my weapon strike me if I break this oath”).

MSP Dimensions
One of the most important goals of these narratives is to abandon a binary notion of MSP (which was used in previous cross-cultural analyses) and to flesh out its various dimensions as they evolved at different times in different places. Below is a general discussion of the MSP dimensions.

Moral concern: Do supernatural agents care about human morality? There could be many gradations, including:

- Supernatural agents are capricious and unpredictable, visiting misfortune on humans in random amoral ways
- All the supernatural agents care about is whether they are properly worshiped or placated and ritual requirements are observed (for example, sacrifices that “feed” the gods). This involves a reciprocity between worshippers and deities, but deities do not punish moralistic transgressions between humans.
- Supernatural agents care about human morality, but it is a secondary concern for them. This may be because they are not self-motivated to detect and punish interpersonal transgressions; instead there must be a prayer for justice, a violated oath in their name, an infraction within their sanctuary, etc. Under some conditions they can be “harnessed” with an oath or another stratagem by which a human transgression is made the subject of a god’s self-interest. Here our focus is on moral transgressions, rather than harnessing supernatural power for selfish/amoral purposes (love philters, curses to harm a rival).
- The primary concern of supernatural agents is enforcing human morality; they are self-motivated to continuously monitor and punish interpersonal transgression even without a prayer for justice, an oath, etc.

Morality aspects: What aspects of morality do supernatural agents care about? We are particularly interested in aspects that affect the functioning of large-scale societies, most notably, generalized trust and prosociality. Another way of thinking about it is the extension of moral concern in relational (face to
face) group to an expanded categorical group including relative strangers (but not necessarily to outgroups, as it may be restricted only to members of a relevant class or guild).

- **personal integrity**
  - refraining from harming others (murder, maiming, etc.)
  - fairness (dividing resources as earned; treating others as one would wish to be treated)
  - respect for others’ property (not stealing)
  - honesty/truthfulness (promotes generalized trust)
  - reciprocity (fulfillment of contracts, repaying debts, honoring oaths)

- **charity**
  - prosociality directed at disadvantaged members of the community (charity proper)
  - production of public goods (prosociality directed at the community as a whole)

- **loyalty**
  - loyalty to the polity (not siding with an enemy, supporting polity in other ways)
  - bravery in defending polity (as distinct from loyalty; willingness to risk death or injury)
  - respect for authority (important for hierarchy to be sustained and to prevent rebellion)
  - loyalty to kin (e.g., caring for children/siblings/cousins, obedience to parents/aunts/uncles, other obligations to kin)

**Supernatural monitoring:** How well can supernatural agents detect immoral acts? Here our primary interest is not in omniscience, but whether and how much they know about moral transgressions. Principal types of detection include (these categories are not mutually exclusive):

- supernatural agents rely on reports by humans alerting them to moral transgressions (as an example, “dumb gods” may be tricked by cunning humans to ignore a transgression, or punish the innocent)
- supernatural agents rely on nonhuman watchers (animals, spirits, angels, etc.)
- supernatural agents have superpowers of vision and hearing (eyes see all)
- supernatural agents know the thoughts and intentions of humans (mind reading, “knowing the hearts of men”) and can sanction “thought crimes,” such as coveting, hatred, and jealousy.

**Supernatural punishment:** How thorough/certain is it?

- Supernatural agents rarely or never directly punish transgressions, instead, perhaps, relying on human agents (the priests, the state)
- Supernatural agents need to be “harnessed” by human agents (for example, making an oath in a temple, or by using a spell to report a transgression)
- Supernatural agents may punish transgressions, but it is uncertain because they are fickle/unpredictable
- Is punishment specific to the individual transgressor, or does the whole group suffer (e.g., a large area hit by flood, or drought)?
- Punishment is somewhat uncertain/indirect, as in bringing misfortune on the head of the transgressor or descendants
- Punishment is certain in this life, as when a transgressor is immediately struck dead (it can also be delayed). Mode: illness or disability/plague, crop failure/famine, earthquake, lightning bolt, shipwreck, personal misfortune/death, other?
- Punishment is certain in afterlife. Is there judgement? A place of punishment (hell)? Alternatively, a place of reward (paradise)?
- Can punishment be avoided? (By spell, purchasing an indulgence, etc.)
- Can punishment be atoned for? (By prayer, repentance, good deeds, confession and absolution)

What kinds of “agency” do supernaturals have?
- Mechanistic causation, such as sympathetic magic, involving similarity or contagion (“let my weapon strike me if I break this oath”)
- Specialized or localized deities and spirits with limited power (e.g. confined to specific locale)
- High gods (heads of the pantheon) with universal powers
- Transcendental gods (e.g., the God of Abrahamic religions)
- Impersonal universal force (the best example is Karma, but Egyptian Ma’at and certain interpretations of Chinese Tian also have aspects of impersonal force)

The social scope of prosocial MSP
- Is the polity ruler the only individual who is monitored and/or punished/rewarded by supernatural agents? Or is it more broadly: the elites, or the entire population?
- Do supernatural agents/forces make a distinction between in-group and out-group members?
- How prevalent are beliefs in MSP:
  - Only within a small group, such as a sect, literati, etc. Examples include Greek philosophers and Chinese Ruists (Confucians)
  - It is adopted as the state religion, but only affects the elites
  - It is adopted as the state religion that penetrates deeply into the common population.
  - Alternatively, beliefs in supernatural agents may be widely distributed popular beliefs that are not shared by an educated elite
- Proxies for doctrinal mode (includes ritual frequency, orthopraxy checks, religious hierarchy, most widespread rituals, etc.)

As a final note, this list of MSP dimensions is not complete, and is continuously evolving.

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**Mediterranean Basin: The Greeks**

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**The Aegean Bronze Age (ca. 3000–1100 BCE)**

Regarding divine punishment and reward, little can be said of the Minoans or of the Mycenaeans (the first Greek-speakers) due to the paucity of written sources. Virtually nothing is known of how Minoan deities functioned in relation to morality. Thanks to the decipherment of Linear B, we know that the Mycenaeans worshiped a god called Zeus, known in the historical period as the principal overseer of justice in Greek religion, and also the Erinyes, female deities responsible in later periods for the punishment of kinslayers and oathbreakers. Yet we cannot assume that these deities had the same functions as they did for later Greeks (Lupack 2012).

One potentially fruitful approach, given the scant sources, is to situate the Mycenaeans in a common Late Bronze Age culture of Eastern Mediterranean and the Near East, which emphasized gift-exchange, reciprocity and diplomatic guest friendship. The Amarna Letters (1-5), for example, talk of the “brotherhood” of kings and mention diplomatic marriage and gift exchange. The Treaty of Kadesh between Egypt and the Hittites (1258 BCE) includes curses and divine punishment for either “brother” who breaks it. The presumption would be that since the Mycenaeans were part of these Late Bronze Age interactions, they would have shared in such beliefs.

Another, and complementary, approach is to situate the Mycenaeans and other Indo-European speakers of the Mediterranean in the larger Indo-European cultural sphere. Jean Haudry (1993) compared oath formulas from a number of Indo-European languages (Old Norse, Russian, Sanskrit and Persian) and found that they share the image of the perjurer struck by his own weapon. Thus, the mechanism by which the oath ritual works is likely an Indo-European concept, and so this aspect of MSP was probably present. Another candidate for prosocial MSP among Indo-European peoples is the notion that abuse of norms between guests and hosts will be punished (and outstanding hospitality rewarded), but such conclusions are based on a combination of guesswork and comparative linguistics (Lújan Martínez 1997, 193-196).

**The Greeks: Early Iron Age and Archaic Period (1100–500 BCE)**

At all periods of Greek history it was much more common to hold the belief that the gods don’t care about human beings than to be an atheist ... it seems that the Olympians were mainly concerned with human justice and morality only insofar
This quotation from Robert Garland exemplifies a misconception common even among Classicists: the notion that the Greek gods did not concern themselves with human morality, and that they punished only infractions against themselves. This narrative will summarize the evidence for a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the degree to which MSP was a part of Greek culture(s). Throughout Greek history, discourse about MSP is characterized above all by a diversity of voices, some promoting the idea that the gods care for justice and punish evildoers, while others depict the gods as capricious or simply uninterested in ethical behavior among mortals. This diversity begins with the crystallization of oral epic traditions in Homer and Hesiod, both of whom name Zeus as the principal enforcer of interpersonal morality.

The *Iliad* represents the viewpoint of the aristocratic chieftain, who rules over a group of settlements in a warrior culture. It posits a world in which the gods rarely pay attention to the behavior of lowly people. Zeus’ moral concern is focused on enforcing the warrior code and the norms of behavior between elite males in three moral domains: guest-friendship, oaths, and supplication. While violations of these norms reliably draw his attention, the ways of Zeus are difficult to know, and he does not always punish those who deserve it. Moreover, in cases outside Zeus’ specific domains of moral interest, a wronged person must pray for help, and make a case as to why Zeus or other gods should get involved (Larson 2020).

Homer’s Zeus was the god who oversaw *xenia* (“hospitality”), which includes ritualized pledges of alliance and reciprocity between elite males as well as more mundane relations between host and guest (Herman 1987, Mikalson 2010: 77-80; Garland 2014: 128-30). In *Iliad* 13.620-35, Menelaus says that he expects Zeus Xenios (“Zeus of Hospitality”) to punish the Trojans for Paris’ crime in stealing his wife. In Homer, this is the key moral domain which Zeus is self-motivated to police (that is, he will detect and punish offenses regardless of whether mortals invoke him). Zeus also enforced compliance with the norms of supplication, a ritual closely related to *xenia*, whereby weaker individuals could receive the protection or favor of stronger ones. For example, Priam ritually supplicates Achilles when asking to ransom his son Hector’s body. Homer repeatedly emphasizes that once Achilles has accepted Priam’s supplication, to give in to anger and kill or abuse Priam would be offensive to Zeus (*Il*. 24.157-8, 569-70, 586). Finally, Zeus oversaw oaths (*Il*. 3.107), which typically involved a ritual making the gods witness to a promise or declaration; placing a matter in the divine sphere made the gods responsible for punishing any infringement. In *Iliad* 19.258-60 (cf. 3.276-280) the Erinyes are guardians of oaths together with Zeus, and punish oathbreakers after they die. This reference to afterlife punishment is unusual, but it is unlikely to be a later interpolation, given its repetition from Book 3 to Book 19. The same passage also refers to this-life punishment for oath-breaking: “If any of this oath is false, may the gods give me many woes, all that they are accustomed to give to whoever offends against them in swearing.”

In the *Odyssey*, widely considered a moralizing work by comparison to the *Iliad*, Zeus is the protector not only of guest-friends, but also of strangers, beggars and suppliants, under the titles of *Xenios* and *Hiketēsios* (e.g. *Od*. 7.159-66, 9.270-71, 14.53-9, 13.213-14). The *Odyssey* is the ancient text most deeply concerned with the rules of *xenia*. Greek mythology includes several variations on a tale-type in which Zeus and other gods visit earth disguised as human travelers in order to test whether people are behaving properly toward strangers (Hansen 2016: 211-6). In Greek literature, this motif is first reported in *Od*. 17.483-7 where the gods observe whether they are received with *eunomiē* (“good order”) or *hubris* (“violence”). In *Od*. 9.269-72, Odysseus reminds the Kyklops Polyphemos of his obligation to treat strangers well: “No, mightiest one, respect the gods; we are your suppliants, and Zeus is the avenger of suppliants and strangers—Zeus Xenios—who accompanies revered strangers.” Polyphemus replies that he cares nothing for Zeus, and proceeds to murder and eat his guests. His
behavior can be contrasted with that of the Phaeacians, who give the stranger Odysseus a generous welcome. When he is cast ashore naked, the young princess Nausicaä tells her handmaidens (Od. 6.206-8), “This is some unfortunate wanderer who has come here, and we must care for him. For all strangers and beggars are from Zeus, and even a small gift is welcome.” The Odyssey thus broadens the scope of moral concern to the behavior of less powerful individuals such as slaves (Eumaeus) and women (Nausicaä), while continuing to limit the types of offenses deemed to elicit divine punishment.

Homer's notions of the afterlife generally do not distinguish between the morally worthy or unworthy, except in the realm of sacrilege. In Odysseus' account of the Land of the Dead, the only punishments mentioned are those for men who directly offended the gods, such as Tantalus and Sisyphus. On the other hand, the Odyssey already says that Zeus' son Minos judges the dead (Od. 11.568-600).

Hesiodic poetry (also written ca. 700 BCE, with a long background in oral tradition) represents the perspective of a farmer living within a system of chiefdoms which are transitioning into city-states. It is possible to argue that the difference between Homer and Hesiod is one of emphasis and narrative goals, yet the moral atmosphere of Works and Days seems startlingly different from that of the Iliad or even the Odyssey. Hesiod avoids domain-specific titles such as Xenios and Hiketēsios, and emphasizes righteousness ( dikê) as an abstract concept which applies to everyone. He insists that Zeus controls myriad watchers who spy on mortals and report infractions to him (WD 252-55) but also that Zeus himself possesses an "all seeing eye" (WD 267-69) which affords him universal scrutiny of human behavior. Thus, no evildoer can escape Zeus' detection and punishment. Hesiod expands the list of interpersonal transgressions which anger the gods well beyond the standard Homeric offenses to generalized antisocial behaviors such as "violence," "wicked deeds," "going astray," "devising recklessness" and so on (WD 238-69). Even Hesiod, however, is most interested in divine punishment of powerful men. The lowly may pay the price together with a wicked prince, when the community is blasted with famine, but it is the "bribe-devouring" man of power whose "crooked judgements" trigger the wrath of Zeus (WD 250-51, 264). Although Hesiod is aware of the Erinyes (Theogony 185) and Tartarus (Theogony, 868), his poems mainly envision this-worldly punishments for mortals.

In Greek myths, the gods themselves could act in capricious and amoral ways, and power relations between them were “temporary and fragile” (Osborne 2013: 277; Pomeroy et al. 2004: 30). Osborne (2013) has suggested that the lack of absolute sovereign power and moral good in the world of the Olympian deities—even Zeus must ensure the support of other gods in order to act effectively—offered a model of negotiated power and pluralistic values which chimed well with the democratic life of the polis. On this view, the absence of universal moral imperatives from the Greek religious system arguably left ethical questions open to debate within human communities. At the same time, we must recognize a distinction between the gods' behavior in epic poetry, which is shaped by genre-based conventions, and how they are described in cultic contexts and in daily life. Furthermore, when dealing with ancient religions, we must be careful not to introduce anachronistic expectations, shaped by the Judeo-Christian tradition, that divine powers are both enforcers of and exemplars of moral good.

Generally speaking, Greek poets and thinkers either represented the gods as givers of both good and bad things, or they attempted to depict them as ultimately just, regardless of the observable fact that justice does not always obtain in daily life.

The Classical Greeks (500–323 BCE)
Our written evidence for MSP concepts greatly expands during the Classical Period, revealing divergent points of view and multiple critiques of traditional beliefs. Standing at the beginning of this period, the victory odes of the poet Pindar combine a conservative perspective on morality with critique of received tradition. In Olympian 1, Pindar revises the story of Tantalus, denying that the gods could ever have sat
down to a cannibal feast (50-64), but uses the opportunity to reinforce the idea of divine surveillance: “But if any man hopes that the god will overlook his deeds, he is mistaken” (Ol. 1.63-4).

Formal guest-friendship (xenia) may be understood as a custom rooted in the need to gain allies and defuse hostilities before they erupt into violence. Supplication (hiketeia) was a related cultural institution. Where xenia in the narrow sense of guest-friendship was practiced mainly among the ruling class, any person could supplicate a more powerful individual, asking for a favor. This favor might involve sparing the life of the suppliant, ritually purifying him, or other kinds of assistance. The powerful one could refuse or accept the suppliant’s plea. If he accepted, he could not change his mind afterward without impiety, and thereafter he had a responsibility to protect the suppliant, much as he would do for a guest-friend. As he had in the Archaic period, Zeus Hikesios was expected to punish those who failed to respect these customs (Aesch. Supp. 347, Pollux 8.142 [in law of Solon], Paus 3.17.9 [on Classical Sparta].

In the second Olympian, written for a Sicilian patron, Pindar draws on new beliefs about the afterlife which were emerging in the western Greek colonies. First, a judge beneath the earth metes out punishments and rewards based on moral behavior, exemplified by oath-keeping (Ol. 2.56-67). But people are reborn, and for “those who keep the soul free from all unjust deeds” over three lifetimes, there awaits a life of blessedness in the company of the heroes (Ol. 2.68-80).

xenia and supplication Garland 2014, 115-228

[Aesch. fr. 281a Radt: Zoe Stamatopoulou’s essay [in Festschrift for Jenny Clay], ‘Justice in the flesh: Constructing Dike as a Dramatic Character in Aeschylus fr. 281a Radt’. Her chapter explores Aesch. fr. 281a Radt, in which Dike appears as a character who acts and whose role and prerogatives therefore surpass what Hesiod attributes to her in the Works & Days. for instance, instead of merely reporting the misdeeds of mortals, Dike is an empowered figure who, as Stamatopoulou argues, personally rewards and punishes mortals.]

A variety of contradictory ideas about the afterlife competed for attention during the Classical period. A “mainstream” view is perhaps represented by Polygnotos (born ca. 500) who painted at Athens a mural of Hades which showed mythic heroes and heroines in Hades, alongside an ordinary man being punished for maltreating his father, and another man paying the penalty for sacrilege (Pausanias 10.28.2). Plato describes other popular views in his day:

Musaios and his son have a more exuberant song than these, of the good things the gods give to the just, for in their tale, they bring them to the house of Hades, and have them henceforth setting up a drinking-party of the righteous, reclining with wreaths on their heads, deeming it the finest reward of virtue to be everlastingly drunk. And some extend the reward of the gods even further than these, for they say that the children’s children and the posterity of the righteous and oath-keeping man will never die out. Such are their praises of justice. But the unrighteous and unjust they bury in the house of Hades in mud, and force them to carry water in a sieve... (Republic 2.363c-d)

Plato’s own “myth of Er” (Republic 10.614–621; cf. Phaedo 106e-115a, etc.) expounds a theory of reincarnation, as did his philosophical predecessors Empedocles and Pythagoras, and adherents to the religious movement of Orphism. Where previous theories had emphasized ritual and bodily purity in the quest for afterlife blessedness, Plato (like Pindar before him) put greater weight on moral conduct and philosophical wisdom. In Gorgias 523a-527e, Plato’s Socrates adopts a more traditional description of afterlife judgement in which souls are sent either to the Isles of the Blessed or to Tartarus. He argues that afterlife judgment of and by the dead far exceeds earthly human justice because the impediment of the body prevents clear understanding of the truth.
The fifth century was a time of great intellectual ferment, during which poets and philosophers critiqued traditional beliefs. The extant sources, most of which are Athenian, reveal that educated people questioned the accounts of the gods in Homeric mythology. In his tragedies, Euripides showed the cruelty of gods such as Artemis, Aphrodite and Dionysus, and their lack of concern about harming the innocent, while emphasizing their power to destroy those who defied them. The famous “Sisyphus fragment,” attributed to either Euripides or the politician Critias, features a speaker who claims that when human laws failed to restrain wicked behavior, “some shrewd and clever man” invented the idea of the gods, with their moral surveillance and mind-reading, in order to frighten people into good behavior (Collard and Cropp 2008, 670-77). Despite these examples, Greek tragedy also reinforces MSP beliefs in the moral domains traditionally subject to divine supervision: oaths, xenia, suppliants, and burial rites. Violators in these areas are always punished (Mikalson 1991, 129-30) whether the playwright is Aeschylus, Sophocles or Euripides. As in the Archaic period, the concept of impiety included various forms of sacrilege, such as insulting the gods, as well as a canonical list of interpersonal offenses which had not changed much since the Early Iron Age.

The Hellenistic (323–31 BCE) and Roman (30 BCE–283) Periods

Many post-classical inscriptions and papyri demonstrate how local gods could be enlisted to police interpersonal injustice, especially when the identity of a wrongdoer was unknown. These written prayers for justice employ many persuasive strategies, such as appeals to the gods’ pity (Versnel 1991, Kotsifou 2016, 187-9). In a cache of late Hellenistic tablets found in the sanctuary of Demeter at Knidos, the writers dedicate wrongdoers to the goddess, to be afflicted until they confess their guilt (Versnel 2002, 50-54; Chaniotis 2004, 6-8 with bibliography). These are similar to oral prayers for justice, but committing them to writing and placing them in the sanctuary increased the authors’ confidence that the deity had “received” the request. Unlike standard magical curse tablets, these texts employ moral arguments in the hope of convincing the god or goddess to act. In some late examples, the stolen object is dedicated to the god; this transforms the culprit into a temple-robber subject to divine punishment (Gager 1992: 195-197, numbers 97, 98, 99).

Another diverse group of inscriptions, collectively known as the “Confession inscriptions,” is specific to Lydia and Phrygia in the first three centuries CE (Petzl 1994; Versnel 2002: 63-72; Chaniotis 2004; Gordon 2004). These inscriptions, set up in public, record individual punishments meted out by local gods. In most cases, the gods punish ritual infractions such as entering the sanctuary in an impure state; accidents and illnesses were regarded as divine punishments in these cases. Significantly, however, these gods also administered interpersonal justice in cases of theft, slander, personal injury, and adultery. A wronged person lodged an accusation with the priestly personnel of the sanctuary in a ritual called “raising the scepter.” This seems to have combined the institutions of oath and curse, directing the god’s anger at the accuser if he or she was lying, and at the accused if he or she was guilty.

The confession texts show Lydian and Phrygian deities dispensing interpersonal justice for minor offenses, which is unusual in Greco-Roman polytheism. Also unusual is the fact that these sanctuaries and their oracles produced explicit moral injunctions, sometimes represented as first person statements or commands from the gods, for example, “I command that nobody should commit perjury” (Chaniotis 2004, 43; Gordon 2004, 188). Analysis of the texts suggests that gossip and group sentiment were important in assigning divine causality to accident or illness, so that individuals believed to be transgressors felt pressure to publicly atone. In these small and isolated communities, where it was difficult to attract the attention of the Roman authorities to minor offenses, cultural evolution seems to have hit upon a solution whereby internal disputes were resolved through appeals to divine justice.
Summary
Throughout Greek history, discourse about MSP is characterized by a diversity of voices, some promoting the idea that the gods care for justice and punish evildoers, while others depict the gods as capricious or simply uninterested in ethical behavior among mortals. This diversity is seen in the two major sources on religion in Iron Age Greece: Homer and Hesiod. The Zeus of Homer oversaw hospitality, oaths, and supplication. Homeric notions of the afterlife generally did not distinguish between morally worthy and unworthy. Hesiod expands the list of interpersonal transgressions which anger the gods beyond the standard Homeric offenses to generalized antisocial behaviors such as "violence" and "wicked deeds." Even Hesiod, however, is most interested in divine punishment of powerful men. The lowly may pay the price together with a wicked prince, when the community is blasted with famine, but it is the man of power whose "crooked judgements" trigger the wrath of Zeus. Hesiod’s poems mainly envision this-worldly punishments for mortals.

Hospitality, supplication, and oath-keeping continue as principal moral behaviors enforced by gods in the Classic Greece. This period also saw a variety of competing, contradictory ideas about the afterlife. While previous theories had emphasized ritual and bodily purity, Plato (and Pindar before him) put greater weight on moral conduct and philosophical wisdom. Plato’s Socrates describes afterlife in which souls are sent either to the Isles of the Blessed or to Tartarus. A theory of reincarnation is discussed by the philosophical predecessors of Empedocles and Pythagoras, adherents of Orphism, and Plato. Overall, the fifth century was a time of great intellectual ferment, during which poets and philosophers critiqued traditional beliefs and offered alternative theories on MSP.

During the Hellenistic and Roman periods many inscriptions and papyri demonstrate how local gods could be enlisted to police interpersonal injustice. Although dispensing interpersonal justice for minor offenses is unusual in Greco-Roman polytheism, in Anatolia confession texts show that Lydian and Phrygian deities administered interpersonal justice in cases of theft, slander, personal injury, and adultery. In most cases, however, these gods punished ritual infractions. More generally, the main emphasis of popular religion in the Greek world was on rituals and sacrifices.

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Mediterranean Basin: The Romans

NGAs: Latium
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The Regal Period and Early Republic (c. 800–265 BCE)

For Latium during the semi-legendary Regal period there is no direct evidence for MSP, and thus any inferences about its presence or absence must be based on much later legend, together with beliefs known to be widely distributed among neighboring peoples. From its very inception, Roman religion was particularly influenced by Etruscan and Greek ideas, so that there is some overlap with these cultures, even if there are also many features we think of as characteristically Roman.

One of the most important traditions about the foundation of Rome, the story of Romulus and Remus, may help shed some light on how the relationship between morality and the divine realm was viewed. The earliest known written account of the two brothers—in Quintus Fabius Pictor's history of Rome, now lost—was set down in the third century BCE (Wiseman 1995: 1–2). Certain motifs and narrative elements allow us to assume that it was circulating in various forms before this date (129–41). The crux of the tale is the murder by Romulus of his twin Remus, a terrible moral transgression in most religions and indeed deeply troubling to the Roman authors of the late Republic and early Empire (Bremmer 2008: 70). Romulus is not punished for this crime, however, but (implicitly) rewarded by the gods, reigning over Rome as its first king (Taco Terpstra, pers. comm., January 2020). This presents an interesting contrast with the biblical tale of Cain and Abel, in which Cain is cursed by God for his fratricide.

Also relevant for understanding early Roman religion and morality is the role played by augurs, signs from the gods, in the Romulus and Remus myth. In Ovid’s telling (Fast. 4.833–48), the twins

*Taco Terpstra also contributed to this chapter by reading and providing feedback on a previous draft.
initially solve their disagreement over who should govern the new city through bird augury. Romulus sees more birds, a favorable sign from the gods, and so assumes the kingship. Jupiter signals his approval through thunder and lightning. The practice of augury retained a prominent place in later Roman religion, such that Augustine of Hippo still felt the need to attack it in the early fifth century CE (De Civ. D. 29). Augurism implies a view of the gods drawing their own plans largely irrespective of what humans do. At most, humans can seek out and receive signals of their desires and activities. This conception of two essentially discrete worlds, one populated by gods and one by humans, is also hinted at by the religious office of pontifex (pontiff). The title was given to the members of one of the priestly colleges that later Romans traced back to the Regal period (Beard et al. 1998: 18), and literally translated means “bridge-builder.” It seems that concerted efforts had to be made to bridge the two realms. The gods would not necessarily concern themselves with human behavior if not prompted; nor could it be assumed that they would act according to a consistent moral law (Taco Terpstra, pers. comm. January 2020).

Written sources from the early Republic onwards (see below) testify to the importance of oaths—which can be seen as a method of “harnessing” the gods to enforce human morality. Several lines of evidence suggest that oaths were also important to the Romans of the Regal period. According to Polybius (3.25), writing in the second century BCE, Rome’s first treaty with Carthage (509 BCE) was sworn by the Romans invoking Jupiter Lapis “in accordance with an ancient custom.” Many oaths invoking gods are attested among the Greeks of southern Italy, especially towards the end of this period, when our sources become more abundant. Examples include the founding of the Greek colonies of Locri Epizephyrii in the seventh century BCE (Sommerstein and Torrance 2014) and Hyele/Elea in the sixth century (Hdt. 1.164–7).

Among the Etruscans, the god Selvans was a patron of oaths, as demonstrated by his epithet Sanchunus, which is thought to be related to the Latin oath-god Sancus (De Grummond 2006: 149; Jannot 2005: 13, 161). Livy (9.39) states that the Etruscans raised an army (310 BCE) under the Lex Sacrata, which meant they were bound by oaths. The practice of military oaths was also found among the Samnites, an Italic-speaking group like the Romans. Livy (10.38, on a battle of 293 BCE) describes how Samnite recruits were forced to swear that they would not abandon the field; any who refused the oath were immediately killed and beheaded as sacrifices for Jupiter (Doberstein 2014: 83–115; Tondo 1963).

The Twelve Tables (c. 450 BCE) provide the most concrete evidence of MSP for the early Republic. Usually the mos maiorum (“practice of the ancestors,” referring to ancestral custom in either ritual or ethics) is described as unwritten law, but the Twelve Tables must have reduced some of the mos maiorum to writing.

An important early Roman concept that appears in the Tables is the idea of making someone sacer, a term which can mean either “sacred” or “accursed.” In Twelve Tables 8.21, it is decreed that a patron who defrauds a client shall be “sacer.” Here, sacer means accursed, handed over to the gods for punishment, and the offense is the breaking of fides; an informal “good faith” agreement or a binding contract made within a formal relationship of reciprocity.

Livy (1.21) discusses early Roman religion as set forth by the (legendary) King Numa during the period of kings, including the establishment of a cult of the goddess Fides (personifying faithfulness to one’s word, promise or pledge). Looking back from the early Principate, Livy paints a nostalgic picture of an early Rome preoccupied with piety and strict morality:

...the nation was governed by its regard for promises and oaths, rather than by the dread of laws and penalties ... [Numa] also established an annual worship of Faith [fides], to whose chapel he ordered that the flamens should proceed in a two-horse hooded carriage, and should wrap up
their arms as far as the fingers before sacrificing, as a sign that faith must be kept, and that even in men’s clasped hands her seat is sacred.

For the Romans, proper respect for the gods and proper interpersonal behavior were both integral to pietas, the key virtue. Pietas included duty to the family, parents, one’s patron, and the state, as well as the gods. The gods were the guarantors of the welfare of the state and the continuance of the social order. Thus, violating the social order by transgressing the mos maiorum was offensive to gods and liable to bring misfortune on the group.

**Middle and Late Republic (264–31 BCE)**

There is more evidence for beliefs about divine punishment and reward from the middle and late Republic than from earlier periods of Rome’s history, although many of the available sources are still of later date.

After suggesting that the Roman gods “were not thought of as watching a man’s conduct,” Liebeschuetz (1979: 39-54) goes on to cover a surprisingly wide range of situations where they punished immorality. His examples come mostly from the third/second century (such as the plays of the dramatists Plautus and Terence) as well as the late Republic. He lists as “offenses that may be punished by the gods” (1) direct affront to a deity such as thieving from the sanctuary or omitting a required rite; (2) violations of fides, such as breaking oaths or a wide range of less formal agreements; (3) incest; (4) kin murder, at least from 200 BCE on; and (5) unjust war. For the latter he cites Livy 5.21 and 9.1 as cases in which military disaster came as the result of broken fides. (Note that the Roman gods, unlike the Greek, seem to have been self-motivated to punish at least some broken promises without an oath.)

Various moral virtues were early on deified and provided with a cult. These included Concordia (social harmony), Fides (good faith), Pietas, and Pudicitia, which was “modesty” or the proper feeling of shame at the prospect of dishonor, especially sexual dishonor, for both men and women. Concordia had a temple as early as the fourth century BCE, Fides in the third century, and Pietas in the second. Pudicitia was connected with Juno in particular.

The traditions surrounding Claudia Quinta, a republican woman of the third century BCE, hint that the gods were thought to reward virtuous conduct. In 204 BCE, the image of the great mother goddess Cybele was brought from Anatolia to Rome. Writing in the early Principate, Ovid (Fast. 4.305–26) relates how as the ship was navigated up the Tiber, it was grounded on a bank: a possible sign of divine disapproval. Claudia, who had previously been the subject of “unfair gossip,” called on the goddess to bear witness to her chastity by allowing the ship to continue onto dry land (Leach 2007: 4–5). Her prayers were successful, suggesting that Cybele was viewed as concerning herself with ethical norms. However, it is important to remember that there is no contemporary written evidence of Claudia Quinta’s life, and the later sources invoke her example for political goals and likely also embellish the story for narrative effect (Leach 2007).

Traditional Roman belief held that any sort of abnormal prodigy or portent indicated divine displeasure and meant that the anger of the gods had been awakened by something—usually a ritual offense but sometimes also interpersonal transgression. To restore the balance, the people had to propitiate the gods. Prodigies were taken as signs of the deviant behavior of citizens, such as committing incest (Rasmussen 2003: 42–43). This is a particularly good example of how the Romans connected social conformity with religious piety. Deviance brought punishment on the whole group, so the group had an interest in enforcing conformity.

The Epicurean philosopher-poet Lucretius (c. 99–55 BCE) wrote *On the Nature of Things* partly in order to allay fears of death and debunk afterlife beliefs. In Book 1.104–5, he suggests that the reader may reject his teachings, “terrorized by the fearsome pronouncements of the fable-mongers.” We hear
(1.111) that, thanks to these fable-mongers, the people “fear that death brings punishment without end” (*aeternas ... poenas in morte*). In Book 3, he alludes to famous mythological punishments of such figures as Tityus and Sisyphus, but insists that these torments belong not to the afterlife but (figuratively) to this life. The living are oppressed by their own passions and fears, not least by their “groundless fear of the gods” (3.988–1023). Many scholars see the late Republic as a time of religious skepticism, especially among the educated elite. Lucretius’ argument both demonstrates this skepticism and suggests that at least some people in his own day were concerned about the afterlife consequences of their deeds.

For his part, Cicero (*Pro Roscio Amerino* 66–67) rationalizes punishment by the Furies “for any impious and criminal act,” a popular belief which he says was much represented on the stage. He explains that it is not the Furies but guilt for their own evil deeds which torments the wicked. But in another oration (*In Pisonem* 46), he asserts that while the Furies are not real, tormenting guilt is itself a punishment sent by the gods upon the wicked and impious. These sentiments are expressed in works of forensic oratory, though even allowing Cicero considerable rhetorical license they do suggest that seeing the gods as authors of torment—psychological or material—was an acceptable viewpoint.

*Pietas* was the virtue of fulfilling obligations, not only to the gods, but also in human relationships. As so often in both Greek and Roman religion, it involved no distinction between ritual and ethical obligations. In his *De Legibus* (2.15–16), a more scholarly treatise on ‘The Laws,’ Cicero writes of the importance of teaching the people that the gods are aware of their behavior and of who practices or falls short of *pietas*. While arguing that such beliefs are plausible in themselves, he focuses particularly on their utility:

> Who will deny that such beliefs are useful when he remembers how often oaths are used to confirm agreements, how important to our well-being is the sanctity of treaties, how many persons are deterred from crime by the fear of divine punishment, and how sacred an association of citizens becomes when the immortal gods are made members of it, either as judges or as witnesses?

Despite Lucretius’ rejection of religion, Cicero’s attitude of measured agnosticism or skepticism toward the gods, combined with strong affirmation of the moral utility of traditional belief, seems more characteristic of late Republican elites.

**Roman Principate (31 BCE–284)**

The Roman Empire is too large and diverse to generalize about, and as their territory grew, “the Romans” quickly become a very multicultural group. With the understanding that Roman culture increasingly encompassed diverse beliefs and practices, we may describe the discourse of elite Roman citizens at this period, which tends to ignore our modern distinction between ritual and ethical transgressions. For example, Livy (1.48) says that the evil princess Tullia conspired in her husband’s murder of her own father, then drove her chariot over her father’s corpse:

> ... crazed by the avenging spirits of her sister and her former husband, they say that Tullia drove her carriage over her father’s corpse, and, herself contaminated and defiled, carried away on her vehicle some of her murdered father’s blood to her own and her husband’s penates [household gods], whose anger was the cause that the evil beginning of this reign was, at no long date, followed by a similar end.

In this account, the household gods punished Tullia and her husband, the hated King Tarquinius Superbus, by bringing about their downfall and exile. Livy says that the defiling kindred blood which Tullia brought back to the house was the trigger. However, it would be quite wrong to interpret this as
saying that the household gods only cared about the ritual offense of pollution. The gods are outraged by the violation of social norms, and their anger dooms the reign of Tarquinius.

We must be careful not to read Vergil’s Aeneid, an epic narrative of the voyages of the Trojan hero Aeneas after the Trojan Wars, as an uncomplicated description of either local traditions or state religion, yet this work was wildly popular from its publication onward. At the least, its depiction of afterlife punishments reflects widely distributed Roman attitudes about which types of behavior were considered most deserving of afterlife punishment. The Aeneid quickly became a school text, and so its contents shaped popular ideas of afterlife punishment for the remainder of the Roman Empire. Its influence on medieval and Renaissance depictions of Hell was also substantial, in its own right and indirectly through Dante’s Inferno, which is modeled upon it.

In Aeneid Book 6, Aeneas is guided past Tartarus by the Sibyl, who describes a process of judgment for evildoers:

Cretan Rhadamanthus holds here his iron sway; he chastises, and hears the tale of guilt, exacting confession of crimes, whenever in the world above any man, rejoicing in vain deceit, has put off atonement for sin until death’s late hour.

Vergil’s afterlife judgment differs from its Greek models in its similarity to a Roman criminal court, where slaves could be tortured in order to force confessions. Within the confines of Tartarus there are legendary offenders against the gods, like Salmoneus (who imitated Zeus/Jupiter’s thunder and asked for worship) or Tityus (who tried to rape Leto, the mother of Apollo and Artemis) but there are also mundane mortal offenders:

Here were they who in lifetime hated their brethren, or smote a sire, and entangled a client in wrong; or who brooded in solitude over wealth they had won, nor set aside a portion for their kin – the largest number this; who were slain for adultery; or who followed the standard of treason, and feared not to break allegiance with their lords – all these, immured, await their doom. Seek not to learn that doom, or what form of crime, or fate, overwhelmed them!

More crimes are listed a few lines later:

This one sold his country for gold, and fastened on her a tyrant lord; he made and unmade laws for a bribe. This forced his daughter’s bed and a marriage forbidden.

Abuse of family members or failure to observe family obligation tops the list of crimes, but adultery is also mentioned. For the Romans, this referred strictly to a man’s sexual involvement with another man’s wife, and Roman law permitted an outraged husband to kill an adulterer caught in the act. The other main group of offenders comprises those who abuse formal relationships of reciprocity, particularly patrons who defraud the clients who look to them for protection, and slaves or others who ought to be obedient and faithful, but instead rebel or break pledges. Thus, Vergil expands the list of acts regarded as impious enough to merit divine punishment, so that they encompass what were regarded as the greatest threats to familial and social order. Interestingly, Vergil focuses explicitly on males as the ones who merit and receive punishment; in Aen. 6.615 he collectively describes those punished as viros, “men.” This likely reflects the Roman legal system, in which most women were under the authority of a father, a husband, or a male legal guardian. Although women were not exempt from criminal punishment in the Roman system, their status as legal minors implies a presumption that greater responsibility lay with the men who supervised them (and had authority to punish them). Although most punishments are reserved for those who abuse their power, subordinates who betray their masters (domini) are also singled out. The use of the term dominus generally refers to slave-master relationships, but by mentioning false pledges of faith (nec veriti dominorum fallere dextras), Vergil expands the category to subordinates of higher social rank.
In Aen. 6.724-51, Vergil has Anchises, the dead father of Aeneas, describe a cycle of punishment, purification, and ultimately reincarnation for human souls:

Therefore are they schooled with punishments, and pay penance for bygone sins. Some are hung stretched out to the empty winds; from others the stain of guilt is washed away under swirling floods or burned out by fire till length of days, when time’s cycle is complete, has removed the inbred taint and leaves unsoiled the ethereal sense and pure flame of spirit: each of us undergoes his own purgatory.

The prospect of such purging in the afterlife appears to be general to humanity here, though the details differ. After a long period of time, the souls are immersed in the waters of Lethe, wiping their memories clean, and may return this world to inhabit new bodies.

Already clear in republican times, the dichotomy between the philosophical and religious ideologies subscribed to mainly by the elites and the popular ritual practices in different parts of the Mediterranean littoral persisted through the imperial period (after 27 BCE). Hellenistic philosophical traditions, with their focus on egalitarian and universalizing principles, continued and found a foothold among the upper echelons of Roman society (Colish 1990).

This period saw a rapid development and spread of an imperial cult, in which offerings were made to the gods on behalf of semi-divine (and later, divine) emperors and their families (Galinsky 2007: 80-82). These cult activities became particularly important in the eastern reaches of the empire, where Hellenistic ruler cults provided a precedent.

It is important to note that, during the imperial period, the empire retained previous religious practices in the territories they conquered. The imperial cults were added to the existing conglomerations which were unique to each area. In the east, “Greek religion” continued, but with the addition of the imperial cult. The most powerful factor in ruler cult, whether centered on Hellenistic kings or Roman emperors, seems to have been the principle of reciprocity, by which collective worship was exchanged for favors in a mutually beneficial relationship. From this perspective, the rites associated with ruler cult fit very neatly into the traditional model of “polis religion” in the culturally Greek parts of the empire: worshipers provide systematic honors for the civic gods in thanks for previous benefactions, or in expectation of future ones.

There is debate over how much the imperial cult meant to people in terms of superhuman agency: for example, did they think that the emperor could perform miraculous deeds? When compared with deities like Jupiter, Juno or Mars, rulers seem deficient. Where are their oracles; why do they not induce trance states or perform miracles or guarantee salvation from drowning? Granted, there are some interesting stories relating to Roman imperial cult, such as the healings performed by Vespasian. Tacitus (Hist. 4.81) relates how while at Alexandria, the emperor cured a man’s blindness spitting on his cheeks and eyes and restored another man’s use of his hand by stepping on it. But Tacitus explains even these miracles as the will of the gods as performed through Vespasian.

In Roman state religion, the emperors themselves and sometimes their family members were substituted as oath-gods (Gradel 2002: 162–4; Katz 2019), so that when people were conducting business involving the state, they would swear an oath invoking the emperor’s name. It appears that all the Roman emperors were treated such, and while they were still living; though it is unclear the extent that this came from the imperial court itself, or was an act instigated by those swearing the oaths. Further, it is unclear how emperors sought to police compliance with oaths taken in their name, or if they even intended to. Since official documentation of these oaths was kept in record offices, the understanding may have been that those swearing would be subject to the state’s punishment—rather than divine retribution in this or the next life—if found to have perjured themselves in public records.

In summary, during the Principate, gods were “harnessed” for the enforcement of contracts, as
in earlier times, and prosocial religious ideas spread further among the literate elites. Civic rituals strengthened the Roman self-image, which included ethical expectations about the rights, duties and “dignity” of each citizen (Schlieter 2014: 655). However, punishing transgressions and rewarding virtue continued to be only a secondary concern of supernatural agents.

Late Roman Empire (284–457)
Many of the religious trends noted in the previous section also apply to the later imperial period, the Dominate, especially before the ascendency of Christianity from the fourth century CE.

The schools of philosophy popular among the elite evolved and sometimes included speculation on the presence and character of MSP. The Neoplatonists (third to fifth centuries CE) are generally thought to have accepted reincarnation, because of their belief that Plato taught it. This created the potential for punishment or reward in the next life, at least for those thinkers who held that something of the human personality survived death. More generally, though, the Neoplatonists presented striving towards “the Good” as the ultimate end of human life, not as a means of pleasing divine personages in the hope of reward (Remes 2008: 177–8). Their beliefs were also somewhat esoteric and limited to a small part of the population, though these strands had a significant impact on the evolution of Christian thought by the end of this period (Becker 2011; Kraye 2003).

The growing popularity of Christianity throughout the Empire during this period strengthened the connection between divine concern and moral/social norms, notions already existing and growing in previous periods, as noted above. Most conversions to the new faith took place between 300 and 450 CE (Galvao-Sobrinho 1995) However, it should be noted that “conversion” was not a simple or one-way process. Many Romans may have nominally converted, but retained many pagan elements in their beliefs or even feigned adherence to Christianity to avoid persecution (Taco Terpstra, pers. comm., January 2020). This period is bracketed by Constantine’s Edict of Milan (313 CE), which legalized Christianity as one religion among many, and the official establishment of Christianity as the state religion of Rome at the end of the fourth century (Martin 2014). For further details on Christianity as a moralizing religion, see the World Religions chapter in this volume.

Summary
Most histories of Roman religion have little or nothing to say about the gods’ role in morality. However, this reflects a lack of scholarly interest in the topic rather than the absence of MSP. Moral behavior among humans was not the primary interest of the gods, and many divine punishments had to do with what moderns would call ritual rather than ethical infractions, yet no such distinction was made in antiquity. Nor was the divine sphere separate from moral concern.

A variety of sources indicate that one form of MSP, supernatural enforcement of reciprocity— including keeping oaths, fulfilling promises, and the proscription of patrons cheating clients—was widespread in Iron Age Italy. Evidence comes from Greek communities in Southern Italy, Etruscans, Samnites, and Romans. Commonalities between Indo-European concepts and language suggest that supernatural enforcement of oaths was already present in Indo-European religion, making it possible to infer its presence for Bronze Age Italy as well (since there is no evidence that this cultural element was first lost, then regained in historic periods); this is entirely speculative, though, until more direct evidence for the beliefs of early Italians can be found. In any case, even when we are on more solid ground in later periods, MSP was still not a primary concern for supernatural agents, who cared more about correct rituals and sacrifices. Furthermore, the scope of punishment was mixed, with either individual transgressors or whole groups targeted for punishment.

In early sources, Roman and Greek gods are often portrayed as unpredictable and amoral. This situation begins to change during the second half of the first millennium BCE, with literate elites
recasting them as moralizing deities. Also during this period, temples dedicated to deities personifying various virtues, like good faith (Fides) and modesty (Pudicitia), proliferated, revealing perhaps a growing sense of gods as guardians (or guarantors) of moral values. From the middle Republic we see evidence for a more comprehensive set of moral norms enforced by the gods, and Vergil (writing during the Principate) lists many more crimes that are punished in the afterlife. As a general rule, however, it is fair to say that the main emphasis of Roman religion was on the correct performance of rites and sacrifices rather than adherence to a code of interpersonal norms.

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Western Europe

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Bell Beaker Period (3200–2000 BCE)

Though the funerary practices of the Bell Beaker people are relatively well studied (see e.g. Clop Garcia 2001: 28-29), sources do not suggest there is any evidence for the belief in moralistic punishment or reward on the part of supernatural agents.

Atlantic Bronze Age (2000–1000 BCE)

Indo-European reconstruction of MSP for oaths and hospitality (see Mediterranean Basin: Bronze Age).

Hallstatt (1000–475 BCE)

Most of the evidence for Hallstatt religious beliefs (which appear to have been spread across much of North-Western Europe) and practices date to the latter half of the period. A small number of sites have yielded artefacts and/or animal remains that appear to have been deliberately deposited, likely for ritual purposes. At Blansko, in the Czech Republic, the Býčí-Skála Cave has been found to contain weapons, vessels, jewelry, tools, horse-riding equipment, the remains of wagons, burnt grain, and a cup made from human skull, as well as the remains of at least forty more humans; interestingly, this site appears to have been in use since the Neolithic, though it is also worth noting that the discovery of human remains may well indicate that the cave was mostly used for funerary purposes (Watts 2013, 368). Items interpreted as sacrificial burnt offerings have been found at Farchant, in Bavaria, and Dellingen, in the Black Forest, while apparently deliberate deposits of metalwork have been discovered at a number of watery locations; there is also some possible evidence for a solar cult and a cult of "heroes" (Watts 2013, 368). However, none of this suggests the belief in moralistic punishment or reward on the part of supernatural agents. Indeed, it is not even possible to infer with any degree of certainty whether the above-listed deposits were intended as offerings to supernatural agents, though one could perhaps argue for continuity with La Tène practices.
La Tène Period (475–52 BCE)
Among the La Tène people (who, like the Hallstatt, inhabited much of North-Western Europe), it seems that moral transgressions were punished by Druids, not the gods. Cunliffe (1997, 190) writes that Druids "gave rulings on all religious questions" and acted "as judges in criminal cases and in disputes about boundaries and inheritances", and that they could enforce their judgements by "ban[ning] the defaulter from taking part in sacrifices [...] and in so doing they cut off the individual from the gods, thus making him unclean and excluded from normal social intercourse: 'no one will go near or speak to them for fear of being contaminated.'"

La Tène gods were thought to intervene in the lives of their worshippers, but only in the sense that they aided or were placated by those who provided them with the correct offerings. The archaeological record is rife with evidence for large deposits of precious items that were likely intended as offerings. These include the mass deposit of weapons and shields at the fifth-century BCE Swiss site of La Tène itself, the large metalwork deposit at the Welsh site of Llyn Cerrig Bach, dating to between 500 BCE and 120 CE, and the second-century BCE and first-century CE shields found in the River Witham and the Thames, respectively (Watts 2013, 371). Moreover, possible evidence for human sacrifice at Linz, in Austria, seems to confirm Caesar's claim that the Druids would offer human victims to the gods in order to "propitiate [their] wrath" (Gall. 6.16, quoted in Watts 2013, 377). The La Tène people also often placed animals and objects in shafts, caves, and other underground locations, likely as offerings to fertility deities or deities in charge of the Underworld: such underground offerings have been found in the Vendé region of France (where, for example, an entire four-metre tree was deposited in a large pit), and at Holzhausen in Bavaria (Watts 2013, 378). Finally, the La Tène people would also leave offerings such as wooden figurines and personal items in watery locations and forest shrines (Watts 2013, 378-379).

Both archaeological and textual sources suggest that the La Tène people believed in some form of continued existence after death, though they point to somewhat contradictory notions of the afterlife. Elite graves normally featured a number of functional items (e.g. plates, cups, toiletries, furniture) indicating that the living thought that the dead would be able to use them in the afterlife (Watts 2013, 383). However, Caesar wrote that the Druids believed that, at death, one's soul simply transferred to a new body, though it is possible he was himself simply following the writings of Poseidonius (Cunliffe 1997, 208). Moreover, Caesar also wrote that La Tène funerals involved bonfires in which the deceased's possessions were thrown, so that they may accompany them in the afterlife (Watts 2013, 283). In any case, neither archaeological nor textual sources suggest that the La Tène people believed that after death they would be punished or rewarded for their behaviour in life.

Roman Period (52 BCE–486 CE)
Caesar's conquest of Gaul in the first century BCE led to the rapid Romanisation of the Gauls: La Tène deities were matched with their Roman equivalents and provided with Roman names and characteristics (Watts 2013, 373). Emperor Augustus banned Druidic practices, and this ban was reinforced by his successors Tiberius and Claudius. By the time of Nero, Suetonius Paulinus, governor of Britain, openly persecuted the few remaining Druids, exiling many onto the island of Anglesey, where he eventually ordered their slaughter (Watts 2013, 375). By the end of the first century CE, then, La Tène religion had been almost completely Romanised, with only a few pockets of resistance in remote regions such as Normandy and the Loire and Seine Valleys in France, and the Cisalpine region of Northern Italy (Watts 2013, 384). For a summary of Roman religion, see the Mediterranean section.
Christianity
Clovis, the first ruler of the Merovingian Kingdom, converted to Christianity in 509 CE. By that point, the majority of the Romanized population of Gaul was already Christian.

Summary
Our survey of the sources for Celtic religion in the La Tène Period so far did not identify any MSP elements in it. This lack may be due to the nature of sources (reports by outsiders); on the other hand, we have a variety of reports, none of which suggests MSP.

Question: we should expect MSP for oaths/hospitality, given the IE heritage, is there evidence for it?

Following Roman conquest in the first century BCE, the religious history in this NGA essentially follows that in Latium.

Literature

Northern Europe
NGA: Iceland
Contributors: Enrico Cioni,

Norse Religion
Both textual and archaeological evidence suggests that the Norse gods were thought to punish certain kinds of moral transgression, most notably, breaking oaths or offenses against hospitality. In the Eddic poem Grímnismál, the god Odin withdraws his protection from King Geirrödr, who was known for being unkind to guests and confirmed his reputation by torturing the god himself when he appeared at his court disguised as a traveller. The withdrawal of Odin's protection causes the king's accidental death by his own sword (Raffield et al. 2019: 11). Moreover, the Eddic poem Völuspá describes a region of the afterlife where those guilty of the worst crimes (including murder, the breaking of oaths, and adultery) were tormented (Raffield et al. 2019: 11).

The god Ullr was directly associated with oaths and Odin was, among other things, also the god of travellers (Raffield et al. 2019: 8, 10). Indeed, in the Eddic poem Hávamál, Odin advises people to refrain from chasing away those seeking shelter, and welcome them as guests instead. It is therefore possible that people who swore oaths or interacted with travellers would feel compelled to abide by the oath and act hospitably, respectively.

Finally, the Norse gods were thought to directly reward bravery and loyalty, as they were believed to welcome those who died in combat in Odin's own halls (Raffield et al. 2019: 11). However, sources say very little about the fate in the afterlife of people who did not die in combat but might have otherwise led virtuous lives.

Indeed, despite the above information, it seems overall more accurate to say that the Norse gods were only occasionally concerned with the proper moral conduct of their worshippers. If these
gods ever prescribed a set of codified moral norms, it has not been preserved. The closest thing to a
divinely prescribed moral code in Norse culture is the aforementioned Hávamál, which does purport to
contain advice from Odin himself: and while Odin does invite hosts to be kind to their guests, he also
provides advice as to the most efficient ways to kill an enemy, seduce a woman, or steal someone else’s
property; he also cautions people from being too trusting of their friends, and reveals that he himself
broke an oath he’d sworn to the giant Suttungur. In fact, Norse mythology includes several stories in
which the gods commit adultery, incest, and various forms of deceit (Raffield et al. 2019: 13-14).

Christianity
Conversion to Christianity in Iceland c.1000 CE. Same time in Norway (King Olaf II). The period 1000–
1200 CE was transitional, when the proportion of population that worshipped Old Gods gradually
debounded.

Summary
Norse religion contains MSP elements related to oaths and hospitality (we can also infer continuity with
the Bronze Age, given the IE reconstruction). However, Norse gods were fickle and largely amoral, and
therefore not particularly interested in rewarding or punishing their worshippers’ moral or immoral
behaviours, except on rare occasions. In other words, MSP was a secondary concern. Punishment was
targeted at individuals.

Literature
Raffield, Ben, Neil Price, and Mark Collard. 2019. "Religious belief and cooperation: a view from Viking-

Egypt
NGA: Upper Egypt
Contributors: Enrico Cioni, Jenny Reddish, John Baines

Naqada I and II (3800–3300 BCE)
Because the earliest example of (proto-)writing dates to the next period (Dynasty 0, about 3300 BC)
(Davies and Friedman 1998; Van De Mieroop 2011: 43), it is difficult to make inferences about Egyptian
religion during this period. Stone and ivory anthropomorphic figurines may have been served as
representations of deities and served important functions in elite burial. However, it is unclear if these
figurines represent ancestral practices to later relationships with deities (Harrington 2004). Naqada II
iconography includes some motifs that are associated with “religious” ideas in later, Dynastic-period art.
Baines (2017: 27-28) notes that images of boats bearing standards on Naqada II pottery show parallels
with the standards of deities familiar from the Dynastic pictorial record. Also noteworthy are late
Predynastic motifs—such as wild animals and enemies being subdued—that may symbolize the triumph
of order over chaos (Kemp 2006: 92-99). These are perhaps an early glimmering of the concept of ma’at
(discussed below), which would become so central to Egyptian conceptions of morality, the legitimacy of
kingship and the role of the gods.

Wall paintings within Tomb 100 at Hierakonpolis, dating to the Naqada II period (c. 3500 BCE),
depict boats that some scholars have read as referencing the journey of the dead to the next world (e.g.
Bárta 2011: 33-34). Others are sceptical, citing a lack of good evidence for this interpretation (Midant-
Reynes 2000; Smith 2017: 22). Still, some characteristically Egyptian burial practices, such as wrapping
the corpse and orienting the body to the west, are already found in Naqada II contexts (Van De Mieroop
2011: 24), suggesting possible continuities of belief. Ultimately, it is not possible to discern what
precisely Predynastic Egyptians believed awaited them in the next world, or whether they believed in a moral judgment after death.

**Early Dynastic: Dynasties 0, I, II (3300–2650 BCE)**

During the Early Dynastic period, there is some evidence of the key elements that characterized later Egyptian religion, such as a range of gods, an emerging divine kingship, and belief in an afterlife (Baines 1995; Stevenson 2016). However, we can be less confident about the precise nature of religion and the relationship between humans and divine during this period due to the scarcity of written sources.

Some of the earliest known Egyptian personal names contain references to gods. For example, the names of Early Dynastic queens often contained “Neith” as an element, referring to a powerful warrior goddess (Wilkinson 1999: 252). Religious iconography familiar from the Old Kingdom is already present in the Early Dynastic period: the jackal-headed Anubis appears in First Dynasty royal tomb contexts and on elite grave stelae (243). The early Egyptian pantheon consisted of some localized gods as well as others who were more widely worshipped throughout the Nile Valley. Other supernatural agents within the Early Dynastic cosmos likely included the dead and beings intermediate between gods and humans (Baines 2017: 27, 32).

It is difficult to say for certain whether these entities were concerned with enforcing human morality and punishing transgressions. Caches of votive offerings suggest that they were appealed to for protection or relief from misfortune; figurines of children left at a shrine on Elephantine Island may have been left by people appealing for a successful childbirth, for instance (Kemp 2006: 116–21). At Abydos and Saqqara, the tombs and mortuary enclosures of royals and the courtly elite contain grave goods suggestive of beliefs in the next world (Wilkinson 1999: 225), but it is unclear whether the concept of judgment after death for one’s actions while alive had yet developed.

De Wit (2011: 199) argues that the ethical concept of *ma’at*, usually translated as “order,” “harmony,” or “justice,” emerged during the Protodynastic and Early Dynastic periods. We discuss this in more detail in the following section.

**Old Kingdom (2686–2150 BCE)**

Old Kingdom state religion was centered on the king, who stood at a pivotal position between the realm of deities and that of humans (Baines 1995; de Wit 2011: 199). The gods were thought to take an active interest in human affairs: according to the ruling ideology that had coalesced over the course of the previous millennium, they had appointed the king as the earthly guarantor of *ma’at* (Morris 2010: 216; Silverman 1995, Stevenson 2016b). The opposite of *ma’at* was *isfet* (chaos), but it was also contrasted with evil and wrongdoing (Assmann 2006: 176). The early Pharaonic cosmos was thus structured in moral terms, and misfortune and suffering on earth could be interpreted as signs that something was awry in the functioning of the state (Assmann 2001: 3–4).

As well as being a fundamental cosmological principle, *ma’at* served as a moral ideal for everyday social relations (Assmann 2006: 15–17). Autobiographical texts found in Old Kingdom tombs from the late Fifth Dynasty (c.2400 BCE) onwards attest to the centrality of altruism and refraining from harming others to ma’at (Lichtheim 1992: 10). Several inscriptions in tombs of officials contain statements that the deceased had “done justice” (i.e. *ma’at*) in his lifetime, going on to deny any misconduct and insist on his generosity to the less fortunate (Lichtheim 1992; Silverman 2000). The Sixth-Dynasty (2345–2181 BCE) official Nfr-sšm-ptḥ (Nefer-seshem-ptah) proclaimed:

> [I have gone from my town,]
> [I have descended from my nome,]
[having done] justice for its lord,

having contented him with what he loves.

I spoke the good, I repeated the good,
[I grasped the right manner,]
[for I wanted the good] for people.

I judged two parties so as to content them,
I saved the weak from one stronger than he as best I could,
[I spoke truly, I acted justly.]  
[I gave bread to the hungry,] clothes to the naked,
I landed one who was stranded,
I buried him who lacked a son,
I made a boat [for the boatless,]
[and supported] the orphan.

I never spoke evil against anyone to a potentate. (Lichtheim 1992: 13–14)

In his tomb inscription, the Sixth-Dynasty official Inti of Deshasha explicitly states the rationale for living in accordance with ma'at: “I am one honored by the king; / I am one honored by the great god; / I am a lover of goodness, a hater of crookedness, / doing the right thing is what the god desires” (Lichtheim 1992: 11).

Some scholars believe that the concept of judgment in the next world, most familiar from much later texts like the Book of the Dead, was already present in this period (e.g. Baines 1991: 151; Morenz 1975: 86–91). Assmann (2005: 136) also notes that divine tribunals were treated as a potential (though not inevitable) danger of the journey between this world and the next from at least as early as the Old Kingdom.

However, the evidence at present does not allow us discern whether the moralizing aspects of the Egyptian religion extended to the general population. Before the New Kingdom, much “practical religion” beyond the rarefied circles of the court and the provincial elite probably centered on responses and remedies to misfortune, for instance through supplicating the dead and consulting seers and oracles (Baines 1987: 86–94). In other words, if moralizing aspects of popular religion, if present, were probably of secondary importance during this period.

**First Intermediate Period, Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate Period (2150–1567 BCE)**

Egyptian ideas about the divine underwent a transformation during the Middle Kingdom (2016–1700). Assmann (2001: 170) argues that for the first time “the question of god (in the singular) was posed,” and Egyptian texts grappled with the nature of the creator deity as well as the problem of evil and suffering. The collapse of the Old Kingdom and the political fragmentation of the First Intermediate Period had “called into question the possibility of realizing maat” (170). Why did the god who made the world allow it to fall into such chaos? Contemporary texts took different approaches. The *Dialogue of Ipuur and the Lord of All* attacks the creator god (who should be a good shepherd) for neglecting his human “herd” (Parkinson 1997: 185). However, *The Teaching for King Merikare* (perhaps in response to the Admonitions of Ipuwer [Assmann 2001: 173]) frames death, illness and other catastrophes as righteous punishment by the creator god. “He has killed His enemies and He has destroyed His children / for thinking to make rebellion” (Parkinson 1997: 226). Spell 1130 in the Coffin Texts (a body of spells and prayers found inscribed on coffins from the First Intermediate Period onwards) speaks in the voice of the creator god. The god claims responsibility for all goodness in the world and implies that the presence of evil is due to human disobedience (John Baines 2019, pers. comm.). “I made every man
equal to his fellow, and I forbade them to do wrong, but their hearts disobeyed what I had said” (Faulkner 1978: 167).

Overall—though doubts are expressed—Middle Kingdom wisdom literature and hymns posit a supreme, beneficent deity who created the world, the other deities and humankind, and continued to intervene by bestowing order and justice here below. Earthly misfortune could be attributed to human immorality and disobedience.

A related shift during the First Intermediate Period and the Middle Kingdom was that the concept of *ma‘at* began to be used in a more personal sense and in a broader range of contexts. Written evidence from tombs and funerary monuments makes it clear that living a virtuous, just, and ordered life—that is, a “ma‘atian” life—was the responsibility of non-royal elites as well as the upwardly mobile middle classes and even the poorer members of society. The Coffin Texts also emphasize that in this period everyone could now expect to be judged in the next world and to account for their conduct on earth (Goelet 2008: 140).

One school of thought holds that there was a general “democratization of the afterlife” between the late Old Kingdom and the Middle Kingdom (Wilkinson 2010b: 144). According to this theory, whereas in the Old Kingdom only the king could hope to achieve immortality as a divine being after death, by the Middle Kingdom non-royal elites and minor officials could aspire to the same fate (Callender 2000: 150, 168-69; Wilkinson 2010b: 144). However, the “democratization” theory has recently been criticized for resting on negative evidence for the restriction of a beatified afterlife to the pharaoh in the Old Kingdom. One scholar (Hays 2015: 201-02) points out that the absence of certain ritual texts from non-royal elite tombs may reflect iconographic and textual conventions rather than the tomb owners’ beliefs about what would become of them in the afterlife.

Likewise, from the Middle Kingdom there is evidence that even relatively low-ranking people participated in the rites of the god Osiris, which appear in the Old Kingdom sources to be a royal prerogative (Callender 2000: 168-69; Van De Mieroop 2011: 120). It is possible, though, that the lower orders were performing such practices, with the associated hope of immortality, before the Middle Kingdom, but that this was not represented in tomb iconography or inscriptions (John Baines, pers. comm. 2019). The prospect of punishment in the next life for one’s unethical behavior certainly looms large in the written and iconographic record for these periods, but Egyptologists are uncertain just how widely held such beliefs were among the general population.

**New Kingdom (1567-1070 BCE) and Third Intermediate Period (1070–525 BCE) and Late Period (1070-525 BCE)**

The concept of divine judgement after death was further elaborated and formalized in the New Kingdom through texts like the *Book of Going Forth by Day*, also known as the *Book of the Dead*. These texts emphasize the importance of refraining from harming others through lists of “negative confessions” to be recited before divine tribunals: “I have not done evil to anyone,” “I have not slain the sacred herd” (perhaps referring to humans), and so on (Quirke n.d., 2013). The deceased’s heart would also be weighed against a feather, symbolizing *ma‘at*, and if found to be too heavy could be devoured by the beast Ammit, a composite being with crocodile, lion and hippopotamus attributes.

In the fourteenth century BCE, the pharaoh Akhenaten made a series of drastic religious and political reforms, promoting the sole worship of Aten, “god of light and time” (Assmann 2005: 144), and moving the capital to a new site, now known as Amarna. While the scale and effects of this upheaval cannot be denied, there are plenty of Egyptian precedents for the focus on a single god: both in the Middle Kingdom (see above) and earlier in the New Kingdom. One innovative feature of Amarna religion
was that Aten, as a “cosmic energy,” lacked “personal and ethical traits”; the role of benevolent, personal god was instead assumed by the deified Akhenaten himself (Assmann 2005: 144–45).

Some scholars believe that after the Amarna experiment was over and the state worship of the old gods restored, there was a flowering of “personal piety”—a more direct and unmediated relationship with the gods—among the general populace. Bussmann (2017: 74) defines personal piety as the expression of “an intimate relationship between a benign god and a human individual.” It is true that prayers directed from individuals to the state gods became common in the New Kingdom, often addressing Amun “as one’s personal savior and guide, a champion of personal justice, mercy, and benefaction” (Szpakowska 2010: 508). After Akhenaten, letters and prayers more often use expressions like “who places [a certain god] in his heart” (Bussmann 2017: 72). The concept of ma’at remained central to New Kingdom religious thought, but the emphasis was slightly different: individuals were to live in accordance with maatian principles not (or not only) because this would lead to prosperity both before and after death, but because it was the will of the gods (Assmann 1989: 72–75). Abundant evidence also survives from the Third Intermediate Period and the Late Period for pious practice, for instance from mortuary inscriptions (Szpakowska 2010: 515).

A case could therefore be made that Egyptian religion from the New Kingdom onwards entailed an increasing internalization of moralizing gods, coupled with a stress on ethical self-examination, for elites and non-elites alike. However, debates on the topic of personal piety are complex and long-standing. It is not clear whether the absence of evidence for non-royal or non-elite “piety” in pre-New Kingdom contexts reflects a real lack of interest in such relationships with the divine, or merely shifting representational and textual conventions. With the relaxing of these strict conventions (known as “decorum”) over the course of the Dynastic period, a greater range of subjects became socially appropriate. It may be that religious texts from the New Kingdom onwards merely represent beliefs and practices that had hitherto been widespread but unexpressed in official contexts (Baines 2017: 24–25; Baines and Frood 2011). Indeed, Bussmann (2017) points to the wealth of material evidence for devotional practices among the general population, in the form of local shrines and votive offerings, from the third millennium BCE onwards. He believes that the “personal piety” phenomenon of the New Kingdom in fact reflects a loss of intimacy with the gods, produced by the exclusion of local communities from cult activities in official temples (Bussmann 2017: 86).

Persian Period (525-323 BCE)

See the section on Iran. In Egypt, religious practice and theology remained mostly unchanged under Persian rule, although there is a general dearth of sources for this period (John Baines, pers. comm. 2019).

Hellenistic and Roman Periods (323 BCE – 300 CE)

The arrival of the Ptolemies brought Hellenic philosophical schools along with the more ‘traditional’ worship of Greek deities (Morrison 2010, 758-761). The extent to which these impacted the daily lives of the rural Egyptian population is debatable. It is certainly relevant to note that, during the earlier phases of Ptolemaic rule, a “double society” developed in which Greek and Egyptian communities were subject to different judicial systems, and ethnic Greeks tended to dominate the civic life of the new cities (Manning 2003, 131). Nevertheless, after 200 BCE, social boundaries and identities became more blurred (Vandorpe 2010, 171-173).

The Greek concept of δίκη (justice) overlaps with ma’at, but also differs from it in key ways. Both were concerned with ensuring proper conduct and maintaining social order and applied equally to rulers and ruled. However, Greek gods were less concerned with human moral behavior than Egyptian deities,
although they were believed to punish injustice, while legal and moral ‘rightness’ were often intimately linked in the Greek world (Petrovic and Petrovic 2016).

The Hellenistic (and, later, Roman) religious philosophies that arrived in Egypt from the late first millennium BCE onwards did not include precepts encouraging charity or almsgiving (Jennifer Larson 2016, pers. comm.). However, widespread in Graeco-Roman culture was a strong tradition of elites engaging in prosocial acts based on a sense of ‘civic duty’ (Hoyer 2013; Verboven 2002). Moreover, the better-off Graeco-Macedonian population, for instance officials and veteran soldiers, also engaged in much prosocial activity, spurred on by similar motivations. These civic benefactions carried considerable ideological weight and led to the creation and maintenance of important infrastructure throughout Egypt, such as roads, bridges, and temples (Fischer-Bovet 2014; Monson 2012).

Both native Egyptian and Graeco-Mediterranean culture and religion, the influence of which had grown under the Ptolemies, continued to flourish under the Romans (Frankfurter 1998, 7). Evidence for Greek religion in Ptolemaic Egypt is surprisingly slight, suggesting that even Greeks adopted indigenous beliefs without perceiving a conflict between the two traditions (John Baines, pers. comm., Vandorpe 2010).

- New book by Frankfurter, good to look at it, but it’s about Christianisation. Worth looking at the 1998 book to unpack further.

**Late Antiquity (after 300 CE)**

By the Late Antique period, when Egypt formed part of the Eastern Roman Empire, religion and ethics in the province included strands of thought from Christian sects (some considered heresies), Judaism, Graeco-Roman paganism, and the ancient beliefs of the Pharaonic age.

After the adoption of Christianity as the Roman Empire’s official religion, elite civic-minded prosociality gave way to religiously inspired notions of Christian charity and benefaction: "Modern scholars agree that Christ’s command to assist the suffering underlay the development of specialized welfare services in Byzantium. According to Matthew’s gospel, Jesus required that Christians feed the hungry, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, and care for the sick (Matt. 25: 34-5)" (Miller 2008, missing page number). It is striking that similar exhortations can be found in the Egyptian textual tradition as far back as the third millennium BCE (John Baines, pers. comm. 2019).

- New book by Frankfurter on Christianization.

After the Islamic conquest (642 CE), Egypt gradually converted to Islam, although it retained a strong Christian (Coptic) minority to this day.

**Summary**

*They [Egyptians] are religious beyond measure, more than any other people* — Herodotus 2.37

In summary, Egypt provides us with a striking example of precocious development of MSP (in fact, the earliest among the regions surveyed in these narratives). Based on a number of inscriptions, we conclude that a well-developed form of MSP appears in Egypt as early as c.2400 BCE (Old Kingdom’s late Fifth and Sixth Dynasties). Ma’at is concerned with a broad spectrum of morality aspects, emphasizing personal integrity and charity. Morality is a primary concern, rather than rituals or propitiation. Punishment in the afterlife is rather certain, although at least some Egyptians believed they could escape judgment by purchasing a spell that would prevent their heart from blurring out all their sins. However, evidence does not allow us to determine how broad was the social scope of MSP in Old
Kingdom. Certainly, it included rulers and most likely the elites, but strong evidence that the moralizing aspects of Egyptian religion extended to general population is available only from New Kingdom on. Before New Kingdom popular religion was probably concerned with responses and remedies to misfortune.

There is much uncertainty about how far back in time can we infer the presence of MSP aspects (beyond Old Kingdom). There is evidence of belief in the afterlife from the Early Dynastic Period (c.3300 BCE) and some scholars argue that ma‘at already played a moralising role at that time, but this thesis is not supported by other scholars.

From New Kingdom on (after 1600 BCE) Egypt possessed a full set of MSP characteristics. This situation was not changed by the conversion of the majority of population first to Christiinity and later to Islam.

References


Quirke. 2013. Going out in daylight (need a better ref)


**West Africa**

NGA: Niger Inland Delta and Ghanaian Coast
Contributors: ... Enrico Cioni, ...

**Pre-Islamic Period (c. 2000 BCE–800 CE)**
Roderick McIntosh (1998: 5) has argued for a long-lived set of values in the Inland Niger Delta, which he calls a “symbolic reservoir of beliefs” (see also R. McIntosh and S. McIntosh 1988: 156). In cultural-historical terms, this floodplain was the crucible for the mixing of two great traditions that still structure West African societies today: the Soninke from the North of the Inland Delta, and the Malinke from its South (R. McIntosh 1998: 15). Both form part of the still larger Mande-speaking cultural sphere. In McIntosh’s view, certain Mande “core rules” of social life and action in the landscape are very old indeed, dating back millennia to the Late Stone Age (pre-Jenne-jeno) and to the 1st-millennium era of urbanization and prosperity in the Inland Delta (R. McIntosh 2000: 159, 167-71).
Extrapolating backwards from historical Mande contexts, R. McIntosh (2000) argues that these rules demanded moral reciprocity both between human individuals and between human communities and the landscape (see also McNaughton 1988: 15-21). Mande concepts of landscape envision a grid underlain by currents of nyama, a vital force that is more concentrated in some localities than others (R. McIntosh 1998, 2000; Togola 2000). A particularly durable Mande trope is the dalimasigi (knowledge quest), in which a charismatic and skillful individual travels over the nyama grid and enters into relations with spirits of the land on behalf of the wider community (Conrad 2008; R. McIntosh 1998, 2005). By placating or subduing these beings, these heroes or heroines can transform potentially dangerous nyama and (for example) make certain locations habitable for humans or enable the extraction and working of iron (R. McIntosh 1998). This worldview is laden with ethical expectations: knowledge quests are undertaken for the common good and not for personal gain, and places of concentrated nyama should never be ‘monopolized’ by individuals or corporations (R. McIntosh 2005: 139-41). The evidence for the prevalence of these ethical expectations in Pre-Islamic West Africa largely consists of the absence of evidence for any kind of hierarchical organisation in the archaeological remains of societies that appear to have been rather complex: most notably, the large, urban site of Jenné-jeno lacks all expected material manifestations of state power, including grand tombs and monuments requiring large-scale mobilization of labour, the use of writing for either bookkeeping, law codes, or royal propaganda, and specialized buildings for administration (S. McIntosh and R. McIntosh 1993).

One could argue, then, that prevailing ideology in the Pre-Islamic Niger Inland Delta promoted some form of ‘prosociality’. However, it is more difficult to speculate on belief in supernatural agents, and whether or not these may have been thought to reward prosociality or punish behaviours that ran counter to it. Indeed, despite the unusually rich trove of oral traditions preserved by Mande jeliw (a hereditary ‘caste’ of historians, genealogists, and political mediators [R. McIntosh 2000]) and the results of decades of modern archaeological research in the Niger Inland Delta, the reconstruction of trends in religious values in the region before the introduction of writing remains a fraught task. Our image of the shifting ‘symbolic reservoir’ will probably always lack temporal resolution. In keeping with the distributed power relations of Middle Niger societies and the importance they ascribed to occult knowledge (McNaughton 1998: 14), it seems likely that the ‘ideology’ of the Delta had no canonical form promulgated from on high (for instance, no equivalent to the Christian orthodoxy reached after the First Council of Nicaea) and that its moral norms and core assumptions about the world often remained unspoken.

Medieval Period (800–1400 CE)
Beginning in 700 CE, Arab and Berber Muslim traders gradually spread Islam South of the Sahara (Levtzion and Pouwels 2000; Webb Jr. 2006: 44). In the mid-1320s CE, King Mansa Musa of the Mali Empire made the pilgrimage to Mecca (Lapidus 2002: 402; Sapong 2016). Like other Sahelian kings and ‘chiefs’ during this period, Musa also brought literate Muslim officials and clerics into the heart of Malian government. Islamic judicial institutions, centers of scholarship, and mosques sprang up across the region, and the development of formal bureaucracies gave Sahelian rulers a greater degree of administrative control over subject populations than had hitherto been possible (Lapidus 2002: 401-09; R. McIntosh 1998: 250). For the description of Islam as a moralizing religion, see World Religions: Islam.

However, pre-Islamic (or non-Islamic) beliefs continued to persist even in the Mali Empire: when traveller Ibn Battuta visited this polity later in the fourteenth century, he noted that “the emperor also remained faithful to certain pagan customs“ and “unorthodox practices”, suggesting that “[a]part from the presence of Arabs and the slight Muslim veneer, what happened at the court of the mansa differed very little from what might have been seen at the courts of non-Muslim kings, for example those of Mossi” (Niane 1984, 152).
Indeed, the aforementioned site of Jenné-jeno, whose final phase of occupation ran from about 900 to 1400 CE, has yielded no evidence for Islamic beliefs or practices. However, it was around the same time that Islam spread through neighbouring polities that Jenné-jeno witnessed the relatively sudden appearance of figurative iconography: specifically, a large corpus of terracotta figurines depicting humans in a variety of poses (kneeling, reclining, embracing other human figures, sitting, riding a horse, standing as if at attention) and bearing elaborate jewelry (suggestive of high status), snakes (arranged around the figure's body like necklaces or bracelets, and suggestive of some kind of "snake cult") and/or bulging pustules (suggestive, perhaps, of disease). Many of these figurines are of unknown context due to looting, but the contexts in which the few that have been found through regular archaeological excavation suggest the possibility of ritual use: hidden in the wall of an iron-smelter's workshop, buried under the floor of a deliberately razed house, placed on what appears to have been an altar, and discarded in a trash heap at the city's periphery after what may have been a deliberate act of mutilation (REFERENCES: from McIntosh books, but page numbers needed!).

According to Roderick McIntosh (R. McIntosh, pers. comm.), the figurines may have been worshipped in order to benefit families or people that were part of "corporations" rather than individual families: that is, groups of people who shared the same craft or economic activity, such as ironworking, woodworking, or fishing. It is perhaps possible to reconstruct such rituals on the basis of what we know about twentieth-century West African rituals centered around sculptures known as boliw (Kedzierska Manzon 2013, 1119-1152). However, there is no evidence that the Jenné-jeno figurines were thought to punish or reward certain behaviours on the basis of a system of morality, nor can such beliefs be inferred on the basis of what is known about boliw worship.

Finally, it is also worth noting that Brooks (1993: 37-38) identifies "landlord-stranger reciprocities" as a pillar of social life in medieval and later West Africa. Remarked on by Ibn Battuta in the Mali Empire as well as later European explorers (Jansen 1996a: 122), these norms enabled the free movement of travelers and traders in safety.

**Question:** at what date can we assume that Islam has become firmly rooted in NID, penetrating into the common population?

**Islamic Period (from 1400?)**
For Islam see the appropriate section of the chapter on World Religions.

**Ghana: Pre-British Period (1500–1900 CE)**
According to the traditional beliefs of the Akan peoples of Ghana, there are multiple gods, and foremost among them is Onyakopon, the creator of the universe. The Akan believe Onyakopon to be both omniscient and omnipotent, as demonstrated by two of his "praise names": Brckyirihuade or "he is the one who knows what is happening in his presence as well as behind his back" and Nya-amanekose or "he is the one to whom if you report (or tell) any need or trouble, he is able to help you", respectively (Danquah 1945: 29). Besides the gods, the Akan must also provide offerings to the ancestors or Nana (Gilbert, Lagacé and Skoggard 2000).

The Akan also believe that both the gods and the ancestors may punish certain behaviors and reward others. Specifically, the Akan believe that both the gods and the ancestors may punish "stealing, pre-marital sex, murder, incest, having sexual intercourse in the bush, adultery and suicide" (Anderson 2013: 167). A list of virtuous behavior that are rewarded by the Akan gods and ancestors could not be found in the available literature, but it may be reasonably inferred that it would include the avoidance of the above-mentioned behaviors. Moreover, proverbs such as "man is not a palm-tree that he should be
self-sufficient", "the right arm washes the left arm and the left arm washes the right arm" and "life is mutual aid" (Gyekye 2011) all suggest that the virtues of fairness and reciprocity were rewarded as well.

However, the available literature presents contradictory accounts of the exact mechanisms by which the Akan think the gods and ancestors reward or punish certain behaviors. Judging by Danquah (1945: 24), it would seem that the punishment or reward is given to the individual, and after death: a person who "lives in the right way" is permitted to join the ancestors in the land of the dead; by contrast, a person who "does not live in the right way" is forbidden from joining the ancestors and becomes, instead, "a hovering spirit" who is "unable to proceed to any desirable habitat". However, judging by Anderson (2013, 167), punishment for transgressive behavior of a single individual is meted out to "the offender and the entire society" via "drought, infertility and sicknesses".

Summary
While prevailing ideology during the Pre-Islamic period probably emphasized prosociality, transgressors were punished by human agents, and there is no evidence of MSP in the Sahel region. MSP is brought to this region with the spread of Islam. However, pre-Islamic religious beliefs were not replaced by Islam.

Rulers of Mali convert around 1300 CE, but before that date there was gradual cultural diffusion of Islam to West Africa via groups involved in trans-Saharan trade. Al-Bakri (1040-95 CE) refers to a town inhabited by Muslims in the Ghana (Wagadu) Empire. Levitzon and Pouwels (Intro to The History of Islam in Africa, 2000: 3) say: “Conversion to Islam was the work of men of religion who communicated primarily with local rulers. The latter often became the first recipients of Islamic influence, an indication to the importance that states had in the process of Islamization. Thus, for some time Muslims lived under the hospitality of infidel kings ... This was the situation in eleventh-century Ghana as in nineteenth-century Asante”. This evidence suggest that Islam was established

On the Ghanaian Coast we observe strong evidence of MSP in the pre-colonial period. A broad set of morality aspects was enforced by supernatural agents. According to some authorities, judgment was personal and affected the afterlife. According to others, punishment was collective and in this world.

Question for the experts: is there any evidence allowing us to answer the question of whether MSP aspects of the Akan religion developed endogenously, or under the influence from Islam?

References


**Mesopotamia**

NGAs: Southern Mesopotamia

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**Chalcolithic: Ubaid Period (c.6500–4000 BCE)**

(Including Halaf Period in North Mesopotamia, which transitions to the Ubaid Period (c. 5300 BCE) with the adoption of influences and cultural features from Southern Mesopotamia).

The material record of this period in Mesopotamia offers insight into ritual activities related to
temples, burial, and symbolism, but very little is known about a system of religion or religious beliefs due to the absence of writing and records. Oates (1978: 117) wrote that "only with later farming villages in Sumer itself (some time before 5000 B.C.) do we find unambiguous evidence for the pattern of town and temple so characteristic of later Sumerian and Babylonian society. The argument for religious continuity from these 'Ubaid villages to historic times is persuasive, has often been discussed (Lloyd and Safar 1947: 93-4; Oates 1960: 44-6; Oates and Oates 1976: 122-32)." There is some evidence on earlier presence of farming in Sumer, but these communities left little or no traceable materials (see: Altaweel et al. 2019).

Charvát (2002: 109-110) notes that the apparent increase in the diversity of burial customs in the Halaf period (c. 6500–5500 BCE) may indicate "that the particular circumstances of death exercise an influence on the funerary ritual". Nevertheless, he does not go on to suggest that there is any evidence that Halaf-period Mesopotamians believed that particular circumstances of death (or indeed moral conduct in life) also resulted in differential treatment in the afterlife. Symbols such as bulls, and horns (bucranea on pottery) specifically, later become important symbols for gods, in general, in historic periods. Structures also begin to incorporate horns as evidence for possible altars or religious symbols (Kornienko 2009). Such symbols have later continuity, which suggest some aspects of religions, perhaps even gods, have origins in early farming communities. Nevertheless, continuous temple use and religious architecture that is distinguishable does not develop until the 5th and 4th millennium BCE, suggesting religious beliefs are evolving towards but not yet comparable to later periods.

Hole (2010, 228-238) argues that Ubaid-era Mesopotamians likely interpreted widespread environmental change in the fifth millennium BCE as "caused by supernatural forces/gods who needed to be supplicated and placated", which led to the "[i]ntensification of ritual", in which "people treated [these supernatural forces/gods] much as they honored their terrestrial leaders, with rituals and gifts". Evidence for this intensification of ritual includes the appearance of seals depicting "humanoids" that Hole interprets as precursors to the figure of the namash, "a person who is thought to be endowed with the ability to communicate with, and influence the behavior of, supernatural forces". At sites such as Tepe Gawra and Susa, these seals grow in quantity and in the complexity of their iconography over time, "implying an elaboration of ritual".

Other evidence for ritual intensification includes a series of temples at Eridu, where remains convincingly suggest continuity with Mesopotamian temples, with the earliest levels dating to the fifth and fourth millennium BCE. This also demonstrates that the concept of gods belonging to a specific place or town, central to later Mesopotamian beliefs, likely developed by this period (Safar et al. 1981). Moreover, late-Ubaid figurines from Eridu, Ubaid and Ur depict realistic human bodies surmounted by elongated heads with "coffee-bean eyes", which may represent mythical figures or humans wearing (possibly ritual) masks. Architectural elements that later temples incorporate, such as niche and buttress designs, begin to be developed, suggesting the foundations of later beliefs were developing. These have been assumed to have led to or influenced the creation of historical gods and how they were worshiped. The Ubaid can be seen as a key period where many material cultural traditions, that define later, historic Mesopotamia, begin. Finally, a great platform was built at Susa, regarding which Hole (2010, 238) writes:

"This monument must have been constructed by and for the good of the community, perhaps for all of Susiana. [...] At Susa, leaders determined that only ceremonies of sacrifice and supplication carried out on top of platforms would impress the forces that could not be controlled by secular human effort. An elaborate set of rituals, with participation by numerous individuals under the direction of priests, emerged".

However, by the end of the fifth millennium, structures at the top of the platform were destroyed, and the platform ceased to be used for ritual purposes. Despite this apparent failure, Hole contends that the ritual intensification of the Ubaid "laid the groundwork for later elaborations of
religious ritual [...], designed to win the favor of the gods”. Overall, then, based on Hole’s interpretation, one could argue that Ubaid-era Mesopotamians probably believed that supernatural agents could inflict suffering on humans, and that they could be placated through the construction of monuments, the offer of gifts, and increasingly elaborate rituals. Hole offers no suggestion that the supernatural agents’ actions towards humans were interpreted as in any way moralistic.

Peasnall (2002, 381) confirms that there was likely continuity between the way Mesopotamians interacted with their gods in the Ubaid period and the way they did in later periods: specifically, he notes that the “presence of basic elements such as a cult niche and central offering table that would continue to be important in later temples suggests that the making of propitiatory offerings or sacrifices to important deities was an important ritual even at this early date”. Peasnall also notes that burial data is too poor to “infer anything of the belief systems underlying” burial customs, and therefore the "concept of an afterlife" more generally. However, where burials have been found, there is evidence of grave goods, which could be interpreted as offering used in the afterlife, which occurs in later historic periods (Hafez et al. 2011).

Uruk Period (c.4000–3100 BCE)

Early forms of linear writing emerge in the Middle Uruk (c. 3500 BCE) followed by further development of the cuneiform writing system during the Late Uruk. Much of these early texts were administrative and associated with public spaces. However, their association with temples, such as the Inanna temple, suggests the importance of religious institutions to the economy and developing urban landscape. The earliest Mesopotamian written records of food offerings made to a deity date to the Late Uruk period. These records, which take the form of administrative documents, point to the importance of "the presence of an honored and therefore benevolent deity [...] to a city's viability", and imply a hierarchical but reciprocal relationship according to which "in return for the offerings the deity will bestow blessings" (Cunningham 2013, 41).

In terms of iconographic evidence for the relationship between Uruk-period Mesopotamians and their gods, Cunningham points to relief carvings on an alabaster vase found at Uruk itself and depicting "a procession of ritually naked men advancing in unison holding vessels filled with the fruits of the land" as well as "a clothed man [...] whose naked attendant presents offerings to a female figure, Inana, standing in front of her temple" (Cunningham 2013, 41). As cities developed, the concept of a chief deity for a city became well established, such as Inanna (Love and War goddess) and Anu (Sky god) being important gods at Uruk. Symbols of Utu appear already by the mid/late 4th millennium, suggesting further developments in the concept of chief gods and dieties. Early proto-literate tablets indicate Utu, who later is the god of Justice (Horowitz 2011: 141), was worshiped by this period (On Utu/Shamash, the Sun God, see below). The presence of Utu, who is associated with an idea of justice, could suggest this quality had developed by this point in relation to this god.

Again, we have clear evidence that Uruk-era Mesopotamians thought that providing the gods with offerings was an important way to gain their favor. There is no direct evidence that they also believed it could also be won (or lost) based on the moral quality of one’s actions towards other humans. However, this due to an absence of data: we don’t know when Utu, who later is important for the idea of morality, acquires his moralistic role. because we do not have clear textual attestations. Nevertheless, the presence of Utu, along with the other gods, could suggest justice, as a concept, began to be associated with gods. The massive increase in the scale of temple construction certainly points to a rapid rise in power of temples and formal religious institutions in Mesopotamia.
Jemdet Nasr (3100–2900 BCE)
Jemdet Nasr, named after the synonymous southern Mesopotamian tell site, is an archaeological period designated to identify certain ceramic forms and styles with a chronological restriction in southern and northern Mesopotamia. These ceramics had distinct features from assemblages of the Late Uruk and Early Dynastic periods (Matthews 1992). However, it is unlikely these shifts corresponded to major cultural changes. Ritual practice during this period was likely similar/continuous with the Uruk Period.

Early Dynastic Period (2900–2350 BCE)
The earliest evidence for attempts at winning the gods' favor through anything other than offerings date to the Early Dynastic Period, beginning with an Early Dynastic II (2750–2600 BCE) inscription written in praise of the deity Nin-Girsu (Cunningham 2013, 47). However, these inscriptions largely focus on praising the gods and their temples: that is, sources do not indicate that their authors attempted to win the gods' favor by describing particularly moral actions they may have performed. For example, an early hymn, known as the Kesh Temple Hymn, "emphasizes their role in mediating between the human world and the divine domains above and below, describing the temple as embracing heaven and being rooted in the ab-zu" (Cunningham 2013: 48).

The Early Dynastic period (specifically, Early Dynastic II) has also yielded the earliest written evidence for the belief that the gods chose rulers to steward the gods' patron cities (Cunningham 2013: 45). Mesopotamian rulers began to depict themselves as representatives of the gods and their role was to be the “good shepherd” (see Dumuzi) of the people, who were also responsible for the upkeep of temples, providing justice (thus association with Utu; kings also served as judges), and protect people (i.e., military leader; Hill 2013 for summary of various authors). Swearing of oaths is attested and the name of the gods would be invoked in keeping promises (Cunningham 1997: 45). Curses and punishment by the gods are given to those who break oaths. There is a text also referencing the personal deity of Enannatum I, a Sumerian king. The law of Urukagina is among the earliest laws, or perhaps reforms, known to us that addresses social justice issues (abuse of power, position in society, equality, etc.) and is dedicated to Ningirsu, an important god of Lagash who is associated with law (among various roles; Foster 1995). Lamentation literature morning the loss or destruction of cities describes 'sins' committed in the destruction of cities.

The Instructions of Shuruppak includes instruction on piety/morality. It discusses the role of the night hiding “good” and “evil” and provides instructions on doing good to one's family, love, etc. These topics suggest there is a distinction between moral and immoral behavior. The text also describes how one might fail morally (e.g., adultery), which could result in undesirable consequences (although does not mention gods enacting punishment specifically). However, this is considered “Wisdom” literature, which might be concerned with more practical advice (Lambert 1996). Cylinder seals also begin to have the symbols of the gods and by this point, if not earlier, we see cities developing their chief temples.

Akkadian Empire (2350–2200 BCE)
The Akkadian period marks the first evidence for kings linking themselves to deities and claiming their own divinity (e.g., Naram-Sin). This practice did not prove popular and only a few cases are known from Mesopotamia related to kings claiming divinity. Nevertheless, we get other references to key gods and oaths taken in their name, suggesting that this helps to bind agreements made as sacred (Gelb et al. 1991). Primary inscriptions mention kings being anointed and having authority given to them by the
god(s) of Mesopotamia (Liverani 2013), particularly temples patronized by the king. Punishment by the gods is mentioned in later sources (post-3rd millennium BCE). One example indicates that Sargon committed a great evil and Marduk punished him and his lands (e.g., bringing famine to the people as punishment; Bosworth 1912). However, the reference of Marduk seems to suggest this is a redaction since Marduk was not so important in the 3rd millennium BCE. The Akkadian term lemmu, meaning bad or evil, is attested, which denotes evil behavior that can apply to a god (i.e., a demon) or a person (Black and Breckwoldt, 2012).

There is also a corpus of later Akkadian/Sumerian texts (tradition continues for nearly a millennium) that contrasts Sargon and his grandson Naram-Sin as “good” and “bad” kings as a moralistic measure of subsequent rulers. In these literary traditions, Naram-Sin expressed skepticism in oracular messages, which as a great impiety toward the god Enil. The consequence was the calamitous downfall of the Akkadian empire. For this reason, Naram-Sin represented bad leadership while Sargon represented good leadership. However, this narrative is not consistent and likely and perhaps an anachronistic mischaracterization of his actual leadership and experiences (Beckman 2001). It is unclear if this purely a later phenomenon or if it extends to proximate Naram-sin’s actual reign.

Late Sumerian/Isin-Larsa Period (2100–1830 BCE)
The Late Sumerian Period offers some early surviving textual evidence for law codes. Examples include the Laws of Ur-Nammu, Eshnunna, and Lipit-Ishtar, among others. The law codes during this period offer a fairly standardized prologue that introduces the ruler as the enforcer of law on behalf of the gods. The specifically named deities vary by ruler. The prologue to the law code of Lipit-Ishtar (c. 1930 BCE) states that the gods have tasked the ruler with enforcing the law on their behalf. Specifically, Lipit-Ishtar boasts that the gods Anu and Enlil chose him for “the princeship of the land in order to establish justice in the lands, to banish complaints, to turn back enmity and rebellion by force of arms, and to bring well-being to the Sumerians and Akkadians” (quoted in Kramer 1956, 57).

In hymns and prayers, “practically all the major deities of the Sumerian pantheon are extolled [...] as lovers of the good and the just, of truth and righteousness” (Kramer 1956, 57). A hymn to the god Enlil included in Kramer (1956, 53-55) describes him as the “lord whose pronouncement is unchangeable, who forever decrees destinies/whose lifted eye scans the lands”, and who “does not let the wicked escape” the “meshes” of his “great net.” The wicked include “the unrighteous, evil, oppressor, [...] the informer, the arrogant, the agreement-violator”, which suggests a concern for the way people behave towards one another, as well as a particular concern for the virtues of honesty and reciprocity. The reference to the god’s “net” also appears to indicate the god was thought to in some way punish transgressors.

Similarly, a hymn to the goddess Nanshe appears to describe her in the act of judging the moral worth of humans as part of a New Year’s ceremony. In the translation quoted by Kramer (1956, 58), Nanshe disapproves of those “who transgress the established norms, violate contracts, who looked with favor on the place of evil, [...] who substituted (?) a small weight for a large weight, who substituted (?) a small measure for a large measure, [...] who having eaten something not belonging to him] did not say ’I have eaten it’, who having drunk, did not say ’I have drunk it’, [...] who said ’I would eat that which is forbidden’, who said ’I would drink that which is forbidden’. Moreover, the hymn notes Nanshe’s will “to comfort the orphan, to make disappear the widow”. Here, too, besides norms that may be interpreted as regulating the relationship between humans and their gods (i.e. those concerning the consumption of forbidden food or drink), it would seem that Nanshe is above all concerned with enforcing honesty and reciprocity between humans, as well as encouraging humans to care for the vulnerable and avoid theft.
Utu, the sun god (also called Shamash in Akkadian), was also believed to directly supervise human morality (Kramer 1956, 57). He is the god of Justice, so his role is to dispense justice and punish the wicked (Nemet-Nejat 1998). Some scholars suggest that for the dead, those who lived a life of justice, Shamash may make their experience in the underworld somewhat better (or at least there was a hope but it was not guaranteed; Kramer 1971).

Overall, however, there is no sense that the Sumerians distinguished between transgressions between humans and ones between humans and gods: both were “abomination to the gods” (Lambert 1996 [1963], 4). Other gods acted mischievously or worked against other gods and humans. For example, Enlil wanted to destroy humans but Ea saved them (e.g., see Atrahasis epic).

From at least the Ur III period onwards (c. 2100–2000 BCE), Mesopotamian thinkers began to grapple with the paradox that, despite the gods’ predilection for righteousness, human society remained rife with injustice: "The most common complaint is virtually about a broken contract. A man served his god faithfully, but did not secure health and prosperity in return. The problem of the righteous sufferer was certainly implicit from the time of the Third Dynasty of Ur. An Akkadian name of this period is Minarni, 'What-is-my-guilt?', which implies the line of reasoning: I have suffered: I must have done wrong: What can it be? Suffering necessarily implies guilt" (Lambert 1996[1963], 10).

In Mesopotamia, and the wider Near East, gods were there to be supporters and power for humans, particularly in difficult times. The moral order governed both gods and humans. Gods were not seen as perfect moral beings but they also had to follow order that governed the cosmos. They were, however, in charge of enforcing moral code; a good king has such responsibilities (e.g., Hammurabi’s code is an example of this). Gods could be tricked (e.g., the Gilgamesh epic where humanity is saved from the flood) and they can be fickle and make poor decisions. Gods could do what they wanted and they created humans as servants to worship them.

Worship of gods was mainly to have them support oneself and the society. Many gods were also specific to a city (from the Bronze Age on) or a state (later, during the Iron Age; state-level gods emerged earlier in Egypt). Ultimately, humans needed to follow moral precepts because they were laws that governed the cosmos (Schneider 2011).

Although these MSP elements were clearly present, morality was not central to the cult, unlike worship and sacrifice to the gods. Morality was, nevertheless, seen as important or even a positive quality by at least some of the gods. The Flood story serves as an example, where only the wise and moral person (Atrahasis; his name means “Extremely Wise”) was saved from the Flood (Lambert and Millard 1999). On the other hand, Enlil was happy to have Atrahasis and everyone else destroyed. This shows gods can do wicked things, but gods can to and humans are more likely got get punished for behavior. The gods also act on whim, sometimes punishing the just and rewarding the wicked (“the righteous sufferer”).

Old Babylonian Period (1830–1530 BCE)

Texts composed in the second millennium BCE point to the widespread belief in "personal" gods, that is, gods who protected specific individuals from the actions of malevolent supernatural agents, and who were able "to take [their] client's case to the greater gods, and to see that it received attention" (Lambert 1996[1963], 7). Though there is some evidence that certain rulers believed themselves to benefit from the protection of personal gods already in the late third millennium, in the second millennium the belief seems to have been that anyone could have a personal god, regardless of social status, although even this likely occurred earlier. Personal names, presence of god figurines, personal seals with gods on them, etc. indicate this idea of personal god could go back much further in time. Regardless, there is no indication that personal gods rewarded virtuous behaviour and punished
transgressions, as sources emphasise that all that was needed to ensure the god’s protection was to provide the god with offerings (Lambert 1996[1963], 7).

Apart from this possible development, Mesopotamian beliefs regarding punishment by supernatural agents shows continuity with the preceding period. Most notably, the Code of Hammurabi followed the tradition of casting rulers as the gods’ representatives on earth, being the ones responsible in dispensing justice, a tradition clearly established in the third millennium BCE, in the matter of maintaining moral order among humans. The Code’s prologue states that the gods gave Hammurabi power over several major cities in order to “provide justice and appropriate behavior for the people of the land” (vv. 16-19, quoted in Roth 1995, 17). The top third of the stela Hammurabi erected to commemorate this achievement depicts Shamash, god of the sun and of justice, seated on his throne, with Hammurabi standing in front of him, which indicates that Hammurabi’s actions in the matter of the law were following Shamash’s instructions (Roth 1995, 22-23). The Laws of Hammurabi are likely reflecting a continuity of earlier beliefs that good kings provide justice, protect people, etc. (e.g., Law of Eshnunna and Law of Lagash).

Moreover, several texts written throughout the Babylonian Period continued to explore the aforementioned question of the “righteous sufferer”. In a text written in this period, a man asks his personal god what crime he could have possibly committed to justify his misfortunes; another text* from the same period contains the line, “I have been treated as one who has committed a sin against his god”, implying that the speaker believes himself to have been punished for a transgression he was not aware of having committed (Lambert 1996[1963], 10). (Although Lambert does not provide a title or identify these text in any way, it is probably from the Counsels of Wisdom, which are presented as different texts because they come from different fragmentary tablets. The date of this text is also debated—Lambert even suspects it might be Kassite period but possibly with a precursor in the Old Babylonian period).

The breaking of oaths was very serious in Mesopotamia. Curses are given, but these curses can vary or be unspecified (Weeks 2004). Basically, bad things happen to those who don’t keep their word. Also, justice was becoming more developed as a concept or at least became clearer by the early 2nd millennium BCE, with Shamash (Utu) seen as a god who ‘rooted evil out’ (Richardson 2013). Shamash (cult based in Sippar) is not only becoming important in the Hammurabi text but throughout Mesopotamia this god is among the most important gods. Kings are to dispense justice and the gods oversee this, although the gods are not necessarily the source of all justice. This aspect probably developed in the 3rd millennium BCE, but became more important at times of conflict/social upheaval (see Darling 2013 on the summary of justice, gods, and kingship).

Kassite Period (1530–1150 BCE)
The question of the "righteous sufferer" continued to occupy the minds of Babylonian thinkers during the period of Kassite rule. The author of the text known as Ludlul (full title: Ludlul bel nemeqi, "I will praise the lord of wisdom") writes that, when apparently righteous people suffer misfortunes, it must be because they transgressed without realising: this leads the writer to conclude that humans have no intuitive sense of what is right and what is wrong, and that “moral standards must be inverted with the gods as compared with men (n. 34-38)” (Lambert 1996[1963], 16). The concept of sin or doing wrong is seen in literature such as the Myth of Adapa (Dalley 2008), although the term seems to derive from the third millennium BCE.

The author of the so-called Babylonian Theodicy (likely written at the end, if not just after, the Kassite Period) is more concerned with the question of why some men oppress others. The text consists of a dialogue between a righteous sufferer and his friend: the sufferer complains that virtuous and pious
behaviours do not guarantee a life of peace and happiness, while his friend argues the opposite; the sufferer also points to the fact that the wicked often prosper. In the end, both men agree that the gods made humans prone to wickedness, which contradicts the friend's idea that the gods' want justice and fairness to reign among humans (Lambert 1996[1963], 17). This emphasises the point that morality was not central to the gods, at least certainly not to all gods.

Several texts written at this time demonstrate a similarly pessimistic view of the relationship between humans and gods, but they may not represented widespread beliefs. Based on the views stated by the non-suffering friend in the Babylonian Theodicy, several hymns, and a text known as the Counsels of Wisdom, it seems reasonable to infer that most Mesopotamians at this time still believed that the gods rewarded acts of kindness towards the vulnerable and punished adultery, slander, oppression, and fraud (Lambert 1996[1963], 17-18). For example, the Counsels of Wisdom contain the following lines (Lambert 1996[1963], 101-103):

57 Do not insult the downtrodden and [ . . . ]
58 Do not sneer at them autocratically.
59 With this a man's god is angry,
60 It is not pleasing to Samas, who will repay him with evil.
61 Give food to eat, beer to drink,
62 Grant what is asked, provide for and honour.
63 In this a man's god takes pleasure,
64 It is pleasing to Samas, who will repay him with favour.

Throughout the second millennium, then, just as in previous periods, most Mesopotamians still believed that the gods rewarded reciprocity, honesty, and charity, and punished whoever hurt the vulnerable. Here we see emphasis on Shamash, so clear roles of justice attributed to that god, but this largely follows on what was already evident by the Old Babylonian period and likely earlier periods.

Iron Age: Neo-Assyrian, and Neo-Babylonian Empires (1150–540 BCE)
Lambert (1996[1963], 19-20) argues that the period following Kassite rule contributed very little to Mesopotamian ethical thought, writing that "the changes are so slight as to be almost unnoticeable". Even with regards to the Assyrians, he writes that "they were completely under the influence of the Babylonians".

Schneider (2013, 65-66) writes that the clearest depiction of the Mesopotamian afterlife can be found in a text describing the goddess Ishtar's descent into the land of the dead. Two manuscripts of this text were found in the library of Assurbanipal (668 BCE-627 BCE), and an earlier variant was found in Assur; though other texts hint at Mesopotamian notions of the afterlife, they do not coalesce into a "uniform view". It is therefore unclear whether the Assurbanipal and Assur manuscripts represent only the way the afterlife as it was understood at the time of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (911 BCE-609 BCE), or whether it points to how Mesopotamians thought of it in earlier times as well. In any case, these manuscripts describe the land of the dead as "a 'dark house', on the road that is 'one-way only', where 'those who enter are deprived of light', 'dirt is their food, clay their bread', they 'live in darkness' and are 'clothed like birds, with feathers' (1:5–10). The door to the place is bolted, and dust has settled upon the bolt (11)". There is no sense that this rather unpleasant realm was reserved for people who had transgressed moral norms, or that people also believed in the existence a more heavenly place where the souls of the virtuous could go.
Achaemenid, Hellenistic, and Sassanian Periods (540 BCE–640 CE)

Following the conquest of Mesopotamia by Cyrus II, Zoroastrianism played a major role in the religious landscape as the official state religion of the Achaemenid empire (see Hoyer 2019). See World Religions: Zoroastrianism, which traces its evolution from the early Achaemenid to the classic Sasanian periods (note also that most of our knowledge on Zoroastrianism comes from later periods).

Texts from Persepolis indicate that “all of the gods” were responsible for the great Persian capital and these gods were representatives of all people of the Achaemenid Empire (Briant 2002: 168). Other gods existed but Ahura Mazda was the god of the Achaemenid rulers. Zoroastrianism survived the period of persecution under the Seleucids and flourished under the Parthians (247 BCE–226 CE) and their successors, the Sasanids (224–651 CE). As with the Achaemenids, our knowledge of the religious situation in Parthian lands is only partial, but it seems that, again as with the Achaemenids, followers of Zoroastrianism coexisted peacefully with those of other religions (Nigosian 1993, 31-32). This seems to have changed under the Sasanids. The first two Sasanid rulers, Ardashir I (224-240 CE) and Shapur I (240-272 CE), are considered the founders of a form of Zoroastrian orthodoxy known as Mazdayasnanism, focused particularly on worship of the high Zoroastrian deity, Ahura Mazda. Mazdayasnanism required the elimination of rival religions. We see an increasing tendency of universal religions that had more orthodoxy, although within the Sasanian period other religions were often tolerated, where persecution often depended if the priestly classes were powerful or not. A high priest by the name of Kartir or Karter, for example, left an inscription in which he boasted of the attacks he directed at other religions in the region, including Judaism, Christianity, Mazdakism, Manichaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and indeed several sources suggest that Manichaans and Christians, in particular, were frequent targets of persecution (Nigosian 1993, 32-42). This policy was not consistent, as some periods saw more tolerance. The power of the chief priest may have greatly influenced how tolerant Sasanians were to other religions.

In the Near East, this is very likely a key period (and perhaps slightly earlier) where significant change had occurred or was occurring to religious belief. This period follows general trends to Axial changes seen elsewhere, including in religion. By this time, philosophy (in Anatolia) and beliefs relevant for all of humanity emerges with morality at the core of these beliefs. Zoroastrianism (Ahura Mazda) and Judaism (Yahweh) may have either transitioned to single-god/ dual-god (good and evil) worship model with morality central, but it is difficult to say for sure when as texts are missing and we often depend on later sources. Judaism emphasis on Yahweh is more clear relative to Zoroastrianism, but even here in the pre-7th century BC you have evidence of other gods along with Yahweh (e.g., mother goddess Asherah married to Yahweh). In fact, the concept of a single, moral god may have developed during the Babylonian exile from the 6th century BCE, as much of the Jewish religious community was exiled to Babylon. It is possible to conclude that the rise of the universal gods begins during this period; both Zoroastrianism and Judaism appear to develop eschatology and judgment of the dead. However, the timing of this rise is not entirely clear and it likely happened gradually during the Axial period, with the pace of change picking up in the late 1st millennium BCE. Punishment is also a major part of the universal religions relative to the earlier beliefs.

What is clear, is how religions, including the monotheistic ones that arose, began to syncretise beliefs. It is possible to identify common themes and beliefs in specific gods are emerging between disparate groups. At Persepolis, “all the gods” is used to refer to the societies of people, clearly indicating societies and gods are linked and that monotheistic ideas were not set yet at a state level but were transitioning to gods that may transcend place (remember how place and god worship were linked as early as the Ubaid period; this now began to change as gods moved around along with populations). In Achaemenid philosophy/ruler expectations, the ruler had the role of creating a perfect world which included moral order. The ruler is seen as a good shepherd who brought justice to his people (this seems
to be based on earlier Mesopotamian ideals with association of Utu/Shamash). This extends the ideas already from Hammurabi but now extends it to wide areas and not only doing good and justice for your own people (such as emphasized in Bronze Age) but all mankind (or at least those in your realm). So morality for kings and rulers extends to doing good for “all people.” This is also an important point because it shows a transition to the idea that god(s) can extend beyond specific people and the concept of a universal standard for justice (or even moral behaviour) was developing (not really clear before). Overall, the clear trend is of syncretized gods and beliefs that began to merge with greater emphasis on punishment and rewards (at least for Mesopotamia). This process of syncretism accelerates after Alexander but begins with Greek colonies and perhaps by the late Iron Age (Assyrian and Egyptian gods linked for instance), movement of Near East populations was critical to all this (summarised in: Altaweel and Squietieri 2018; example of syncretism: Budin 2004).

Islamic Period (after 640 CE)
See World Religions: Islam

Summary
Writing emerges towards the mid or end of the Uruk Period (ca. 3500-3200 BCE). During this period there is also pictorial evidence of offerings to the deities, but no conclusive indications of MSP. Many practices associated with later beliefs, such as building temples in the same location and temple design, when MSP existed, already emerged as early as the Ubaid period (c. 6th-5th millennium BCE). We cannot rule out MSP already in the Ubaid or perhaps by the Uruk period. We have evidence that the temples of many of the chief gods, such as Ea, were already established in the periods long before writing was established. The god Ea, in later periods, was known to have had very clear ideas of justice and doing good deeds that was also expected of humans. Many traditions of gods are likely to be very ancient, suggested by the conservative nature of temples and where temples are built for specific gods (Safar et al. 1981). The god of justice (Utu) is depicted during the Uruk period, which could suggest justice as a concept associated with the gods already, but no direct evidence exists. However, there was no conclusive evidence for the presence of MSP, but this is due to the lack of writing having been developed and only with a full development of written language, which occurs in the 3rd millennium BCE, is there literature that discusses morality. Writing in the 4th millennium was to archaic to express complex topics such as religious thought or even moral concepts. During the Early Dynastic Period (2900–2350 BCE) numerous inscriptions offer praise to gods; by this time writing was developing to capture more complex topics. The concept of a king doing ‘good’ for his people and ‘sins’ in the destruction of cities begins to emerge. Wisdom literature (from Shurupak; “Instructions of Shurupak”; Alster 1974) indicates that there is a moral code: it encourages following a “good” life. This document dates to about the Early Dynastic II (2750–2600 BCE), which makes it potentially among the earliest evidence that gods care about ruler stewardship (Lambert 1996; Alster 1974) as and see a ruler’s behavior as measured against expected, good behavior. Moral behavior is not directly linked to the worship of gods, but it states (“The father is like a god: his words are reliable”), indicating gods also give good advise on good behavior. Keeping oaths and giving offerings to the gods are expected of people for the most part from the 3rd millennium BCE. Those who violate oaths are cursed and threatened with punishment by the gods.

Possible MSP is attested in the Akkadian period (around 2300 BCE), with inscription of Sargon and plagues/famine near the end of his life attributed with punishment for evil. However, this is not a primary source (i.e., could be a later invention, similar to the treatment of Naram-Sin by later text).
From the Ur III period the number of texts substantially increases and writing began to cover a wider scope of topics, compared to the earlier periods. Because writing is much more limited in the 3rd millennium BCE, it is possible that certain aspects of MSP were present, but not reflected in earlier sources.

Texts from the Ur III period onwards (c. 2100 BCE) present very clear evidence of MSP. It should also be noted that from this time on the number of written documents substantially increases, making it more likely a variety of topics, including on religious though, become more common. Such elements written include fairly comprehensive lists related to morality concerns and individual-targeted punishment are present. At the same time, morality was still not central to the cult: worship and sacrifice to the gods were and generally remained so through the 1st millennium BCE. Furthermore, the rise and persistence of the “righteous sufferer” texts suggest that gods could behave in unpredictable ways and texts suggest gods do bad things and can be unpredictable. There were also mischievous gods (Enki), who could seduce or trick other gods.

Major changes occur during the Axial Age, as greater syncretism of the gods and new, emerging universal concepts began to take shape (even before the rise of monotheistic beliefs). Morality became central from this time on in worshiping god(s), although there were indirect indications of it’s presence as early as the Bronze Age. The development of universal gods and ideas takes time and there is progressive development from the late 1st millennium BCE to the early 1st millennium CE. The afterlife became central from the Axial period in Mesopotamia, as it was seen as giving rewards for a good life, while in the Bronze Age this was either not clear or the afterlife was the same for “good” or “bad” people.

Literature


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Neolithic (9600–6000 BCE)
The southern Anatolian site of Çatalhöyük, which is situated on the Konya Plain and flourished around 7,000 BCE, has yielded ample evidence of ritual activity during the Neolithic. While the material remains of ritual activities at the site do not offer conclusive evidence for whether the site's inhabitants believed that supernatural agents could punish moral transgressions and/or reward proper moral conduct, there are some possible clues as to the values promoted by the dominant ideology. Specifically, there is evidence that the dominant ideology promoted prosociality and bravery.

With regards to prosociality, Çatalhöyük has yielded much evidence of feasting activity, as well as cattle horns and crania that were openly displayed in buildings, plausibly as a way of commemorating past feasts. It should be noted crania become symbols for later gods. Noting the prevalence of concealed household storage in the preceding era, Bogaard et al. (2009, 664-666) speculate that "communal social cohesion was a key issue for this densely packed settlement, and that extra-household sharing of meat, particularly from cattle, played an important role in its maintenance. Thus, visual celebrations of private stores were socially provocative, but commemorations of communal festivities were desirable (and potentially competitive). Food sharing, rather than storage, thus became the focus of display."

As for bravery, Whitehouse and Hodder (2010, 128-129) describe two houses with wall paintings depicting groups of people teasing and baiting wild animals such as bulls, deer, boars, and a bear. This, combined with the frequent retrieval of the meat-bearing parts of wild bulls in feasting deposits, as well as the occasional discovery of bear claws, a leopard claw, and the talons of wild raptors, seems to suggest that "that on rare occasions wild animals and birds were killed, perhaps at times in association with male feats of bravery and strength". Indeed, it is worth noting that hunting wild aurochs also
appears to have been an ideologically important activity across much of the Near East and North Africa during the Neolithic. Similar assemblages are documented at the earlier Neolithic site of Musular (Duru & Ozbasaran 2005, 23).

**Chalcolithic (6000–3000 BCE)**

As in the case of the Neolithic, there is not enough evidence to know whether or not Chalcolithic Anatolian populations believed in moralistic punishment or reward by supernatural agents, but archaeological data provide some clues with regards to the prevailing ideology.

For example, archaeologists have unearthed abundant evidence for large-scale feasts at the Early Chalcolithic site of Kösk, including high concentrations of meat-bearing animal parts in midden deposits likely coinciding with the original location of large roasting pits. Arbuckle (2012, 310) speculates that "the ability to give generously and to be apportioned high quality cuts of meat at public feasting events may have been central mechanisms by which social differences were measured and defined". One could therefore say that the dominant ideology at sites like Kösk promoted prosociality, though it is possible that those who could afford of the greatest displays of generosity used this to justify power imbalances in other areas of social life.

It is also worth noting that pottery vessels were often richly decorated in the late Neolithic and early Chalcolithic, which could suggest these vessels were used for communal feasting (Hayden 1995; Tsuneki 2017). Ceramics with bucrania design were defining symbols of the early Chalcolithic in Analtolia before the Ubaid expansion. If considered within the context large scale feasting and the presence of cattle ritual space (e.g. Domuztepe, Tell Kurdu), feasting and animals in ritual were strongly connected (Kansa et al. 2009; Özbal et al. 2004). However, it is unclear how these rituals connect to a larger cosmology of religious systems of belief. In southern Anatolia, the influence of the Uruk culture is evident. Temples and different structures to gods are likely built, including depiction of likely deities in iconography (Stein et al. 1996).

**Early and Middle Bronze Age (3000–1650 BCE)**

The Early and Middle Bronze Ages mark a period of expanding settlement and exchange networks across Anatolia. While this period offers a wealth of material and symbolic evidence of ritual activities, there is no conclusive textual evidence of religious systems of belief before the adoption of writing systems through contact with the Mesopotamian states and the emergence of the Hittite Empire in the Middle to Late Bronze Age.

Many features of ritual activity during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic share architectural and material similarities with the Early Bronze Age cultures at various archaeological sites across Anatolia. However, this continuity may also be the result of the fragmentary nature of archaeological understanding of this period as well as the fragmentary nature of cultures themselves. One pattern is evident in the site of Beycesultan, where ritual spaces exhibit marked shifts in cultic practice. The Early Bronze Age twin shrines at Beycesultan contain possibly anthropomorphic stelae made of plastered clay, liquid offering vessels/basins, horn-shaped enclosures for the stelae, ritual wooden posts, altars. These structures also included a storage room and ovens and hearths, possibly used to prepare food (Yakar 1974). The shared symbolic use of horns echoes the earlier Neolithic and Chalcolithic use of cattle horns. The complexity of these spaces suggests a complex system of cultic activity directed at placating deities through rituals performances and offering. Use of the shrine continued through the Middle and Late Bronze (overlapping with the Hittite Period), which may suggest a degree of religious continuity. Since it is not possible to clearly delineate identities of deities or the intention in ritual practices, we cannot conclusively state if the MSP noted in the Hittite period was ancestral. A lack of clear written materials
also means it is difficult to conclude the presence of MSP. Through Akkadian sources, we know the Hatti culture, which may have influenced the development of the later Hittites, occupied much of central Anatolia. Some of the symbols of gods used by the later Hittites appear first in Hattian cultures (Akurgal 2001). In general, much of Anatolia was relative rural. Features of large temple complex were often absent.

The Hittite Period (1650–1180 BCE)

The Hittite gods not only demanded but were believed to be dependent on offerings of slaughtered animals, food, and drink, as well as festivities in their honor (Collins 2007, 165). Like Mesopotamian gods (see Mesopotamia), they were neither all-knowing nor omnipresent, and under certain circumstances could even be tricked (Bryce 2002, 134; Collins 2007, 174). Gods were also arthylized[??] or shared, with evidence of Levantine and Mesopotamian gods worshiped and syncretised with local gods at places such as Hattusa.

However, the Hittites did believe that their gods punished moral transgressions. Indeed, the Hittite concept of arā, meaning appropriate or virtuous behaviour, drew its force from ideas of divinely bestowed morality (Collins 2013). Its opposite, natta arā, may be glossed as “sin” and has several parallels in Mesopotamian and Egyptian religious thought (for example, the Assyro-Babylonian incantatory text known as Šurpu, and the confessions of guilt on stelae dedicated to the gods in New Kingdom Egypt [Assmann 2004; Cranz 2017, 33–35]). There are also several different terms for sin or bad behavior in Akkadian, which date from the mid-3rd millennium and later (see the Chicago Assyrian Dictionary – a proper ref?).

During the Hittite New Kingdom (1344–1180 BCE), sins such as theft, murder (particularly the murder of family members), and oath violation (as well as a number of ritual transgressions, such as sorcery, happening upon an impure object or place, or transgressing a taboo) were all thought to result in divine punishment through earthly misfortune (Collins 2007, 91, 178-179; Bryce 2002, 139-140). The gods were thought to punish transgressions even when these were unintentional or accidental; if not dealt with properly, the pollution or impurity (papratar) resulting from the transgression would pass on from the original transgressor to their descendants (Collins 2007, 178-179). The only way to placate the gods was by identifying the transgression, confessing it to priests, and enacting the necessary rituals and/or offerings (Collins 2007: 91). Intriguingly, the Hittite rites of expiation have much in common with first-millennium Levantine practices, and Feder (2011) posits a common origin, perhaps in Bronze Age Syria, for certain Hittite and later Jewish beliefs about the power of blood to atone for sin and impurity.

As the Hittite state developed, the belief that the gods took active interest in human conduct also developed. As Collins (2013: 106) writes, by the time of the New Kingdom, the gods were thought to be “manifest in history.” For example, Mursili II (r. ca. 1321–1295 CE), interpreting a devastating plague as a sign of the gods’ displeasure, sought possible explanations in the conduct of his father Šuppiluliuma I, who had broken a peace treaty with Egypt guaranteed by the Storm God of Ḫatti (Bryce 2002: 140; Singer 2002: 9–10). Gods could also be fickle, so omens were used to interpret their actions. Moral behavior did not guarantee good outcomes for individuals (Bryce 2002).

The Hittites also believed in an afterlife. Similar to Mesopotamia (see Mesopotamia) textual references to the Hittite afterlife are almost entirely negative, depicting a gloomy, sunless world where One does not recognize the other. Sisters by the same mother do not recognize each other. Brothers by the same father do not recognize each other. A mother does not recognize her own child. A child does not recognize its own mother. . . . From a fine table they do not eat. From a fine stool they do not eat. From a fine cup they do not drink. They do not eat good food. They
do not drink good drink. They eat bits of mud. They drink muddy waters(?). (From the Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköy, tr. Hoffner, quoted in Bryce 2002, 181.)

However, though some texts suggest that at least some kings believed the afterlife to be dark and miserable (e.g. Hattusili I and Mursili II), other texts describe an idyllic afterlife reserved exclusively for rulers (Bryce 2002, 181, 183-184). Similarly, archaeological evidence (and, specifically, the types of items that accompanied the dead in their graves) also suggest yet another alternative vision of the afterlife, that suggest that the existence of the dead involved similar activities and occupation as that of the living (Bryce 2002, 180). Still, none of these versions of the afterlife suggest that the Hittites believed that one’s fate after death was determined by one’s moral conduct in life.

Finally, it is worth noting that Hittite texts from the New Kingdom period tell us very little about the beliefs and religious practice of the majority, non-elite populace (Collins 2013: 96, 104).

Iron Age (1180–560 BCE)

After the disintegration of the Hittite state, our sources for reconstructing religion and ideology in Anatolia are even fewer and further between. The small states that occupied the South and Southeast of the peninsula during the early to mid-Iron Age are known as “Neo-Hittite” because they preserved certain aspects of older Hittite culture, especially the iconography and rhetoric of kingship, but the degree of religious continuity after 1200 BCE remains unclear in many cases. In light of the strong evidence for a Luwian cultural orientation for the Neo-Hittite states, it is probable that Luwian religious practices now came to the fore. These included bird augury and certain types of rituals and festivals (Hutter 2003; Mouton and Rutherford 2013). As implied by the alternative name for the Southeastern Anatolian Iron Age kingdoms, the “Syro-Hittite” states, this was also a period in which the various Anatolian traditions underwent further mixing with Northern Syrian and Levantine practices, forming the widely shared religious culture from which a distinctive Jewish theology would emerge over the course of the last millennium BCE. However, within the specific contexts of the Neo-Hittite kingdoms from ca. 1200 to their incorporation into the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the mid-eighth century BCE, clear evidence has yet to emerge of any belief in moralistic punishment on the part of supernatural agents.

Though the Neo-Assyrian Empire incorporated a number of Neo-Hittite Kingdoms in the mid-eighth century BCE, it did not extend its rule to the rest of the Anatolian peninsula, which was divided between a number of mid- to large-size polities, most notably the Urartian and Phrygian kingdoms.

Overall, the impression conveyed by Urartian iconography and epigraphy is of a religion that served to bolster royal legitimacy rather than promote proper moral conduct (Smith 2000). We know that the king occupied a divinely legitimated position like the monarchs of both Ḫatti and Mesopotamia (Kravitz 2003, 90–92; Zimansky 1995, 1144). Haldi, the supreme god, was a warlike deity who supported the king’s conquests; both he and the lesser gods required regular animal sacrifices and festivities in their honor (Taffet and Yakar 1998; Zimansky 1995). However, as in the Hittite case, it should be kept in mind that the surviving sources are heavily biased towards royal and elite ideologies.

Phrygian religion is still less well understood than Urartian religion, because of the very small corpus of extant textual evidence. Written inscriptions and carved images at sacred sites associated with the polity have led scholars to suggest that Phrygian religion was polytheistic but with a focus on Matar, a “mother goddess” (Roller 2011, 570–72). Indeed, it is widely accepted that the cult of the goddess Kybele (Greek) or Cybele (Latin) in the Graeco-Roman world derived from earlier Phrygian practices (Alvar 2008; Roller 1999). The name of one Midas, possibly the aforementioned historically attested king, is inscribed at one of Matar’s sanctuaries, hinting that—whatever the disruptive potential of later ecstatic Greek and Roman rites in her honor—in Phrygia she had close ties to the state and to royal power (Joukowsky 1996, 374–78; Roller 1999, 69–70).
The limited evidence we have tells a similar story for the Lydian kingdom, which was socially stratified and ruled by an “absolute” monarch with the aid of a wealthy elite (Joukowsky 1996, 409). Lydian material culture testifies to strong links with the Aegean world (Greenewalt Jr. 1995, 2011), and religious life at Sardis involved the worship of Greek as well as local Anatolian gods (Roosevelt 2009, 80–84). Though our impressions of Lydia are colored by Greek authors’ stereotypes of Eastern decadence and tyranny, it must be admitted that, again, there is no evidence of any belief that supernatural agents punished moral transgressions or rewarded proper moral conduct.

Evidence of Greek interaction are evident in Western Anatolia and Lydia in particular through material cultural links. Gods such as Artemis (Artimu), Apollo (Pldans), Leus (Zeus), Cybele, and Bacchus (Baki) were worshiped and had clear Greek equivalents (Munn 2006).

The Achaemenid and Hellenistic Periods (559–64 BCE)
The Achaemenid period brought the rites and institutions of Zoroastrianism to Anatolia, which survived into the Hellenistic period and beyond. The worship of older gods mostly continues and there is no evidence of mass conversion; however, syncretism with other gods also occurred, which also included combining belief systems and myths regarding different gods (Dusinberre, 2015). Zoroastrianism’s tenants and beliefs are not clear at this time as to what its religious practices were. Zoroastrian practices in Anatolia are attested in the reports of Greek and Roman historians as well as in archaeological remains, such as the presence of a fire altar at a sanctuary in Hellespontine Phrygia (Hjerrild 1990; Roller 2011, 564-65). Lydia shows particularly clear cultural and religious ‘Iranization’, although it also retains much of its earlier heritage and is influenced heavily by the Greeks and Aegean cultures, where Lydian nobles do show some evidence of being influenced by and included Persian nobility (Dusinberre 2015; Sekunda 1985). For Zoroastrian beliefs regarding moralistic punishment by supernatural agents, see Mesopotamia: Axial Period.

Alexander’s conquest in the late 4th century BCE and the emergence of Hellenistic kingdoms did not result in a wholesale replacement of Anatolian and wider Southwest Asian ideologies in the region, but it did added or accelerated Greco-Macedonian elements already influencing the wider Near East and added more influence to an already complex cultural mixture. For a summary of Greek MSP beliefs, see Mediterranean Basin: Hellenistic section.

Roman Period (64 BCE–313 CE)
As Anatolia gradually came under Roman hegemony and then direct rule from the mid-second to the first centuries BCE, cultural exchanges took place in both directions, which had been already occurring but continued or even accelerated. While Greco-Roman deities such as Jupiter, Juno/Hera, and Aphrodite/Venus received worship at new temples across Anatolia, eunuch priests conducted rituals in Rome itself in honor of the Phrygian mother goddess Cybele (Fear 1996, 43; MacMullen 1981, 7, 43; Rubin 2008, 65-68). The worship of Mithras, with similar elements to Mithra (Persian) also worshiped in Anatolia, also being evident. We can also point to significant continuities in religious practice, as the Eastern portion of the Roman Empire retained a substantially Hellenic cultural character. For a summary of Greek and Roman MSP beliefs, see Mediterranean Basin section. Syncretism across religious beliefs in the wider eastern Mediterranean (see Mesopotamia section) indicate common sharing of beliefs was occurring throughout much of Anatolia. This included combining gods as well as gods sharing attributes
The interconnected and cosmopolitan nature of the post-axial Mediterranean enabled the rapid spread of Christian beliefs and practices, and Anatolia saw the formation of some of the earliest Christian communities beyond Palestine. By the mid-third century CE, “powerful Jewish and Christian communities” were present even in the mountainous interior (Mitchell 1993: 10).

**Late Antiquity (Byzantine/ Late Roman Period) (after c.300 CE)**

After c.300 CE Anatolia was first Christian and later Islamic. The emperor Constantine, ruling from Constantinople, converted to Christianity in 312 CE (Lim 1999: 196).

**Summary**

Evidence for MSP in Hittite religion is fairly strong, especially for the New Kingdom (1344–1180 BCE). Theft, murder, and oath violation were subject to divine punishment and earthly misfortune. However, the primary concern of the Hittite deities were not moralistic, but rituals and sacrifices that sustained them. Additionally, divine punishment was unpredictable as gods were not all-knowing and could be tricked. Many religious practices and beliefs show parallels to Mesopotamia and somewhat to the Levant in the Middle Bronze Age and Late Bronze Age (i.e., 2nd millennium BCE).

For the earlier periods, e.g. Bronze Age, we cannot infer continuity with the Hittite beliefs, and lacking information (no textual records) must code all variables as unknown. However, the utilisation of some material culture, including religious symbols, in later periods may suggest traditions attributed to the Hittites could derive earlier.

During the Iron Age, apparent lack of moralistic aspects in the Urartian, Phrygian, and Lydian religions could suggest a code of inferred absence. However, continuity is more likely and there is evidence for syncretism in beliefs with the wider Near East after the Iron Age, with gods combined from those of the Near East and Greek worlds, which accelerated after Alexander. Similar to other regions, it slowly transitions to the universal faiths, including Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, with elements of Jewish communities established in places.

**Literature**


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Iron Age (1200 BCE–380 CE)
Inscriptions constitute our main source for religious belief in the Arabian peninsula generally (and southern Arabia specifically) prior to the fourth century CE. These inscriptions consist of short texts through which worshippers petitioned, thanked and/or described an offering made to a specific deity. This deity is usually named and often assigned an epithet. In one of these inscriptions, a member of the Amir tribe of northwestern Yemen wrote that he ‘dedicated to his lord Dhu Samawi in his temple . . . a bronze statuette of a she-camel that Dhu Samawi may grant him the wellbeing of himself and his children as well as the wellbeing and safety of his camel’ (Ja 1976: 2956; quoted in Hoyland 2001: 140). Inscriptions like this one make it clear that ancient Arabs believed they could gain the gods’ favor through offerings; moreover, it is also clear that they were polytheistic. However, the inscriptions in most cases do not suggest that these gods punished or rewarded their worshippers on the basis of a moral code. The usual basis of punishment was rather a worshipper’s failure to fulfill his ritual obligations with respect to a deity, or infringement of the code of ritual purity (see, e.g., Beeston, Alfred F.L. 1948. The Ritual Hunt. A Study in Old South Arabian Religious Practice // Le Muséon, 61: 183-196; Ryckmans, Jacques. 1972. Les confessions publiques sabéennes: le code sud-arabe de pureté rituelle // Annali dell’Istituto Orientale di Napoli, 32/1: 1-15; Jamme , Albert W.F. 1962. Sabaean Inscriptions from Mahram Bilqis (Mârib). (Publications of the American Foundation for the Study of Man, 3). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press). On the other hand, the most typical human deeds that were expected to be rewarded by deities were just the fulfillment of ritual obligations for deities (first of all – presenting various offerings to them). However, there are some indications that the idea of MSP of moral transgressions was known to the Ancient Southarians. Of special interest here is the 3rd century CE Sabaic inscription from the Sabaean “federal” temple Awwam (Korotayev 1996: 122–133) near the Sabaean “capital”, Marib, MB 2002 I-28 (see Maraqten, Mohammed. 2006. Legal documents recently discovered by the AFMS at Mahram Bilqis, near Mârib, Yemen. Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies, 36: 53-67; Multhoff, Anne and Stein, Peter. 2008. Sabäische Texte. Pages 393-415 in Bernd
Janowski and Gernot Wilhelm (eds). Omina, Orakel, Rituale und Beschwörungen. Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments. Neue Folge). This inscription narrates about the punishment of the civil community of Marib produced by the Sabaean “federal” deity Almaqah, the lord of Awwam. This punishment is described as follows:

6 He (Almaqah) did not grant irrigation to them, before the rainy season of spring, in the second year of
7 Ns²ʾkrb, son of Mʿdkrb, of the family Fḍḥn, and (for that) an amount of
8 insects and the locusts which were in their countries.

Note that the object of the divine punishment is the entire population of the Marib oasis. Thus, in this case punishment is not specific to the individual transgressor, but the whole group suffer from drought and invasions of locusts/insects.

The inscription also contains quite a clear description of the reasons for the above-described supernatural punishment:

09 ...that because of
10 the sanctuaries of the gods which are being robbed;
11 and because of the natives taken away from the city of Mrb; and because of
12 anyone who does not perform the religious obligations of ʾlmqh; and because of the transgressors
13 and the wrongdoers; and because of the wrong which has been spoken, and because of
14 the unirrigated and irrigated crops, which are taken away in the land of Ḥaḍramawt, and therefore
15 because of all matters, which are in the heart of ʾlmqh, besides
16 these mentioned matters.

As we see, the failure to perform ritual obligations of Almaqah features prominently among the reasons for divine punishment. The robbery of sanctuaries belongs to a similar category of human misbehavior (on the other hand, it is highly remarkable that Almaqah cares for the safety of not only his own temple, but also for the one of sanctuaries of other deities; in this respect the behavior of Almaqah himself appears quite prosocial at the divine level, which by itself seems to suggest the presence of certain prosocial elements in the Sabaean religion – the altruistic behavior of the deity vis-a-vis other deities was likely to promote altruistic behavior among worshippers). With respect to some reasons of the divine punishment (“and because of the transgressors /13/ and the wrongdoers; and because of the wrong which has been spoken”) it is not clear whether the oracle (through whom the message was delivered) meant the wrong behavior vis-à-vis deities or with respect to people; however, one cannot exclude that what was implied here was just antisocial behavior of the members of the Marib civil community. However, as regards two other types of misbehavior described as a reason for the divine punishment, they are clearly antisocial, and the divine punishment of them can well be regarded as squarely prosocial. Their description looks as follows:

a) 11 and because of the natives taken away from the city of Mrb;
b) 13 ...and because of /14/ the unirrigated and irrigated crops, which are taken away in the land of Hadramawt,
The next part of the inscription (that will be cited below) makes it quite clear that what is meant in the first case is the selling of enslaved natives of Marib to other communities. This information is quite congruent with another inscription from Marib that is very close in time with MB 2002 I-28, R3910, that indicates that Marib in the second half of the 3rd century CE was a center of rather active slave trade. It is quite clear that what is punished in this case is a patently antisocial activity undermining the communal solidarity and its punishment (and, as we will see below, the authors of this inscription envisaged some practical steps to make this punishment real) could actually increase the communal solidarity in a rather substantial way. Note that the attempts to sell natives of Marib to outside communities must have intensified as a result of the catastrophic draught (mentioned in lines 6-7) when poor families had to sell their children in order to survive.

It is rather remarkable that antisocial selling of the natives of Marib outside is mentioned before the failure to “perform the religious obligations of Almaqah” that affected Almaqah himself.

The other antisocial behavior that became an object of the divine punishment was the selling of foodstuffs to the closest big neighbor of the Sabaeans of Marib, Hadramawt (note that this issue must have become especially sensitive during the abovementioned draught).

Can such a punishment be atoned for? Yes, it can. In fact, our inscription specifies quite in detail how it can be atoned. The text below specifies very clearly how every of the above mentioned transgressions should be atoned:

16 Almaqah ordered the following: everyone who steals from the temples of the gods or from the cemetery, his body must pass (he must die);
17 who takes away natives out of country, must bring back these men and who took them away must lose the purchase price; who does not fulfill the obligations of ʾlmqh, he must do that a second time;
18 who from the city of Mrb and its valleys does not stay away and retreat from transgressors and wrongdoers, his body must pass (he must die); who does not initiate a right lawsuit, he must get as a punishment from the kings and Sabaeans and the ʾqwln the measure that they view as a punishment for him; who takes away unirrigated and irrigated crops in the land of Hadramawt, he must receive with the (?) 200 beatings and he must lose the purchase price,
21 but if he is a proper man, it is not allowed to beat him, he must pay a fine of 200,000 pure balat-coins to his lord, the king, instead of his beatings.

In general, in view that inscriptions like MB 2002 I-28 are more than counterbalanced by much more numerous texts where the basis of supernatural punishment was rather a worshipper’s failure to fulfill his ritual obligations with respect to a deity, or infringement of the code of ritual purity, one may suggest that at least some Ancient South Arabian supernatural agents cared about human morality, but it was a secondary concern for them. In any case we do not seem to have evidence of the presence of any elaborate moral code protected by some supernatural forces.
Hoyland (2001: 140-141) notes that, in Southern Arabia, a tribe's own patron deity "played a vital socio-political role in that their cults served as the focus of a people's cohesion and loyalty and functioned as an expression of communal will and activity". In other words, "it was the cult of the patron deity that allowed the community to function as a coherent entity (as opposed to a mass of discrete localised kinship groups), acting as a sort of social glue". Priests took tithes owed on land and produce in the name of these patron gods, and then redistributed them to benefit the wider community (Korotayev 1996: 60–66). For example, tithes to the god Sayin were used for public banquets. Some of these tithes also took the form of contributions to public works: for example, the tithe-payers might be requested to help with the construction of town walls. Moreover, inscriptions note that cooperation between landlords and tenants was made possible by the fact that they worshipped the same patron deity; other inscriptions state that Saba military campaigns were undertaken 'for [the god] Almaqah and the Sabaeans'; and fines for a range of different offenses were paid 'to Almaqah and the kings of Saba' (respectively, Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique 1900-68: 3688–89, 3691–93, 3945; Jamme 1962: 576; all quoted in Hoyland 2001: 140-141). With regards to Iron Age Arabia more widely, truces were called around the time of major religious celebrations, to allow the safe movement of pilgrims (Hoyland 2001: 161; Korotayev 2003). It may therefore be possible to say that Iron Age Arabian ideology, and specifically Iron Age Arabian deities, promoted some forms of prosociality, though, again, there is almost no evidence for belief in direct moralistic supernatural punishment or reward.

Around 150 CE, Yemen was annexed to the Aksumite Empire. It is not clear whether Aksumite ideology made much of an impact on Yemeni beliefs and practices. Again, however, there does not seem to be any clear evidence for belief in MSP among the Aksumites prior to their conversion to Christianity. The Aksumites' relationship to their gods centred on the sacrifice of livestock (Kobishanov 1981, 396), which suggests that they believed the gods were moved to intervene in mortal lives by expressions of piety rather than the moral quality of their worshippers' behavior towards other people. However, it is also worth noting that the Aksumites' supreme deity, Mahrem, was likely a god of war (Kobishanov 1981, 221), which might mean that he favored prosociality in the form of loyalty and bravery in the service of the polity.

The Aksum Empire adopted Christianity as its official ideology following King Ezana's conversion in the fourth century CE. For information on MSP-related beliefs in Christianity, see the relevant Summary. It is worth noting, however, that there does not appear to be any evidence that Christianity spread to Yemen at this time; indeed, the region was ruled by Christian Aksum for only a few decades before the rulers of the indigenous Himyarite Kingdom re-established their control over southern Arabia (which they had previously ruled between 270 and 340 CE) (Hitti 2002 [1937]: 60).

**Judaic Period (380–570 CE)**

Early in his reign, Himyarite king Abikarib As'ad (r. 383–433) converted to Judaism. It would seem that the new religion spread relatively rapidly among his subjects as well, judging from the fact that, between the fourth and the fifth centuries, references to Iron Age gods in southern Arabia were almost entirely replaced by references to the single god of Judaism, and inscriptions began to include Jewish expressions such as the concluding slwm, "peace" (Hoyland 2001, 146-147).

See World Religions: Judaism for its MSP characteristics.

Some time between 525 and 531 CE, the Aksumites again took nominal control of southern Arabia: that is, rather than re-annexing the region to their empire, they maintained the Himyarite throne and selected its new occupant, prince Sumya'fa' Ašwa', known in Greek as Esiphimaioi. Esiphimaioi converted to Christianity, and indeed the earliest official Christian inscriptions found in Yemen date to his reign. However, Esiphimaioi was soon ousted by his general Abraha, who also refused to submit to
Aksumite authority. Judging from his own inscriptions, Abraha maintained Christianity as the Himyarite Kingdom's official credo, though it is worth noting that the expressions they include have more in common with contemporary Syrian Christian inscriptions than Aksumite ones. Moreover, Abraha's inscriptions consistently refer to Jesus as "God's Messiah" rather than "God's Son", suggesting perhaps an attempt at appeasing the polity's still-significant Jewish population (Segovia 2015, 6-9).

**Persian Period (570–630 CE)**

For MSP beliefs in Zoroastrianism, see relevant Summary. But it is likely that the brief period of Persian rule did not significantly affect the religious landscape of Southern Arabia.

**Islamic Period (after 630 CE)**

For MSP beliefs in Islam, see relevant Summary.

**Summary**

There is some evidence from the third century CE that at least some Ancient South Arabian supernatural agents cared about human morality, but it was a secondary concern for them. Punishment was collective, and narrowly focused on a particular kind of transgression. There is no evidence of the presence of any elaborate moral code protected by some supernatural forces. The conversion of Himyarite Kingdom to Judaism in the late fourth century followed by the Islamic conquest in the seventh century suggests that this region began transition to a fully MSP religion around 400 CE. However, the pre-Islamic Judaic and Christian inscriptions from Yemen do not contain any clear mentions of MSP, so this transition probably was completed only in the seventh century.

**Literature**


Sogdiana
NGA: Sogdiana
Contributors: Enrico Cioni, Selin Nugent, Peter Sagota

Sarazm (3500–2000 BCE)
The site of Sarazm, in modern Tajikistan, constitutes the earliest evidence of urban society in Sogdiana. Sources do not speculate with regards to possible MSP-related beliefs at this time, but the site has yielded possible evidence for ritual activity that appears to suggest some degree of continuity with succeeding periods. Such evidence includes disk-shaped and rectangular altars with deep holes at the centre that may have been used "for the lighting of a sacred fire" (Isakov 1994: 10). The site has also yielded evidence for ritual use of figurines.

Andronovo (c. 2000 BCE–1400 BCE)
The Andronovo culture is a blanket designation for the groups of people who inhabited the Kazakh steppe during the Bronze Age (Cunliffe 2015: 142). Archaeological evidence suggests that they practiced mixed farming and stock raising (particularly camels, horses, oxen, and sheep), that their elite warriors rode chariots and held high-ranking positions in society, that some of their key rituals revolved around fire, and that they buried their dead under a kind of tumulus known as a kurgan. Together, these things correspond to what has been reconstructed for the Indo-Iranians based on linguistic data, suggesting that the Andronovans were an Indo-Iranian people (Kuzmina 2007, 238).

No texts have survived from the Indo-Iranian religion. However, because Zoroastrianism and Vedic Hinduism both descended from it, certain aspects of Indo-Iranian religion may be speculatively reconstructed by means of a comparison between the two later religions (Gnoli 2004). Two sets of sacred texts have proven to be particularly useful in this regard: the Vedas and the Avesta. The Vedas are a collection of hymns likely composed some time between 1500 and 600 BCE (Whaling 2009: 14-16); of these, the most important is the Rigveda. The Avesta is the Zoroastrian sacred text; the general consensus is that its oldest section, the Old Avesta, likely dates to around 1000 BCE (Kellens 1987).

Witzel (2001) writes that the Indo-Iranian people likely preceded both the Rigveda and the Old Avestan by "a few hundred years", and that their "society was governed by a set of strict moral principles, including adherence to truth (satya : haiðiia), oaths (touching or drinking water, kośam pā) and other oral agreements between individuals (arya-man : airiia-man, especially for marriage and guest friendship) and between tribes (mitra : miθra) which regulated water rights and pasture". These principles correspond to the aspects of morality we refer to as "honesty" and "reciprocity".

The Indo-Iranians likely believed that their gods rewarded actions inspired by honesty and reciprocity and punished actions that transgressed against these values. We may infer this from the fact that gods are described as doing so in both the Rigveda and the Avesta. Specifically, in the Avesta, the god Mithra is "the protector of those that are faithful to their contracts and [...] the enemy of those who 'belie' their 'contract' or 'contractual word' (miθra dru)" (Thieme 1960: 306-307). As for the Rigveda, Thieme (1960: 309) quotes the following passage:

"Sharpen thy strong weapon, Indra, against those without contract (‘who do not recognize the sacredness of contracts/ treaties’), who deceive/ betray a contract (concluded between former or potential enemies) [and thereby: God Mitra], a hospitality (the contract existing between guest and host) [and thereby: God Aryaman], agreements (agreed upon by mutual friends), and true speech (in general, or in particular: ‘a solemn oath’) [and thereby: God Varuṇa]." (10.89.9)

It is not entirely clear, however, how exactly the gods enforced the principles of honesty or reciprocity, as the sources do not include any explicit description of punishment or reward, either in life
or after death. Indeed, it is worth noting that, according to Gnoli (2004), Indo-Iranians likely believed in a continued existence after death, but they also likely thought that one’s fate after death was determined by one’s status in life rather than the moral quality of one’s behaviour: specifically, social elites such as priests and warriors were probably thought to go to a kind of heaven after death, while everyone else went to a "grey, shadowy" world that "is neither good nor bad".

The sources consulted are silent with regards to aspects of morality besides honesty or reciprocity.

**Early Iron Age (1400–520 BCE)**

After Sarazm, the second urban phase in the prehistory of Sogdiana began with the site of Koktepe, which was occupied in two phases before Achaemenid rule: from 1400 BCE to 1000 BCE (Koktepe I), and from 750 BCE to 520 BCE (Koktepe II). Most evidence for ritual and religion at the site dates to the period of Achaemenid rule and after. However, the discovery of a discoid marble plaque dated to the Bronze Age in a pit in a courtyard area has been interpreted by Rapin (2007: 33) as possibly connected to purification rituals. Moreover, Koktepe II saw the construction of the earliest known monumental architecture at the site, some of which may have had religious functions (Rapin 2007: 34). Sources do not speculate with regards to possible MSP during either phase; however, Rapin (2007: 42) does write that it is not at present possible to attribute any of the evidence for ritual at pre-Achaemenid Koktepe to an early form of Zoroastrianism.

There is evidence for nomadic intrusions (and the subsequent abandonment of the aforementioned monumental architecture) at Koktepe and Sogdiana generally in the sixth century BCE (Rapin 2007: 35). These nomads were likely Scythians. Because the Scythians themselves had no written language, their beliefs may only be reconstructed by piecing together evidence from archaeology, the writings of Classical authors (above all Herodotus), and what is known about better-known Central Asian and Iranian religions. Unfortunately, this means that our knowledge of Scythian religion is rather partial and speculative. Most likely, Scythian religion was polytheistic, and the god of war (identified as “Ares” by Herodotus) was the foremost deity. It likely involved animal and human sacrifice, though the latter may have been reserved for the god of war. Scythian religion likely also provided mythological justification for the existence of a rigid social hierarchy, as well as for the ruler’s power over his people, which may have been thought to be sacred (Ivantchik 2018). Given the ideological importance of war and hierarchy, then, it is possible that the Scythian gods were thought to reward certain forms of loyalty to the state (e.g. bravery in battle, obedience to the ruler) and punish their opposite, but, judging from the sources’ silence on the matter, there is no clear evidence for this.

**From Achaemenid Empire through Late Antiquity (from 520 BCE)**

For beliefs regarding MSP in the Achaemenid Empire, see the section on Zoroastrianism in the Religions Overview chapter. Zoroastrianism was probably the most important religion in this region, with additional influences from Hellenistic religion in the post-Achaemenid period and later Buddhism, until the Muslim conquest.

**Summary**

Assuming that the identification of Andronovo culture with the Indo-Iranians is correct (which is supported by the majority of the scholars), we can infer the presence of several MSP elements in this region at least from the Bronze Age (c. 2000 BCE). These elements include supernatural enforcement of honesty and reciprocity (see the Andronovo section above). Following Achaemenid conquest, this region
made a transition to fully moralised religions, starting with Zoroastrianism, followed by Buddhism, and finally Islam. How much time this transition required is difficult to estimate.

References


Mongolia

NGA: Orkhon Valley
Contributors: Enrico Cioni, Jill Levine, Nikolay Kradin, Vesna Wallace

Two factors greatly influenced the dynamics of the distribution of world religions among the nomads of Inner Asia (for a detailed historiography see: Dashkovsky 2011): the distance between nomadic societies and settled civilizations and the degree of inclusion of the steppe society in the world-system processes. There were several different areas in the Mongolian region with substantial nomadic populations: (1) the nomadic heartland where the Gobi Desert separated the Mongolian steppes from China; (2) Inner Mongolia, where pastoralists and farmers lived side by side; (3) peripheral mountainous, forest-steppe and forest areas (Altai, Tuva, Baikal area). Inner Mongolia was most impacted by world religions imported from settled societies (Nasan Bayar 2014).

Iron Age (500 BCE–300 CE)

The ancient and medieval nomads of Inner Asia were mainly shamans and worshiped the Eternal Sky (Tengri). Narrative sources on the Hunnu (Xiongnu), Wuhuan, Xianbei, Rouran, and Turks confirm this. In the Xiongnu imperial confederation (209 BCE – 48CE), the political leader (chanyu or shanyu) is called "the Great Shanyu of Heaven" (Watson, 1961: 140). A more detailed form of this title is: “the great Shanyu of Xiongnu born in Heaven and Earth and dedicated to the sun and moon” (Watson 1961: 144).
Julian Baldick reconstructs Xiongnu shamanism using a variety of sources, mainly Chinese histories. These sources report the Xiongnu worshipped Tengri (Heaven), along with the Sun and the Moon, and performed annual sacrifices to the ancestors, heaven and earth, and spirits (Atwood, 2004, 595). These included both human and animal sacrifices (Baldick 2000, 22-23). Shamanistic religious beliefs centered on Heaven worship have come to be called Tengrism (Bira 2004; Roux 2004 etc.).

The Mongol-speaking Wuhuan and Xianbei (130-180 CE), the eastern neighbors of the Xiongnu, revered “the souls of the dead and spirits, offer sacrifices to Heaven, Earth, the sun, the moon, stars, constellations, mountains, rivers and the late famous military elders” (Taskin 1984: 64). The Wuhuan and Xianbei practiced sacrifice rituals using cattle and sheep, “whose carcasses are burned at the end of the ceremony” (ibid.).

**Early Medieval (300–1125 CE)**

Similar information on indigenous religious practices can be found in narrative sources about the Rouran Khaghatate (later fourth century–552 CE) (Taskin 1984: 64, 290). One informant reported: “In their possession they are able, using witchcraft, to make sacrifices to Heaven and to cause wind with snow” (Taskin 1984: 240). Chinese sources tell us a bit about Rouran Buddhism, but it is still difficult to know how pervasive Buddhism was in this period. In 511 CE, the Rouran sent a Buddhist monk and priest to China to present a Buddhist image to the emperor (Kyzlasov 1996: 317). A Chinese source tells a story about shamans that involves sacrifices to the spirit of Heaven (Baldick 2000: 28) The Rouran also fired arrows at the sky during thunderstorms (ibid.). These practices seem be related to Rouran indigenous beliefs (Keown 2013: 37). A belief in karma spread together with Buddhism, which acts as a moralizing force, promoting charity, human reciprocity, and respect for life, abstinence from killing, stealing, lying, adultery, intoxicants, etc. However, it is difficult to know how the moralizing tenets of Buddhism mixed with localized beliefs. Most likely it did not penetrate far beyond the elites, while the main religion for the general population continued to be Inner Asian shamanism. This is suggested by the replacement of Buddhism with Manichaeism (see below) and persistence of shamanistic beliefs in Eastern Central Asia amongst variable peoples inhabiting this region today.

The early nomadic empires of Inner Asia were located in the steppe heartland. Their relationship with China was based on distant exploitation. Conquest nomadic empires from Inner Mongolia (the Northern Wei and Liao) only appeared in the Medieval period (Tamura 1956; Di Cosmo 1990; Barfield 1992; Kradin 2014). Nomadic empires were included in world-system exchanges (Silk road for Turks and Uyghurs [Di Cosmo 1990], Mongolian globalization [Kradin 2013, etc.]). These exchanges resulted in the emergence of urban megapolises where practitioners of several important world religions coexisted (Uyghurs, Khitans, Mongols).

The Northern Wei empire (386–556 CE) was created by Toba, Mongolian-speaking nomads from Inner Mongolia. Nomads and farmers interacted closely in this period, and Buddhism competed fiercely with steppe shamanism among the Toba, eventually replacing it. The Northern Wei did not adopt Chinese traditional ideologies like Daoism and Confucianism, and promoted Buddhism at court. This rejection of traditional Chinese thought was a way for the Northern Wei feel superior to the conquered Han peoples.

Buddhism continued its influence during the Turkic Khaganates (583–744 CE), as the western branch of the Turk empire adopted Buddhism as a court religion. However, the Turks continued to practice their indigenous religion as well, which featured a sky god Tengri (Heaven) and an earth goddess Umay. Their political system was established on the belief that Heaven commanded the qaghan and punished men who disobeyed the ruler (Baldick 2000: 39). Tengriism continued its influence in the region through the Mongol Empire (Atwood 2004: 173).
It is unclear whether Buddhist morality was truly officially adopted because of the influence of Turkic religion. The inscription on the stele inscribed in memory of Kül-Tegin (684–731 CE), a general of the Second Turkic Khaganate, reads "when the blue sky (and) the brown earth was created above, the sons of men were created between (them)" (Malov 1951: 36). The inscription also described the formation of the universe according to Turkic beliefs: “at the top the Sky of the Turks and the sacred Land and Water of the Turks” (Malov 1951: 37). The Türks, like the Xiongnu believed in the "Sky granted by charisma (qut)." They sacrificed to the spirit of Heaven (Bichurin 1950: 231). The entrance to the Khan’s yurt faced east, towards the sunrise (Bichurin 1950: 230).

In the early 20th century, V.F. Panov noted a direct similarity in the titles of Xiongnu, Turk, and ancient Mongolian rulers. In the Chinese transcription, the 

\textit{chenli gudu} ("son of heaven") roughly corresponds to the ancient Turkic 

\textit{tanri qut(y)} ("born by Heaven" [Bichurin 1950a: 237]) and the Mongolian 


There are known attempts by Zoroastrianism and Buddhism to penetrate the steppes during the First Turk Khaganate, possibly through Sogdian merchants. Neither religion, however, was very influential (Golden 1992: 150). In the Second Khaganate, Buddhism was negatively perceived as an ideology of the weak (Moses 1973: 47).

The Uyghur Khaganate (744–840 CE) originally practiced shamanism and Heaven (Tengri) worship. As the Uyghurs formed relations with settled civilizations, they became intermediaries on the Silk Road. In the Mongolian steppes on the Orkhon River, the huge city of Ordu Baliq (Karabalghasun) arose as the first capital of the Uyghur Khanate. The city was mainly inhabited by non-nomads. In 762 CE the Uyghur Qagan Bögü converted to Manichaeism (Golden 1992: 174).

As a result of Bögü’s conversion, Manichaeism, previously a persecuted minority religion, became the state religion in the Uyghur Khaganate, but it did not seem to have spread far beyond the official administration (Clark 2009). Manichaean doctrine centered on the belief in a powerful and moralizing high god and on keeping the ten commandments that demanded a renunciation of “idolatry, lying, greed, killing, fornication, theft, teaching of pretenses and sorcery, of standing in two opinions (concerning the religion) and of slackness and negligence of work” (Colditz 2009: 76-80). Ignoring these commandments risked supernatural punishment in the future life and in this life. "Negligence of the religious commandments could have drastic consequences for their status within the Manichaean community and especially for the future fate of the soul: hierarchical debasement, exclusion from absolution, excommunication and consequently the imprisonment of the Light particles of the soul in the Bolos, the final prison of Matter" (Colditz 2009: 79-80). However, by 982, Uyghur kingdom of Turfan became Buddhist.

In the early tenth century, the Khitan created the Liao Empire (907–1125 CE) on the territory of Inner Mongolia. The empire practiced Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, as well as pre-imperial Khitan ideology, which featured traces of animism, totemism and magic. The Khitan, led by the emperor, worshiped Heaven and Earth, the Sun, the Moon, the sacred mountains of Mue and Heishan. During sacrifices to the deities of heaven, earth, and the sacred mountains, the Khitan killed a black bull, a white or yellow-red horse, and a ram (Ye 1979: 315-316, 523-528). The white horse and dog were Khitan totem animals. The Khitan court might have consciously promoted a variety of religions (Buddhism, Daoism) and ideologies (Confucianism) in order to attract those who followed them. The Liao did not proclaim a single state religion or ideological system, leading to an era of religious diversity, competition, and collaboration between different beliefs and ideologies (Lin 2011: 238-239). This provided balanced sources for the legitimation of imperial power by various groups of conquered peoples. The most common world religion in Liao was Buddhism. There were several sources of penetration of Buddhism in Liao: from the Uyghurs, from Xi Xia, from Korea and China (Wittfogel and Feng 1949: 222, 298, 306-307). Like previous incarnations of Central Asian Buddhism, the main MSP
force was karma. Gods and humans are both “subject to karma and are eventually reborn like everyone else” (Keown 2013: 37).

**The Mongol Period (1125–1745 CE)**
When the Mongols became the leading steppe tribe in the eleventh century, they mainly practiced a form of indigenous shamanism. During the Mongol empire, Mönge Tengri (“Blue Sky”), or Eternal Heaven, was the center of the Mongolian civic religion. Below the Eternal Heaven was the Mother Etüken, the Mother Earth, a protectress of the Mongol ruling clan. Shamans played an important role as healers, spirit mediums, diviners, and as courtly clergy that had influence on s political life behind the scenes. Although Eternal Heaven destinies all things, it does not appear as a moralizing force. Its main function seemed to protect the qaghan and his state.

*The Secret History of the Mongols,* the early twelfth-century account of the rise of Chinggis Khan, underlines the continuing importance of Mönge Tengri, which mandates the power of the Mongols’ true ruler through miraculous signs and through shamans. Eternal Heaven was annually worshipped by the khans in the company of shamans, from late May till early August, with the offerings of fermented mare’s milk from white horses. Mongols saw Eternal Heaven as identical to Chinese *tian* (Heaven), Allah, and the Christian God (Atwood, 2004: 532).

At later time, Eternal Heaven was annually worshipped along with 99 gods. After Mongols’ conversion to Buddhism during the Yuan period, the term *tengri* began to denote various gods (Sanskrit *deva*) belonging to one of the six realms of *samsāra*, who, although having supernatural powers, are mortals, subject to death and rebirth and are neither omniscient nor all-powerful. They delight in heavenly, sensual pleasures or abide in meditative equipoise in their respective heavens. Their heavenly births are results of their wholesome karma in previous lives and their heavenly dwellings last until that karma becomes exhausted.

Mongol ruler Möngke Khan (1251-1259), who promoted Tibetan and Kashmiri Buddhism, told missionary William of Rubruck that he believed in a singular God who has, “given humankind several paths” (quoted in Baldick 2000: 101). God gave the Mongols their shamans as spiritual guides, and he gave Christians the Bible. Möngke told Rubruck Mongols follow the advice of their shamans and therefore live peacefully while Christians struggle because they do not follow the Bible’s advice (ibid., 101).

Despite the belief that ancestors go to the sky upon death, the sense of Christian Heaven or hell was absent in Mongolian shamanism. Italian diplomat Giovanni da Pian del Carpine reported in a 1245–7 mission to the Great Khan’s court the Mongols, “are devoted to prophecies, magic, and incantations” (ibid., 99) and believe that life after death is similar to Mongolian life on Earth. Certain behaviors were enforced through customary law, some carrying the penalty of death (ibid., 95, 99).

The Yuan period was characterized by the courts’ strong support of Buddhism as their principal religion. Although Mongols’ early contacts with Buddhism were with the Chinese Dhyana (Chan) school, eventually, under Qubilai, Möngke, and Ogodei Khans, Tibetan and Kashmiri forms of Buddhism were adopted, with Tibetan Buddhists becoming the most influential Buddhist clergy in the empire. Conversion of Mongols to Buddhism was a lasting legacy covering entire Inner Asia. Phag pa Lama (*’Phags pa Bla ma), who was appointed as the empire’s religious preceptor by Qubilai Khan, in his writings encouraged Qubilai Khan to abolish capital punishment and abstain from violence on the grounds that violence is ineffective in strengthening the royal power.

The nomads of the Mongolian steppes were familiar with Uygur Manichaeism, and Nestorianism was widespread among a number of chiefdoms and tribes (for example, among the Kereits) (Gumilev 1987). Under the Mongol Empire and its conquests, the Mongols practiced religious
tolerance and patronized all religions, encouraging religious diversity. In conquered countries, clergy were exempted from taxes, and the Mongols tried not to destroy temples and monasteries. The khans hoped to win over religious elites, and might have even hoped to protect themselves from harm from other gods. Over time, Mongols in the Middle East, Central Asia and the Golden Horde converted to Islam - the religion of warriors and merchants (Fletcher 1986; Skrynnikova 1988; Khazanov 1993; 1994; De Wesse 1994; May 2012).

Mongolian shamanic practices and ancestor worship persisted until the sixteenth century. We know little about shamanism of the early period. Baldick writes that there is little known about Mongol religion in the fifteenth century but it seems that Buddhism temporarily lost its influence (ibid., 106). In 1580, Altan Khan initiated a process of conversion of his southern (Tümed) Mongols to Buddhism and initiated the persecutions of shamans and shamanesses who performed blood sacrifices, by executing shamans, exiling them, or confiscating their property, and burning shamanic figurines (onghons). Altan Khan was emulated by other Mongol khans in their territories. With Altan Khan’s persecution of shamans, certain shamanic practices either disappeared or became adopted by Buddhism and adapted to Buddhist pantheon (Atwood 2004, 491).

Summary
Our sources suggest that the prevailing popular religion among Mongols until the sixteenth century was a local version of shamanism, which lacked moralizing aspects. However, on top of this popular religion ruling elites periodically superimposed moralizing religions.

Buddhism entered the region early in CE and was the official religion in several imperial confederations. However, how far it spread into the non-elite population prior to the sixteenth century is uncertain. Additionally, Buddhism periodically lost its pre-eminence as the state religion, and at one point, it was replaced by Manichaeism (under the Uighurs). Buddhism also coexisted with Tengrism (at least, from the Turkic Khaganate on), which some scholars count among major Axial religions (ref). Buddhism took root among general population only after 1580, with Altan Khan’s persecution of the shamans (and this must have been a drawn-out process, as religious conversion doesn’t happen overnight).

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**Siberia**

NGA: Lena River Valley

Contributors: Eva Brandl, Jill Levine

**Yakuts**

The *Sakha*, also known as Yakut, are a Turkic people inhabiting the Lena river valley of Siberia. Their ancestors migrated there from the Lake Baikal region in the 14th century and may have shared cultural roots with Mongols and Chinese Uyghurs (Balzer & Skoggard 1997). They subsisted on pastoralism, specifically the breeding of horses and cattle for meat and dairy (ibid.). Animal husbandry was supplemented with hunting and fishing; cereal agriculture was not introduced until the region came under Russian control (ibid.). Sakha families were transhumant/semi-nomadic. In the summers, they occupied urossy or tents made from birch bark (Wrangel & Sabine 1842: 38). In the winters, they built yurts or earth huts, small cottages covered in earth, mud, clay, and cow dung for insulation (ibid.; Jochelson 1933: 139).

Some native Siberian groups, such as the Chukchi, Yukaghir, Koryak, Itelmen, and Aleut, appear to recognize a supreme being of some kind that is seen as the giver and sustainer of life, but unlike a personal god, this being or force is indefinite, elusive, and only conceptualized in very vague terms (Willerslev 2011: 517). Rather than a high god, it is a kind of primordial totality from which the particular souls or viewpoints of more limited creatures such as humans and animals arise, and which both transcends and encompasses the latter (Willerslev 2011: 519). In daily life, more concrete entities predominate. For example, the Sakha cosmos was made up of myriad spirit beings, including gods thought to inhabit nine heavenly realms in the east, among them deities associated with the sun, the hearth, and fertility (Gogolev 1992: 80). Their cosmos also featured numerous other spirits or *ichchi*, which were thought to inhabit rocks, trees, natural forces, living beings, and artefacts (Balzer & Skoggard 1997).

The Sakha’s cosmos was divided “into *ajiy* -the divine, light, clean, and good- and *abahy* -the diabolical, evil, and unclean. Humanity, livestock, and useful animals and plants comprised *ajiy*. Everything harmful and foul -that is, everything that causes harm to humanity- was the invention of *abahy*” (Gogolev 1992: 71). Sakha notions of ‘sin’ or ‘misdeed’ were broad, and incorporated domains that a Western audience would consider both mundane and spiritual:

Very characteristic of the Yakut beliefs is the absence of conceptions of paradise and hell and the lack of any idea of retaliation as we understand it. The Yakut word *aj[unknown]y* usually translated, sin, means more properly, harm, damage; for instance, *aj[unknown]y* is used when milk is spoiled by a mouse falling into it, or, when a man’s bed is contaminated by a frog (Jochelson 1933: 104). Contamination was feared, and offences against spirit beings could provoke misfortune. Spirits or souls claimed rights over the animals, plants, and objects they inhabited. Those who encroached on their territory without paying their proper respects were “liable to be punished in some way: by illness,
epizooty [epidemics among animals], or some other calamity. The Yakut is a hunter and fisherman. The *abasy-sיאäce* (i.e., *abasy*, the eater) also procures food for himself, and this food may be the man and his cattle” (ibid.).

Those who had been afflicted with some disease or other forms of misfortune consulted shamans. Shamans held seances for healing rituals; to this end, they travelled to other cosmic realms to retrieve lost souls or capture harmful spirits (Balzer 1996: 306). In this they received assistance from spirit helpers. Mediating spirits took the form of animals, such as “raven and eagle [or] such birds as the loon, hawk, crane, woodgrouse, swan, lark, cuckoo, and sandpiper, and included bears, wolves, foxes, bulls, and dogs” (Balzer 1996: 308). Shamans also had ‘doubles’ such as the mother-beast spirit or *iio-kyyl* (Balzer 1996: 308). This concept is rooted in a complex notion of the soul. Sakha are thought to possess “three main souls: the *iio-kut* or ‘mother soul’, *buor-kut* or ‘earth-clay soul’, and *salgyn-kut* or ‘air-breath soul’” (Balzer 1996: 308). All three of these souls undergo transformations when a person trains to become a shaman (Popov 1947: 285; Balzer 1996: 308). The mother soul transforms into the mother-beast, which also takes the form of an animal (Balzer 1996:309):

While many shamans acted as healers, shamans were not universally benevolent and some could be harmful. Ethnohistorians speak of the “implicit menace of Sakha stories about still-avoided shamans' graves, about ravens as bad omens, and about shamanic curses [...] that are said to have affected some families for several generations” (Balzer 1996: 313).

However, misfortune was not only brought on by offending the spirits or the shamans who served them. For example, those who lied under oath were also thought to court disaster. The process of swearing oaths and the consequences of breaching them are described in some older accounts: A magician [RCH: i.e., the shaman] places his tambour and dress before the fire, the embers of which are burning. The accused stands before it, facing the sun, and says: ‘May I lose during my life all that ‘man holds dear and desirable, father, mother, wives, children, ‘relations; all my possessions and cattle; the light of the sun, ‘and then my own life; and may my spirit sink to eternal misery (*mung taar*), if I be guilty of the charge laid against me!’ The magician throws butter on the hot embers; the man accused must then step over the tambour and dress, advance to the fire, and swallow some of the exhaling smoke from the butter; then, looking to the sun, say, ‘If I have sworn false, deprive me ‘of the light and heat.’ Some of the tribes close the ceremony by making the accused bite the head of a bear; because they allow this beast to have more than human wisdom, and suppose that some bear will kill the aggressor (Sauer 1802: 123).

Among the Dolgani, a Yakut-speaking population of reindeer herders of mixed origin, some transgressions were also thought to cause harm in the afterlife. For example, men and women who died childless were turned into frightening ghosts (Popov 1946: 22). Widowers who remarried lost favour with the gods because such actions were believed to go against fate (ibid.). This was the case because “the [first] woman he selected was believed to have been born specially for him and had been fated to be his wife” (Popov 1946: 22).

Some ethnographers claim that the Sakha had little sense of punishment or reward in the afterlife, even after Christianization (Sieroszewski 1993: 958). However, their belief system had other ways of supporting shared values. For example, notorious evildoers became impure or ‘defiled’ by their actions, just like people who came into contact with polluting substances. They were therefore excluded from some ritual activities (Sauer 1802: 117).

**Summary:** The Yakut religion generally lacks moralizing aspects. One notable exception to this is supernatural punishment for lying under oath.
Altai

Among the Altai, another Turkic group in Siberia, animals are categorically divided into wild and domesticated species, representing two different but parallel dimensions of reality (Broz 2007: 292-295). The wilderness, in the form of water, land, and mountains, is owned by spirit masters (Broz 2007: 296). The wild animals that inhabit these areas, such as deer and woodpeckers, are like domestic animals to the spirit masters, such as cows and stallions (ibid.). When humans hunt, they enter the realm of these spirits and, like guests, must maintain a respectful relationship with them to ensure successful hunts. Hunters pay their respects by performing certain rituals and giving gifts to the spirits, for example (Broz 2007: 297). Should they fail to do so, the spirit masters will perceive them as mere thieves and robbers and won’t allow the hunt to go forward (ibid.). They express their displeasure by punishing improper conduct, sometimes with fatal results (ibid.). “For example hunters who went to hunt in a forbidden territory accidentally shoot one of their number who was turned, by the local eezi [the spirit master], into a deer at the moment of shooting” (ibid.).

Hunters’ relationship with the spirit world is also defined by a notion of balance and moderation. It is believed that for each hunter, it is appropriate to kill a certain number of animals over a lifetime (Broz 2007: 298). Should they exceed their allocated share, both them and their descendants will face repercussions, for example in the form of curses (ibid.). This concept forms part of a more comprehensive moral framework that disapproves of greed and obstinacy and values restraint in all interactions, be it with humans or non-humans (ibid.). Spirit masters accept only those hunters who embody these virtues (ibid.). Inappropriate, excessive or disrespectful hunting practices are akin to stealing livestock from other humans: “inappropriate hunting and cattle theft could be described as two sides of the same coin” (ibid.) because both are driven by greed and lack of moderation. Accordingly, both were punished in the afterlife (ibid.). Adhering to appropriate moral norms ensures that the perspectives of human hunters and spirit masters can meet during hunting expeditions in a manner that is respected by both parties (Broz 2007: 299). Accordingly, we might conclude that the Altai notion of moral conduct transcends humanity. In fact, humans and spirit masters participate in a shared moral universe that all parties must acknowledge to ensure a productive relationship between humans and the environment that sustains them.

Summary: The Altai religion includes markedly stronger MSP elements, compared to the Yakuts.

References


McIntosh posits that the lack of clear evidence for the use of force as a method for punishing transgressive behavior is a likely indication that the inhabitants of Harappans were largely kept in line through the threat of divine sanction (McIntosh 2008: 393). However, because explicit information on Harappan deities is also lacking—more precisely, what little may be gleaned about Harappan deities entirely derives from iconographic depictions that are open to multiple alternative interpretations (McIntosh 2008: 285-290)—this theory should be seen as highly speculative.

Early Vedic Period (c.1500–500 BCE)
The overall consensus now is that social complexity emerged gradually in the Ganges region, developing from a combination of indigenous and foreign influences. It is likely that, in the first half of the second millennium BCE cattle-herding speakers of Indo-Iranian language(s) from Central Asia settled the Punjab region, and from there spread throughout Northern India, probably through several waves of migration that took place across several centuries. Between 1500 and 500 BCE, these migrating groups introduced new technologies and domesticates, including the war chariot and the horse. They also adopted agricultural techniques via interaction with indigenous populations. They founded polities, enforced their borders, built cities, established trade relations, and waged war against their neighbours. We know about all these developments from their sacred texts, but, unfortunately, these texts do not clarify the exact processes by which these developments came about. Nor do they shed much light on the emergence of two of the more influential aspects of these Sanskrit-speaking, cattle-herding cultures: a strict social hierarchy in which different groups are divided into hereditary ‘castes’ with little possibility for intermarriage, and the dominance of the priestly caste, known as Brahmins (Keay 2013: 28-29).

Although Vedic religion was not founded on moralistic principles, it included MSP elements. Ṛta, or the truth, was the principle governing the natural, social, religious, and moral order. In various passages of the Rg Veda, the Varuṇa, who personifies a divine authority and is associated with (ṛta), justice, and social relations, is an ethical all-knowing god, who foresees all destiny and punishes those who violate the moral order of Ṛta, binding them with cords. He can be approached with requests for forgiveness. Invoked along with Varuṇa is god Mitra, who stands for judicial side of their joint governance over morality. For example, Thieme (1960, 307-308) infers that “the couple Mitra and Varuṇa together induce people to make agreements and preserve peace” from verses such as the following:

“You two, Mitra [and Varuṇa] keep in agreement these people (host and poets, in this case) and lead them together.” (RV 5.65.6ab of Rṣi Rātrahavya Ātreyahu)
“You two, Mitra (and Varuṇa) are of firm peace through vow (you secure peace by seeing to it that vows are kept); you cause people to make mutual agreements through [your] establishment of [truth].” (RV 5.72.2ab of Ṛṣi Bāhuvṛkta Ātreyaḥ)

"Mitra (God Contract), when named, causes people to make mutual arrangements (which establish peace).“ (RV 3.59.1a of Ṛṣi Gopavana Saptavadhriḥ)

Moreover, in other passages, the god Varuna is called upon for moral redemption:

"Loosen from me sin [aghaḥ] [that is] like a rope; may we partake of the well [khā] of truth [ṛta] from you, Varuṇa.” (RV 2.28.5ab Ṛṣi Kūrmo Gārtsamadaḥ; translation by Peter Sahota)

Some of these passages also point to the author's sense of their own moral faults in the eyes of Varuna, for example:

"Varuṇa, if ever we made a transgression against any person, whether a dear one, or a friend, or a companion, or a brother, or a dependent, or a stranger, please pardon that./If [we] gamblers cheated while playing a dice-game or if [we] committed sin [āgas] knowingly or unknowingly, remove all those as if [they are] loose as well, god! Let us be dear to you, Varuṇa!” (RV 5.85.7–8 of Ṛṣi Atriḥ; translation by Peter Sahota)

There are also passages that suggest that Varuna monitored human behavior, for example (Thieme 1960, 307):

"[The heavenly waters] in whose midst king Varuṇa walks, looking down on the truth and untruth of the people ..." (RV 4.16.2cd)

Finally, the Rg Veda contains several passages suggesting a belief in moralistic supernatural punishment:

“Sharpen thy strong weapon, Indra, against those without contract (‘who do not recognize the sacredness of contracts/ treaties’), who deceive/ betray a contract (concluded between former or potential enemies) [and thereby: God Mitra], a hospitality (the contract existing between guest and host) [and thereby: God Aryaman], agreements (agreed upon by mutual friends), and true speech (in general, or in particular: ‘a solemn oath’) [and thereby: God Varuna].” (RV 10.89.9 of Ṛṣi Reṇuḥ)

"Powerful Indra and Varuṇa, strike down [your] most powerful arrow, your vajra [or lightning] at this one who is malignant, a robber, an enemy to us; towards that one mete out overwhelming strength." (RV 4.41.4 of Ṛṣi Vāmadevo Gautamaḥ; translation by Peter Sahota)

However, the sources are vague concerning whether the Vedic gods were truly thought to punish moral transgression. If they did, then this punishment must have taken place during a person's lifetime rather than after their death, as most people were allowed entry into a place of eternal pleasure after their demise.

With later Vedic developments, in the early Purānic period, Varuṇa’s ethical authority gradually diminished, as he eventually become a god of the dead, who can bestow immortality; and in the later Purānic period, he became a guardian of the western direction.

According to the Atharva Veda, only the souls of those guilty of exceptionally heinous crimes (e.g. sorceresses, murderers, and anyone who dared injure a brahmin) are sent to the narakaloka (hell). In later Vedic texts, those guilty of ritual transgressions, such as breaking taboos or failing to correctly perform rituals were deemed worthy of eternal punishment. For example, in the Jaiminīya and Samantha Brāhmaṇas, hell is reserved for those who cut wood or eat animals or plants without performing the correct sacrifices, while the Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa states that those who do not perform the correct ritual before eating an animal may expect that same animal to take its revenge on them in the afterlife (Obeyesekere 1980, 156-158).
In the Purânic period, Yama is the lord of the dead, king of ancestors; later also known as the lord of Dharma, or the lord of righteousness (dharmarāja). In the (Ṛg Veda 10.10), in a dialogue with his twin sister Yamī, who tries to incite him to commit incest, he rejects the deed, asserting that gods always watch our deeds and will punish the sinful. He chooses to die and departs to the other world.

The dead go to Yama’s court to be judged. After weighing their karma, he sends the soul of the dead either to hell, or back to the world of mortals where it can have another chance to accumulate good karma, or grants it immortality in the celestial realm. Thus, he is not an independent punisher of sins but simply a judge who witnesses the amount of the persons’ accumulated bad and good karma and determines a retribution. The notion of karma as a moral force emerged for the first time around the eight century BCE in one of the earliest Upaniṣads, the Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad, where it is said that a man becomes good through good actions and bad through bad actions.

Buddhism (c. 500 BCE–c.1100 CE)
Throughout its history in India, Buddhists argued against the notion of the independent, omnipotent and all-knowing God, or Lord (Īśvara), who is a creator of the world and who punishes or rewards the doers. One of the arguments was that if Īśvara punishes bad deeds or rewards good deeds, he is not an independent agent, his judgement depends on the actions of others. Buddhist theory of codependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), according to which everything arises and ceases due to multiple causes and conditions, goes against the idea of a single cause to which everything can be traced. Likewise, if Īśvara created the world consisting of the elements of the earth, water, and so on, then he is not an independent creator and he himself has those elements, in which case, he is also subject to change.

Since its inception, Buddhism held the doctrine of karma as relevant to moral causation. Karma has never been understood as a system of punishments and rewards imposed by some external, higher being; and it has not been interpreted in a fatalistic manner either. Although certain actions determine the nature of one’s rebirth and life experiences, it does not necessarily mean that all events or experiences are karmically determined. Likewise, a person has the ability to choose whether or not to engage in the wholesome or unwholesome actions.

Karma as a moral action, be it mental, verbal, or physical, is inextricably connected to one’s moral choices, or intentions (cetanā), which propel one into action; therefore, the mental action is more powerful than verbal and physical actions. Thus, what makes one’s action karmically positive or negative is a motivation behind the action. The Buddha actually defined karma as volition. Actions motivated by unwholesome mental states such as greed, envy, hatred are invariably unwholesome, or non-virtuous, and therefore, obstacles to the attainment of liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. In contrast, actions arising from wholesome, mental states are ethically positive and conducive to liberation. The doctrine of karma is concerned not only with the effects that an action has on its agent but also with the effects that it has on others. Hence, wholesome actions should be of benefit to oneself and others and facilitate social harmony. Therefore, one is advised to compare oneself with others to realize that one should not do to others that what one does not wish for oneself.

Hinduism of the Classical and Medieval Periods (c. 100–1200 CE)
Vedic Brahmanism incorporated the notion of karma only very gradually: even the Upanishads, a set of sacred texts likely written not long after the emergence of Buddhism and containing a number of more or less clear references to karma (e.g. "a man turns into something good by good action and into something bad by bad action", quoted in Bronkhorst 2011: 47-48), still stop short of providing a comprehensive system of recommended ethical behavior, and largely limit serious punishment to behaviors resulting in harm to brahmins (Obeyesekere 1980, 158).
However, by the time Brahmanism had developed into Classical Hinduism, i.e. by the middle of the first century CE, karma had become as significant an element of its doctrine as it was for Buddhism (ref? and, also, is there any clear sense of how exactly this transition took place?). Indeed, for the purpose of this summary, the Hindu interpretation of karma does not differ significantly from its Buddhist counterpart, outlined above:

"In this era, the belief in a single life span was replaced by a system of reincarnation called samsara, the cycle of rebirths. According to this system, at death one would pass on to a life in heaven or hell, depending on the merits of one’s activities in life. Then, after a certain amount of time, the individual would be reborn on earth once again. The mechanism that regulated this system was karman, a word that literally means 'action.' Every action must have an effect. So, the effects of one’s actions in life determine what one will experience after death, and what kind of life one will have in the next birth. In this way, even if a person does not seem to receive all the rewards or punishments deserved in a particular life, the scales will be balanced in the future." (Shattuck 1999: 29)

The system of morality a Hindu must follow in order to lead a virtuous life is known as dharma. Dharma promotes refraining from harming others through physical violence (ahimsā), theft, and dishonesty (Dwivedi 2012, 110-123); conversely, it encourages actions motivated by compassion and/or generosity:

"The householder’s business is the maintenance and support of those in the other three stages of life: the students who have not yet entered into the world of work, the retirees who have seen the birth of grand-children and spotted their first gray hairs, and the renunciants, those who have left behind not only the world of work and material possession but who have also left behind family and self-interest for a life focused on spiritual freedom. Householders are the ones with material wealth, and their responsibility, their dharma, is to share it with others." (Eck 2013: 364-365)

With regards to virtues relating to loyalty, dharma promotes respect towards one's kin:

"[d]eeply embedded in Hindu notions of marriage is a disposition toward protection" (Courtright 2006, 226-298). Sources do not emphasize loyalty to the state as a key virtue within Hinduism: however, it is worth noting Dundas (2002, 118-119) contrasts Jain anti-militarism with "the possibility, frequently stated in Hinduism, that a warrior who died in battle would be reborn in heaven (Bh 7.9)".

Need more details on Medieval Hinduism

Summary
Vedic Brahmanism has several MSP aspects. However, morality concerns appear secondary to ritual; punishment is directed at individuals, but is uncertain.

The Axial Age in Northern India, and especially the development of the concept of karma c.500 BCE reshapes the religious landscape and introduces fully moralizing religions (Buddhism and later Hinduism). Between 500 and 300 BCE these new ideas have currency primarily among a small segment of the population, but after 300 BCE Buddhism becomes the state religion. Karma also becomes a central concept in Hinduism from the middle of the first century CE.

Literature
Central and South India

NGA: Deccan
Contributors: Enrico Cioni, ...

Neolithic and Iron Age (3000–300 BCE)
In south India, archaeologists have unearthed plentiful evidence for ritual activity, dating to both the Neolithic (3000–1200 BCE) and the Iron Age (1200–300 BCE). Specifically, rituals have been partially reconstructed from Neolithic “ashmounds” (the product of periodic large conflagrations of cattle dung, possibly as part of seasonal fertility festivals [Allchin 1963; Boivin 2004a]) and rock art (in which the frequency with which both cattle and male figures with erect penises are depicted also suggests a preoccupation with fertility [Boivin 2004b]), as well as from Iron Age megalithic monuments (which were likely associated with mortuary ceremonies [Johansen 2014: 66-67]). However, none of the sources suggest that there is any evidence to reconstruct belief in deities or other supernatural agents or forces in the region during these periods, let alone MSP.

Imperial Period (after 300 BCE)
Most likely, belief in MSP first came to South India in the third century BCE, when the region became part of the Mauryan Empire, which led to the spread of Buddhism. Indeed, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, many Buddhist monasteries dating from this time were built near the site of Iron Age megalithic mortuary contexts, which suggests a direct transition from Iron Age beliefs to the new religion (Johansen 2014, 71-77).

Summary
Karma as an MSP force, first after Buddhism arrived with Mauryas, then due to Classical Hinduism.

References
Eastern India
NGA: Garo Hills
Contributors: Eva Brandl

Garo

The Garo are a Sino-Tibetan population inhabiting the Garo Hills area of Eastern India (Assam) and
neighbouring areas of Bangladesh. The ‘Garo’ label is of colonial origin and refers to a set of groups with
distinct dialects and cultural traditions (for a detailed discussion of the emergence of Garo ethnic
identity see Bal 2007). Garos refer to themselves as a’chik or hill men (Roy 1999). At the time much of
the ethnographic research we will be referring to was carried out, the hills population subsisted on
slash-and-burn horticulture, cultivating grains such as dry rice and millet along with root crops and
vegetables (ibid.). They lived in hilltop villages built from bamboo, local wood, and grass (ibid.). These
villages were of substantial size and surrounded by bamboo palisades for the purpose of defense
(Playfair 1909: 40). Each village also had a nokpante or men’s house, where unmarried boys spent the
night and elders congregated to debate matters of common concern, among other functions
(Choudhury 1958:12p).

The Garos’ songsarek or ‘native’ cosmos included numerous shapeless spirits beings or “mites
[sic]” (Roy 1999). These beings were associated with such forces as the sun, fertility, strength, thunder,
and prosperity (ibid.). Some of them possessed a god-like character: “To some of these mite the Garo
attribute the creation of all the creatures of the world, the control of natural phenomena and the
granting of health, wealth and happiness to mankind” (Khaleque 1988: 132). These higher beings
coeexisted with lesser spirits, who were often malevolent and a frequent cause of illness and misfortune
(ibid.). Spirits were thought to inhabit a wide range of locations including both the village and the jungle
as well as trees, streams, road forks, and mountain tops (Burling 1963: 55).

Both kinds of spirit demanded that humans observe certain taboos during rituals. For example,
“[s]ome crops must not be eaten before a certain ceremony. One doesn’t beat drums while the rice is
ripening, for to do so might offend the spirits or gods and bring suffering to the transgressor” (Burling
1963:62). When suffering some misfortune, humans performed animal sacrifices and other offerings in
order to appease the angry spirits. During these rituals, knowledgeable men would “offer an egg, a
chicken, a pig, or even a cow, depending upon the seriousness of the disease and the demands of the
mite” (Burling 1963:55) over a makeshift altar of bamboo and leaves, along with some rice beer (ibid.).
Ritual specialists were known as kamal (Roy 1999). In addition, each village possessed a number of ritual
stones or kosi. These were cleansed once a year with the blood of a sacrificial animal in a communal
ceremony (Marak 1997: 112). A notable ritual still practiced among some Garo communities is the
Wangala dance. During this ceremony, Songsarek families make offerings to deities and deduce omens
about the fertility and good fortune of their crops (de Maaker 2013: 231). The village shaman or priest
then chants the local creation myth followed by a dance (ibid.).

While rituals prescribed certain actions, there is only one example in Garo ethnographic sources
of enforcement of moral behavior by supernatural forces:

When the dried fields are burned at the beginning of planting, Saljong sees the smoke of the fire
and comes to join the people as they worship him in their fields. He supervises them as they fix the
boundaries, and he blinds the people if they later move the markers—the only example of supernatural
punishment for immoral behavior that I ever heard of (Burling 1963:58).
**Summary**
While humans sought to maintain an active exchange with the spirits, our sources indicate that this relationship was generally not a moralistic one. Misfortune usually resulted from angering the spirits due to some taboo violation during rituals or ceremonies, not from immoral behaviour towards other humans (Burling 1963: 61).

**References**

**Southeast Asia**
NGAs: Cambodia and Java
Contributors: Enrico Cioni, John Miksic

**Preclassic Period (c. 1,000 BCE–1 CE)**
Little is known about prevailing ideologies in the Mekong Basin and Central Java prior to the arrival of Buddhism and Hinduism. However, it may be possible to infer a few things from the non-Hindu, non-Buddhist, and therefore probably indigenous elements of later South-East Asian ideologies. For example, inscriptions show that early Khmer kings recognized the power of local ancestral spirits known as anak ta, the "owners" of the land, and portrayed themselves as taking over some of their spiritual functions (Work 2017). Overall, the image that emerges from later evidence such as these inscriptions is one in which people felt both respect and fear towards ancestors, whose "power was not always benign": though the dead could be invoked "to provide warning of impending disaster, and possible assistance", they were also often seen as "unhappy or vengeful, and had to be propitiated to prevent them from wreaking havoc with the living" (Miksic and Goh 2017, 173). Given the sources' silence on the matter, there appears to be no evidence that supernatural agents punished or rewarded their worshippers' behaviour towards other humans: all the ancestors cared about was that the living worshipped them in the correct manner.
For Java, the evidence similarly suggests that indigenous South-East Asian religion was and is largely a form of ancestor worship, in which ancestors are powerful but sometimes dangerous beings, and there appears to be no evidence that supernatural agents punished or rewarded their worshippers' behaviour towards other humans.

“Ancestor worship” can mean many different practices and beliefs. The Southeast Asian concept of ancestors was much different from that of the Chinese, for instance. Chinese believed that the spirits of the dead retained their individual consciousness and personality after death, and therefore it was possible to pray directly to one’s own ancestors. This practice harmonized with the strong patrilineal Chinese kinship system. In Southeast Asia, it was believed that 12 years after death, the individual soul of the deceased person was reabsorbed into a great Oversoul, from which human souls are temporarily detached during their attachment to a body and for 12 years after death. After 12 years, the individual soul was reunited with the Oversoul, and therefore no trace of individual consciousness remained which could be communicated with. This concept is congruent with the ambilineral nature of most (but not all) Southeast Asian societies, which do not have family names or lineal descent systems.

The clearest expression of this belief is found in the Desawarnana, a 14th-century poem which describes the sraddha ceremony held 12 years after the death of a queen of Majapahit, Java. The term sraddha is Sanskrit; in India it denotes a series of ceremonies performed on various occasions, including births and marriages, but also after deaths. In India these rituals were not limited to 12 years; there was no concept of the reabsorption into an Oversoul or the loss of personal existence after death. In Java the sraddha was adapted to suit local beliefs.

**Protoclassic Period (1–600 CE)**

The Protoclassic Period (also known as the Iron Age or Protohistoric Period) witnessed the introduction of South Asian culture generally, and Hinduism and Buddhism specifically, throughout South-East Asia, including in the Mekong Basin and Java. Traders, Brahmans, and missionaries traveled to the region along the "maritime Silk Road," that is, the Indian Ocean. In the History of the Southern Qi Dynasty (Nan Qi shu), a report to the Chinese Emperor written between 479 and 502 CE by a Buddhist monk known as Nàgasena or Na-kia-sien, describes Funan as a land where both Saivite Brahmanism and Mahayana Buddhist flourished, at least among the elites. It is also worth noting both Nàgasena and another ambassador sent by Funan to China brought a number of Buddhist items as gifts to the emperor on the part of the ruler of Funan, including ivory stupas and a coral image of the Buddha (Harris 2005, 5-6).

In terms of physical evidence for the presence of Buddhism and Hinduism in Protoclassic Cambodia, Hindu motifs appear frequently in portable objects attributed to the Funan polity (c. 225–639 CE), including gold leaf and amulets, as well as statuary representing Vishnu, Krishna, Rama (Lavy 2003; Le Thi Lien 2008, 2015), and Shiva's phallic form, worshipped by elites and known as lingam (Sanderson 2003: 403-09). The first known Buddhist statues in the Lower Mekong region date to the fourth and fifth centuries based on radiocarbon dates of wooden Buddha images found at Dong Thap (Vo 2003, 65).

In the early fifth century CE, a Chinese monk named Faxian visited the port of "Yeh po ti", likely in Java, and wrote that there were no Buddhists "to speak of" there; archaeological excavations in northwest Java led to the discovery of a large Buddhist complex in the island’s northwest, likely also dating to around the beginning of the fifth century CE. It is possible that at this time Java was divided into several polities, some of which favoured Hinduism and some Buddhism (Miksic and Goh 2017, 214). Written sources and the name of the place where the first large temple complex in central Java was built (e.g. Dieng, or Di Hyang, “the ancestors”) suggest that Preclassic ancestor worship was still present, at least in traces (Miksic and Goh 2017, 257).
Both Buddhism and Hinduism are strongly moralising religions founded on the concept of karma. According to karma, morally positive actions make it more likely that one will be reborn in one’s next life as a higher being and/or in a heavenly realm, while morally negative actions make it more likely that one will be reborn as a lower being and/or in a hell-like realm. Morally negative actions include harming others through violence, theft, and dishonesty, while morally positive actions include actions motivated by generosity, compassion, and respect towards one’s kin. For a more detailed explanation of karma, see the MSP Narrative for India.

**Classic Period (600–1400 CE)**

In Java, the Buddhist temple of Borobudur, constructed between 790 and 830 CE, was decorated with relief carvings depicting Buddhist texts. The exterior foot of the temple depicted the *Mahakarmavibhangga*, “The Great Law of Cause and Effect”. The carvings illustrated punishments and rewards for various deeds. A similar series of carvings was used to decorate the south corridor of Angkor Wat, a temple dedicated to the Hindu god Vishnu, in the early 12th century, indicating the popularity of this text among Hindus. In Bali paintings on the ceiling of a wooden pavilion in the Klungkung palace were created in the 18th century.

This rather lengthy period saw the rise of Hinduism to official state religion in Zhenla (640–800 CE) as in Early Angkor (800–1080 CE) (Bhattacharya 1997); Late Classic Angkor (1200–1327 CE) saw the decline of Hinduism, beginning with the reign of Jayavarman VII (r. 1181–1218 CE), who favoured Mahayana Buddhism (Roveda 2004, 34); finally, beginning in the thirteenth century, Theravada replaced Mahayana as the dominant form of Buddhism (Marston and Guthrie 2004, 9). Meanwhile, forms of ancestor worship that likely derived from Preclassical belief systems (as described above) continued to be practiced, especially by commoners.

Though these changes were certainly significant (in particular, the rise of Theravada and decline of Mahayana may have had something to do with the fall of Angkor and rise of Ayutthaya; see Fletcher et al. 2017, 282), there is no indication that they were accompanied by changes in beliefs regarding moralistic supernatural punishment.

In Java both Buddhism and Hinduism continued to flourish throughout this period, and indeed Islam was established relatively late in the region compared to the rest of South-East Asia (Miksic and Goh 2017, 445). Sources do not suggest any significant changes in beliefs regarding moralistic supernatural punishment or reward.

**Summary**

Prosocial MSP is inferred absent during the Pre-Classic period. Hinduism and Buddhism arrive from India during the Protoclassic period and appear to be well established in Cambodia towards its end (e.g., c.500 CE). In Central Java the earliest undisputed evidence of Buddhism is the Canggal royal inscription of 732 CE from the Medang Kingdom. No demonstrably older statues or temples have been found before that date. Although it seems likely that some cultural diffusion was taking place (for example, an Indian Buddhist pilgrim visited “Ho-ling”, possibly in Java, in the 5th century), it appears that Buddhism became established in Central Java later than in Cambodia. It was certainly well-established by 800 CE, as indicated by the construction of Borobudur.

After that, despite significant religious change (from Hinduism to Buddhism in Cambodia, and to Islam, eventually, in Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, and among the Cham in south Vietnam) strongly moralizing religions are continuously present. Conversion to Islam introduced the idea of eternal existence of the soul, but ideas of tortures of the damned in hell were already present in the earlier Buddhist texts. The difference was that after a period of torment, the soul in Buddhism and Hinduism would be reincarnated in a new body; one’s status upon rebirth was dependent on the good and bad deeds committed in previous lives. In Islam, the idea of a deity who meted out punishment or
conferred blessings was introduced to the region. In the pre-Islamic period, no monuments were created for the dead, who were cremated and their ashes discarded. In the Islamic period, graveyards were created, and permanent memorials to individuals sometimes became sites of pilgrimages by devotees.

**Literature**


**Borneo**

NGA: Kapuasi Basin
Contributors: Eva Brandl, Jill Levine

**Iban/Dayak**

The *Iban*, also known as Dayak or Sea Dayak, trace their origins to the Kapuasi Basin of Borneo (Sutlive and Beierle 1995). During a series of migrations, they established themselves in other regions, including Sarawak on the Northern coast of the island. They share a Malayo-Polynesian language and form part of the non-Muslim population of the island. In the pre- and early colonial periods, they subsisted on slash-and-burn horticulture, specifically the cultivation of dry rice, which they supplemented with vegetables, root crops, and maize. Hunting, fishing, gathering, and animal husbandry also contributed to their diet (Sutlive and Beierle 1995). The population was scattered across dispersed communities that settled in
longhouses built from wooden materials (Sandin & Sather 1980:10). These settlements functioned as autonomous political units, with no formal authority above them (Freeman 1955a:8).

The Iban pantheon featured numerous types of spirits and higher beings, ranging from animistic beliefs and lesser spirits, often malicious, to benevolent creator gods who inhabit the divine realm of *panggau libau* (Sutlive & Beierle 1995). Despite their remoteness, the latter were “unseen, ubiquitous presences” (ibid.). Men and women sought to maintain a good relationship with these spirit beings by performing sacrifices for them. Most commonly, these sacrifices were food offerings named *piring*, “composed of rice cooked in bamboos, cakes, eggs, sweet potatoes, plantains, or other fruit, and sometimes small live chickens” (Gomes 1911: 202). These offerings were presented on a brass plate or a makeshift altar made with sticks and small pieces of wood, and the spirits were thought to come and “eat the soul or spirit of the food” (ibid.).

Families sought *lantang*, or the blessing of the spirits, before clearing farmland (Jensen 1974:165-168). Other offerings were made whenever new residents joined the longhouse community (Howell 1908-10:24-28). Bards or *lemambang* performed incantations during such ceremonies (Sutlive & Beierle 1995). Augurs or *tuai burong* interpreted omens in order to determine whether the spirit world approved of the community’s undertakings (Sandin & Sather 1980:xxxviii). But the relationship between humans and spirits was not confined to seeking good luck or auspicious signs. Spirit forces also responded to moral conduct among humans. This is evident in the Iban notion of *adat*, a body of customary laws that defined the rights and duties of all residents in the longhouse, including matters related to marriage and inheritance (Komanyi 1973:90). These norms, orally transmitted between the generations, also specified how breaches of *adat* should be punished (Sandin & Sather 1980:xiii). The headman of the longhouse was responsible for safeguarding *adat* (Sandin & Sather 1980:3). He also consulted with other members of the community who were knowledgeable about customary law, including ritual experts such as augurs (ibid.).

Norm violations were not mundane matters. In fact, transgressions were thought to destabilize the world, which could have catastrophic consequences, including disease and crop failure (Jensen 1974:113). Perpetrators of serious transgressions became *busong* or cursed (Sandin & Sather 1980:xxviii). Conversely, transgressions that caused personal injury to one’s peers or damaged their property were thought to harm the victim’s soul (Sandin & Sather 1980:xiv). Grave offences such as incest threatened to bring misfortune on the community as a whole. The Iban notion of incest precluded relatives from specific generations (such as the mother’s sister) from being legitimate partners in marriage (Sandin 1976:34-37). Marriages in defiance of this taboo were thought to cause earthquakes and tidal waves (ibid.).

Communities sought to prevent such disasters by performing pig sacrifices and ceremonial baths (ibid.). These were considered necessary to repair relations with the spiritual world. Intriguingly, and of interest to Norzenzayan’s (2013) hypothesis, many of the acts thought to cause *busong* are covert, like theft, adultery or other sexual delicts, and so are often undetected, or if suspected, are difficult to prove. Thus even though a wrongful act may remain unpunished, a sense of moral disapproval is reinforced by a belief that the culprit will eventually be visited with misfortune as a consequence of his actions. The Iban believe that anyone who successfully cheats another, or escapes punishment for his crimes, even though he might appear to profit temporarily, ultimately suffers supernatural retribution. In addition, a person who refuses to accept a judicial settlement is similarly thought to suffer *busong* (Sandin & Sather 1980:xxviii).

**Summary**

Iban spiritual forces enforced moral conduct between humans. Tenets of correct behavior and recommendations for punishments were passed through oral tradition. Norm violations could have
dangerous consequences such as sickness, poor harvests, or death. Even if culprits of moral transgressions are unpunished in life, the Iban believe that they will eventually be punished by spirits.

References
TBA

North China
NGA: Middle Yellow River Valley
Contributors: Jill Levine, with contributions from Peter Bol, Eugene Anderson

Script: First evidence for script in the Late Shang. Inscribed pottery and shards have been uncovered by archaeologists dating from Early Yangshao sites, but definite evidence for script first present in the Shang (Keightley 1985: 5-6). For example, in Pan’po, a Yangshao site in the Wei Shui valley: “The marks are made with simple strokes and are of regular shapes; there are 22 varieties of graphs executed by means of horizontal, vertical and slanting, and forked strokes (Cheung 1983: 324).” Radiocarbon dates from the Pan’po pottery and shards are between approx. 4773 and 4194 BCE. Cheung (1983: 364) writes that the practice of inscribing pottery was pervasive in Yangshao culture. Scholars have identified later versions of archaic Chinese characters in these early markings and the early markings seem to be representative of concepts (ideographs) (ibid.). While early pottery marks “cannot be regarded as representative of the entire corpus of writing at any particular stage, even in much earlier times (Cheung 1983: 376),” and are likely connected to later characters, the first unified script in early China is the oracle bone script used in the Shang (Shelach-Lavi 2015: 217).

Records: First written records date to the Late Shang period. Most of what is known of Shang is written on 107,000 "oracle" bones (Roberts 2003: 7; Kerr 2013: 20). The Shang carved “divination records…into the scapulas and the plastrons, thus establishing themselves as the first fully literate civilization east of the Indus (Keightley 1985: 5-6).”

Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (5000–1250 BCE)
There is little known about religious beliefs in North China before the introduction of abundant written records in the Late Shang. There might have been human sacrifice in Yangshao, providing possible evidence for belief in an afterlife, but archaeological evidence seems inconclusive (Underhill and Habu 2008: 131). There is more evidence for sacrifice (including human sacrifice) and ritual practices in the succeeding Longshan and Erlitou cultures. Archaeologists have uncovered clearly demarcated ritual areas and sacrificial pits in Longshan settlements like Taosi and Wangchengang and Erlitou settlements like Yanshi (He 2013: 268; Demattè 1999: 126; Reinhart 2015a: 86). Music and feasting possibly accompanied these rituals (Underhill 2001: 159; Reinhart 2016, pers. comm.; Liu 2004: 70). Early forms of script have been unearthed from four Longshan sites (Demattè 1999, 127), and in the Early Shang (Erligang), there were bone fragments and ceramic jars with inscribed characters. These records, however, cannot tell us about the specific tenets of religious practices in this period and whether rituals were undertaken to appease moralizing spirits. Nonetheless, evidence for early spirituality and appeasement of some kind of forces helps lay the foundation for our understanding of late Bronze Age religion.

Late Bronze Age (1250–771 BCE)
Records became abundant during the Late Shang. The Shang worshipped many deities: ancestors of the royal clan; nature spirits, such as River, Mountain, Wind, and the cardinal directions; and a number of other spirit figures from popular myths or local traditions (Eno 1990a). Di (帝), the High God of the Shang, was the god of rain, snow, hail, wind, thunder, and disasters (Keightley 2000: 97). According to the traditional view, Di was the head of the Shang pantheon (but see Eno 1990a and Allan 2007 for
alternative interpretations). Shang oracle bones talk about Di summoning natural phenomena to, for example, ruin harvests or call lightning to strike; Di could support or ruin political and military endeavors (Eno 2009: 71). The Shang king acted as an intermediary to appease or influence Di through the correct ritual sacrifices. Eno concludes there is no evidence in the oracle bone records for Di as a moralizing force: “Nowhere in the texts do we see clear indication that the Powers are beneficent … The Shang rulers seek advance approval for their actions - sometimes, it seems, obsessively - but there is no suggestion that the basis for approval will be anything other than the arbitrary inclinations of the Powers” (Eno 2009: 100).

The introduction of the concept of Tian (Heaven, 天) in Western Zhou inscriptions has prompted scholars to question the nature of religious continuity between the Late Shang and Western Zhou. Archaeologist and historian Li Feng notes that the relationship between Di and Tian is a point of debate (Li 2013: 143). The doctrine of the Mandate of Tian (Heaven) became a central concept in the Western Zhou, making a significant change in the Chinese religious landscape. The Mandate is mentioned in the Book of Documents (Shang Shu) by Western Zhou ruler King Cheng (1042-1021 BCE) (Shaughnessy 1999: 314). The Book of Documents, like all Chinese classical texts, however, was compiled much later in Chinese history (written at least in the Warring States, while Zuo Zhuan is 4th century BCE). However, the text suggests Zhou elite might have reworked the Shang concept of a high god for their own political purposes. In this, “God [Di] lost his omnipresent power over both human and natural words, a power that was taken over by Heaven [Tian]” (Li 2013: 144). The Mandate of Heaven is also mentioned in the Classic of Poetry, another classical Chinese text compiled in the seventh century BCE. The odes in the Classic of Poetry were performed in feudal courts, and were seen as representative of the culture and values espoused by former Zhou kings (Waley 1960: xxii). The Classic of Poetry notes that King Wen of Zhou, founder of the Zhou dynasty and father of the first Zhou emperor, Wu were given the Mandate of Heaven (ibid., 136). The following passage shows the interrelationship between the ruler, Heaven, and Di, and emphasizes that the mandate is passed from father to son:

I
King Wen is on high
Oh, he shines in Heaven!
Zhou is an old people,
but its Mandate is new.
The leaders of Zhou became illustrious,
was not Di’s Mandate timely given?
King Wen ascends and descends
on the left and right of Di.
II
How diligent was King Wen,
whose fame is without end.
What was bestowed upon Zhou,
extends now to King Wen’s grandsons and sons,
King Wen’s grandsons and sons,
their line branching out hundreds of generations.
And all Zhou officials
Will also be illustrious for generations. [need a reference]

There is sparse material evidence from the Western Zhou on the Mandate of Heaven. Robert Eno points to a 998 BCE Western Zhou inscription that quotes a ruler named King Kang claiming the Shang had lost the Mandate of Tian because of its king’s acceptance of poor behavior like drunkenness and overall bad governance (Eno 2009: 101; Li 2013: 144). As Li explains, “…the last Shang king was denounced as a tyrant who was vicious and paranoid: his officials were indulgent and alcoholic and
deserved a total destruction, and the Zhou had the inevitable responsibility to exercise Heaven’s punishment” (Li 2013: 143). It seems that Tian took on the role of ethical guardian, punishing rulers according to moral standards and the quality of their stewardship of the state (Eno 2009: 101). The Western Zhou used the Mandate of Heaven as justification for overthrowing the Shang and therefore as political legitimation. Anything beyond this seems to be history written in later periods.

Additionally, during the Western Zhou only the king had a direct connection to Tian. The royal monopoly on Heaven ended after the fall of the Western Capital in 771 BCE, following which lower-level rulers, such as the Duke of Qin or the ruler of the small state of Xu, began also invoking Heaven (Eno 1990b:26). This “democratization” of Heaven was further developed by the Confucians (see the next section). This is why it is important to critically approach the classical written texts describing Zhou views of Heaven, as they may be projecting their moral concerns back into the past. One passage of the Classic of Poetry asserts that those who make ritual sacrifices to Heaven will benefit in life (in this case “The Descendant” has made a ritual sacrifice). In other words, it would appear from this text that supernatural agents are concerned not with moral behavior; rather an emphasis on honoring Heaven and other spirits.

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The Descendant's crops
Are thick as thatch, till as a shaft;
The Descendant's stacks
Are high as cliffs, high as hills.
We shall need thousands of carts,
Shall need thousands of barns,
For millet, rice, and spiked millet;
The labourers are in luck.
'Heaven reward you with mighty blessings!
Long life to you, age unending!'
(trans. Waley 1960: 170)

Due to a lack of primary evidence about Zhou religion, it is difficult to know how the Mandate functioned in daily religious and court life. A story from the later Book of Documents about King Cheng of Zhou, however, suggests ruler’s relationship to Heaven was complicated, and that Heaven, like Di, could be arbitrary in its will. In the text, King Cheng performs turtle shell divination to ask Heaven whether it would be auspicious to attack his own uncles: “Although the oracles regarding such an attack were auspicious, the king's advisors all urged him to disregard them in the face of the difficulty of the task and the disquietude of the people. The king acknowledged this difficulty and disquietude but refused to go against the apparent will of Heaven (Shaughnessy 1999: 314).” In this specific example, Tian is not a beneficent being and does not act as any form of “moral compass.”

Li Feng suggests the introduction of the Mandate of Heaven changed the relationship between the ruler and the people in that the people were no longer inextricably linked to their ruler or government. The Western Zhou did not slaughter the Shang people in their conquest but incorporated them into their new polity. Li writes, “The subjugated Shang should have no blame for the Zhou because their own kings and ministers caused the removal of the Heaven’s Mandate from them. (Li 2013: 144).”

Mark Lewis gives examples from the Book of Documents and The Zuo Tradition (Zuo Zhuan) in which Tian is evoked by army commanders (note: Lewis also notes that these speeches are probably fiction) (Lewis 1990: 24). In these speeches, army commanders tell their troops they are following the will of Heaven by fighting a particular enemy who has committed crimes. The commanders tell their troops that Heaven will punish them if they do not follow proper conduct in battle, “and in some cases the rewards they will receive if they obey and triumph” (Lewis 1990: 24). These speeches suggest Tian had
some kind of directed sense of punishment for immoral behavior and that the will of Heaven could be followed by officials and soldiers who seemed to act as proxies for their ruler. This also appears to be the first appearance of MSP directed at loyalty to the polity.

Chinese emperors evoked the Mandate of Heaven until the end of imperial rule in 1911. Much evidence on the Mandate of Heaven in Western Zhou comes from texts compiled in later centuries like the *Book of Documents* and *The Zuo Tradition*, likely written during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods in which scholars promoted a return to Western Zhou political practices. Therefore, the exact tenets of Mandate and the role of Tian in the Late Bronze Age period are sketchy at best.

Iron Age (Eastern Zhou: Spring and Autumn, Warring States: 771–221 BCE)

During the fragmented Spring and Autumn period, no ruler claimed to hold Tian’s Mandate. The Mandate was also highly contested during the Warring States period. Confucius, Mencius, and other Ruist thinkers looked back to Zhou times, nostalgic for the concept of a clearly enforced Mandate (Loewe 2003: 610). This was partially a result of the scholarly trend in the Eastern Zhou period that promoted a return to Western Zhou traditions and governance. The concept of Heaven is pervasive in ideology and scholarship from this period. Mark Edward Lewis writes, “Several of the later chapters of the Shang Shu and Mencius stated that the perceptions of Heaven are those of the people” (Lewis 1990: 236). Lewis argues that Confucius and Mencius connected the concept of Tian directly to the will of the people. According to A.T. Nuyen, modern scholars interpret Mencius’ views of Tian differently: a more liberal viewpoint connects Tian to the will of the people, while more conservative scholars see Tian as transcending the will of the people (Nuyen 2013: 113). Therefore, the scholarly debate on the role of Tian continues.

Axial Age thinkers in China offered different interpretations of Tian and its Mandate. On one hand, Confucian thought equated the strength of a ruler’s army to their adherence to the will of Tian: “Heaven was identified as a moralized nature which reflected the condition of the people, so the strength of the army depended on following the moral principles of Heaven/nature” (Lewis 1990: 236). However, the concept of Tian could extend beyond the ruler: Confucius also believed he was a messenger of Tian and that Tian protected him. In *Analects* 9.5, Confucius does not fear harm at the hands of the people at Kuang, who surrounded his chariot after a case of mistaken identity. The *Analects* quotes him as stating, “If Heaven intended this culture to perish, it would not have given it to those of us who live after King Wen’s death. Since Heaven did not intend that this culture should perish, what can the people of Kuang do to me? (*Analects* 9.5, trans. Slingerland 2003: 88).” In addition, for Confucius, the Way of Heaven was linked to the concept of fate: while Heaven demands correct behavior there is little men can do to influence its outcome. This is underlined in a section of *Analects* 14.36: “The Master said, ‘Whether or not the Way is to be put into action is a matter of fate. Whether or not the Way is to be discarded is also a matter of fate’” (trans. Slingerland 2003: 168). In the accompanying commentary, Confucius’ response is interpreted as, “a surety of one’s own rectitude and a confidence that Heaven’s will shall be done” (ibid.). Confucius saw Tian as a clear source of moral authority that could not be swayed. His disciple Mengzi had a different view. He believed the realm of Tian was beyond the control of humans, but one could actively cultivate the self, which was given by Tian (Adler 2016:166). Mengzi argued that rulers had to understand their own nature to understand Tian, “and that the Mandate of Heaven was equivalent to the support of the people” (Lewis 1990: 236). For Mengzi, then, Tian becomes less of a mystical, all-knowing force and more of a metaphor for responsible and fair governance. In addition, Mengzi cites a section of the *Book of Poetry* that describes how the Mandate of Heaven is not permanently given to one family or dynasty (Loewe 2003: 610).

It is important to note that the concept of Tian as a moralizing agent/force during this period was developed primarily within a restricted group of intellectuals, Ruists (Confucians). In the non-philosophical thought, in contrast, Tian was often portrayed as an amoral deity, or fate (Eno 1990b). Even some Confucian scholars, like Xunzi, believed that Heaven was not involved in human affairs, and promoted ritual and rule of law over the cult of Tian (Kim 2011: 375). This loss of the moralizing nature of Heaven in non-philosophical thought apparently reflected the chaotic conditions and political
fragmentation in China prevailing after the Zhou dynasty was forced to flee the Western Capital in 771 BCE. Eno (1990b: 28) provides many examples and cites Ikeda 1968 for additional ones. A poem dated to soon after the fall of the western capital illustrates this view of Tian (Eno 1990b: 26):

Bright Tian so vast prolongs not its grace,
Hurls misery and famine, beheading the states.
Bright Tian rises awesome, unthinking, unplanning,
Lets the guilty go free; they have paid for their crimes—
And the guiltless must join them, all drowning as one.

Warring States thinkers like Zou Yan (304-240 BCE) viewed dynastic changes through the theory of Five Phases of Change. This theory was later used as political legitimization by the Qin dynasty (Chen 2014: 326). The cycles are based on the five elements of earth, wood, metal, fire, wood, and water. These elements, “form two parallel cycles: the cycle of creation (sheng 生) and the cycle of conquest (ke 克)” (Chen 2014: 327). In dynastic cycles, the order of elements creates a pattern of destruction: a water element dynasty, for example, would come after a fire element dynasty. Each element is connected to a specific color: yellow, blue, white, red, and black, respectively. Zou Yan connected this thought to the Mandate of Heaven. Chen writes, “Zou Yan claims that the Mandate of Heaven approves the legitimacy of a dynasty by sending self-manifesting auspicious signs in the ritual color that matches the element of the new dynasty (Chen 2014: 328).” Zou Yan claimed the Zhou dynasty was connected to the element of fire and that Heaven sent red crows to the Zhou ancestral temple during King Wen’s rule. Starting with the Qin dynasty, the Five Phases of Change were used to legitimize dynastic cycles. The theory was also used to explain the shift of the Mandate of Heaven once it was reincorporated in the Han dynasty (Chen 2014: 328).

Earlier philosophical Daoists (Dao Jia) saw Heaven as a non-judgmental entity. There is little evidence on the life of Chinese philosopher Laozi, who is credited as the father of Daoist philosophy and the author of the Dao de Jing. There are various theories on when Laozi lived, ranging from the seventh to fourth century BCE, or if he was a real figure or an historical construct. Most modern scholars do not believe he was the author of the Dao de Jing (Chan 2000: 2-3). In the Dao de Jing, Heaven and the Dao (or the Way) are interrelated. Hans-Georg Moeller concludes, “…when heaven, as a process, follows the Dao, there will be order. But when it does not, there will be natural catastrophes” (Moeller 44). He adds that the text discourages any actions that might go against Heaven’s will, because they will likely fail (ibid. 44). Instead of moralizing behavior, the Dao de Jing encourages restraint, suppression of acting for personal gain and non-action (ibid. 48). Laozi’s more rationalistic follower Zhuangzi (late 4th century BCE) also believed that Tian was not judgmental and he critiqued Confucian thinkers who saw Heaven as a more punitive force (Chong xii).

While later Daoist religious movements in the Han used ancient Chinese concepts like cosmic resonance theory and the Five Phases of Change to promote moralizing agendas. Cosmic resonance theory, first recorded in the Qin state in the third century BCE was based on the ancient concepts of ganqing (感应) and yin-yang theory (Meyer ref? Yuet-Kuang Lo dates it to the Han in the chapter “Destiny and Retribution in Early Medieval China [2010]). In both theories, the world was naturally balanced, and it was human behavior that caused disorder and chaos. The concepts of yin and yang must be balanced to keep the universe in order. Both the ruler and people were responsible for maintaining this balance: “All human actions had cosmic repercussions. Yin-oriented actions among men, like the consumption of wine (yin) in the marketplace (also yin), would give distress to the yang element and cause social disturbances” (Hendrischke 2000: 148).

In the beliefs of common people, Chinese traditional thought conceived of a non-punitive world of the dead. This tradition is known as early as the fourth century BCE (Bokenkamp 2007: 34). The dead moved freely and left when they wanted (Zhang 2014: 119). Chinese pre-Buddhist underworld consisted of separate spaces including Yellow Springs, Fengdu, and Mount Tai. In Yellow Springs, the common people worked in a similar manner to their life on Earth. At Mount Tai the dead served in a bureaucracy.
which ran the underworld (Bokenkamp 2007: 35). Tian determined the fate of a dynasty and could cause chaos that brought suffering to the people, but there seems to be no concept of individualistic punishment by Tian in pre-Buddhist China (apart from the hints in Confucius, as noted above).

**Early Imperial (Qin, Eastern Han, Western Han: 221 BCE – 220 CE)**

The Qin legitimized itself as a dynasty using the concept of the Five Phases of Change (Wu Xing) rather than the Mandate of Heaven, rejecting the idea of a single omnipresent supernatural force (Loewe 2003: 221). The first Qin emperor claimed his ancestor once caught a black dragon, evoking ties to the ritual color black and element of water, which naturally followed the Zhou element of fire (Chen 2014: 329). However, the Mandate of Heaven was not specifically evoked for Qin legitimization. The theory of Five Elements without the Mandate seems to be based purely on omen rather than on moral behavior or judgment by high gods.

The Western Han also followed Five Phases of Change theory, but the Mandate of Heaven began to return to the political sphere. In the early Western Han, philosopher and official Dong Zhongshu (179–104 BCE) advocated for a return to Heaven worship, but these were not generally held views (Loewe 611). According to Michael Loewe, the first official mention of the Mandate of Heaven in the Han dynasty came in 44 BCE in a memorial by then junior official Kuang Heng. In 30 BCE the Western Han state cult officially switched from the Five Elements to the Mandate of Heaven. However, this was followed by several further shifts back and forth. The Mandate of Heaven was only established solidly in the Chinese imperial tradition by Wang Mang in 5 CE. Wang held imperial power since Emperor Ai’s death in 1 CE. In 9 CE he overthrew the Western Han and established the short-lived Xin dynasty (ended 23 CE). According to Michael Loewe (2003: 611), “[The Mandate] is cited in the requests made by officials that [Wang] should accede to the imperial throne; it is quoted in a document entitled Fu ming that he circulated on an empire-wide basis immediately after doing so.” The Mandate of Heaven was also invoked after Wang Mang’s death in 23 CE. The first emperor of the Eastern Han claimed the Mandate as follows: “Wang Mang had bequeathed his successors the means of strengthening their claims to rule the world under the protection of Heaven.” While Tian’s Mandate became the official cult, the theory of Five Elements was also still occasionally used to legitimize dynastic cycles.

By the late Han, the Mandate of Heaven had evolved. The emperor had to do more than conduct the proper sacrifices and rituals, as he had in ancient times (Ivanhoe 2004: 272). It now related more closely to the moral behavior of the emperor and his ability to rule. Moral rule was attached to a concept called “de” or virtue and a concern for the welfare of the people. The Mandate of Heaven now gave the Chinese people the right to overthrow a dynasty which no longer acts in their interests: “Heaven showed his displeasure not directly but by omens: by cataclysms and disasters, droughts and inundations, by sudden eclipses, comets, and so on” (von Collani 2014: 179). This description gives the sense of potential collective punishment or suffering for the actions of the emperor.

While the people could suffer collectively under an emperor who had lost Heaven’s favor, the concept of individual morality began to develop under the influence of Buddhism. Buddhism was not an official ideology in the Han period, but Buddhist ideas regarding hell gradually became influential during the Eastern Han (Zhang 2014: 119). These ideas were especially pervasive between the second and seventh centuries (Zhang 2014: 102). Buddhism introduced the idea of a punitive underworld and karmic retribution, because in Buddhist thought individuals are judged for the transgressions they commit during life (see the section on Buddhism). They are reborn in heaven or hell, or as humans, animals, or ghosts on Earth. Chinese thinkers adopted Buddhist concepts of hell but added indigenous elements. In the new concept of hell, the dead are tried in court trials which involve physical torture (Zhang 2014: 121-123).

Religious Daoism (Dao Jiao) sometimes claims loose connections to Daoist philosophy. Its later development is largely an imitation of Buddhist infrastructure but at a tenth of the size. This period saw the rise of two large popular religious Daoist movements. The first organized school, the Way of the
Celestial Masters (or the Five Pecks of Rice), appeared in the second half of the second century CE. Another popular movements Taiping Daoists, who followed the Way of Heavenly Peace, incited Yellow Turban Rebellion in 184 CE during the Eastern Han. The movement’s leader, Zhang Jue, based some of his teachings on the Daoist texts compiled as the *Taiping Jing*. The Yellow Turbans attempted to use ancient concepts outlined above like yin-yang theory and the Five Phases of Change to promote a moralizing social agenda, banning polygamy and female infanticide (Hendrischke 2000: 148-9). These religious movements were outside of the official ideologies of the state.

**Medieval (from the fall of Han to Late Tang: 220–907 CE)**
In imperial China, the Mandate of Heaven continued to be a way for dynasties to define their legitimacy through traditional Chinese concepts (Holcombe 2011: 60). Barend ter Haar writes that the common people were also fascinated by dynastic transitions and the loss of the Mandate of Heaven, as seen in popular folklore covering, for example, both the rise and eventual fall of the Han (ter Haar 2000: 308). The Mandate created, “the notion of an ‘orthodox succession’ (a concept dated to the Han) that recast dynastic succession into a unilinear narrative (Rawski 2015: 107).” This, along with the continued use of the Five Phases of Change, allowed non-Han dynasties like the Northern Wei to claim political legitimacy. The concept of Heaven-worship and political legitimacy through a Heavenly force are similar to shamanic beliefs held by Mongols, Manchus, Turks, and other Central Asian cultures (Rawski 1998: 198; see “Mongolia” chapter for more information on MSP in Central Asia). Central Asian dynasties like the Jin, Yuan, and Qing integrated shamanic rituals in their Heaven-worship (ibid., 235).

The use of cosmic resonance theory continued as well. The official Tang preface to *The Book of Changes* describes the need for rulers to act in accordance with Heaven and only make careful changes that did not upset the balance of the universe (Bol 2008: 122). While the Tang also believed the emperor was given the Mandate and therefore the supreme right of rule over his people, cosmic resonance theory could act as a check on the absolute power of the emperor (ibid.). If the emperor did not govern well, Heaven would send natural disasters.

Medieval China was influenced by Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and traditional popular religion. Mahayana Buddhism entered China in the first century CE through contacts with Indian and Central Asian merchants traveling the Silk Route or southern maritime trade routes. It was not a widely espoused state ideology, however, until the Western Jin (265–317 CE) (Knetchtges 2010: 183). While Mahayana Buddhists believe in powerful bodhisattvas (those who have reached enlightenment but choose to stay on Earth and help others reach nirvana), they do not seem to act as high moralizing gods. Buddhism promotes a shared universal moral code (see section on Buddhism), with an emphasis on karma as a moralizing supernatural force. “Chinese people [understood] Buddhism almost exclusively in terms of its doctrine of karma and transmigration” (Lo 2010: 337).

Before the rise of Buddhism in China, charity was mainly elite private giving within one’s lineage (Simon 2013: 60). The first Buddhist hospitals were constructed in the Northern and Southern dynasties period (386–589 CE). By the Tang period, Buddhist monasteries and societies ran hospitals, kitchens and orphanages for the poor, and provided housing for the elderly. Buddhists also gave alms to monasteries and donated private goods including land and in turn, monasteries supported the construction of public works (Benn 2004: 29). Buddhist organizations also constructed large public works including roads and bridges (Simon 2013: 63). Buddhism received state support in the seventh century CE under Tang Empress Wu Zetian, but monasteries were later persecuted by the state in the late Tang.

Religious Daoists attempted to create a more cohesive ideology in the fifth and sixth centuries. This included the compilation of Daoist canon from a diverse set of classical texts. This canon was invented: the ancient authors of these texts would not have identified as part of the same school or religion (Kirkland 2002: 177). Dao Jiao was promoted by the official court in the Northern Wei, but only after the arrival of Buddhism (Xiong 2009: 11). Daoist leaders often served as advisors to the emperor (Kirkland 2004: 145), and Tang emperors generally favored religious Daoism.
Later Imperial (960–1912 CE)

The Northern Song saw the rise of Neo-Confucianism, a more secular and rationalistic version of Confucianism. While the state examinations only included Confucian Classics under the Northern Song, scholars set up large private academies for Neo-Confucian studies (Zhao 2015: 337). State-run institutions began to provide charity and relief in the Northern Song (Simon 2013: 65). Neo-Confucianism continued to influence the court in the succeeding Ming period. These Neo-Confucian elites, however, still held Daoist and Buddhist beliefs. The work of Buddhist charitable halls continued into the late Ming period.

The Mandate of Heaven continued to evolve during the later imperial period. In the Northern Song, Neo-Confucians like Zhu Xi reinterpreted Confucian concepts of Heaven, combining the concepts of the natural order and the moral order of humans. According to Joseph Adler:

The Neo-Confucians of the Song followed Mencius in thinking of Heaven in mostly naturalistic terms, yet still with a moral dimension. However, both tian and ming were partly reinterpreted: Heaven was the source of the cosmic order (li 理), which comprised both the natural order (tianli 天理) and the moral order (daoli 道理). In the human being, one’s nature (xing) was the instantiation of that order. The good nature that Mencius had discussed was now called more specifically the “nature of Heaven-and-earth” (tiandi zhi xing 天地之性) or the “original nature” (ben xing 本性). (Adler 2016: 167)

This reinterpretation created a more codependent relationship between Heaven, nature, and the people. The Song thinkers questioned the notion of the emperor as the center of the universe, and some officials even believed the Mandate of Heaven was not real (Bol 2008: 125). According to Peter Bol, Song treaties name previous Liao rulers as “sons of Heaven” suggesting that the Song did not believe that there was a single ruler alone mandated by Heaven. Neo-Confucians argued that it was impossible for past rulers to have truly held the mandate of Heaven because “this could be achieved only through learning and the way of learning had been lost for 1,400 years (Bol 2008: 130).”

The Hongwu Emperor (1368–1398 CE), founder of the Ming Dynasty, however, feared liberal interpretation of Mengzi’s view of the Mandate of Heaven, that Heaven depends on the will of the people. Hong Wu ordered scholars to delete passages in Mengzi’s work that implied the people had the right to exercise Tian’s will (Ivanhoe 2004: 272). A quote from Hongwu in 1392 CE suggests that the emperor’s virtue is key in keeping the Mandate, and the people follow those who have virtue: “People are the mandate of Heaven. He who has virtue Heaven will give it to him and people will follow. If he does not have [virtue]. Heaven will withdraw [the mandate] and people will leave him” (Duindam 2016: 50). Hongwu also worried that his successors would lose the Mandate as they had been brought up in imperial luxury (Duindam 2016: 302). The Great Ming Code, drawn up under his rule, was closely linked to the Mandate of Heaven. Yonglin Jiang writes, “In imperial China, as in many other societies, legal culture would not have been considered justified without the intercession of supernatural forces” (Jiang 2011: 180). Shih-shan Henry Tsai writes that in the reign of the Ming Yongle emperor, “…following the teachings of the sages and cultivating virtues within himself were imperative in winning the heavenly mandate, frequent rituals were equally important as outward expressions of his respect for Heaven” (Tsai 2001: 82). This suggests at least some Ming emperors saw a return to an emphasis on a ruler’s virtue and ritual behavior as a way to maintain the Mandate rather than the more rationalistic approach espoused by Northern Song intellectuals.

To overcome the image of outside invaders, the early Qing rulers reigned as Confucian emperors. Because their empire was multicultural, they also encouraged the practice of Manchu shamanism and attempted to legitimize themselves as Tibetan Buddhist rulers (Rawski 1998: 199). The Qing practiced tolerance towards Muslims and Uyghurs and funded mosque construction until the nineteenth century (ibid.). Manchu conqueror and father of the first Qing emperor, Nurhaci (1559–1626 CE), believed that Heaven helped him win campaigns against the states of Yehe and Haida. In his “Seven Grievances
Against the Ming Dynasty”, he declared, “The king of the state of Yehe acted against the Will of Heaven and was punished by Heaven” (translated in Ming 2017: 29). This suggests that Heaven could aid and punish rulers outside of the emperor—a more diffuse Mandate similar to the Song’s concept of multiple “sons of Heaven.” In a more practical interpretation of the Mandate, Neo-Confucian official Li Guangdi (1642–1718 CE) wrote that the mandate of Heaven is determined by a dynasty’s choices and actions, and that a dynasty needs good officials in order to maintain it (Ng 2001: 169-170). Despite changes in the concept of the Mandate, supernatural omens, unrest, corruption, and natural disasters still seemed to predict the loss of the Mandate of Heaven by the ruling dynasty, as it did in ancient times. In 1811, the appearance of a bright comet inspired the Eight Trigrams Rebellion, showing that the common people still looked to Heaven for signs that the Mandate was shifting, or at least used supernatural omens as an excuse to attempt to overthrow a declining dynasty. A series of subsequent rebellions and foreign defeats further suggested that the Qing dynasty had lost the Mandate of Heaven (Elleman and Paine 2019: 565) In the declining Late Qing, Empress Dowager Cixi referred to the Mandate of Heaven after the Boxer Rebellion, saying, “China is weak; the only thing we can depend upon is the hearts of the people” (Schoppa 2000: 46), implying that the Mandate partially depended on the will of the people.

Summary
Late Shang (1250–1045 BCE) deities lacked any moralistic aspects. We infer similar absence of MSP in the preceding periods.

The first appearance of MSP is Tian in Western Zhou (1045–771 BCE). However, the primary concern of W Zhou deities remained with ritual; morality aspects were limited (and rather vague); punishment was uncertain and inflicted on whole groups, rather than individuals; and dealing with Tian was the exclusive domain of the ruler. During Eastern Zhou the concept of Tian was democratized by the Ruists, but this development, at least initially, affected a small segment of literate elites. Furthermore, here was significant variation between different Confucian thinkers on Tian and its Mandate.

The Mandate of Heaven was officially adopted as the state ideology during the Han period. It was explicitly invoked by Wang Mang and endorsed by the first Eastern Han emperor (first century CE). Nevertheless, Tian never evolved into a fully moralizing supernatural force/agent. Its MSP effectiveness was limited by its coming into and out of fashion (competing with an alternative amoral theory of the Five Elements). According to conflicting interpretations, Tian could either punish transgressions directly, or leave enforcement to human agents and punishment could be either individual-focused, or collective. Furthermore, all these MSP aspects apparently affected only the state and the elites; the popular religion in China lacked any moralizing aspects.

The rise of Neo-Confucianism c.1000 CE encouraged the development of a more rationalistic and secular state. Song Dynasty Neo-Confucians suggested the emperor was not the center of the universe and some even denied the Mandate altogether. The first Ming emperor, however, marked a return to a more traditional approach to the Mandate and Heaven-worship. Thus, the interpretation of the Mandate was not consistent in Imperial China and was greatly influenced by shifting court ideologies. By the end of the Qing dynasty, it appears that both ritual behavior and good governance/the will of the people were key in maintaining the Mandate.

Fully developed MSP arrived in China with Buddhism, which started making inroads during the first century CE, first became the official ideology c.300 CE, and became a mass religion during the Tang period (eight century). There are aspects of MSP in Daoism, but it was not a cohesive religion or fully integrated in the state cult until after the introduction of Buddhism.

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**Southwest China (Yunnan)**

NGA: South China Hills

Contributors: Eva Brandl, Jill Levine

**Hmong**

The Hmong are a highly heterogeneous Sino-Tibetan population that inhabit the hills regions of various Chinese provinces, including Guizhou, Yunnan, Hunan, Sichuan, and Guangxi. They share cultural and linguistic roots with the various Hmong groups of Southeast Asia and other Chinese ethnic minorities. Subsistence strategies varied considerably between these sub-groups, ranging from shifting cultivation supplemented with hunting, gathering, and animal husbandry to irrigated terrace farming.

The Hmong lived mainly in farming villages, located on the relatively inaccessible and defensible mountain slopes in China's Southeast. The basic socio-economic unit was the village, with several villages grouped into 'hamlets' of about ten to twenty households each, led by elder headsmen. Different villages cooperated at times, for instance in opposition from the main Chinese authorities, but the lack of formal collaborative institutions often lead to fragmentation.

Throughout most of Hmong history, Chinese governmental control was imposed indirectly through native headmen known as tusi, who were responsible for keeping the peace, tax collection, and organizing corvée labour. The Qing settled officials in Hmong territory, acting as feudal-type lords exercising political, economic, and social control of granted lands along with the peoples on them. A series of Hmong uprisings occurred against the Qing, first in western Hunan from 1795 CE to 1806 CE, and then in Guizhou from 1854 CE to 1872 CE. Chinese policies toward the Hmong during the Republican period alternated between assimilation, containment, dispersal, removal, and extermination. One of the last uprisings occurred in 1936 CE in western Hunan in opposition to a new policy forcing Hmong farmers peasants to open up new lands and grow crops for the state. The Hmong were incorporated into the People's Republic after Mao's revolution, and 'Miao' is an officially recognized minority group by the current government.

Among the Hmong, supernatural beliefs and ritual practices varied from group to group. Many Hmong communities practiced de facto syncretism, combining animistic and shamanistic beliefs with
Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity. Vincent K. Her warns against generalizing Hmong religion as animist or shamanist: “Statements asserting that Hmong are animists are jarring because they are exceedingly vague, leaving much to the imagination (Her 2018: 27).”

Hmong cosmology featured many different kinds of beings, including deities, culture heroes, protective ancestor spirits, and malevolent ghosts. Benevolent higher beings were believed to reside in a heavenly realm, while lesser spirits inhabited both the household and nature, such as “sacred groves, stones, caves, and other natural phenomena, as well as [...] bridges and wells (Diamond 2009).” The Hmong believed all natural phenomena to be controlled by *kuëi* or spiritual beings, and readily attributed unexplained events to them.

It is less clear whether spirits, ancestors, and other beings were also involved in the enforcement of moral norms. The following passage implies that one’s fate in the afterlife was determined by the circumstances of death rather than moral conduct:

Those who suffer a sudden or violent death, such as from knife or spear wound, or from difficult childbirth, rolling into a gully, or falling into a pit, after death many become evil *kuëi*. They are unable to go up to heaven; they are either immediately reborn into another state of existence and come back to life, or remain in the world to make trouble for people. If a streak of black vapor is seen at night, they consider it the manifestation of a *kuëi* and people cry out. “[p□ ts□(ə)□]” (meaning “drive away”), to expel them. (Ling and Tsao 1947: 187-190)- find exact page number

Hmong ancestor spirits assisted or punished their living descendants, but it is not clear whether this was based on moral conduct or ritual activities (Lee and Tapp 2010: 23)

Individuals attempted to influence *kuëi* and ask for their help through sacrifices (Ling and Tsao 1947: 187). Both benevolent and malicious spirits were propitiated with sacrifices in order to remain in their good graces. Individuals and their families performed sacrifices in order to cure illnesses, ritually cleanse themselves after observing supernatural phenomena, and to resolve conflicts. Other rituals were performed to ask for wealth and children. Taboos related to polluting substances were observed before the performance of some sacrifices. The sources also mention house-cleansing ceremonies and the ritual purification of sacrificial objects. Other rituals were performed to seek “pardon for sins after death” (Ling and Tsao 1947: 190). Shamans or diviners guided many sacrifices and other rituals. Shamans often acted as healers and performed healing ceremonies in order to expel malevolent spirits and to cure the souls of the ill (Diamond 2009).

The Hmong concept of hell is loosely based on the Chinese concept of the underworld. There are two Lords of the Otherworld: one judges human souls before reincarnation and the other controls death and rebirth (Tapp 1989: 60). Another deity named Saub helped create the twelve Hmong clans and is associated with reproduction. Saub created the first shaman giving a human some of his healing powers (ibid). These deities, however, do not seem to have any moralizing inclinations. The Lords of the Otherworld are influenced by shamans, rather than the behavior of humans.

Hmong Americans, according to Her, use many aspects of religion for moral and ethical teachings, including *qhuab kom* “songs of teaching” (Her 2018: 28).

Thus, *qhuab kom* encourages the children of the deceased to lead moral and ethical lives (not to engage in illicit behaviors such as to cheat, steal, murder, or commit adultery); to work hard to meet the needs of their families by doing things in season; to be productive citizens by heeding their responsibilities and obligations to others in their communities; and to contribute positively to society by giving aid, or by making their homes a welcoming place for relatives and others (ibid).

These songs of teachings, however, do not seem to reply on supernatural punishment, but rather encourage community standards of conduct.
Summary
Given that Hmong religion was not homogenous, it is difficult to create a cohesive narrative. Groups that synthesized aspects of Buddhism and Christianity likely held beliefs about moralizing forces. In terms of indigenous Hmong religion, there is no evidence that *kuei* spirits enforced moral norms. Hmong Americans invoke songs of teaching to promote an ethical code of conduct, but these do not invoke on moralizing supernatural forces.

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Japan
NGA: Kansai
Contributors: Enrico Cioni,

Pre-Buddhist Period: Yayoi, Kafun (300 BCE–537 CE)
In Japan, pre-Buddhist indigenous supernatural entities are known as *kami*. According to the principle of *tatari*, the kami were thought to use storms, epidemics, and other misfortunes to punish mortals for impious acts such as breaking taboos, disrespect, and failure to perform rituals correctly or at all (Hardacre 2016, 87). In other words, at least before the arrival of Buddhism, the kami were not concerned with their worshippers' moral behaviour towards each other, only with their behaviour towards the kami themselves.

Asuka and Heian Periods (537–1185 CE)
When Buddhism was first introduced to Japan in the mid-sixth century CE, Buddhist divinities (buddhas, bodhisattvas, and foreign deities associated with Buddhism) were, at first, seen as "foreign kami" who differed from Japanese kami only in their geographic origins and the rituals they required: otherwise, like their Japanese counterparts, "they were thought to cause diseases when angered, and to lend their power to the clan that conducted their cult, if only they were worshipped correctly and generously" (Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003, 7). With time, however, this interpretation of Buddhist divinities faded, in favour of a new understanding of the nature and role of the kami. Already in the seventh century, the kami began to be reinterpreted in light of Buddhist beliefs, and, by the Heian era (794 CE-1185 CE), they were seen as local manifestations of Buddhist divinities.

Medieval and Early Modern Japan (1185–1868 CE)
Moreover, medieval texts suggest that, by the twelfth century at least, a division of responsibilities had emerged between the kami and the Buddhist divinities: the kami came to be seen as beings responsible (among other things) for punishing transgressions (particularly the breaking of oaths and offenses against Buddhism generally) and rewarding proper Buddhist conduct on earth, while Buddhist divinities were seen as responsible for rewarding proper moral conduct after death (Sato 2003, 95-98). However, there were many exceptions. Many Buddhist deities were also believed to punish transgressors, though
it is worth noting that these were all entities who were strongly associated to a specific physical location rather than to the metaphysical realm. Moreover, there are some textual examples of worshippers praying to kami for a good re-birth (Sato 2003, 112-115).

In the Kamakura period (1185–1333 CE), texts such as the Kami honji no koto (possibly dating to the fourteenth century) recorded the existence of cults surrounding "real" kami, that is, kami who were not manifestations of Buddhist divinities, but rather the spirits of ordinary people; because ordinary people are commonly afflicted by greed, anger, and ignorance, those who worshipped their spirits in the form of kami were thought to be destined for moral perdition. Most likely, texts that describe the negative results of worshipping "real" kami were written by Buddhist authors who who wished to discredit the continued existence of kami cults that had managed to escape significant Buddhist influence (Teeuwen and Rambelli 2003, 31).

For a sense of the kinds of behaviours that "Buddhist" kami and "physical" Buddhist divinities punished and rewarded, see the summary of Buddhist ethics in the India section.

**Summary**

Prosocial MSP: inferred absent in the pre-Buddhist period. A transitional period during Asuka (537–794 CE), during which Buddhism took root and was incorporated into Japanese religious thinking. It is notable that Imperial edicts of 646 and 833 CE banned human sacrifice (specifically, the custom of killing widows after their husband’s death), suggesting that Buddhism (which abhors human sacrifice) was still gaining influence as late as 800 CE (see [Seshat History of Human Sacrifice](#)). After 800 CE prosocial MSP is present.

**Literature**


**Polynesia**

NGA: Big Island Hawaii

Contributors: Enrico Cioni, Jenny Reddish

**Ancestral Polynesian Society and Early Hawai’i**

Hawaiian societies did not develop writing before the arrival of Europeans in the eighteenth century. However, this does not mean it is impossible to say anything about the beliefs and religious practices of the first Polynesian voyagers to reach the archipelago. One way of reconstructing these intangible aspects of early Hawaiian societies is to use phylogenetic methods, borrowed from evolutionary biology and historical linguistics. For instance, the "triangulation method" applied by Patrick Kirch and Roger Green (1987, 2001) integrates post-contact ethnohistoric accounts, archaeological data, and linguistic reconstructions to build up a picture of “ancestral Polynesian society” (APS), the common substrate from which all Polynesian societies—from Tonga and Samoa in the west to Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the south and Hawai’i in the north—developed.
In their book *Hawaiki, Ancestral Polynesia* (2001), Kirch and Green distinguish several features of Polynesian theology that were present in APS, which they locate in western Polynesia: Tonga, Samoa, and several smaller island groups. *Mana* (generative power), and a distinction between *tapu* and *noa* (roughly speaking, sacred and profane) were already important structuring concepts and accompanied Polynesians as they radiated out from this homeland to settle archipelagoes like the Society Islands, Cook Islands, the Marquesas, and later Hawai‘i (Kirch and Green 2001: 239–41). Linguistic and ethnohistoric studies also point to the antiquity of ancestor veneration among Polynesian societies. In APS, claim Kirch and Green (244–45), ancestors (*tupunga*) were the source of growth and of the *mana* that is “essential for life itself” (see also Fox 1996).

Other concepts are attested only for central and eastern Polynesian societies. While the anthropomorphic deity *Taangaloa* was already being worshipped in APS, three other major gods, *Taane*, *Tuu* and *Rongo*, came later, after the expansion to central and eastern Polynesia beginning around 1000 CE (Kirch and Green 2001: 242; Wilmshurst et al. 2011). This marked a “fundamental change in Polynesian theology” according to Kirch and Green (2001: 275). The formation of a class of ritual specialists separate from the chiefly elites also likely dates to this Proto Central Eastern Polynesian (PCE) stage (275).

The first settlers of the Hawaiian Islands came from central-eastern Polynesia, very probably the Marquesas, after c. 1000 CE (Allen 2014; Athens et al. 2014), and so would have brought these concepts and religious institutions with them. However, still other facets of religion appear to be Hawaiian innovations, linked to the development of highly centralized political organization in the islands: a hierarchy of hereditary priests (*kahuna*), for instance, and the transformation of the *tapu/*noa distinction into the *kapu* system, a set of “protocols and prohibitions” of a complexity not seen anywhere else in the Pacific (Kirch 2010: 21; Kirch and Green 2001: 249).

Kirch and Green do not speculate in *Hawaiki* about the evolution of moralizing religion in Polynesian societies. On the basis of the evidence they present, it seems fair to say that the earliest Polynesians had ritual obligations towards their ancestors, who had to be supplicated in order to ensure the flow of *mana*. Maintaining good relations with ancestors through offerings and ritual observances remained vital in Hawai‘i alongside the worship of the higher-order gods (Valeri 1985: 30). As we discuss below, the most important ancestral deities, the ‘*aumakua*, had been transformed by late pre-contact times into enforcers of “moral law” (24). They were concerned not only with being nourished by offerings but also with their descendants’ adherence to a broader system of norms, which included both ritual and ethical obligations—a distinction between the two was not emic for the Hawaiians.

Phylogenetic analysis points to an expansion of the pantheon of anthropomorphic gods at the PCE stage to include *Taane*, *Tuu* and *Rongo*, and over the course of the evolution of complex chiefdoms and archaic states in the Hawaiian Islands, these gods (and the more ancient *Taangaloa*) gained dedicated priesthoods, temples and more elaborate rites in their honor (Kirch and Ruggles 2019: 19; Sahlins 1995: 256–63). It is difficult to be precise about the timing, or about how “moralizing” these gods were in the centuries after 1000 CE. What we can say is that Hawaiian religion of the earliest periods represented an intermediate stage between the concepts, deities and rites inherited from central-eastern Polynesia and the more intricate and formalized system in place by the late eighteenth century.

**Late Pre-Contact Hawai‘i**

*The following narrative refers to the late prehistoric period of Hawaii (Hawaii3 in Seshat), which starts in c.1580 when the Big Island was first unified within one polity, and ends in 1778 with the arrival of Cook’s*
expedition. Accounts set down shortly after European contact by explorers, missionaries, and Native Hawaiians have been used to shed light on Hawaiian religious beliefs and practices in this period.

Hawaiian families and individuals prayed to ancestral gods known as 'aumakua, deceased humans who had lost their individualized identities and names and now manifested themselves in the form of animals, plants and natural phenomena (Valeri 1985: 19–30). These gods "expected" their worshippers/descendants to "refrain from breaking the laws of the many gods, to observe and obey the kapua pronounced by the chiefs and kahuna and to be a helpful person and refrain from hurting his fellow men in any way" (Mitchell 1992, 77). 'Aumakua often took the form of dangerous animals such as sharks, thereby functioning as “representative[s] of moral law ... if sharks do not kill, it is because the ‘aumakua protect their living relatives; if they do kill, it is because these same ‘aumakua are punishing a moral transgression” (Valeri 1985: 24).

In addition to the 'aumakua, Hawaiians also worshipped a complex pantheon constituted by four major gods and hundreds of thousands of minor ones. By the time of European contact, the Central-Eastern Polynesian quartet of *Taangaloa, *Taane, *Tuu and *Rongo (called Kanaloa, Kāne, Kū, and Lono in the Hawaiian language) had risen to the rank of "state gods" and played an important role in legitimizing the authority of the chiefly class (Kirch and Ruggles 2019: 19). "It should be noted that the totality of deities is defined by the expression—often placed at the beginning of prayers (cf. Beckwith 1940, 82)—i kini o ke akua, ka lehu o ke akua, ka mano o ke akua, 'the 40,000 deities, the 400,000 deities, the 4,000 deities' (Emerson 1965, 21)" (in Valeri 1985, 14). There are many legends in which gods punish humans for impiety: for example, the one in which the shark god, Kauhuhu, almost eats the human protagonist for setting foot on the god's land (Westervelt 2012, 49-59). Moreover, the fact that, in their prayers, people would ask gods like Kane to grant them things such as wisdom and prosperity (e.g. Beckwith 1940, 57) suggests a belief that the gods could also reward piety by direct intervention in their worshippers’ lives. Conversely, there are legends in which gods punish people who violate the system of morality known as the kapu (Kirch, pers. comm.).

The kapu included the following prescriptions (Kamaku 1964 [1898], 72-76), which suggest that ancient Hawaiians championed virtues related to loyalty and personal integrity above all others:

4. Coveting the property of another has many aspects to it, a spying upon another, lying in ambush on his trail, plotting, treachery, deceit, trickery with the intent to murder secretly in order to get someone’s goods. All of these things come under the head of robbery and are of the nature of murder ("pepehi wale").

5. If one has determined to enrich at another’s expense the evil has many shapes. [...]  

6. If a man wishes to deal truthfully with another and afterwards finds that things have been misrepresented to him, there are many things involved in that. [...] 

10. There were all sins, clearly understood to be wrong[...].  

17. To act justly without trespassing or deceiving, not frequenting another's house, not gazing wistfully upon your neighbor's goods not begging for anything that belongs to him--that is the prudent course. 

18. The following actions were considered worthy of approbation: to live thriftily, not to be a vagabond, not to keep changing wives, not to be always shifting from one chief to another, not to run in debt.

Overall, however, it would appear that moral transgressions were mostly policed by human agents, specifically chiefs: "In contact-era Hawai'i, the legitimate use of force included not only the ability of kings to wage wars of territorial conquest, but also to exercise the right over life or death in the everyday affairs of the common people. This kind of continual threat no doubt was highly effective in maintaining ali'i control. The frequent references in the ethnohistoric sources to death as a penalty for breaking some kapu are striking. Failure to perform the prostrating kapu in the presence of a high-ranking ali'i, any number of violations against the person or property of the king of a chief, coughing or
uttering any noise during a religious service, and various other infractions were all punishable by death" (Kirch 2010, 69).

**Post-Contact Hawaii**

The *kapu* system was abolished in 1819. It was made clear that it would not be reinstated (after the period of ritually sanctioned "defilement" and free-eating following the death of Kamehameha I) when the regent queen Kaʻahūmanu ate with the young king, Liholiho, breaking the "eating taboo" that forbade men and women to dine together; the high priest of the war god Kū, Hewahewa, then set fire to the god images and their sanctuaries (Seaton 1974, 197). American Protestant missionaries arrived in 1820, and their influence is evident in edicts issued by various chiefs, but (Calvinist) Christianity was established as the state religion only in 1825, with the beginning of the reign of Kamehameha III (Fish Kashay 2008, 18, 33-35). See *World Religions: Christianity*.

**A Survey of Central-Eastern Polynesia**

According to the Glottolog classification, the Hawaiian language belongs to the Central-Eastern Polynesian branch of the Austronesian family. In this section we review what is known about MSP in other Polynesian cultures within this branch. The main question that motivates this section (and to which we return in the Summary), is whether this knowledge allows us to make inferences about MSP beliefs in Hawaii between the time when the archipelago was settled and the late prehistoric period (Hawaii1 and Hawaii2 according to Seshat classification).

**Maori**

*Afterlife:* According to Te Rangi Hiroa (1925, edited and republished by Sir Peter Buck in 1952), the Maori had no concept of punishment or reward in the afterlife:

> Rewards and punishments in a future state were not known to the Maori until after the coming of the white man. The Maori concept did not include the reward or punishment of the soul in the next world for what its body had done in this world. The Maori gods rewarded or punished in this world and were strangely apathetic to what occurred in the next. Thus death closed the account of the body, and the soul (wairua) entered the spirit land (reinga) with a clean sheet and without apprehension. As there were no just and unjust, there were no heaven and hell, and the one spirit land accommodated all. (p. 516)

Te Rangi Hiroa also suggests that this belief was widespread in Polynesia:

> In spite of variations and elaborations, the Polynesians and the Maori believed in the immortality of the soul and in a spirit land to which the souls of the dead went as their just right, without fear of being penalized for deeds committed in their life on earth. (p. 519)

Best (1924) confirms that the Maori did not believe in punishment or reward in the afterlife:

> Several writers have told us that the Maori concept of the lower spirit world is that of a hell; this is absolutely wrong. Never did he conceive any punishment of the soul in the spirit world. This erroneous statement seems to have been practically confined to the missionary type of writer. The “place of torment” of which the Rev. Mr. Yate told us had no place in Maori belief. Dr. Savage, who visited New Zealand in 1805, remarked that the natives have an idea of a variety of rewards and punishments in a future state! Inasmuch as this writer could not converse with the natives, and interpreters were not, he must have indulged his imagination to some extent. [...] Earle, who sojourned in New Zealand in 1827, did not so give play to his imagination, and so gives us a credible account of native belief on this subject. He wrote: "The natives had not
formed the slightest idea of there being a state of future punishment. They refuse to believe that the good spirit intends to make them miserable after their decease.' [...] (pp. 324-325)

This life: Te Rangi Hiroa writes that the Maori gods "rewarded or punished in this world" (p. 516), but elsewhere his text does not suggest that these rewards or punishments had any basis in morality. Instead, the gods punished those who failed to respect them, as we can see in the following quote:

Apart from classical distinctions, Tane's practical value to the people was his position as divine head of the department of forests and their products, timber for woodwork and birds for food. Before one of the tree children of Tane was felled for an important house or canoe, recognition of Tane's parenthood had to be made by some ritual chant or an offering. Non-recognition of Tane brought punishment in some form, such as obstruction to the work. [...] Fowlers hunting in the forests recognized Tane as the lord of birds, and the first bird killed was laid aside, with appropriate words, as an offering to Tane. After that they had Tane's tacit permission to go on catching for themselves. (p. 455; a few lines down, Te Rangi Hiroa equated Tane to the Hawaiian god Kane)

Alternatively, gods would punish transgressions of things that were tapu:

Theoretically, the atua kahukahu [family gods] defended the family honour by punishing those who transgressed against the various tapu restrictions of the family, whether wilfully or through ignorance. The spirits entered the body of the transgressor and produced the suffering and abnormal condition now known as disease. (p. 463)

Best (1924) provides the following definition of tapu, which suggests that transgressions against that which is tapu could also be classified as transgressions against the gods:

To put the matter briefly, it may be said that tapu means prohibition, a multiplication of "Thou shalt not." These may be termed the laws of the gods, and they must not be infringed. The penalty for neglect of these unspoken commands is the withdrawal of the protecting power of the gods. This left the erring one in parlous plight, for it meant that his active life principle was seriously affected, and nothing stood between the innumerable evil influences that are ever active, and his defenceless body. (p. 251)

Actions that were seen as violations of the tapu system included any act perceived as disrupting the hierarchy between men and women and between chiefs and commoners (e.g. a man and a woman sharing a meal, a commoner stealing a chief's possession), threatening the separation between death and life (e.g. trespassing onto a place where a person had died), or insulting the gods (e.g. trespassing onto a place a worship). Overall, these and other actions listed by Best (1924, pp. 252-259) suggest a greater concern over purity and pollution, and for respect toward the gods, than for moral behavior between humans.

Rarotonga

The following quote from a missionary that Gill includes in his 1856 book should likely not be taken at face value: most likely, it is a Christian misinterpretation of beliefs surrounding the Rarotongan equivalent of the tapu system.

The people of Rarotonga, in their heathen state, had also conviction of sin. [...] They held that it was sin to profane the names, the representations, the word, and the habitations of the gods. They knew it was wrong to steal, to commit lewdness, to murder; they felt that these, and other wicked deeds, were followed by punishment here, and that they would be subjected to penalties hereafter.
Gill was himself a missionary, so it is unclear whether his own interpretations of Rarotongan rituals should be seen as valid. Overall, his writings suggest that the Rarotongans believed that supernatural entities could be coaxed into punishing one's enemies and rewarding oneself simply through offerings or the correct performance of specific rituals, regardless of one's enemies moral faults or one's own merit. For example, Gill (pp. 8-10, 18) describes Rarotongan women making offerings to the remains of their mother in order to achieve a good harvest, a "priest" using human remains as intermediaries to request that the gods give sickness or death to the priest's enemies, and various ceremonies performed in order to compel the gods into terminating an ongoing natural disaster such as a drought, floods, or an epidemic (the first by pouring water onto a skeleton, the second by setting fire to a skeleton, the third by performing human sacrifice).

Unfortunately, more recent sources do not devote much attention to MSP among the Rarotongans. However, the one passage we could find that explicitly deals with the matter seems to confirm that supernatural punishment had little to do with moral behaviour toward other people, except perhaps for respect for authority, though that could also be ascribed to the tapu system:

A decrease in mana was likely to be explained as the person having displeased the gods, or to interference by an evil deity, or ritual having been performed incorrectly, or a subordinate having failed to pay due respect to his chief, or some other standard of behaviour having not been met. [...] Conversely, increases in mana could be regarded as reward for exemplary adherence to the norms. (Gilson 1980: 12)

Overall, it seems reasonable to assume that more general observations on moralistic supernatural punishment in Polynesia as a whole (e.g. ones by Handy and Oliver, see below) likely also apply to pre-contact Rarotonga.

**Tahiti**

Tahiti appears to be another case where there was no moralistic punishment either on earth or in the afterlife.

The Tahitian gods were an unforgiving, fearsome lot unless properly propitiated and well fed, and even then they were capable of turning their backs. As an overriding force for social control, they were better than a thousand laws, since the punishment for infractions was not clearly defined in the supernatural world, and one could never be sure that the divine punishment would necessarily fit the earthly crime. (Ferdon 1981: 70)

Captain Bligh could find no belief in an afterlife, only in a state of nothingness. However, other Tahitians believed differently. [...] John Forster's queries in this regard brought forth the information that the soul left the body upon death but hovered about the corpse for some little time before taking up its permanent abode in one of the carved wooden statues erected in the places of burial. From here it must have sallied forth occasionally, since the afterlife was pictured as a happy one with sunny days where one feasted on breadfruit and even the meat required no cooking. Since upward social mobility was inconceivable for the living, why should it exist in the hereafter? The servant remained a servant, the chief a chief.

Another view pictured the spirit as a lively individual who, [...] upon death, [...] was purified and became one of the lesser deities. As such, it had to be propitiated by the living with prayers and offerings since, as an employee of the higher deity, it was known to watch over the living by curing their illnesses or inflicting punishment on those who deserved it. (Ferdon 1981: 174–75)
Cook Islands (Penrhyn)

It seems that the gods mostly intervened in human lives based on requests and offerings from their worshippers:

Though the priests controlled the means of approach to the gods on the more important occasions, there were times when a small group, or an individual, had to deal directly with the unseen powers without awaiting the mediation of a priest. For such occasions certain incantations had been composed, and it was a part of the general education to learn the correct observances with regard to the particular gods, and to commit the appropriate incantations to memory. The incantation, having been established as the correct approach, had mana (favor) in itself to obtain the desired end, in that its recitation acknowledged the authority of the god, and by pleasing him, inclined him to regard his devotee with favor. […] The ceremonial pattern here contains three elements, the incantation, the offering of a share of the catch, and a set posture while repeating the ritual. On some occasions there was the additional element of marking the fish. The significance of the laying aside of a portion of fish for the god may be interpreted through comparison with the psychological attitude toward the giving of presents in social life. Hospitality was based on reciprocity, and giving was followed in due time by receiving. After the giving of a share of fish to the god, the god would be expected to reciprocate by making future fishing operations successful. Also, the gods were angered by obvious neglect, and the failure to render a share of the fish would cause the god to render future fishing operations fruitless, and might even precipitate disaster and misfortune in other undertakings. (Buck 1932: 88)

Tuamotu

Of the three sources listed in the supplementary material to Watts et al., two don’t mention divine punishment or reward. (Need to chase down the third source)

Marquesas

Afterlife: Among the Marquesans, one's fate in the afterlife had more to do with the quality and quantity of offerings received from the living than anything else. Presumably this reflected one's status in life.

The Marquesans believed there were below the earth three regions. In the lowest, that to which those who had many pigs offered attained, life was good with an abundance of excellent food and lovely women. Above this was a world of mediocre sort where there was an amplitude of good things, but not luxury. Still above this, next the earth, as a realm haunted by demons, where there were only disgusting foods that were brought down from earth by evil spirits. Souls that had only one pig's head offered to them could not penetrate beyond this unpleasant region. But there was also, in addition to these three nether worlds, another region that is not definitely located, to which were consigned souls that had had nothing offered for them at all, a disgusting hell in which these abandoned souls lay sunk in mire until someone came to their rescue and offered a pig for them (77, p. 251). (Handy 1971 [1927]: 75)

This life: As elsewhere in Polynesia, one could be punished for transgression of the tapu system.

In the Marquesas, tapu meant primarily restricted or forbidden because sacred, not to be profaned, and secondly, defiled, spiritually dangerous. Tapu had as its fundamental meaning, sacred; thus, a first-born's head was tapu. The secondary meaning applied to rules to protect sacredness: thus, a woman's menstrual cloth was not tapu, but it was tapu to touch it. (Handy 1923: 257)
The punishment for the breaking of tapu was supposed to be sickness, or sudden death in some such manner as by drowning, or by being eaten by sharks. Leprosy was caused by the breaking of the tapu relating to defilement. Deep ulcers (puku) were supposed to result from eating the fish sacred to the priests and the gods. It was also thought that the breaking of tapu established by the tribal priest was punished by curses directed by the priest. An insult to personal tapu was punished directly by physical violence, or indirectly through witchcraft. (Handy 1923: 263)

Violations against the tapu system included women’s transgressions against men, commoners’ transgressions in relation to chiefs and priests and their possessions and everything else associated with them, any transgressions in relation to heads (including those of women), certain colours on certain islands, the portion of fruit or fish that should be given to the gods, certain games (in that they could not be played by women), certain activities and foods depending on the season, anything a priest had declared tapu, anything to do with death, and so on. Overall, it seems that transgressions against the tapu system had more to do with a concern for maintaining boundaries between the pure and the impure than morality—though it’s worth noting that sources like Handy don’t use either “purity” or “impurity” (Handy 1923: 257-263). Some forms of antisocial behavior (most notably, theft and murder) were also seen as violations against the tapu system, but these were often punished by human rather than supernatural agents:

For murder, theft, insult, or other personal offense within a tribe, the recourse was personal or family retaliation by open force or by supernatural means. Murder and other offenses on the part of other tribes were, if sufficiently serious, avenged by the tribe as a whole. All evidence indicates that stealing within a tribe was very rare and that killing was more so. Stealing was so frowned upon by public opinion that a father would disown a son who did it. Theft was usually punished by supernatural means but sometimes by death. Most of the murders that occurred within a tribe had as their motive sexual jealousy. A chief enforced his authority by supernatural means or by having the offenders killed by his war leaders (toa). The executive tuhuna functioned as guardians of the chief’s rights, — several of the stories collected illustrate this, — but the protection of property was generally by supernatural means through a spell or by making the property tapu in one way or another, such as by giving it a sacred name. (Handy 1971 [1927]: 56-57)

The following quote suggests that the chiefly classes had a different relationship to supernatural entities compared to commoners, but either way there was no sense of MSP: for chiefs, one could earn the favour of at least some supernatural entities via offerings and prayer, while commoners believed at least some supernatural entities to be highly dangerous and overall best avoided.

Among the upper classes the souls of the deceased became atua ["gods"] who spoke to them through tau’a and could be placated by rituals, offerings, and prayers. For the lower classes these same souls were perceived as implacable spirits, and thus best avoided. (Ferdon 1993: 50)

It is also worth noting that in the case of something like thieving, rather than the thief being automatically punished for their actions by supernatural entities, supernatural entities must be prompted by the thief’s victims in order for the thief to receive punishment. Even then, it’s not clear that the supernatural entities “understand” that they are punishing someone specifically for thieving—it seems that they may have been simply “activated” and made more likely than normal to attack the presumed thief.

Suspecting a particular person of having committed a robbery, the victim would give people’s names to the presumed culprit’s breadfruit trees, pigs, and other possessions. These then
became bewitched by the spirits of the named individuals and could never again be used by the presumed thief. (Ferdon 1993: 50)

**Polynesia in General**

A look at sources that specifically discuss commonalities between Polynesian belief systems generally, Handy (1927) and Oliver (2002) don’t appear to have much to say about MSP during life, suggesting again that it did not form an important part of Polynesian belief systems. Both confirm that as a concept MSP was universally excluded from ideas of the afterlife; any known examples of differentiation in the fates of "souls" in the afterlife had more to do with status than anything else.

As a generalization, it may be said that the souls of those without superior mana, exhibited in worldly distinction of some kind were destined to dwell after life on earth in the lower regions, while souls with mana, those who were distinguished by divine descent, or by sacred or notable attainment of some kind in this life, such as priesthood, wealth, prowess in war, or distinction in craft, were destined ultimately to attain some sort of heavenly or earthly paradise. (Handy 27, 76)

[...] among many if not most Polynesian peoples a human's conduct toward other humans had less effect upon his fate in the afterlife than did his conduct toward gods. (Oliver 2002, 177)

**Robert Hommon’s Notes on Moralizing Religion in Traditional Hawai`i**

These notes, expanding on the preceding material in this chapter, propose an answer to the question “Did a moralizing religion exist in traditional Hawai`i?” According to the definitions in the *Introduction*, the term ‘moralizing religion’ refers to “clusters of beliefs and practices postulating a system of supernatural punishment and reward for morally salient behavior in human interactions.” They observe that “[w]hat most of the cultural evolution theories of moralizing religion have in common is the idea that belief in supernatural punishment motivates prosociality (i.e. behavior that benefits others) in ways that contribute to the flourishing of complex societies” (Turchin et al. 2019:2)

The answer to the question proposed here is that a moralizing religion did exist in traditional Hawai`i, though not in the elaborate worship of the great gods in major temples by kings, high ranked chiefs, and priests, but rather in the daily worship of *`aumākua*, deified ancestors, by individuals and families at small local shrines and altars.

**The Hawai`i Island Primary State**

Primary states, polities that attained statehood spontaneously, uninfluenced by pre-existing states, were the ultimate ancestors of all other state societies, past and present. It is widely recognized that primary states emerged between about 2,000 and 6,000 years ago in six regions: Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Indus Valley, China, Mesoamerica, and Andean South America. Polynesia, with primary states that emerged more recently in Hawai`i and Tonga, is the seventh such region. Three competing Hawaiian primary states had emerged by about AD 1720. Unlike the archaeological record of the earliest pre- or proto-literate states in the other six regions, that of the Hawaiian primary states is complemented by a rich literature including a large body of oral historical narratives preserved in written form; long multi-island genealogies; public records of the nineteenth century Hawaiian monarchy; and numerous accounts by fully-literate eyewitness, both native and foreign (Hommon 2013).

The Hawaiian Islands were colonized around the eleventh century by voyagers sailing more than 3,500 km from islands in Eastern Polynesia. At the time of Hawai`i’s first contact with the non-Polynesian world in 1778-1779 during Captain Cook’s third voyage, the largest and most powerful of its
The Hawai`i Island Kingdom, consisting of eight traditional districts, including two on the island of Maui that had been annexed by conquest. I estimate the population of this 11,000 km² kingdom to have been roughly 260,000. King Kalani`ōpu`u, who ruled as both head of state and head of government at the time, delegated power to a multi-level stratified bureaucracy through which he exercised what was generally recognized as his legitimate power to collect taxes, maintain order, declare wars, and direct public works projects (Hommon 2013).

The Hawai`i Island state encompassed about 450 named local communities known as ahupua`a or `āina. The Hawaiian population was divided into two sharply defined socioeconomic classes. Commoners (maka`āinana), the great majority of the population, cultivated crops, caught and collected virtually all seafood, and produced nearly all manufactured necessities and prestige goods (Malo 1951:60-61).

Commoners were forbidden to trace ancestry beyond two ascending generations (Kamakau 1992:242). In contrast, chiefs (ali`i), who comprised probably one to two percent of the population, claimed membership in the aristocratic class by tracing genealogical connections to chiefly ancestors within ten generations. A chief’s ascribed rank depended primarily on his or her genealogical distance from a senior line of firstborns. A chief’s position in the political hierarchy tended to parallel kinship seniority so that rulers were usually one of the top four ranks and chiefs of local ahupua`a communities were of low ranks “As kings, priests, governors, war leaders, landlords, and bureaucrats, chiefs occupied virtually every administrative position of political, military, economic, and ritual power in ancient Hawai`i” (Hommon 2013:17). The term “kahuna” applied to specialists including commoners skilled in various crafts and priests (kāhuna pule) of either class.

According to Malo (1951:53), a king’s duties in the government were to gather the people together in time of war, to decide all important questions of state, and questions touching on the life and death of the common people as well as of the chief and his comrades. It was his to look after the soldiery. To him belonged the property derived from the yearly taxes, and he was the one who had the power to dispossess commoners and chiefs from their lands. It was his to assess the taxes both on commoner and on chiefs and to impose penalties in case the land tax was not paid. It was his duty to consecrate the temples, to oversee the performance of religious rites in the temples of human sacrifice . . . that is, in the luakini, to preside over the celebration of the Makahiki festival, and such other ceremonies as he might be pleased to appoint. From these things will be apparent the supremacy of the king over the people and chiefs. The soldiery were a factor that added to the king’s pre-eminence.

Hawaiian Religion: Sources
David Malo, cited above, is one of three Hawaiian scholars whose contributions to Hawaiian culture, society, and history are key to the following discussion. Malo (c. 1793-1853) was the author, in 1838, of Hawaiian Antiquities (Mo`olelo Hawai`i), two editions of which are cited here (1951, 1996).

In the 1860s Samuel Mānaikakalani Kamakau (1815-1876) published numerous articles in Hawaiian newspapers which have been translated and collected in several books, including Ka Po`e Kahiko: The People of Old (1964).

Mary Kawena Pukui (1895-1986) was the author or co-author of many volumes including The Polynesian Family System in Ka-`u (1972), Nānā i ke Kumu: Look to the Source (1972), and several editions of the Hawaiian Dictionary (1973, 1986).

Mana, Kapu, and Noa
As in other Polynesian societies, the status of the Hawaiian chiefly class was based on the quality called mana. The fundamental principle of traditional Hawaiian religion, “mana manifests the power of the
gods in the human world” (Shore 1989:164). The *mana* of chiefs was manifest in sexual potency and in the growth and abundance of the society’s crops and other food resources (Shore 1989:138–142). The chiefs’ intercession with the gods was believed to bring the blessings of agricultural abundance, internal order, and success in war. It was in recognition of the potency of chiefly power over both spiritual and earthly matters that commoners supplied the chiefs with material necessities and wealth. [Hommon 2013:19]

Intimately associated with *mana* were the concepts of *kapu* (*tapu* in various Polynesian languages, the source of “taboo” in English) and *noa*. Anthropologist Bradd Shore (1989:164) has defined *tapu* as “a state of contact with the divine” and *noa* as “the unbounded state of separation from the divine.” Anthropologist Valerio Valeri (1985a:90), however, views the pair as relative qualities, in that “persons or things that are closer to the divine are *kapu* to those that are less close to it.” While a low-ranked chief, for example, was *kapu* to a commoner, he was *noa* to a chief of superior rank. The term *kapu* can refer either to the “contained potency of some thing, place, or person” or, in a passive sense, to the state of being “forbidden or dangerous for someone who is *noa*.” In the first sense, it connotes sacredness and reverence, in the second, fear and danger (Shore 1989:144) [Hommon 2013:19]

**Great Gods**

While both commoners and chiefs worshipped major Polynesian gods (*akua*) and ancestral spirits (*aumākua*), as in other areas of life their participation in religious practices tended to vary along class lines. In general, high ranked chiefs presided over and high ranked priests performed infrequent, often regularly scheduled ceremonies in major temples (*heiau*) dedicated to major gods (*akua*) in behalf of the entire kingdom and its districts during eight months of the year, as well as various events of the four-month-long Makahiki festival. In contrast, while commoners occasionally observed major ceremonies and festival events, their ritual life probably tended to be centered primarily around the daily worship of *`aumākua* at small neighborhood shrines and altars.

Hawaiians worshipped many gods, poetically described by the phrase “*kini-akua, lehu-akua, mano-akua*,” meaning “forty thousand gods, four hundred thousand gods, four thousand gods” (Malo 1951:83). The four primary anthropomorphic gods, born of the primordial pair of earth (female) and sky (male), were Kū, Lono, Kāne, and Kanaloa (Kirch and Green 2001:243-244; Pukui et al. 1972:1:24). Each of these four were said to exist in any of *kino lau*, (“four hundred bodies”), including animals such as sharks and owls, as well as plants and stones (Handy and Pukui 1972:123; Valeri 1985b:10). Many of these forms were identified by the god’s name and a descriptive epithet. For example Hawai‘i Island’s god of war was known as Kū-kā‘ili-moku, literally “Kū Island-Snatcher,” and Lono-nui-ākea (Lono of the Vast Expanses) was one of the manifestations of the agricultural god Lono. Kāne was sometimes recognized as “the leading god among the great gods” (Beckwith 1970:42), and Kanaloa is probably the most ancient of the Polynesian gods (Kirch and Green 2001:242-243). However, according to Valeri (1985:109-111), as regards the religious and political significance of rituals and the temples (*heiau*) in which they were performed, the major gods were ranked, in order of most to least important, Kū, Lono, Kāne, and Kanaloa.

Hawaiians worshipped their gods and deified ancestors with prayers and sacrifices of food and other valuable items. They believed, as did other Polynesians, that supernatural beings demanded respect, responded to prayerful requests and consumed the shadow or essence of food offerings in the form of odor or smoke (Firth 1970:245-253; Pukui et al. 1972:10)

In behalf of the kingdom and its component districts, high ranked priests (*kāhuna pule*) belonging to two orders (*mo`o*) performed complex ceremonies in major temples that sometimes
continued for days without interruption (Malo 1951:175; Pukui and Elbert 1986:5). About 500 temples are known throughout the archipelago (Hommon 2013:90). Most of them appear to have served as heiau ho`oulua, or “temples for the increase of food crops” where priests of the Order of Lono performed ceremonies on behalf of prominent chiefs (Pukui and Elbert 1986:64).

About 99 of the heiau have been identified as luakini, temples where, at the command of the king, priests of the Kū Order performed ceremonies dedicated to a war god such as Hawai`i Island’s Kū-kā`ili-moku (Kolb and Dixon 2002:523–525). The dedication of a luakini, an act that constituted a declaration of war, required 13 ritual phases over a span of ten days that included the sacrifice of at least three humans (usually war captives or kapu violators), and the offering of and feasting on hundreds of pigs (Malo 1951:175).

Moralizing in Traditional Hawai`i

Moralizing in Hawai`i is here explored from three perspectives: right (pono) and wrong (hewa) behavior; the application of kapu by chiefs as a means of social control; and reward and punishment by the `aumakua.

According to Biccieri (2017:32), morality can be described as

- a code of conduct that guides behavior. Moral codes regulate the behaviors that a society considers to be most important, including behaviors that directly or indirectly affect others: rules against killing, causing pain, and deceiving are all examples of rules that prohibit causing direct or indirect harm.

Hewa and Pono. In any society moral codes are based on the identification of behaviors that are widely considered to be right and wrong. In Chapter 23 of Hawaiian Antiquities, entitled “Wrong and Right Conduct (Na Hewa Me No Pono)” Malo (1951:81-87)1 lists behaviors traditionally considered to be either hewa or pono. Depending on context, hewa is variously translated with terms such as “wrong,” “sin,” “evil,” and “finding fault,” while translations of pono include “right,” “worthy of approbation,” “virtuous,” and “commendable.” Behaviors considered hewa include slander, gossip, sarcasm, intimidation, and several forms of lying; those considered pono include acting as a responsible member of society skilled at farming, fishing, or craftwork (Malo 1951:72–76, 1996:42–44, 186–189; see also Pukui and Elbert 1986:67, 340–341). Though making no mention of mana, kapu, or noa, or of gods or spirits, the chapter suggests the range of behaviors that may have been seen to warrant punishment or reward, supernatural or otherwise.

Kapu as Social Control. Hawaiian chiefs routinely employed the popular belief in their divinely endowed power of kapu to enforce behavioral rules in several ways. Prescriptive rules required certain behaviors. For example, the kapu moe required that most chiefs as well as commoners lie prostrate in the presence of chiefs of the two most sacred ranks. Prescriptive rules prohibited certain behaviors such as touching a superior chief’s belongings. Most such rules were “permanent” in the sense that they were always in effect, as was the prohibition on women eating pork and most varieties of bananas. Some permanent rules varied seasonally as did the prohibition on fishing for aku (bonito) that alternated every six months with the prohibition on ōpelu (mackerel scad) fishing. Chiefs could also declare a “situational” rule pertaining to a specific activity for a limited time by, for example, temporarily forbidding commoners to swim or paddle out to a visiting European ship with goods to offer to the crew.

Violation of each of the permanent rules noted above were punishable by death (Hommon 2013:56, 134, 243; Malo 1951:29, 56-57, 189). Cioni (2019) is correct in observing that violations of the chiefs’ declared kapu “were primarily policed by human agents, rather than by supernatural agents.” It

1 Cited by Cioni (2019) as “Kamaku 1964 [1898], 72-76”
is interesting that journal entries by members of Captain Cook’s expedition within weeks of first contact with Hawaiians at Kealakekua Bay in 1779 suggest that scofflawry may have been common:

The Cook chronicles testify to two sorts of tabu transgressions by ordinary Hawaiian women. First, they ignored interdictions on the sea by swimming out to the ships at night while the tabu was on. Secondly, when women slept on board the ships, as on most nights, they did taste of forbidden fruits and pork, and in the company of men—the British seamen.” (Sahlins 1981:46-48).

Reward and Punishment by `Aumākua. Mary Kawena Pukui is a significant source for the following discussion of Hawaiian deified ancestors (`aumākua), and particularly for the proposal that punishments and rewards administered by `aumākua constitute evidence for the existence of a moralizing religion in traditional Hawai‘i. Though Pukui was born more than a century after Hawai‘i’s initial contact with the non-Polynesian world, she was educated in traditional Hawaiian practices and beliefs by her maternal grandmother in the Ka‘ū District of Hawai‘i Island (Pukui et al. 1972:viii). That `aumakua worship persisted in Ka‘ū into the 20th century is indicated by the fact that “Pukui memorized names of all her family `aumākua as part of her childhood education. She learned a total of 50 names! With so many `aumākua, the word `ao`ao was used to designate the spiritual ancestors on a specific side or branch of the family” (Pukui et al. 1972:36).

[Kū, Lono, Kāne, and Kanaloa] were distant, awesome deities, concerned with the mighty forces of land and sea, storm and calm, light of day and dark of night. As major gods, their help was invoked for major causes and great events. For the needs and solaces of daily life, Hawaiians called on their own personal ancestor gods, the `aumākua.” (Pukui et al. 1972:24)

Unlike the powerful gods of deep antiquity, the `aumākua were believed to be transformed human ancestors, some of whom had been known by their worshippers as still-living relatives. In contrast to the elaborate, government-sponsored ceremonies for the great gods in major temples, `aumākua worship consisted of relatively simple, often daily rituals performed by and for the benefit of local families and individual farmers, fishers and craftworkers. Aumākua were “personal gods, pili kino” of both chiefs and commoners (Kamakau 1964:55), but it seems likely that `aumākua worship was more significant in the religious lives of commoners, who, unlike chiefs, seldom if ever participated directly in prayers and offerings to the great gods in major temples.

“With one’s `aumakua, a human-to-spirit communication was possible. One spoke to an aumakua through ritual and with reverence, but without the almost paralyzing awe of the akuas or impersonal gods sometimes inspired. Therefore, an `aumakua could also be a ‘spiritual go between’ passing prayers to the akuas” (Pukui et al. 1972:35).

Though normally invisible and ever-present, `aumakua, like the great gods, were capable of appearing in kino lau, animal, vegetable, or mineral guises (Pukui et al. 1972:36).

Hawaiians believed that their `aumakua aided them in their tasks, as when a shark `aumakua brought fish to their canoe, protected them by warning of potential danger, or saved them when they were in trouble. (Pukui et al. 1972:37) “The `aumākua also had that most beguiling quality, a sense of fun. `Aumākua could also be capricious, mischievous and naughty” (Pukui et al. 1972:39).

Families and individual farmers, fishermen, and craft specialists (kāhuna), in each ahupua’a community worshipped `aumākua at a variety of small, relatively simple stone altars and shrines. Today, the most numerous identifiable ceremonial structures are fishing shrines (ko’a), small stone structures built along the shores of all islands, where local fishermen prayed and sacrificed a portion of each catch to the local `aumakua to ensure continued abundance.

The Mua was the men’s eating and lounging house, and their sanctuary. At one end was an altar (kuahu) dedicated to the family `aumakua whose effigies stood there. Here the head of the household
prayed and performed necessary rites sometimes without, sometimes with the aid of a kahuna pule [professional priest], when came time for the rites of the life cycle such as birth, cutting the foreskin, sickness and death. Here the family rites during the monthly days of kapu were performed. The common daily worship would seem to have consisted in offering a bit of food (hanai`ai) at the time of eating.” (Handy and Pukui 1972:95–96)

The following excerpts from sources by Kamakau and Pukui describe or imply instances of punishment and reward (underlined) by `aumākua

The Pohaku o Kane, the Stone of Kane was a place of refuge, a pu`uhonaa, for each family from generation to generation. It was not a heiau; it was a single stone monument (he wahi`eeoe pohaku ho `okahi), and a kuahu altar with ti and other greenery planted about. When trouble came upon a family for doing wrong against an `aumakua god, by being irreligious, or doing any of these defiling things, the cause for this trouble was shown to them by dreams, or visions, or through other signs sent by the god. It was pointed out to them what sacrifices to offer, and what gifts to present, to show their repentance for the wrong committed by the family. They were to go to the Pohaku o Kane, their pu`uhonua, where they were to make offerings to atone for their wrongdoing (mohai hala) and to pacify the god (mohai ho`olu`olu).” (Kamakau 1964:32).

The `aumakua makes its warnings, reprimands and guidance known in dreams, visions, physical manifestations, or just the nagging feeling that something was wrong.” (Pukui et al. 1972:38)

“Illness was often thought to be punishment sent from an offended `aumakua. Breaking the food kapus (taboos), bathing in pools that were kapu, violating the kapus of the menstrual period—all could bring reprimands, in the form of physical discomfort. So could behavior that impaired interpersonal relationships—greed, dishonesty, theft. Often these were ‘diagnostic clues.’ A swollen hand pained a thief until he made restitution.” (Pukui et al. 1972:38)

“[W]hen one man became an expert canoe maker and another an especially skilled fisherman, this was due partly to individual training. The training was superimposed on the mana (special power or talent) each had received from his `aumakua.” (Pukui et al. 1972:37)

For all their appealing, human-like qualities, the `aumākua remained figures of supreme authority. After death each mortal would know his `aumākua as implacable judge and jury. For the `aumākua had the power to punish or reward the released spirit, or even to send it back to the body. The true unfortunates were the spirits whose earthly existence was found unworthy. Explains Mrs. Pukui: “Those who in life had offended and did not try to correct the offense disgusted the `aumākua. The `aumākua would not bother with them [thus punishing by withholding contact]. These became `ao kuewa, homeless, hungry, wandering spirits, chasing moths and grasshoppers for food.” (Pukui et al. 1972:40)

In the ancient days, the `aumakua and the kumupa`a ancestral deities were havens of forgiveness (pu`u kalahala); they were healers; they counteracted (wehe) trouble. Death or suffering sent by another [sorcery] were as nothing to the `aumakua, and escape from these influences was called ‘life from the `aumakua,’ o ke ola ia a ka `aumakua.” Thus there were many lives saved by the `aumakua in the ancient days. The reward of right living was an `aumakua life’, the warding off of death from another…. (Kamakau 1964:28-29).

“Very different was the calling upon of the `aumakua (ho `aumakua ana) by ka po `e kahiko [the people of old] in the setting to rights of the punishments and troubles sent by the `aumakua to this or that family” (Kamakau 1964:60).

“It was kapu to even cross the smoke from a fire in which a cock or a kapu fish was cooking. If they did, they would get a ma `i ho opa `i (a chastising illness inflicted by the ancestral `aumakua).” (Kamakau 1964:87).
“The medical kahunas, *kahuna lapaʻau*, did not use real medicines in the ancient days. The illnesses they treated were those sent by the *akua* [`aumākua] to punish a man for doing evil, breaking oaths, and wrongdoing against consecrated things—eating the *akua*’s animal form, or a kapu plant or fish or wearing forbidden clothing—and all sorts of other errors. If the illness was a very serious one, one that a kahuna could not comprehend, and it was beyond the knowledge of the first kahuna who treated for it, then it was due to the `aumākua`. It was very difficult to dodge the “smoke” (*uahi*) of the `aumakua” (Kamakau 1964:95).

**Conclusion**

Available evidence appears to support a two-fold answer to the question of the existence of moralizing religion in traditional Hawaiʻi based primarily on whether behaviors were believed to be punished and rewarded supernaturally or by human agency. The government-sponsored worship of the great gods (*akua*) in major temples cannot be considered a moralizing religion given that punishments for violations of its norms were administered by or at the order of chiefs rather than by supernatural means.

In contrast, the worship of deified ancestors (`aumākua) by individuals and family groups in local communities meets the definition of a moralizing religion as it was based on the fundamental belief that both rewards and punishments were administered by these ancestors.

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Valeri, Valerio


Westervelt, William D.


**Summary**

There are clear moralizing elements in the late pre-contact Hawaiian religion. However, morality was not the primary focus of the chief Hawaiian deities, who cared more about correct rituals and sacrifices. Furthermore, it appears that prosocial prescriptions in the *kapu* system were of secondary concern compared to restrictions placed on women (e.g., separation of women and men at mealtimes, higher quality foods reserved for men) and commoners (looking at, touching the chiefs). Additionally, offenses against *kapu* were primarily policed by human agents, rather than supernatural agents. Finally, the idea of punishment or reward in the afterlife appears to be universally absent in Polynesia.

A very interesting question is how far back in the Hawai‘i history we can infer the presence of the MSP elements, limited as they were. Phylogenetic analyses have been used to reconstruct the religious beliefs and institutions that the first Hawaiian settlers brought with them. This heritage included ancestor veneration, important religious concepts *mana* and *kapu*, and four major
anthropomorphic gods cognate with the Ancestral Polynesian *Taangaloa and the Proto-Central Eastern Polynesian *Taane, *Tuu and *Rongo.

Our survey of Central-Eastern Polynesian cultures, closely related to Hawai‘i, however, found very little evidence for MSP. In Maori, Rarotonga, Tahiti, and Cook Islands gods punished violations of the tapu system, including acts perceived as disrupting the hierarchy between men and women or between chiefs and commoners, and failing to respect the gods, rather than for moral behavior between humans (note that in this volume our focus is on prosocial morality, as defined in Chapter 1). A partial exception to this pattern is the Marquesas, in which some forms of antisocial behavior (theft and murder) were also seen as violations against the tapu system. It is significant that Hawai‘i, almost certainly, were colonized from the Marquesas. Thus, it seems appropriate to propose that these very limited MSP elements were retained in Hawai‘i and indeed developed and institutionalized there to an extent not seen in related Polynesian societies.

**Literature**


**Micronesia**
NGA: Chuuk Islands
TBA

**Papua-New Guinea**
NGA: Oro-PNG
Contributors: Eva Brandl, Jill Levine, Harvey Whitehouse

**Orokaiva**
The *Orokaiva* are a Melanesian population located in Papua New Guinea. Their ethnonym is of colonial origin (Crocombe & Hogbin 1963: 1). Prior to the colonial period, the population now known as Orokaiva were divided into various autonomous ‘tribes’ speaking distinct but mutually intelligible dialects of a shared Papuan language (Latham & Beierle 2004). These ‘tribes’ cultivated roots and tubers such as taro, which formed their primary means of subsistence (ibid.). They supplemented swidden horticulture with foraging, fishing, hunting, and animal husbandry (ibid.). Pigs were the most important domestic animals and played a prominent role in symbolism and ritual (ibid.). Dogs and chickens were also raised (ibid.). The Orokaiva resided in compact villages made up of family huts built from bush poles, palm wood, and fronds (Dakeyne 1969: 10). In addition, villagers constructed men’s houses named *oro* or *arijo*, which housed unmarried boys and served ceremonial functions (Williams & Murray 1930: 70).

The Orokaiva spiritual world was populated by ‘demigods’ or culture heroes, ancestor spirits, and animistic beliefs. They conceived of the cosmos as divided into two realms: “the human world, comprising villages and gardens, and the wild world, *ariri*, the bush, where everything is dangerous and inimical to man, and where the ghosts (*sovai*) have their abode” (Schwimmer 1973: 140). These spirits did not resemble the omnipotent creators Gods of the Abrahamic religions. Spirits were not considered superior to humans: “So-called supernatural beings, like persons and things, are part of society. As such, they are also subordinated to the values that order society and their identity is determined in terms of relations” (Iteanu 1990: 37). Spirits were defined by their position in ritual exchanges, specifically their ability to butcher, eat, and distribute meat in culturally sanctioned ways (Iteanu 1990: 37). These ritual obligations helped to define relationships between participants, and impose distinctions between humans, animals, and spirits. Bloch (1992: 12) emphasizes that spirits are similar to humans and their spirits are “normally localised in the bush, more particularly in a village of the dead in a remote place”. It is thus not surprising that, following the arrival of Christian missionaries, Orokaiva were initially reluctant to accept claims about god’s omnipotence (Schwimmer 1969: 129).

Instead of being remote, mysterious entities, their own ‘demigods’—the most powerful ancestor spirits—had their abode in Mt Lamington, an active volcano believed to be the centre of the universe (Schwimmer 1973: 51). In mythical time, the mountain housed primordial humans (ibid.). Going near the crater was thought to anger the spirits that dwelled within, and the area was taboo.
These potent mythical ancestors were also the source of important social norms and moral conventions (Schwimmer 1973: 51). The myth of the man named Sumbiri and his wife who were punished by the mountain does evoke the idea of moralizing punishment, but localized to the mountain:

In three of the versions, the Mountain began to rise while Sumbiri (ignoring a taboo) slept with his wife. Several crags then formed on one of which the couple was lodged, unable to climb down. Separated from the world, they leapt into the crater that had formed between the crags. The fourth version, collected at Hohorita and belonging to the Sangara tribe, describes a fight between a pig (presumably the first pig ever hunted by man) and a large dog or dogs, during which the mountain began to change shape. Originally it was ‘one Mountain but now it became divided into parts so that there remained a number of peaks too steep to climb up or down.’ Pig and dog(s) disappeared into the hole that was formed; the man and woman found themselves separated on different crags and died of loneliness and despair (Schwimmer 1977).

This myth seems to emphasize localized punishment for violating sacred space. While Schwimmer collected these myths through ethnographic research in 1966-7, he believes that they precluded the eruption of the volcano in 1951 but does not make any conclusions about the influence of Christianity on these foundational myths.

In the indigenous cultural system, social institutions such as warfare, feasting, and gift exchange, were said to have come into being through the actions of primordial ancestors and other mythical figures (some of these myths and their implications for Orokaiva social philosophy are explored in Schwimmer 1973: 51-56). Mythology provided a template for (temporarily) overcoming internecine strife. For example, in mythical times, a fight broke out in a community preparing a feast (Schwimmer 1973: 52):

“As Ivi and Gasi quarreled with Ombota, the mother and father went down to Erehata creek, taking with them their entire small house, as it stood on its posts. They floated down that stream until it met the river Embara. [...] They stopped when they had reached a place called Sorovi-Ereremba. Meanwhile their sons, about to give the feast, inquired where their parents were but could not find them. When the battle (isoro) was over, Gasi and the oldest son, Havurure, went away to find their mother and father. Upon arriving at the place called Sorovi-Ereremba, they saw them where they had come to a stop. Their parents told them: ‘We are staying here but you must go back and feast.’ The sons then went back, but their mother and father stayed behind. At that time, their parents' words were as follows: ‘We are staying here. In bad times you will hear no speech from us but if times are good, and you intend to hold a feast, then listen to our speech.’ Thus they spoke.” (Schwimmer 1973: 53).

This tale establishes a set of customs related to feasting, such as the construction of ceremonial houses for the purpose of giving a feast (Schwimmer 1973: 53). The parents, or feast-givers, remove this ritual house from the festival after fighting breaks out. Accordingly, a “feast could be permitted only if perfect peace reigned among the guests. If the guests quarreled the demigod's spirit would at once depart and the feast would be ritually void or even calamitous” (Schwimmer 1973: 54).

Maintaining good relations with the dead was believed to sustain life among the living. Conversely, when angered, ancestors became dangerous and punished taboo violations: “The native goes in real fear of his dead relatives and in perpetual anxiety lest he should offend them and incur their displeasure” (Williams 1928: 58). Illness and misfortune were thought to befall those who dared enter a dead man’s gardens, but also those who failed to observe the offerings and other rituals meant to honour the dead (ibid.). When Mt Lamington erupted in 1951, many Orokaiva interpreted the event as punishment for breaches of taboo, such as the use of firearms near the volcano (the consequences of
the eruption are discussed in Schwimmer 1977). Others were convinced that the spirits of the mountain had punished the colonial powers for killing indigenous people (ibid.) The eruption was linked to Christianity as well: "A great deal of evidence supports Belshaw and Keesing in their suggestion that in 1951 the Orokaiva ascribed the eruption to the anger of the Christian God and thought they had brought this anger on themselves by various transgressions (Schwimmer 1977)."

Some accounts suggest that ancestors were also displeased about strife among their descendants. For example, when an Orokaiva community experienced a catastrophic crop failure in the 1970s, villagers assumed that conflicts and in-fighting among the residents had caused some spiritual force to punish them (Newton 1985: 93). While some suspected the work of a sorcerer, many attributed their misfortune to the Christian god and their own ancestors (ibid.).

Beneath the normal social order lurked archaic powers that were potent but also highly dangerous. These forces did not follow normal social rules and distinctions. They were activated in dramatic collective rituals like the jape (also known as embahi) ceremony of the initiation ritual, in which boys and girls re-entered the settlement after a period of seclusion. Adults assumed specific characters or personas on the occasion:

"On the day of the jape ceremony, the candidates are brought back into the village some time before dawn. They are immediately set upon by the different jape characters which attack them violently, each in its own specific way, while a flimsy hedge of elderly villagers do their best to protect them. If a candidate is killed, he does not receive a funeral and is immediately buried secretly in the bush. The characters do not just attack the children, however. They destroy at random everything that represents society, burning houses, killing domesticated animals, and uprooting palm trees. They set brother against brother, and sometimes have sexual intercourse with married women." (Iteanu 1990: 46).

The powerful but dangerous spiritual force at work in these ceremonies “temporarily extinguishes social relations and obliterates the distinction between subjects, objects and supernatural beings” (Iteanu 1990: 47). The attackers in the ceremony wear bird feathers and pig tusks and behave in a bird-like manner to represent ancestor spirits and the young initiates are likened to pigs being herded onto a butchering platform (Bloch 1992: 8). This ceremonial destruction of the normal social order was followed by another lengthy period of seclusion for the initiates (Iteanu 1990: 46). The community re-established ordinary social relations some years after these events by giving a big feast and exchange ceremony during which gifts were offered (Iteanu 1990: 47). Children ascended a ceremonial platform from which they emerged as complete social persons once pigs have been slaughtered and shared among the guests (Iteanu 1990: 48). This bizarrely antisocial behaviour exhibited by the spirits actually contributes in the longer run to the transformation of children into moral community members (Bloch 1996: 8). However, the logic behind the ceremony is very different from that of the moralising god or any kind of supernatural moral enforcement mechanism (Whitehouse 1996 discusses the embahi ceremony in terms of shared terror and solidarity).

On one level, Orokaiva society possessed a social order validated by ancestors and culture heroes who provided templates for correct ritual behaviour. Ancestor spirits and demigods might abandon ritual feasts if its hosting parties quarreled, with deleterious consequences for the living, thus incentivizing limited forms of cooperation. However, some collective rituals like the jape ceremony endorsed antisocial behaviour, including intra-group violence and other behaviours that would normally have been morally censured.

Much of the ethnographic research and writing on the Orokaiva was undertaken after the spread of Christianity to the region, which began in the 1890s. This adds another layer of complexity to our analysis. Popular movements (commonly classified as ‘cargo cults’) appeared in Melanesia in the
wake of colonization. These movements did possess some concept of supernatural agency, but inspired by both Christian missionary and traditional Orokaivan beliefs (Schwimmer 1973, 1969). For example, there is at least one documented example of crop failure among the Orokaiva being interpreted as a punishment by the Christian God (Newton 1985). As government ethnographer F.E. Williams wrote in his 1923-5 research on popular movements: “no little confusion now exists between the new and old (Williams 1928: 5)”. Indeed, Swanson (1960)’s dataset codes moralistic supernatural sanctions related to health as present based on Williams’ two monographs. The likely example used for Swanson’s coding is the example of Orokaiva shamans from different cults (Baigona men and Taro men) who worked with spirits to punish others:

The Baigona men were visited by the spirits of the dead, and had dealings with them particularly in that reptilian form which the dead frequently take in Orokaiva theory. It was only necessary for the Baigona man to look at or name his victim, and the spirit who was in league with him would in some hardly understood manner effect the damage. Similarly the Taro men could punish any who gave them offence by means of the spirit of the dead (or in some cases the spirit of the taro itself) by which they were possessed (Williams 1928: 208).

However, in our opinion, the examples given by Williams seem to be pertain more to personal revenge and conflict than violations of a code or taboo. There is also no mention of omnipresence and the examples are from a time period after the spread of Christianity.

Summary
There is very little here to suggest MSP. In addition, ...

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**Mesoamerica**

NGAs: Basin of Mexico, Valley of Oaxaca (need to split BoM, Oaxaca, and Maya into separate chapters)

Contributors: David Carballo (BoM), Enrico Cioni, Gary Feinman (Oaxaca), Gene Anderson (Maya)

**Basin of Mexico: Classic Period (250–900 CE)**

Despite a wealth of iconographic and archaeological data, particularly in the Classic Period, archaeologists have generally been reluctant to infer much about any beliefs in punishment or reward by supernatural agents the inhabitants of the Basin of Mexico might have entertained prior to the establishment of the Aztec Empire. This is partly due to the absence of writing systems, or, in the case of the Teotihuacan polity, the fact that the known writing system remains undeciphered and was used more sparsely than the contemporaneous Maya writing system in southern Mesoamerica (Helmke and Nielsen 2017, 130). Moreover, what little speculation exists in the literature is heavily influenced by what is known about more recent belief systems, particularly the official normative ideology of the Aztec Empire. Nevertheless, it is clear that certain core principles of later Aztec religion—including certain suites of deities, elements of the layout of sacred architecture, and types of rituals of termination and dedication—had their origins in the pre-Teotihuacan cultures of the Formative period and were further elaborated at Teotihuacan (Carballo 2016).

At Teotihuacan Headrick (2003) and Helmke and Nielsen (2017, 134) argue that warriors expected to be rewarded with an idyllic afterlife: this is based on the depiction, on ceramic incense burners likely intended for ceremonial use, of warrior bundles associated with "luxuriant plants and butterflies", which seemingly echoes the Mexica belief that men killed in battle or as war captives would spend part of their afterlife in an idyllic world, before being reincarnated into birds and butterflies (see below). Similarly, McKeever (1995) interprets a mural painting in Tepantitla, one of Teotihuacan's apartment complexes, as a depiction of a possible afterlife where the soul of the dead enjoy an idyllic landscape populated with birds and butterflies. The scene occurs underneath another one in which two Teotihuacano priests are dutifully making offerings to a water and/or fertility goddess, who is rendered much larger than either of them; this second scene is also framed by depictions of the Storm God hovering over the frolicking people and providing water for their agricultural fields.

Even if one ignores the apparent parallels between certain elements of Teotihuacan iconography and certain aspects of Mexica beliefs about the afterlife, it is likely that the warriors of Teotihuacan were closely associated with the Storm God, a direct predecessor to the Mexica deity
named Tlaloc. For example, warriors were frequently depicted bearing the Storm God's key attributes, such as "goggles" and fangs (Nielsen and Helmke 2017, 141) or had depictions of the deity on their shields. This suggests that one of Teotihuacan's major deities rewarded loyalty to the polity.

Finally, Helmke and Nielsen (2017: 135) speculate that the gods of Teotihuacan lacked "omnipresence" (which in their definition includes the quality of being "all-knowing", that is, omniscience) and were relatively limited in their power and influence compared to their Abrahamic counterpart(s), based on the observation that in "traditional Amerindian religions, both before and after the arrival of Europeans and even to this day, the divine is inherently a part of nature and as such can be seen as immanent and more local than omnipresent".

**Toltec Period (900–1168 CE)**

The earliest iconographic depictions of the deity named Tezcatlipoca date to the Toltec period (Wilkosz 2014: 21), and include relief carvings on the primary temple platform of the Toltec capital of Tula. Later, among the Aztecs, Tezcatlipoca was believed to be omniscient and omnipresent. According to Durán, as part of the Toxcatl festival, "wretches and sinners" were expected to confess their transgressions to Tezcatlipoca; those who did not show remorse or regret risked punishment from the god in the form of illness, poverty, or public outing of the crime and subsequent punishment (but not punishment in the afterlife). Durán's "wretches and sinners" included those guilty of theft, murder, and sexual transgressions (Wilkosz 2014: 72-75). Another Spanish source, Sahagún, writes that Tezcatlipoca inflicted paralysis, blindness, or "rottenness" on those who committed sexual transgressions such as adultery and premarital sex (Wilkosz 2014: 205). It is possible that the Toltecs already had similar beliefs about Tezcatlipoca, and/or about other gods, but no source could be found to confirm this.

**Aztec Period (1428–1521 CE)**

The dominant political group within the Aztec Empire, the Mexica, believed they had a direct, personal relationship with their gods. Gods rewarded those who offered them prayers, chants, offerings and sacrificial victims by providing them with "life and sustenance" (Olivier 2017, 581); conversely, famines, epidemics and agricultural catastrophes were seen as divine punishments that necessitated placatory ceremonies (López Lujan, 614). It was also possible to influence the gods' behavior (specifically, their intervention—or lack thereof—in the affairs of the living) through communication channels established through divinatory practices (Olivier 2012).

Different groups (e.g. entire peoples, entire place-based communities, entire professions, etc.) benefited from the protection of a patron deity. Even slaves could count in the protection of a major deity such as Tezcatlipoca: masters who failed to observe the customs dictated for Day 1 Death or Ce Miquitzli (that is, removing their slaves' collars and treating them with the greatest respect) were thought to be punished by Tezcatlipoca by having the roles of slave and master reversed (Olivier 2017, 580; Sahagún 1950–1982:4:34–35).

Overall, however, the sources do not suggest that the Mexica gods were particularly interested in policing the way humans behaved towards one another. The only exception to this appears to be Tezcatlipoca, an omniscient, omnipresent deity that punished murder, theft, and sexual transgressions, but during people's lifetime rather than in their afterlives—as detailed in the preceding section.

Overall, however, the sources do not suggest that the Mexica gods were particularly interested in policing the way humans behaved towards one another. Possible exceptions to this include Tezcatlipoca, who in certain sixteenth century texts is portrayed as an omniscient, omnipresent deity that punished murder, theft, and sexual transgressions, but during people's lifetime rather than in their afterlives—as detailed in the preceding section. Another could be the deity Quetzalcoatl, who in his
avatar as the wind (Ehecatl-Quetzalcoatl or Lord 9 Wind) was conceived of as omnipresent, if not omniscient (Florescano 2002? need to check).

Mexica religion has been interpreted as "fatalistic", because a person was assigned a specific destiny (tonalli) based on their date of birth, through a ceremony officiated by a priest specialised in calendrical divination, known as a tonalpouhque. However, it was common practice for families to postpone the ceremony (and therefore change the child's official date of birth) for children born on an unlucky day (Olivier 2017, 581).

Similarly, sources appear to offer contradictory information regarding Mexica beliefs in the afterlife, such that León-Portilla (1982, 127) argued that the Mexica believed that one's fate in the afterlife was primarily determined by the nature of one's death, not one's moral conduct, while López Austin (1988, 338) argued that they believed both that the nature of one's death could be a punishment or reward for one's moral conduct, and that a person who had cultivated the virtues of valour, purity and devotion was more likely to find reward in the afterlife. However, Baquedano (2011) points to the ethnographic writings of Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún (1500-1590) as suggestive that both interpretations contain an element of truth.

Sahagún describes four possible destinations for the Mexica dead.

- Those who died a natural death (including those who died of illness) and were subsequently cremated ended up in Mictlan (according to some accounts, this was believed to be the case for both rulers and commoners, while other accounts suggest that rulers would not enter Mictlan by virtue of their superiority). Mictlan was believed to be miserable and cold, a place of "much suffering" (Sahagún 1950-1982: 3, 42). After four years, these dead finally met eternal rest.

- Those who died in a way that suggested the personal intervention of the god Tlaloc (drowning, lightning, hemorrhoids, dropsy, or gout) and were subsequently buried ended up in Tlalocan, where they would find "great wealth, [...] great riches. Never did one suffer. Never did the ears of green maize, the gourds, the squash blossoms, the heads of amaranth, the green chilis, the tomatoes, the green beans, the cempoalxochitl, fail" (Sahagún 1950-1982: 3, 47). After four years, these dead found their way back to the world of the living through reincarnation, but with no memory of their experience of Tlalocan.

- Men who died in battle, captives who were killed by their captors, sacrificial victims, and women who died either while pregnant or as a consequence of giving birth all ended up in Tonatiuh Ilhuicac, the dwelling of the sun and "a place of wealth, a place of joy" (Sahagún 1950-1982: 3, 49). After four years, these souls returned to the world of the living in the form of winged creatures (e.g. birds, butterflies). Graulich (1982, 264) also suggests that the souls of priests tasked with sacrificial killing were also granted access to this place.

- According to the Codex Vaticanus A (Sahagún 1950-1982: 6, 96), children who died before learning to speak went to Chichihuacuauhco, where the souls of these children found a tree whose branches had breasts that would nurture them.

Baquedano (2011) argues that this system encouraged Mexica citizens to pursue morally superior endeavours such as fighting, giving birth to the next generation, and offering themselves to the gods. Of these endeavours, the first two in particular suggest that the Mexica and their gods valued loyalty to the polity above other moral virtues.

**Early and Middle Formative Oaxaca (1400—500 BCE)**

Early archaeological evidence for ritual in the Valley of Oaxaca has been interpreted as indicating a preoccupation with communicating with the ancestors. During the Tierras Largas (1400–1150 BCE) and
early San José (1150–850 BCE) phases, there is evidence for rituals through which men contacted and/or worshipped ancestors, possibly via bloodletting and use of hallucinogenic substances, and rituals through which women contacted recent ancestors, possibly via divination practices and the manipulation of figurines. This, at least, is how Marcus (1999) interprets the available data, based on more recent ethnohistoric observations, as well as evidence for apparently similar rituals practiced in northern China at a similar time (1200–1000 BCE). It is possible, of course, that ancient Oaxacans performed these rituals in order to persuade the dead to intervene in the lives of mortals in a positive or negative way, perhaps even to reward or punish certain behaviors. However, neither Marcus nor any other sources suggest that this was the case, or that there is any evidence to suggest that this may have been the case.

Similarly, it is likely that, by at least 700 BCE, in-group loyalty and/or respect for authority had become important ethical values in ancient Oaxaca, judging, respectively, from large-scale construction projects (Joyce 2009:116-117 and differential treatment of bodies at death (Marcus 1999). However, there appears to be no clear evidence that the Oaxacans believed supernatural agents (be they gods, ancestors, or anything else) rewarded these behaviors or punished their opposite. Much the same can be said for later centuries.

There is some indication that social segments, possibly based on descent, were present in the Valley of Oaxaca at this time. At San José Mogote and several other excavated settlements, carved ceramics depict two distinct symbolic entities, one stylistically representing lightning or sky (the fire-serpent) and the other earth (portrayed as earthquake) (Blanton et al. 1999:38; Flannery and Marcus 1994:136–139; Marcus 1989). This pottery may refer to male descent groups as only males are buried with the carved imagery. These decorated vessels may symbolize spatially distinct social segments as some whole communities are associated with other of the symbolic elements or the other. At San José Mogote, the largest site at this time, the community was partitioned into two areas, one sky and the other earth (Pyne 1976). These social segments were integrated into a larger cooperative arrangement.

Late Formative and Classic Oaxaca (500 BCE–900 CE)

The Main Plaza at the site of Monte Albán was the setting for large-scale public rituals involving a blending of traditional activities such as autosacrificial bloodletting, ancestor veneration, divination, and ritual feasting with practices like human sacrifice, which "were particularly significant in contacting deities and ancestors, reenacting the cosmic creation and the sacred covenant, and renewing the world" (Joyce 2009: 139). Again, sources do not speculate on the possibility of MSP-related beliefs among ancient Oaxacans. However, it does seem reasonable to infer, from reconstructions such as Joyce's, that Oaxacan supernatural agents who were capable of intervening in the lives of their worshippers were likely believed to be motivated not so much by the moral quality of their worshippers' behavior towards other humans, but by the quality of their offerings to their gods.

On ceramic artifacts, Cocijo, a supernatural associated with lightning and rain, symbolically dominates across the region following the foundation of Monte Albán, continuing until the fall of that central settlement. Ritual activities associated with Cocijo focus on the integration of social/community segments, including processions, and ancestor veneration (Marcus 1983). Processional rituals and food sharing activities that integrated social segments across a community are evidenced at Lambityeco (Middle Classic period), a secondary center under Monte Albán (Feinman and Nicholas 2019). During the period when Monte Albán was the regional capital, integrative ritual activities as opposed to more divisive, punishment-focused ones predominated.
Post-Classic Oaxaca (900–1520 CE)
Communication with supernatural agents remained central to Oaxacan ritual practices in the Post-Classic. This is suggested by the placement of offerings in Classic-period tombs, as well as by the nature of these offerings, all of which were traditionally associated with death, sacrifice, and ancestors: small ceramic vessels, incense burners, figurines, and obsidian blades (Joyce 2009: 251-252).

Later Post-Classic beliefs may be partly (and speculatively) reconstructed based on the ethnohistoric observations of Zapotec rituals on the part of Spanish sources in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Lind 2015). According to these sources, the Zapotecs believed in multiple deities, foremost among them a "supreme universal god" named Bezelao, or Lord 13 Flower (Pohl 2003:201-206). Unfortunately, the Spanish sources do not indicate whether these beings were thought to be omniscient, omnipresent, or omnipotent.

Spanish sources also do not suggest that the Zapotecs believed in MSP. Judging from their accounts, the Zapotecs thought that supernatural agents were responsible for misfortunes, and that when these occurred the relevant supernatural agents must be placated through ritual (Lind 2015: 346-347), but the Spanish sources do not suggest that the Zapotecs believed that supernaturals specifically caused misfortunes to punish moral transgressions. Spanish sources do describe an annual ceremony that involved the confession of transgressions committed over a year, followed by autosacrificial bloodletting and the offering of valuable items to a deity that was then expected to absolve worshippers of their transgressions (Lind 2015, 344). However, the nature of these transgressions and the deity's identity both remain unclear, and the fact that the ritual also involved offerings suggests that these were sufficient to secure the gods' benevolence.

Classic Maya Religion
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We know a great deal about classic Maya religion from several sources. By far the most important are the countless great Maya cities surviving in Mexico and Central America, with their superb art, enormous pyramids and palaces, and copious inscriptions. Since the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphs about 50 years ago, we can read more and more of these, and find that—as in other traditional cultures—many were about religion. Other sources include post-contact materials. Bishop Diego de Landa, after persecuting Maya religion and religious people so savagely that the Spanish government censured him, wrote a book explaining the religion. Maya learned to write in Latin characters and wrote several manuscripts about rituals and calendrics, as well as short histories and a collection of songs. An amazing survival is the Popul Vuh, the sacred origin myth of the Maya, as recorded by some nameless but brilliant Quiché Maya writer or writers not long after the Conquest. The authors had not only learned Latin characters, they had learned enough to create one of the most gripping and beautifully constructed religious texts surviving from Indigenous America (Christenson 2005).

Finally, Maya religion survives robustly, now fused inextricably with both Catholic and Protestant Christianity. Almost all Maya are Christian, but they retain varying amounts of pre-Christian beliefs. A great deal of what used to be called syncretism has taken place, including identifying Christian figures with pre-Columbian Maya gods. Most important is the continuance of some attributes of the Maize God, probably the most important Maya deity, with Jesus; both are called “handsome lord” (kichkelem yum) in Yucatec Maya. It helped that the maize plant was often shown in pre-Columbian religious art as a cross, bearing leaves and ears. The identification was probably clinched when the Maya learned of Jesus’ words: “except a corn of wheat fall to the ground and die, it abideth alone: but
if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). Of course, this was exactly the Maya idea of the Maize God.

A large number of gods are known from old sources. We are not clear on how many. More keep turning up, and some images that we thought were different gods turn out to be different icons of the same one. Many are named in the hieroglyphic texts. The Popul Vuh tells the story of two sets of hero-twins and their adventures slaying demons and establishing the world; this is a version of an origin myth known from the Hopi in Arizona far down into Central America. The Maize God, a handsome young man (as the Maya name indicates), is probably the most universal. He is the Maya avatar of a widespread figure; the Maize God traveled with the crop itself, and was known from the American southwest down into Central America. Another god known from all sources to have been important was Siip, the deer god, who probably protected game from overhunting. A tree named for him, sipcheté (Siip’s tree), is still important in rituals, including skin washes for curing purposes. It turns out to be strongly antiseptic the curing action we now ascribe to chemicals in the leaves was ascribed by the Maya to the power of Siip. Also known was the wind god, Ehecatl in Nahuatl (the Aztec language), probably some compound of ik’ “wind” in Maya. Also popular was Ixchel, the goddess of the moon, weaving, and suicide. In spite of the last part of her role, she was generally liked, but several other gods were associated with death, decay, and the expected end of the world. All the gods were rather fluid, possibly aspects of a generalized k’uj, divine power (Vail 2000). (See Miller and Taube 1993 and Sharer and Traxler 2005 for full accounts of gods.)

Death was a chief concern, as in all religions. Fear of it is evident in the art, and presumably much attempt was made to avoid it.

Pre-Columbian Maya practiced many long and complex rituals. Reading the hieroglyphic texts has allowed us to learn that these had to do with war, calendrics, agriculture, and general well-being, and that there was a clear connection with today in that the rituals were expected to get the natural and spiritual powers to cooperate rather than hindering. Above all, maintaining the cosmos on its appointed rounds, with periodic world renewal as cycles turn, was a basic concern (Christenson 2016; Houston 2014). Rain and other seasonal goods were particularly important. Success in war was a constant concern, and many rituals had to be carried out for that to occur. Human sacrifice to keep the cosmos on its appointed rounds was practiced, but not on anything remotely close to the scale of central Mexico. On the other hand, self-torture with bloodshed by piercing tongue and penis with sharp spines was necessary to keep the cosmos functioning, and kings and queens did this apparently in public, since sculptures of it are found. Piercing involved stingray spines, obsidian blades, and other sharp media. Bloodletters apparently had visions of cosmic serpents (the Vision Snake) and other things, possibly because of ingesting drugs to deaden or distract from the pain, possibly just from the pain itself. Use of mind-altering drugs in Maya religion is controversial. No one is sure whether, or how much, psychotropic drug use went on. This contrasts with central Mexico, where abundant evidence for it exists.

Many of the post-contact Maya books are highly apocalyptic, speaking of past and future plagues and disasters and the potential end of the world. These apocalyptic beliefs are still alive, especially among older, more traditional people (Sullivan 1989; I have heard many such stories too). These are associated with a legendary priest, Chilam Balam, and are thus called the books of Chilam Balam, but they are a diverse collection of manuscripts held by particular towns and written over the space of a couple of centuries (see e.g. Barrera V. and Rendon 1948; Bricker and Miram 2002).

Other features of Maya religion are local variants of widespread images. Some even recall the mystical archetypes of Carl Jung. The sacred Flower Mountain (Taube 1994), central to the ancient Maya worldview, was covered with lush vegetation among which were beautiful birds, and in it was a cave with tooth-like stalactites. This cave probably held water. Maya caves even today are visited for
the “virgin water” in them, which is ritually important. Like the Maize God and the hero twins, the Flower Mountain image extends from the American Southwest onward, and blends at all it borders with more general mountain cults; every Native American group that lives in mountainous country has some form of reverence for high mountains.

Representations of the Maize God and the Flower Mountain go back to the very earliest Maya cities, being found in murals at San Bartolo from ca 300 BCE (Saturno et al. 2005). The representations changed remarkably little in the next thousand years.

The Maya everywhere still revere sacred mountains, such as the peak of Huitztepec above San Cristobal de Las Casas in Chiapas. Its name is a Nahuatl creation, fusing Maya wits “mountain” with Nahuatl tepec meaning the same. The pyramids of the Maya lowlands are created to imitate, and indeed to be, sacred mountains. They were built high enough to be visible from at least one other pyramid. For the highland Maya groups, local mountains are all-important in worship and ritual. All Maya groups that practice much traditional religion have a special reverence for caves and cavelike openings into the underworld. The relationships of skyworld, this world, and underworld remain of concern to all groups, though differently conceived among the 20 or so surviving Maya ethnic divisions.

The Maya had the story of the plumed serpent, K'uk'ulkaan (more famous as the Aztec Quetzalcoatl). They had high regard for birds, but some birds were ill-omened—not only owls and other night birds (feared almost everywhere on earth), but also visionary parrots, jays, and other powerful spirits in bird form. They could bring mental and physical illnesses. Some of this belief survived into the 20th century (Anderson and Medina Tzuc 2005; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934).

Among the most important of spirits in ancient Maya life, as well as modern Yucatec Maya life, are the rains. Chaak (or cha’ak) is the general word for a rainstorm, but it also means the gods that sent and were embodied in the storms. These were portrayed in ancient Maya art as rather stormy-faced deities with long snouts like the trunks of tapirs. No one knows why this image became established, but snouted chaak masks covered whole pyramid fronts, as at Kabah in Yucatan. The greatest ceremony in much of Yucatan today is the cha’ chaak, “Praying for Rain” (Anderson 2005; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934).

Constant forces were the winds. The Yucatec Maya word is ik’, with cognates in other Maya languages. Winds can be real ones that bring rain and cold and warmth, or they can be spirits. In general, spirit ik’ are insubstantial like real winds, but they can be or appear substantial and tangible, such as the demon opossum that appears to be an ordinary opossum but is a spirit that brings bad luck. (This bokol ooch is not known for the ancient Maya, but Redfield heard of it and Felix Medina Tzuc described it to me; he does not believe in its reality.)

The four cardinal directions and the center are ritually important, and are honored in ceremonies. Each has its color: red east (dawn sky), white north (fog and drizzle), black west (sunset and night), yellow south (sunlight), green/blue center (vegetation and water; the Maya color term yaax, “green,” extends to cover blue). Ritual dishes, colored accordingly, are arranged on altars for some ceremonies. At the center of the world, and at the actual center of many a traditional Maya town, is a well or spring or waterhole with a tree. For the Yucatec Maya, the tree is the ceiba (Ceiba pentandra), a widely-worshiped tree in tropical America, which is often—like the maize plant—represented by a cross. It is called yaaxche’, “green tree,” in Maya, indicating its importance as the most honored of trees. Several other trees have major religious significance, especially very common trees like the jabiiin (Piscidia piscipula) in the lowlands and the pines in the highlands. Branches of these trees adorn local altars.

Spirits protect fields and forests, and must be thanked and rewarded with ceremonies. The Yucatec words for such thanksgiving and favor-asking ceremonies are loj “thanksgiving” and janli.. “food
of…” with the name of the spirits to be fed: *janaal pixaan* “food of the souls” for All Souls Day, *janlikool* “food of the field” for the spirits of the farm, *janlik’aax* “food of the forest” for the *yumilk’aax*, “Lords of the Forest,” the spirits that guard that habitat. Other Maya groups have equivalent ceremonies, often specifically related to particular calendar dates (which is not the case for the Yucatec). Daykeepers—religious officiants who keep the calendars, days, and rituals in order—regulate ceremonies in much of the Guatemala highlands.

All these various beings and ceremonies go back to pre-Columbian times. Most are slowly dying out, as modern urban Christianity prevails, but the old ways prove astonishingly persistent. Maya ethnic nationalism are leading to local revivals, and even to some self-conscious intellectuals returning to their version of pre-contact Maya spirituality.

Morality in modern Maya religion, and even in the Chilam Balam books, is Christianized. Early texts, however, speak enough of sexual modesty and avoidance of unusual sex practices to make it fairly clear that strong sexual morality predated Christianity, and Landa’s book confirms this to some extent. The apocalypses in the Chilam Balam books are often related to sexual sin and to the malffeasances of government officials and predatory merchants, but this all rings of Christianity. The whole idea of a coming apocalypse is very possibly from Christianity rather than pre-Columbian, though authorities disagree.

In addition, and much less Christian, a very pervasive environmental morality is exceedingly important, deeply felt, and persistent even in the most Hispanicized communities. It is essentially the same as that found widely in native North America. First, humans are part of the world; there is no sharp distinction between people and nature. There is a distinction between *kaaj* “town,” *kool* “field,” and *k’aax* “forest,” but they interpenetrate. Fields regrow to forests, forests are converted to fields and then abandoned to regrow. Many a town has also gone to forest. Humans manage all three environments, but are in turn dependent on them and must learn how to live with and from them.

Second, human management must be conserving and conservative, with the goal of keeping everything functioning for everyone—John Locke’s principle of leaving “enough and as good” for others. Maya everywhere care deeply about their environments and living creatures. My coworker Don Felix Medina Tzuc, when he picked up an ant to show me, would put it back down, unhurt, and he carefully put it down pointing in the same direction it had been going. This is typical; I could tell many similar stories. Sustainability is an emotional and deeply moral issue, not just an intellectual one.

For the Maya, now and clearly in the distant past, the spirits of animals, fields, forest, rain, wind, mountains, and caves will punish anyone who uses nature selfishly and excessively. A friend of mine gave up hunting because he had a vision of animal spirits threatening him for taking too much game; he had actually not taken much. The old Quintana Roo hunter Eleuterio Llanes Pasos (1993) described similar sanctions in his stories, including the Leaf-litter Turkey, a giant turkey spirit that guards game birds and punishes overkill.

It is universally agreed by everyone that has worked much with traditional Native Americans that they have a high level of spirituality, however defined. The book title *In a Sacred Manner We Live* (Curtis 1994) gets it perfectly. The general idea is more or less what the Maya feel: an intensely emotional, loving, caring, reverent attitude toward the living and natural world, expressed in a vibrant morality of caretaking and tending. It is somewhat meaningless to contrast “religion” with “reality,” as Euro-American atheists do. The Native Americans revere mountains, rivers, waterfalls, animals, trees, and other beings whether or not they believe them to have divine powers. If Coyote did not create the world, he still deserves reverent respect, simply for being Coyote.

What this means in terms of divine punishment is controversial. The spirits and divinities very clearly sanction it, punishing careless and selfish users. Interpersonal behavior is similarly sanctioned.
Maya children are taught to be tranquil (*tranquilo*—a high value), generous, unselfish, helpful, peaceable, attentive, committed to learning, and cooperative, and they are, to an astonishing degree. Life in a Quintana Roo Yucatec town is certainly the pleasantest, most peaceful life I have ever experienced. Everyone is friendly and helpful, even the teasing town kids who laugh at my bad Maya. Today, the Christian god is invoked, and in pre-contact times the native Maya gods probably were, but morality is largely maintained by ordinary interpersonal sanctions, ranging from rewarding or punishing children to sharp community pressure on adults (see Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934 for classic accounts).

There is thus no hard proof that gods specifically enforced morality, but there is adequate evidence to show that certain moral teachings were sanctioned by spirit powers. A generalized morality of unselfishness is reinforced and sanctioned by a generalized spirituality and divinity residing in the cosmos. Religion as the collective representation of the community (Durkheim 1995) is the religion of the community of all beings, not merely of humans.

**Sources**

Most of the above is based on field work in Mexico, 1987-2012, and conversations with the Maya and with my colleagues at UCR, especially Karl Taube.


Summary
Elements of MSP are clearly present in the Mexica religion. Tezcatlipoca, who was believed to be omniscient and omnipresent, punished murder, theft, and sexual transgressions in this life by bringing misfortune on the transgressors. Additionally, men who died in battle and women who died in childbirth went to a place of wealth and joy, implying afterlife reward for loyalty to the polity. At the same time, MSP was not a primary concern for Mexica gods; ritual and sacrifices were. Divine punishment for transgressions was often diffuse (famines, epidemics), rather than focused on individuals, and uncertain, because it was possible to influence gods through supplication and sacrifices.

Presence of MSP can be inferred fairly securely back to the Toltec period (Tezcatlipoca) and more speculatively to the Classical period (Storm God, warrior afterlife associated with images of "luxuriant plants and butterflies").

Current evidence provides no support for MSP in the Oaxaca (Zapotec) religion.

Literature


North America

NGAs: Cahokia and Finger Lakes
Contributeors: Jill Levine, Eva Brandl, Peter Peregrine

**Mississippian Religion**

The geographical location of Cahokia, a large and complex pre-contact settlement in the heart of the Mississippi River Valley, was virtually uninhabited until about 1000 CE. The Lohmann-Stirling phase, 1050-1200 CE, was a period of great change and demographic expansion. The previous settlement pattern of sparse clusters of houses was abandoned in favor of widespread units of single-family farmsteads, between which were larger ritual or symbolic complexes, likely serving as focal point of communal interaction. These include several centrally-located granaries, though it is unclear to exactly what purpose this collected produce was put: For communal rituals and festivals? To be saved for some emergency use? At its height, there were at least 50,000 people supported within the 2000 km² region surrounding Cahokia.

Some archaeologists are skeptical whether there was a ruler or king figure at Cahokia. The community could be led by a priesthood or oligarchic group of ruler-priests within a social stratum that included chiefs, sub-chiefs, elders, priests, and other religious functionaries. The Cahokians were
capable of feats of organization that included the famous Monks Mound and other mounds which required moving 1.1 million m³ or earth and a 15 m high wooden palisade that ran for nearly 3 km.

Starting around 1200 CE, for some still unexplained reasons, the population in Cahokia population had fallen about 40% from the Lohmann-Stirling peak, giving way to the Moorehead phase of settlement.

There is very little known about the specific tenets of religion in Cahokia before the arrival of Christianity (Peregrine 2017). Mississippian religion, a form of which was likely practiced at Cahokia, evolved from Woodland belief and ritual systems, which included ancestor shrines and sacred monuments (Dye 2000: 138). The religion is also known as the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex. Anthropological data on indigenous North American southwest societies is often used for insight into Mississippian religion and society (Granberry 2005: 109). Southwestern religion features an Upper World for the living and a Under World full of monsters and darkness. Julian Granberry writes that in Southeastern and Southwestern mythologies, “the Under World is also associated with water and fertility. In both mythologies a goddess gives birth to a set of twins who perform a series of miraculous exploits to become culture heroes. In both there is a belief in reincarnation (ibid., 113).” The dead are reborn as children, and fertility and renewal are key aspects of both religions (ibid., 114). Reincarnation was linked to mound building at Cahokia: the earth on the mound that would grow grass in the spring represented the reincarnation of the person buried beneath it (Hall 1997: 35, 57).

Mississippian religion shared many characteristics with Mesoamerican religions, such as a hybrid birdman deity, a cosmology in which the sky featured as “the realm of order and supernatural power”, and a focus on the performance of rites of renewal and regeneration (Peregrine 2001: 337). Mississippian deities included the Earth Mother, the Birdman, the Twins, and the Great Serpent. Priests, shamans, and other religious specialists contracted these deities through ritual and sacrifice. Shamans moved between the worlds of the dead and the living to heal individuals and communities and religious cults often focused on one spirit or deity (Dye 2000: 139). Individuals could obtain powers from spirits through “fasting, employing guardian spirits, and seeking visions.” Mississippian spirituality was strongly linked to administrative power: chiefs were top priests and had connections with deities and spirits (Dye 2000: 139–141).

David Dye suggests the Earth Mother was a supernatural moralizing force: “She was a guardian for people who respected her and abided by her rules, but she dispensed punishment to those who broke her taboos, brought about disharmony and imbalance in the world, and violated prescribed rules” (Dye 2000: 146). Birdman imagery dominates the Southeastern Ceremonial Complex: the Birdman is a mythical warrior with falcon features (Brown 2004: 106). Dye’s description of the Birdman, however, does not include mention of correct behavior, only “prayer, respect, and supplication,” on behalf of the deeds and battles of the mythic figure (Dye 2000: 149). In tribes that likely trace their origins to Cahokia, the Birdman is linked to the myth of the Morning Star, “an allegorical figure who plays a central role in ensuring the triumph of life over death, day over night, summer over winter (Brown 2004: 118).” In these tribes (which include Kansa, Omaha, and Osage), the Morning Star opposes the Great Serpent, who represents death and the lower world. “Morning Star represents the capacity for rebirth; the Great Serpent exercises discretion over the timing of death. Each controls aspects of fertility: Morning Star controls the generation of human life and the Serpent/puma the generation of plant and animal life” (Brown 2004: 119).

In Cahokia it is likely that elites were deeply involved in religious ceremonies, including those connected with the care of ancestral remains as well as calendrical rituals and feasts. The timing of these ceremonies appears to have been worked out using large circles of posts or “woodhenges” that allowed measurement of the sun’s position throughout the year. Elites were identified by elaborate regalia, personal ornaments, and ritual paraphernalia that incorporated exotic materials obtained through
extensive long-distance trade. It appears that some of these items were created by specialist craftspeople present at Cahokia itself. Shell beads and effigy pipes originating here were distributed throughout the midcontinent. Human sacrifice rituals like the burials uncovered in Cahokia’s Mound 72 suggest a level of social stratification, but more research is needed about the ties between sacrifice rituals and appeasement of Mississippian high gods.

Illinois Religion
The Iliniouek (known to European Settlers as the Illinois Confederation) period refers to the span of time from 1640 CE, the approximate date of the first European written reports of the Illinois (also known as Inoca, Illiniwek, Illini). The region referred to as the Illinois Country in both modern and older (though Western) sources was located to the east of the Middle Mississippi river, bounded to the north by Lake Michigan, to the south by the Ohio river, and to the west by the Wabash. However, it is likely that the Illinois-speaking groups encountered by Europeans in the 17th century had arrived in this area relatively recently, possibly migrating westwards from the Lake Erie basin, perhaps displacing previous inhabitants of the Mississippi watershed like the Oneota and others.

Despite the use of the term ‘Illinois Confederacy’ to describe prevailing socio-political life in the region, there is no indication in the written sources of any formal inter-tribal political organizations such as those found among Iroquoian groups to the northeast in the same period. Political leadership among the various Illinois tribes was provided by both peace chiefs—who played important diplomatic roles, such as conducting calumet (peace pipe) ceremonies for visitors but had relatively little formal authority—and war chiefs, who organized raids on other settlements.

In the post-contact period e.g. late 17th century), the Illinois tribes were settled in large villages often close to French forts and trading posts, most notably the Grand Village of the Kaskaskia. It has traditionally been assumed that these large settlements, which included Illinois speakers from various subgroups as well as Chickasaws, Shawnees, and others, functioned almost as refugee centres as the Illinois fled attacks from the Iroquois to the east and clustered together in the wake of disease and depopulation. Some, however, argue that these large agglomerated settlements represented instead strategic policy by certain tribes to monopolize critical bison-hunting territory and slave raiding opportunities.

From the 1660s and 1670s onwards, France claimed title to the Illinois Country (Pays des Illinois) as part of its North American colonial possessions. French presence was generally limited to small numbers of missionaries and traders, while the tribal groups maintained much autonomy. This all changed in 1717 CE, when Illinois lands were incorporated directly into the French colony of Louisiane. After this, the French began to settle arable farmers and black slaves in large numbers throughout the Middle Mississippi Valley. In 1763 CE, at the end of the Seven Years’ War, France ceded the part of their Louisiane colony that lay east of the Mississippi to the British. The Illinois resisted British incursions into the region for several years. British forces eventually managed to occupy Fort de Chartres, the main French military and administrative centre in the region, in 1765 CE until they, in turn, were unseated by American Revolutionary forces under general George Rogers Clark.

Our understanding of Illinois religion is mainly based on observations by French colonists in the seventeenth century. According to these sources, the Illinois people worshipped Kitchesmanetoka as the creator of all things (Kinitez 1965: 213). French missionaries attempted to draw parallels between the Christian God and the Illinois’ belief in a supreme deity (Illinois State Museum 2000; Allouez 1667). Writings from Jacques Marquette suggest the Illinois believed that the earth rested on the back of an otter, and that the universe had three levels: the Upper World, inhabited by the sun and the thunder; the Middle World (Earth); and the Lower World, home to monsters (Illinois State Museum 2000;
Young Illinois men went on vision quests and women fasted in lodges in order to connect with personal spirits called manitous. Shamans connected to animal spirits conducted rituals and ceremonies which often including smoking tobacco and dancing (Pritzer 2000: 418). Calumet pipe ceremonialism, which originated with the Pawnee and spread to other tribes, was present among the Illinois (Hall 1997: 4, 30). The Thunderbird was a symbol of these ceremonies (ibid., 30).

Illinois oral traditions recorded by the French in the post-contact period give evidence for the idea of both charity and communal feasting to encourage correct behavior. The Illinois story “How Wisakatchekwa Got into Some Trouble” illustrates the moral norms of this culture by distinguishing between correct and incorrect behavior. The story as we have it today is the version told in 1919 by George Washington Finley, one of the last speakers of the Peoria language. In the tale, Wisakatchekwa is tricked and punished by two old blind men after he moves their guide rope, causing them to fall into a river (Knoepfle 1993: 145). While the story evokes the concepts of right and wrong, Wisakatchekwa was punished by the elders themselves, not by a spirit or any supernatural forces. In addition, while the Illinois believed in a Lower World populated by monsters, our sources do not mention whether in Illinois thought people were sent there as punishment after death for breaking moral taboos during life. Therefore, while Illinois culture no doubt encompassed moral norms and ideals of correct behavior, we cannot infer that their religion or cosmology was strongly moralizing.

Iroquois Religion

The Haudenosaunee, more commonly known as the League of the Iroquois, inhabited the Great Lakes area of North America. A confederacy of five ‘tribes’ or ‘nations’ founded in the 16th century, they were made up the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca (Reid 1996). The Tuscarora joined them in the early 18th century as a sixth nation (Reid 1996). The Haudenosaunee spoke Iroquoian languages and formed part of what is now known as the Eastern Woodlands culture area. The nations of the league were bound to each other through “fictive relations of kinship” (Foley 1994: 46). The ‘tribes’ or ‘nations’ were governed by a group of chiefs, who congregated in a hierarchical system of councils to debate matters of common concern. At the top level of this system, the member nations were represented in a common league council.

Ancestors, ritual, and myth were also close to the foundation of Iroquois society. Their cosmos was composed of multiple deities, souls, and lesser spirits. These included the Three Sisters or the spirits of the sacred crops maize, beans, and squash, which were celebrated in the annual thanksgiving festivals (see Morgan & Lloyd 1901a:180-199). The most important entity was the Great Spirit, “who was responsible for the creation of men, the plants and, animals and the forces of good in nature” (Reid 1996). Early anthropologists theorized that this moralistic concept of the Great Spirit was a product of the colonial encounter, when Christian concepts introduced by Jesuit missionaries were incorporated into the indigenous cosmos (Morgan & Lloyd 1901b: 233). According to Morgan, these encounters transformed Iroquois beliefs into an “ethical religion” (Morgan & Lloyd 1901b: 234). Previously, the primitive Indians, says W. P. Clark in The Indian Sign Language, “were limited pantheists -- they did not believe that the universe taken as a whole was God; but that everything in the world had its spiritual essence made manifest in the forces and laws of nature.” [...] Not only was the clan totem revered, but each individual had his personal totem -- (in Algonquin Manitou, in Iroquois Oki). In youth after certain exercises and fastings he waited for a dream, and whatever he dreamed of became his Manitou on which his fortune depended, -- the Master of his Life, the Jesuits translated it (Morgan & Lloyd 1901b: 233).

The pre-contact Iroquois are said to have worshipped the sun, or a Sun God, to whom “were paid prayer and sacrifice and thanks for such good gifts as food, sunshine, and victory over the enemy”
However, other sources contradict Morgan’s claims about the nature of indigenous worldviews. They emphasize that the spirit world legitimated key values, such as obligations to kinsmen, loyalty to one’s ‘nation’, and respect for elders:

The myths of disorder and order established a set of relations where consensus, equity and hospitality were stressed. At the village level all the myths of disorder and order validated the authority of the elders, matrons and chiefs; while at the confederate level the epic of the establishment of the league validated the authority status of the civil chief. Actions harmful to the interests of those in positions of authority could result in cultural disaster and thus supernatural sanctions against factionalism existed (Foley 1994: 46).

Furthermore, “[s]haring took on a ritualized form and received a supernatural sanction in the dream quest behaviour and feasts for the dead” (Foley 1994: 47). The welfare of humans relied on their ability to maintain harmonious relations with the spirit world. The spirits of humans, animals, and the forces of nature were all connected and communicated with each other (St John 1994: 50). Iroquois treated dreams messages from the spirit world (Hewitt 1895: 110). The spirits of animals, rivers, crops, and trees, among many others, appeared in dreams to give advice and make demands. The dreamer and his community strove to meet these demands (ibid.). The “denial of a request [...] might upset the harmony between human and non-human persons” (St John 1994: 57).

Whenever the harmony of the cosmos had become disturbed, the spiritual connections between all animate things were vital to restoring balance in the world (St John 1994:50). The people’s welfare also depended on maintaining harmonious relations with the dead. The living were obliged to remember their ancestors and to offer up food and presents to them (Shimony 1961: 231). Those who neglected these observances were met with illness and death (ibid.). The balance between the natural and spiritual worlds is seen in the timing of Condolence Councils, when a new chief replaces one who has died. These councils can only be held after the crops have been harvested because they are associated with death (Hall 2000: 34).

**Summary**

Overall, evidence for prosocial MSP in Cahokia and Finger Lakes NGAs is lacking, or very thin. Even if we accept David Dye’s argument for Earth Mother as a supernatural moralizing force, she was only one of the pantheon of deities, the rest of which show no evidence of moralistic concern. Additionally, to project this belief back to the Cahokia period, we need to infer consistency with beliefs at Cahokia and the wider Mississippian religious tradition.

Illinois oral traditions show the enforcement of proper behavior came in several forms, but required human, not CPS agents.

It is unclear whether the Great Spirit of contact period Native Americans was a product of indigenous religion or came out of French Christian influence. Scholars also contest whether the pre-contact Sun God was a moralizing supernatural force.

**References**


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Evaluating the existence and nature of moralizing superhuman punishment in the deep past of the central Andes presents some distinctive interpretive challenges. The region has one of the deepest independent records of social complexity, but no detailed written record existed until Spanish writers began to produce retrospective accounts of the Inca Empire in the mid-1500s. The Spanish ethnohistoric corpus is extensive, but it is contradictory and biased, and even a cursory comparison of the Inca Empire and earlier complex societies demonstrates the problems with directly extrapolating descriptions of Andean religion across space and time. Consequently, the material record of archaeology offers the sole source of direct evidence for millennia of social evolution in the central Andes. That record is fragmentary and is far from representative, and it is important to acknowledge the constraints inherent to addressing metaphysical questions using ancient material patterns. This review will focus on describing material patterns in monumental structures, open spaces, iconography, and ritual contexts.

Late Preceramic Period (3500–1800 BCE)

During the Late Preceramic period, large, permanent settlements coalesced for the first time in some coastal areas (Haas and Creamer 2006: 745–50; Zeidler 2008:461-464). Different subsistence strategies supported this population growth and resource coordination, and coastal communities exploited local combinations of fishing/shellfishing, wild plant gathering, and the horticultural cultivation of beans, peppers, maize and other plants (Quilter 1991: 393–401). In some coastal valleys, formally laid out plazas appeared, which were often associated with modest circular semisubterranean plazas and low pyramid mounds. The largest known concentration is in the Norte Chico region, with the site of Caral treated by some as an urban center of the first Andean civilization (Haas and Creamer 2006; Quilter 2014: 89; Vega-Centeno 2006).

The scale of the open plazas and size of some early platform mounds indicates an increased coordination in construction activities, potentially involving populations living beyond a particular site. The existence of multiple construction phases indicates the periodic enlargement and elaboration of monuments that began as fairly modest projects. This might indicate festive cycles that brought outlying populations to the center during time of resource abundance, to feast and occasionally enlarge or improve the collective monument. The work of construction was potentially a symbolically powerful act of landscape modification that punctuated seasonal ceremonies and local beliefs. Similar developments, which occurred in other world regions, may include Stonehenge, Gobekli Tepe, and Poverty Point that seem to have functioned at a time when hunter-gatherers were transitioning toward agriculture. It also is similar to the evolution of mound-building in the North American eastern woodlands (Adena, Hopewell, Mississippian)

Early monuments were architecturally simple and built of readily available materials, including mud bricks and shicra (reed net bags filled with rocks). Although the scale of construction was impressive, special plazas and platform-top structures were probably too small to accommodate the labor force that would have built them (Pozorski and Pozorski 2018:356). For example, the earliest dated circular sunken plaza—dated to 3500 BCE at Sechín Bajo—measured around 100 square meters, a space that could comfortably hold only hold several dozen individuals in its interior, or seat a smaller number at its perimeter (Quilter 2014:85). Other circular sunken plazas reach a few hundred square meters at sites such as Cerro Lampay and Caral. Likewise, while the volume of fill used to raise early platform mounds reached several thousand cubic meters, early temple structures built on the summits...
had small rooms, rarely with more than a few dozen square meters of interior space. The scalar
contradictions between construction labor and accessibility suggest that over time only a small
percentage of a region’s population participated in activities in sunken plazas or entered temple
buildings. Some researchers interpret this as evidence of durable social hierarchies, although others
might see other kinds of exclusive groups (e.g., sodalities, ancestral cults) helping to coordinate
otherwise egalitarian societies.

Highland populations also began to invest more labor and resources in building ceremonial
architecture at this time. Preceramic groups constructed semi-subsurface courts, mounds and free-
standing ritual chambers with hearths at sites such as Huaricoto, La Galgada, and Kotosh, leading
scholars to identify a shared “Kotosh Religious Tradition” (e.g. Burger 1992: 45–52). This tradition
continued to thrive during the second millennium BCE, in the succeeding Initial Period (Quilter 2014:
136). Kotosh temples, of modest size, were associated with the burials of prominent women and men.

The construction of early ceremonial architecture complemented continuity and change in
rituals and offerings taking places in domestic, subsistence, and mortuary contexts. For instance,
archaeologists found that the two Late Preceramic pyramids at Río Seco were surrounded by dense
scatters of ritual deposits, where the people had made offerings of plants and the remains of birds and
sea lions (Quilter 2014: 86). Offerings from the Huaca de los Ídolos at Áspero included animal fur, plant
remains, basketry, and clay figurines of human figures. At Caral, human figurines also appear in
association with ritual architecture, and flutes made of carved pelican and condor bone have been
encountered as well.

The presence of exotic fauna in offerings appears to have intensified over time (Burger 2008),
and was incorporated into decorative elements, including mural painting and frieze-work on
monumental structures. The early temple at Ventarrón has polychrome murals of a deer caught in a
net, the earliest known example of such decoration (Quilter 2014:89). At Buena Vista, the Temple of the
Fox has incised and painted animals decorating its walls (Benfer et al. 2007). The temple complex at
that site is aligned with the pathway of the sun, and the Temple of the Menacing Disc at that site has a
clay sculpture of an angry circular face that is flanked by two deer-like animals. The sculpture is located
in the innermost part of the temple, and could be seen through a doorway by people who had access to
a square patio that measured less than 100 square meters (Benfer et al. 2007).

Initial Period (1800–800 BCE)
The basic architectural components that appeared in the Late Preceramic period continue after the
appearance of pottery on the Peruvian north coast (Pozorski and Pozorski 2008). The importance of
ceremonial architecture to coastal populations grew during the Initial Period (1800–800 BCE) and
religious centers became more elaborate as construction projects continued over time. Initial Period
communities came together periodically to perform rituals at monumental U- or J-shaped pyramid
complexes (Dillehay 2004). Some of these developed from pre-existing Preceramic ritual centers, while
others were new foundations. The spread of common architectural and artistic elements suggests the
regional distribution of loosely overlapping religious traditions, which can be seen at sites like Garagay
(Rimac Valley), Cardal (Lurín Valley), and Sechín Alto (Casma Valley) (Burger and Salazar-Burger 1991;
Quilter 2014: 120–25). High relief polychrome friezes appear at some of these religious centers,
typically depicting zoomorphic (spiders, sea otters, felines) and monstrous beings, like the blue
feathered, fanged creature seen at Garagay. There are also figures that possess the features of humans
and animals, and the large modeled heads at Huaca de los Reyes and Moxeke. At Garagay, there is a
frieze of a fanged polychrome cayman or lizard figure, while Burger and Salazar (1998) excavated a
similar creature at Mina Perdida, which possessed a human head and limbs. Shibata’s (2017) recent
excavations at Huaca Partida (Nepeña Valley) have identified murals and friezes decorating the exterior walls of the multi-tiered temple structure. The lower levels are associated with a fish/cayman and a feline, above which is a winged anthropomorph that the excavator identifies as a shamanic mediator who connects the terrestrial world with the celestial one, an upper tier decorated with a polychrome frieze of a raptorial bird.

Religious activities likely included both public processions, feasts and offerings in the open plazas and rituals restricted to priestly elite groups in special courts and chambers. Offering caches included a variety of materials, including sheets of precious metal, pottery, burnt plants, crystals, clay figurines, and animal remains (Burger 2012; Dillehay 2004; Moore 2014: 225). Burger (2012) excavated a group of elite burials associated with the monumental complex at Cardal, noting that one elderly male was buried with a necklace of sea lion canines and red-painted whalebone earspools. Burger interprets them as emblems of leadership, possibly by a shamanic practitioner. Those excavations also encountered an offering that contained a child’s decapitated head, ceremonial pottery, a figurine, greenstone beads, and a sea lion canine. Although not widespread, human sacrifice might also be indicated in the burials atop a pyramid at Late Preceramic Áspero and by bas-reliefs of richly dressed men carrying dismembered body parts at Initial Period Cerro Sechín (Moore 2014: 234; Quilter 2014: 650). It is difficult to extrapolate from this to the nature of early Peruvian deities (or spirits, or ancestors), their powers and concerns, but in general we can say that a logic of sacrifice and supplication seems to have structured ritual activity. In historic-period Andean societies, it was obligatory to show respect to and care for a range of “supernatural” beings—for instance through festivals, food offerings, and “feeding” and clothing ancestral mummies (MacCormack 1998: 308–11; Mannheim and Salas Carreño 2015: 60–64)—in order to secure protection for the community and favorable conditions for agriculture. Theoretically, something similar may have been taking place at this early date, although we should keep in mind the depth of time separating historic Andean communities from their Archaic and Initial Period predecessors.

The study of iconography is also used to make inferences about early Andean religion. As noted above, depictions of animals—and the offering of exotic animals—can be seen at early religious centers, possibly distinguishing some individuals as religious or political leaders. Aside from clay figurines, human representations are rare in early religious art. There is some iconography that suggests the existence of belief in superhuman beings, some of them associated with celestial bodies. Haas et al. (2003) believe that a drawing on a gourd dating to 2600–2000 BCE from the Norte Chico region represents a “Staff God” similar to the deity known from later Chavin, Wari and Tiwanaku art. The figure on the gourd faces the viewer and holds one staff in each hand; its fanged mouth suggests that it is no ordinary human ruler or priest but some form of metahuman being. Over time, some religious iconography suggests the association of superhuman beings with powers over weather phenomena: “rayed heads,” perhaps denoting the radiant power of the sun, and water and lightning images linked with snakes. These early “gods” are not anthromorphic, raising questions of how they might have intersected with moral beliefs of the societies where they appear. Composite human-animal figures, often interpreted as deities, are found in the art of the Initial Period, for example in sculpted friezes at monumental sites (Pozorski and Pozorski 2018). These often appear as modeled stucco heads that bring
to mind the “theriomorphic” figures seen on Late Preclassic Maya temples (for instance, at Cerros, Cuello, Lamanai and Mirador). Mayanist scholars have identified a general trend toward more anthropomorphic images that eventually coalesce around representations of Maya royalty and gods in the Classic period.

From the emerging picture of early religious monuments and the sketchy evidence from offerings and mortuary practices, it is possible to make some general statements about social development and religious practice, although many aspects of belief remain elusive. The scalar features of early monumental complexes suggest that they drew together people from multiple communities— and perhaps people living beyond the local valley—who came for festivities and contributed periodically to the labor that built the impressive complexes. The different degrees of access and identification of high-status burials suggests that there were leaders, perhaps hereditary elites, who managed construction work and ritual activities at these sites. These leaders were often buried in association with religious monuments, sometimes with the same exotic materials that appear in the most important offerings. At a time when irrigation networks were beginning to reshape coastal valleys, there appear to be people and superhuman beings that were at the center of ritual networks, the recipients of exotic goods and labor. These supernatural beings are not humans, and while there is no way to prove that these were not “moral monsters,” that provided oversight in everyday human interactions, it is significant that their representations appear to be limited to contexts that few people would see, even during important religious festivals. It is not possible to quantify the extent to which the material flows to religious leaders and superhuman beings were reciprocated, either by the redistribution of food or the promulgation of an ideology of ceremonial intercession on behalf of the laboring population.

In addition to the identification of religious leaders and superhuman beings in transegalitarian societies on the coast, it is possible to recognize the lack of a universal pantheon that might bind different coastal valleys—or coastal and highland areas—under the same religious beliefs (and by extension, superhuman moral oversight). There are multiple overlapping religious traditions across the central Andes, and some differences in the offerings seen at the sites of fishing, farming, and herding populations (Burger 2012). The early religious complexes and depictions of superhuman beings are different enough to suggest that these are not “high gods” capable of overseeing the moral life of all humans. There is no evidence that superhuman beings were part of the everyday ritual life of ordinary people, based on what little is known of domestic rituals. Instead of exerting an omnipresent oversight, the depictions of superhuman beings seem more like the organizing patrons for the festive cycles of early religious centers, occupying sacred places, and in the case of celestial beings, organizing the timing of construction events and ceremonies.

**Early Horizon (800–200 BCE)**

The Early Horizon is characterized by the continued spread of religious architecture and iconography throughout the Central Andes. This was once thought to be driven by the highland temple and plaza complex of Chavín de Huántar in the modern-day Ancash region of Peru. However, research at Initial Period centers shows that the architectural elements and depictions of superhuman beings seen at Chavín de Huantar have precedents on the coast (Kembel and Rick 2004: 62). Chavín was just one among many important first-millennium BCE centers with monumental sacred architecture, and the use of Mito-style temples in its vicinity suggests the co-existence of diverse beliefs and practices (Contreras 2017). Chavín influence fades with distance, and the religious structures and iconography of the south-central Andes—for example, the Yaya-Mama Complex of the Lake Titicaca Basin—do not reflect the influence of Chavín. Some of the most important ritual features found at Chavín de Huantar are unique to the site and would have been accessible to very small numbers of people (Rick 2017).
Chavinoid artwork represents richly attired figures whose hybrid animal and human features suggest—in time-honored Andean style—that they are metahuman beings (Moseley and Heckenberger 2013: 651). Prominent among them was the aforementioned Staff God. It appeared in elaborate form at Chavin de Huántar on the carved stone known as the Raimondi Stela (whose precise original location is unknown), grasping two staffs or scepters and baring sharp canines (Burger 1992: 174—175). Within a cross-shaped chamber deep in the temple complex stood the five-meter-high Lanzón Stone, a carved monolith that may have embodied a chthonic deity (Rick 2008). Like other beings represented at Chavin and other Early Horizon sites, the Raimondi and Lanzón figures sport feline features: fangs and clawed hands and feet. Pozorski et al. (2017: 554) have noted that in historically observed Amazonian societies, jaguars are “symbols of force and power” and “tools of social control as potential punishers when traditional values and rules are not respected.” These authors proposed that such symbolic role, along with the association of predatory cats with “shamanic practices,” may help explain the prominence of felines and feline features at Initial Period sites on the coast. Their arguments could also be applied to Late Horizon iconography in the highlands and elsewhere, with the implication that the fierce deities of the Chavin cult were concerned with ensuring human adherence to customary ethical codes.

However, such use of ethnography—from a society two millennia later with a different social organization and inhabiting a different linguistic and ecological region—is a flawed foundation to build on. Is there felid imagery on the coast and in the highlands after about 1500 BCE? Yes, but the meaning of that imagery is more elusive. For the Incas, the jaguar was a symbol of lowland savagery. There is a story of a prince who killed a jaguar and started wearing its pelt around. He then began to terrorize and cannibalize his lowland opponents—essentially a “Heart of Darkness” story rather than one of moral retribution.

Iconography is not the only source for understanding religious practices in this period: archaeological excavation at Early Horizon sacred centers has been used to make inferences about ceremonies and religious organization. Lumbreras (1993) argued that Chavin de Huántar served as an oracle for the wider region, where ritual specialists may have interpreted environmental clues in order to predict El Niño events (see also Burger 1992: 193–95). Others have stressed the importance of Chavin as a pilgrimage site where adherents could have intense experiences of divine power, mediated through dazzling imagery, music and the ritual use of hallucinogenic drugs (Burger 1992, Weismantel 2014, Kolar 2017). The monumental architecture shows a concern with controlling and restricting access, and it is likely that a trained priesthood was present to direct ceremonies. While public rites and processions took place in the plazas outside the temples, it was likely only a small subset of pilgrims who were admitted to the innermost galleries and allowed to interact with the Lanzón stone (Kembel and Rick 2004). The labyrinthine passages leading to the statue were accessible only via a small circular plaza, perhaps restricted to high-ranking initiates. Caches of valuable goods, such as the fine ceramics and stone vessels found in the Ofrendas Gallery, as well as carved human finger bones placed on the Lanzón’s head (Rick 2005: 79; Quilter 2014: 144), suggest that adherents of the Chavin cult interacted with its deities through offerings and sacrifice. Rick (2017) has noted the diversity of ritual features across the ceremonial complex, however, which suggest that the restricted, priest-managed circuit through the temple was part of a broader, and less centrally managed, set of religious practices taking place at times of religious congregation.

There are several different schools of thought about the ways Chavin ideas and practices were disseminated beyond Chavin de Huántar. In Burger’s (1992: 192–93) view, the cult was a peaceful one that succeeded by transcending pre-existing ethnic boundaries. Some have argued that richly decorated textiles aided efforts by missionaries or initiates to spread the new creed across the Andes (e.g. Moseley 2001: 168–70). However, the interpretation of Chavin as a missionizing religion has fallen out of favor in recent years, partly due to a lack of evidence for local shrines or temples where worship could have
taken place in proselytized areas. A consensus view is developing of Chavín de Huántar as a pilgrimage site dominated by a priestly elite. The finely crafted artefacts bearing Chavinoid iconography that circulated through the Early Horizon Andes may have played an exclusionary role, in which such goods bestowed social power on those who had access to and could interpret them.

Overall, there is scant evidence for moralizing superhuman powers in this period of Andean prehistory. While some scholars have seen the architectural and iconographic programs at Chavín and other Early Horizon sites as expressions of long-standing Andean values such as reciprocity and complementarity (Quilter 2014: 151; Weismantel 2014/2015: 48), it would be quite a leap from this to arguing that the gods of Chavín enforced such values by monitoring, punishing and rewarding the behavior of their worshippers. The “shamanic” elements identified by many scholars in Chavinoid artwork hint that mind-altering, direct contact with supernatural beings for the privileged few—rather than a system of divine punishment and reward—formed the core of Chavín religious experience. Hallucinogenic snuff was used in the south-central Andes before 2000 BCE, and snuff trays are present on the coast during the Initial Period (Torres 1995), reinforcing the sense that Andean societies viewed the supernatural as largely existing outside of their daily lives.

In this section we have focused on developments in, or originating in, the highlands, to the exclusion of the coast, but it is worth noting briefly that the iconography of the south coast Paracas culture of the first millennium BCE also gestures towards the importance of shamanism, including images of shamans in flight on textiles and ceramics, possibly after using hallucinogens. Paracas archaeology long focused on elaborate mortuary ceremonies, but recent work at population centers has identified platform mounds and sunken plazas (Tantaleán et al. 2016). Its supernatural imagery features many human bodies with zoomorphic or monstrous attributes. The possibility that supernatural agents represented with monstrous features are less likely to play the role of divine overseer and judge of human morality remains a question to be explored comparatively. It is not clear whether this sort of religious leadership existed along the north coast, where many U-shaped mound centers were abandoned during the Early Horizon. In the Nepeña Valley, Chicoine and colleagues have identified densely settled sites with agglutinated enclosure compounds. Those enclosures hold modest-sized plazas that sometimes contain evidence for musical performances and other ceremonial activities (Helmer and Chicoine 2013).

**Early Intermediate Period (200 BCE–600 CE)**

During the Early Intermediate Period, regionally distinctive cultures developed in the Central Andes, including Recuay in the north-central highlands, Gallinazo and Moche on the north coast, and Nasca on the south coast (Lau 2002–2004; Moseley 2001: 173–203). Farther south, the modest sunken patio complexes and monoliths seen at sites like Pukara and Chiripa persisted for centuries before evolving into a distinct state religion at the Titicaca Basin site of Tiwanaku. Here we focus mainly on the Moche culture, which has produced the most evidence of urbanism, stratification, and political centralization.

The political and religious organization of the Moche (c. 100–900 CE) remains a matter of debate (Chapdelaine 2011). Earlier portrayals of a unitary state based in the Moche and Chicama valleys that expanded through conquest (Larco Hoyle 1945) have been replaced by a recognition of more complex developments. Although the site of the Huacas of Moche, two vast adobe pyramids in the Moche Valley, was probably not the “capital” of the entire North Coast, it was nevertheless one of the most impressive ceremonial centers ever built in the Pre-Columbian Americas. The reproduction of elements of the iconography seen on the exterior of the Huaca de la Luna in the Chicama Valley to the north (Huaca Cao Viejo) and the Nepeña Valley to the south (Pañamarca) suggests the successful introduction of state ideology (e.g., Jackson 2008), as does the broad distribution of royal iconography along the north coast.
The repetition of iconography depicting a “Temple of the Staircase and Wave” (de Bock 2003) suggests the broad distribution of temple structures across space and time, which might be taken as evidence of a more ecclesiastical form of religion in the Moche world. Nevertheless, it is important to note the diversity of ritual practices found in proximity to Moche monuments (e.g., Chicoine 2011).

Moche culture is famous for its elaborate visual culture, including painted and sculpted pottery, fine metalwork, and painted adobe murals. Several figures portrayed in these media have been interpreted as deities and supernatural creatures. Many of these superhuman figures are anthropomorphic, with animal features (fangs, wings) that are reminiscent of earlier depictions of shamanic figures. Elite burials show humans adorned in some of the same superhuman costumes depicted on Moche ceramics. Makowski (2003: 353) identifies four different gods, distinguished by their adornments and attributes, that recur in the iconography, including a Rayed Deity (or Warrior Priest). In Quilter’s (1997, 1990) view, this personage should be interpreted as a sun god who re-established order after a period of cosmic chaos in which even inanimate objects revolted against their masters, and who now receives sacrifices in recognition of this role.

Moche artwork features humans with much greater frequency than the iconography of earlier periods. Decorative themes include the interaction between the living and the dead, and the existence of an afterworld as a kind of inverted version of the world of the living (Bourget 2006, Wiersema 2010). It is interesting to see the production—for some deceased only—of mortuary assemblages that invoke the elements of everyday life. Does this resemble ancient Egyptian practice and/or early imperial Chinese (Han) ones? Perhaps such practices reflect not beliefs about the afterworld, but an enduring metaphysical aspect to some humans, which needed to be nurtured in a death context that was set apart from the world of the living. This would be very different from the concept of afterlife realms like Hades or Heaven, where moral behavior could be punished or rewarded.

From his studies of ceramic iconography (especially the “Burial Theme”) and the mortuary treatment of high-ranking individuals, Bourget (2006: 224) concludes: “If the iconography serves in part to represent this other world and the proper way of relating to it, then it would seem that only a fairly restricted number of individuals could access this afterworld.” In his analysis, it was elite power and status, not correct moral behavior, that conferred access to a continued existence after death.

It is unclear whether some figures in the iconography, particularly on “fineline” painted pots, represent gods or members of the ruling elite dressed as gods. Some of the spectacularly rich burials uncovered in recent decades, such as the “Lord of Sipán” (Lambayeque Valley) and the priestesses of San José de Moro, included ritual regalia matching that of gods shown in fineline scenes (Bourget 2016: 380; Donnan and Castillo 1992). Likewise, the discovery of the remains of sacrificial victims at Huaca de la Luna, Dos Cabezas and Cao Viejo showed that the Sacrifice Ceremony depicted on pottery and temple walls, in which the blood of defeated high-ranking warriors is offered to the Rayed Deity (also called “Warrior Priest”), was in fact performed at the sacred pyramids (Sutter and Cortez 2005). One possibility is that the scenes portrayed in the artwork were intentionally ambiguous. Quilter (1997: 114) draws an analogy with the Christian Eucharist: both a pivotal moment in the life of Christ and a ceremony reenacted by worshippers during church services. Some scholars suggest that the reenactment of central mythic dramas could have functioned to fructify the earth and ensure the continued flow of water for irrigation (a “gift from the gods” according to Chapdelaine [2011: 191]).

Several lines of evidence—iconography, elite burials, archaeological evidence of sacrifice, and monumental construction—thus converge to produce a picture of Moche society as ruled by a priestly elite, who cemented their authority by embodying the gods in ceremonies that included human sacrifice (Bourget 2006, 2016). As in earlier periods, there is little evidence of moralizing supernatural beings, and what we think of as Moche religion appears to have been confined to an exclusive noble class. Despite the shared elements of identity and belief that were distributed along the north coast in Moche times, it
is important to draw attention to the geographical limits to any religious integration. Outside of the lower coastal valleys of northern Peru, contemporaneous societies did not share these beliefs. For example, in the north-central highlands, the fantastical composite beings that had adorned monumental sites during the Early Horizon were largely replaced in Recuay ceramics and sculpture by representations of human men and women, usually marked out as high-status figures through their clothes and adornments (Lau 2011: 196–206). Ancestor veneration was evidently an important aspect of Recuay religion. By the end of the period (c. 700 CE), monumental above-ground mortuary structures were widespread in the northern highlands; they included spaces where the living could make offerings to their ancestors as well as niches and doorways that allowed mummy bundles to be removed for ceremonies (Lau 2011: 111–16). We can see from this ritual architecture that Recuay people believed they had a duty to nourish the dead. It is not possible to tell whether the ancestors monitored, punished and rewarded human behavior, but this was not the case in historic-period highland societies where ritual activity centered on ancestral remains. Rather, the relationship was one of reciprocity: propitiating and consulting the dead ensured prosperity and protection for the living (Lau 2002: 281).

Middle Horizon (c. 600–1000 CE)

Two highland polities had a widespread influence on the Central Andes during the Middle Horizon. From its capital in the Ayacucho region, the Wari state controlled scattered colonies across the region. Its presence was felt more broadly through the spread of iconography and ceramic and architectural styles. Tiwanaku, centered on a great city and monumental complex near the shores of Lake Titicaca, also exerted limited political and wider cultural influence on the area to the south of the Wari sphere.

The iconography of both polities featured three recurring images: a Staff God (positioned frontally and grasping two staffs), a Rayed Head, and a range of “attendants” viewed in profile (Isbell 2008: 734; Isbell and Knobloch 2006). Pictorial elements like appendages radiating from the head and vertically divided eyes mark the figures out as metahuman beings (Cook 2004: 105–06). However, there were also important differences between Wari and Tiwanaku ritual practices and political structures. These are images that circulated earlier in other parts of the Andes, and the published literature is rarely clear about how many examples of this iconography have been identified on portable artifacts and sculpted stone. Isbell and colleagues (2018) approach the common use of iconography as part of a south-central Andean world that he calls the Southern Andean Iconographic Series. The focus on these three figures obscures the appearance of other animal, human, and superhuman figures in Wari and Tiwanaku iconography. It is important to note that work at local sites in many parts of the highlands does not necessarily reinforce an impression of widely shared belief and identity. For example, Bélisle’s (2019) excavations at the local center of Ak’awillay in the Cuzco region have uncovered evidence of distinct decorative styles, architectural forms, and ritual practices.

Wari iconography features many scenes of political domination and ritualized violence, interpreted by Anita G. Cook (2004) as expressions of an elite seeking to legitimize its position. The Wari capital lacks large plaza spaces and monumental temple complexes, but ritual activities linked to human sacrifice took place in D-shaped temples, which are found in the Ayacucho Valley and, more rarely, elsewhere in the Wari sphere of influence (McEwan and Williams 2012: 67). D-shaped temples are small one-roomed buildings that could hold a few dozen people, and they are found at colony sites outside of the Ayacucho region, including Espiritu Pampa, Cerro Baúl, and sites in the Sondondo and Soras Valleys. Several researchers have noted the apparent coordination of Wari peripheral sites with prominent mountains, suggesting the prominent peaks and bodies of water were important elements in Wari cosmology (e.g., Glowacki and Malpass 2003; Schreiber 2004; Williams and Nash 2006).
In the Ayacucho region, D-shaped temples are associated with the ritual use of trophy heads, a practice seen earlier in the nearby coastal valleys of Nasca. For instance, at Conchopata in the polity’s heartland, 31 trophy heads prepared from recently deceased adults, many showing cranial injuries, were found inside a D-shaped structure along with finely decorated pottery and sacrificed camelids (Tung 2014: 246). Isotope analysis showed that the sacrificed individuals were not local to the region (246). One possible interpretation of these remains is that the ceremonies in D-shaped structures entailed the symbolic subjugation of defeated enemies. Ritual/religious structures in both the capital and the provinces also shows a concern with controlling and restricting access, perhaps indicating the presence of a priestly elite (Schreiber 2001: 92). This iconographic and archaeological evidence does not give the impression that the Wari Staff God (or any other supernatural beings) functioned as an arbiter of correct ethical conduct. The artwork abounds with images of trophy heads and disembodied organs, often in close connection with motifs suggesting agricultural growth (Cook 2004: 111). The bio-archaeological evidence for ritualized head-taking among the Wari elite could potentially be explicable as an attempt to propitiate supernatural powers to ensure crop fertility and favorable weather conditions.

Tiwanaku has been described as a “hospitality state,” held together by communal rituals, feasting and pilgrimage routes rather than direct administrative control by the imperial center over the periphery (Bandy 2013). Unlike the Wari capital, the site of Tiwanaku had a monumental religious precinct at its core, with several low platform mounds and modest plaza spaces that scholars have interpreted as accessible to pilgrims coming to the site from the surrounding region. With the exception of the temple at Omo in the Moquegua Valley (Goldstein 2015), there is little religious architecture in the Tiwanaku style outside the capital, suggesting that there was little attempt to impose an institutionalized religion on communities within the polity’s sphere of influence. Recently, Baitzel and Trigo Rodríguez (2019) have identified a Tiwanaku Camelid Sacrificer, a human-camelid hybrid that appears in the iconography found on portable objects distributed across Tiwanaku networks. Instead, overarching group identities may have been formed, and elite power bolstered, through the public ritualized feasts held at the capital, where meat and maize beer were consumed in vast quantities (Berryman 2010: 4). Bandy (2013: 144) comments: “Elite status at Tiwanaku was formulated in a commensal idiom … The aristocracy was constituted as a body of permanent hosts, and their subjects as eternal guests.”

Sacred sites around and in Lake Titicaca were visited again and again for the purpose of making animal sacrifices and offerings of fine vessels, metalwork, and ornaments of precious shells and stones (Bauer et al. 2004; Delaere et al. 2019; Seddon 2004). Delaere et al. believe these ceremonies, performed by elite specialists but witnessed by a wider community, were a vital component of state formation processes in the south-central Andes. They hypothesize that they “would have emphasized the re-production of a pan-regional moral code signaling appropriate civic and economic behavior” (Delaere et al. 2019: 8234).

The moral values valued highly within the Tiwanaku state thus included generosity and ritualized hospitality. While it is theoretically possible that the fierce Staff God or other deities enforced these “prosocial” practices through the threat of punishment, there is little evidence for this. More probably, such norms were reinforced through communal feasting and traditional host–guest relationships across the empire. Moreover, the repeated rituals at sacred sites at Lake Titicaca could have played a more exclusionary role than that ascribed to them by Delaere et al. (2019), shoring up elite status by demonstrating their privileged access to higher-order supernatural entities (R. Alan Covey, pers. comm. 2019). The populations within the Tiwanaku orbit no doubt had their own ritual practices and concerns, but there are few signs of the presence of deities like the Staff God in their everyday lives.
Late Intermediate Period (c. 1000–1476 CE)
The Late Intermediate Period represents the phase of Andean prehistory that followed the collapse of the highland polities of Tiwanaku and Wari. Although the highlands experienced widespread decentralization and the cessation of monumental construction and widely distributed art styles, complex coastal societies continued to flourish and spread. Foremost among them was Chimor, the kingdom ruled by Chimú elites, which expanded from what had once been the Moche heartland to conquer much of the northern and central coast (Quilter 2014: 243–44). For a review of the Late Intermediate Periods, see Covey (2008; also Conlee et al. 2004; Quilter 2014: 231).

Chimú religion built on what had come before, displaying some motifs and supernatural figures familiar from Moche contexts, but also differed in important ways. For instance, the Moon Animal, a mythical creature with clawed feet, sinuous body, and often a serrated back, is found in both Moche and Chimú (as well as Recuay) artwork (Mackey and Vogel 2003: 327). According to Moore and Mackey (2008: 798–99), the Chimú pantheon also included a Staff God, a Goddess, and a deity with a feathered headdress; but in contrast to representations of supernatural beings in the Chavín or Moche style, the Staff God of Chimor lacked theriomorphic elements like fangs or claws. Some artefacts also depict nobles with headdresses and large ear ornaments, sometimes presiding over subordinates in audience scenes (Moseley 2001: 268).

This trend towards more straightforwardly anthropomorphic representations of important figures, whether divinities or lords, may be linked to the increasing importance of ancestor veneration on the coast during this period. At the capital, Chan Chan, and at urban complexes in other valleys along the North Coast, the Chimú elite oversaw the construction of walled compounds composed of intricate arrangements of chambers, now known as ciudadelas. In the innermost precincts of some of these were platforms where royals and their retainers were buried (Conlee et al. 2004: 215). A miniature model of a chamber inside a Chimú ciudadel was deposited at the Moche pyramid of Huaca de la Luna, by that time abandoned (Quilter 2014: 246–47). It shows several mummy bundles, including one seated in pride of place on a raised dais. Below him are musicians and ceramic vessels that may have contained maize beer: possibly the model shows a ceremony held in honor of the royal or noble ancestors (246–47).

It is likely that deceased royals and nobility continued to play an active role in Chimú society, receiving offerings and perhaps even being consulted on matters of state. However, given the great pains taken to exclude the majority of the population from the inner sanctums of the ciudadelas, we cannot conclude that deceased ancestors watched over moral behavior in any broad sense. More probably, their presence served as a kind of charter for the continuing authority and wealth of elites claiming descent from them.

The Chimú also occasionally practiced human sacrifice on a large scale. In one recently discovered example, over 140 children and over 200 camelids were sacrificed at Huanchaquito-Las Llamas around 1450 CE (Prieto et al. 2019). This was not merely a continuation of older Moche practices: contrasts in the victims chosen (children rather than captured warriors) and in the treatment of the bodies suggest that Chimú-directed sacrificial rites had different rationales and supplicated different supernatural forces. The excavators of this deposit note that the killing coincided with an episode of flooding and high rainfall on the coast, linked to the El Niño–Southern Oscillation: they raise the possibility that the sacrifice was a response to this climatic stress. Unfortunately, we cannot discern which supernatural figure or force the representatives of the Chimú state hoped to propitiate by performing the ritual: maybe royal ancestors or a more remote creator deity? Regardless, this and other mass ritualized killings suggest that for the Chimú (or at least the elite), the way to attract attention and favor from metahuman beings was through sacrifice rather than adhering to a moral code.
The construction of the massive *ciudadelas* at Chan Chan contrasts with the ritual scale seen across the Andean highlands for most of the Late Intermediate Period (Covey 2008). Most regional settlement hierarchies are decentralized, and the largest sites lack formal plazas or temples. A great deal of ceremonial life appears to have been centered around kin-based ceremonies, which included the construction and maintenance of above-ground mortuary repositories located in natural places surrounding settlements. Local material culture and domestic architecture are variable enough to suggest diverse identities, and there is no iconography that would indicate the existence of religious beliefs with moralizing superhuman punishment.

To the south of Chimu the Pachacamac shrine integrated the small polities of the central/south coast. Pachacamac was a universal creator and an entity that existed above the local political hierarchies, whose patron wak’as were said to be children or wives of Pachacamac. At the same time, the creator was a fixed entity, residing in the temple at Pachacamac, and there weren’t branch temples or a widely distributed iconography that would suggest that most people saw Pachacamac as watching over them.

**The Inca Period (c. 1400–1532 CE)**

An alternative name for the period in which the Central Andes region was politically unified under Inca rule is the Late Horizon. Beginning around 1400, the Incas expanded from their core in the Cuzco Valley to build the largest empire in the pre-Columbian Americas, stretching from what is now southern Colombia in the north to Argentina and Chile in the south and encompassing desert, high sierra and tropical rainforest ecosystems (Bauer 2004; Covey 2006). Andean religious beliefs during the period of Inca domination seem to be more easily accessible than those of previous civilizations because soon after the Spanish arrived in the early sixteenth century, they began to produce written accounts of the people they encountered, their culture and ritual practices. Christian indigenous and mestizo authors, such as the Quechua noblemen Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala and the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (son of a conquistador and an Inca princess) also wrote chronicles in the 1600s. These and other sources present some major interpretive pitfalls. The Andean men were born after the European invasion and wrote as Christians, whereas Spaniards writing on Inca religion earlier had their own agendas: they were intent on either showing that the Incas glimpsed Christian truth (Bartolomé de las Casas) or were committed demon-worshippers, or using Inca religion to help justify the Spanish conquest. The early modern documentary sources should be treated with caution for several reasons: the Spanish interpreted Andean religion through the lens of a monotheistic faith with a single moralizing deity; many Andean nobles converted to Christianity before they began to share oral traditions with the chroniclers; and all authors had political motives in writing these works (R. Alan Covey, pers. comm. 2019). Nevertheless, when used carefully, these sources can shed light on the nature of the supernatural agents who populated the Andean cosmos during the Late Horizon.

Inca state religion centered on the worship of the Sun, from whom Inca royals claimed descent, as well as a host of other superhuman beings. The creator, Viracocha, may initially appear to fit the definition of a “high god,” and his name was used by some early missionaries to translate the Christian concept of “God” (Hosne 2018: 323). Garcilaso de la Vega identified the coastal creator Pachacamac, to whom a sanctuary was dedicated on the central coast, with both Viracocha and the God of Abraham (MacCormack 2006: 636–37). However, such processes of religious translation elevated these deities to a position they had not occupied in pre-contact Andean belief (Hosne 2018; Zuidema 1992: 19). For instance, according to the creation story set down by the chronicler Juan de Betanzos (1976: Part One: 1), Viracocha was not actively involved in the world of humans and did not assume the role of a cosmic judge.
The Sun was also a splendid and distant figure rather than a personal god who watched over human moral conduct. The Incas built sun temples at their administrative centers in the central highlands—between Quito (Ecuador) and Paria (Bolivia)—as well as at important creation shrines like Pachacamac and Titicaca. There was no local manifestation of this state cult, which appears to have been absent in most coastal areas and in the south-central Andes. Many coastal societies revered the Moon (Killa), while herders venerated the thunder (Illapa). In the south-central Andes, Inca offerings on snowcapped mountaintops indicate a religious patronage that respected powerful places (apus) already important to local people.

It should also be emphasized that in the late pre-Hispanic Andes, beings like the Sun, Pachacamac or Viracocha coexisted with a wide range of supernatural entities—including deceased ancestors and animate mountains, rocks and springs (Nielsen et al. 2017: 243–44). The Quechua word *wak’a* (or *huaca*) could be applied to any of these beings, to a sacred place or shrine, or to a powerful deity. Andean people interacted with *wak’as* by making offerings and showing reverence in ritually prescribed ways, in exchange for which they hoped for agricultural plenty and protection from misfortune (Yaya 2012: 148). The relationship between a community and its *wak’as* was one of reciprocity and was generally framed in terms of kinship, so that, for example, a mountain could be the ancestor of a local descent group (Chase 2015: 80–81). Andean supernatural agents were not concerned with abstract notions of sin and virtue. It was simply necessary to fulfill one’s ritual obligations to them in order to ensure the flow of vitality and the continued flourishing of human communities. Additionally, ordinary farmers fed the Earth Mother (Pachamama) as a way to ensure the fertility of their fields, and fisherfolk made their own offerings to Mother Ocean (Mama Qocha). The Inca state does not appear to have played a role in that sort of everyday ritual.

As a possible hint of supernatural punishment in the late pre-hispanic Andes, the sixteenth-century Spanish priest Francisco de Ávila (in Zuidema 1992: 29) relates how in the Huarochirí region of central Peru, abnormal births (including the birth of twins) were thought to be caused by human fault and required rites of propitiation addressed to the Thunder. However, this account comes from native witnesses who were born after the conquest, raised as Christians, and who understood that religious officials in nearby Lima considered traditional religion to be idolatry. The people of Huarochirí had already worked the Crucifixion into their myths of universal upheaval.

Natural disasters like earthquakes might also be interpreted as signs of divine anger and disapproval. However, supernatural punishment generally afflicted entire communities rather than individuals; nor was there any expectation that it would be fair or just. Andean people did not expect to be judged for their actions after death, and the idea of an immortal soul was not part of their cosmology.

Instead, “prosocial” ethical norms were enforced at the community level through networks of mutual reliance. Those who refused to support their neighbors and kin could be informally sanctioned, for instance by the withdrawal of help to harvest their own crops. The central ethical value for Andean village communities under Inca rule can therefore be identified as *ayni*, reciprocity. At the level of the state, some forms of wrongdoing, such as rebellion against Inca authority or murder, were punished by Inca officials (D’Altroy 2014: 358–60). In the Andes during this period, moral monitoring and punishment of infractions were thus human affairs, carried out without reference to the will of supernatural beings.

**Summary**

Having reviewed the evidence for religious activities since the advent of agriculture in the central Andes, some general inferences can be made based on the existing evidence.

1. Supernatural agents. Superhuman beings appear in religious iconography early on, and there are some elements (fanged or winged anthropomorphs) that appear in different regions and
periods. There might be a trend from depicting monstrous figures to “theriomorphic” ones to more anthropomorphic ones, and in the earlier depictions there are shamanic figures who transform in order to access some superhuman beings. Although there is much that remains unknown about ancient belief systems, the early distribution of these images was highly restricted—people generally had to travel to a religious center on a festive occasion to see an image of a superhuman being, and in the iconography it appears that altered states and special sacred knowledge or power were needed for a small number of individuals to interact with those beings. Over time, it was more common for these beings to be represented on portable elite objects (textiles, pottery), but these had a restricted distribution. Although it is possible that beliefs were not consistent with these patterns, the material evidence is more suggestive of supernatural agents that were not directly involved with human affairs, or positioned in a way to monitor everyday morality. Of course, the ritual activities that occurred away from religious monuments suggest a concern for other entities—the earth, the sea, mountains, ancestors, that might have a closer relationship with ordinary people. The superhuman beings inhabiting local sacred landscapes might have worked within the logic of community hierarchies and kin-based moral oversight, but they would not necessarily exercise oversight beyond a local scale. From Inca ethnohistory, there seems to be an inverse relationship between the power of a wak’a and its engagement with everyday human affairs.

2. Morality aspects. The archaeological record does not permit the reconstruction of moral values across space and time. It is safe to say that the religious developments described in this chronology took place in societies that were developing or maintaining social hierarchies, so that the logic of moral action would probably be “T-shaped”: political and formal religious hierarchies would treat the structured inequalities of society as morally appropriate, while people from the same stratum or occupation might hold more balanced values about interpersonal behavior. Inca ethnohistory offers some views on morality around the time of the Spanish conquest. The principles of respect and reciprocity were important for kin groups, and were modified as political strategies of the imperial state. These were largely worked out at the local level, with Inca “law and order” enacted in the provinces only when governors representing the ruler were present at an administrative site. The Inca ruler oversaw the moral life of the capital city and the Inca nobility personally.

3. Supernatural monitoring. From the evidence, it is possible that there were entities could have monitored humans from a distance, especially if rayed figures represent the Sun. However, the representation of these figures suggests that they were seen as too distant for ordinary humans to approach, and they were housed in a small number of temples, making it unlikely that shamans or priests could act as the agents of a monitoring supernatural for the broader population. Inca ethnohistory suggests that locally-powerful mountains and other wak’as could inflict punishment on a region—through earthquakes, hail, landslides—but they were not omniscient, or even very interested in how humans interacted with one another.

4. Supernatural punishment. It is possible to associate large-scale offerings with major environmental disasters (e.g., ENSO-associated floods and landslides), and ethnohistory describes such punishment as the result of a lack of reverence or care for superhuman beings. If anything, these probably would have been seen as a moral/sacred failing of the priestly elite—one coastal flood myth says that the people of the Lambayeque Valley bound their king and cast him into the sea to end their punishment. Inca sources suggest that regular gifts of food, drink, cloth, and other things that different waka’s would want would maintain a good relationship—it was proactive and done at the group/community/political scales. Punishment does not appear to be individualized or linked to the afterlife.
5. Supernatural agency. The diversity of representations and offering practices suggests fairly localized conceptualization of superhuman agents. Even the most broadly shared images do not suggest beliefs that would be widely distributed enough to use religion to buttress a shared set of moral values across polities, ethnicity, and subsistence landscapes.

6. It appears that religious elites were the ones with the greatest access to superhuman beings. To the extent that there were state religions, they did not displace local beliefs and ritual practices.

Overall, the Central Andes represents a clear example of the formation of large-scale complex societies in the absence of MSP.

References


**Caribbean Basin**

NGA: North Colombia

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**Tairona**

The name Tairona is generally used in reference to the indigenous groups of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta region, a mountainous range stretching along Colombia’s Caribbean coast. The Tairona people came in contact with the Spanish in the sixteenth century, but the name is also applied to the pre-contact societies that inhabited that same area and which are mostly known through the artefacts they left behind. The Tairona phase of occupation is dated roughly 1050–1524 CE, with 1524 the year in
which the Spanish military garrison was established that spelled the death-knell for indigenous autonomy.

At the time of the Spanish Conquest, the Tairona were organized into semi-independent village groups governed by a priestly class and a hierarchy of chiefs (Oyuela-Caycedo 2008: 423). Most likely, this system began to emerge between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, as suggested by the appearance of several new ceremonial buildings, new spaces dedicated to feasting activities, a general overhaul of the layout of settlements, and evidence for the expansion and intensification of agricultural activities (Giraldo 2010: 283). There is evidence for a thriving and diverse regional economy in North Colombia at the time, with workshops housed by craft specialists (including gold smelters, semiprecious stone engravers, and merchants). The crafts specialization, coupled with intensive exchange of agricultural products, was possible because of the regional ecological diversity. This diversity encouraged the development of centers of specialization and regions of production for items such as ceramics, lithic artifacts, and agricultural products. It also produced a diversity of cultural—religious and linguistic—groups. The Tairona society that encountered—and was quickly overrun by—Spanish settlers represented a high-point of cultural pluralism, resulting in both a flourishing society but also periodic outbursts of sectarian violence and struggles for regional hegemony.

The Sierra Nevada is currently inhabited by the Koguis, Arhuacos, Wiwas, and Kankuamos descendants of the Taironas displaced and segregated during the Spanish conquest. They constitute an indigenous town hall recognized by the Colombian legislation. Scholarship on Tairona religion borrows from studies on one of these groups, the Koguis, because archaeological, historic, and ethnographic evidence on infrastructure, mythology, material culture, and territory suggests the Taironas were the ancestors of the Koguis (Soto 1988: 97, 112; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1977: 104), therefore we use Kogui religion and myth as the basis for our understanding of Tairona traditions. The Koguis have an animistic belief system with supernatural divinities. These include ancestors and totemic-animals like the jaguar, the bat, frog, snake, birds, lizards and bears. These animal divinities are easily identifiable in the iconography on the metal objects and pottery vestiges found during excavations and in modern Kogui rituals that evolved from Tairona material culture (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1997: 266, Museo del Oro Tairona 2014: 39). The frog served as a symbolic representation of fertility, an important aspect of Tairona religion. The jaguar was the “father of creation” and representations are seen in ceramic figures and masks (Londoño 1992: 48, 24).

There were also greater gods like the Sun and Universal Mother. The Universal Mother, the Sun, and the totemic animals control, determine, and organize reality and are active in human affairs (Museo de Oro Tairona 2014: 39; Falchetti 1993: 34-35, 37; Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1997). Although archaeology and chronicles attempt to inform us about several rituals performed by individuals against harm, there is no concrete evidence of supernatural punishment. Ancestors do not seem to punish their descendants for incorrect behavior but can be called on for protection through rituals. In one such ritual, beads and necklaces are deposited inside pottery vessels during the construction of houses as offerings to ancestors and the Universal Mother (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1977: 265). This ritual mainly focuses on the idea of kinship protection from the ancestors but does not imply any type of enforcement of kinship obligations.

As mentioned before, at the time of the Spanish Conquest, the Tairona were organized into independent polities governed by a priestly class and a hierarchy of chiefs. Priests called mámas (or mamos) held wisdom imparted by the gods. Mámas performed all rituals, and ceremonies, and also intervened and continued or changed the course of nature and human beings. They were taught and chosen to be the direct representatives and personification of the gods on the earth (Londoño 1992: 72; Navia 1999).
Kogui religion includes a moral code and supernatural punishment. The Kogui Universal Mother demands strict adherence to certain laws and behaviors including “collaboration, reciprocity, honestly, and an utterly no-materialistic attitude towards life ... Signs of ‘disorder’ such as hermaphroditism, left handedness, seven-month babies, twins, cause consternation and are attributed to the Mother Sun’s displease with mankind’s behavior” (Reichel Dolmatoff 1990: 12). In addition, Kogui offerings through a priest intermediary are more effective if the offeror abides by the Kogui moral code (Reichel Dolmatoff 1990).

Summary
There is little information on the exact tenets of Tairona religion, and no concrete evidence for moralizing supernatural punishment. Kogui descendants of Tairona culture, however, face punishment from the Universal Mother for improper conduct: ignoring the Mother’s rules of conduct can provoke disorder. MSP in Kogui religion is characterised by a broad set of morality concerns, but the morality was probably not a primary focus for their religion, and moralistic punishment was diffuse (on groups rather than individuals).

We cannot securely infer these beliefs as present in pre-contact Tairona religion as they could have evolved in the post-conquest period under the influence of Christianity. On the other hand, we equally cannot dismiss the possibility of MSP presence before 1500.

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Lowland Andes
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Jivaro
The Jivar or Shuar inhabit the Andean lowlands of Peru and Ecuador and share a Jebero-Jivaroan language. They have historically subsisted on swidden horticulture, planting root crops such as manioc and sweet potatoes along with other vegetables (Beierle 2006). They supplemented farming with
hunting, fishing, and gathering (ibid.). The population was dispersed into compact hamlets built in relative isolation (Dyott 1926:160). Each hamlet was made up of one communal house, a large elliptical structure built from wood, lianas, and cane-stalks and occupied by a group of related families (Rivet 1907:583). Some hamlets “form, however, larger or smaller groups, separated from each other by forest and yet connected with each other by narrow footpaths” (Brüning 1928:52). Due to frequent hostilities, homesteads were separated by large tracts of no man’s land (Bennett Ross 1984:93).

Amazonian worldviews are animistic, but also ‘perspectivist’. Their “world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view” (Viveiros de Castro 1998:469). Human’s ordinary perception of reality differs from the way these beings see humans and themselves (Viveiros de Castro 1998:470). In fact, animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture – they see their food as human food […], they see their bodily attributes […] as body decorations or cultural instruments, they see their social system as organized in the same way as human institutions are (Viveiros de Castro 1998:470).

Those barriers are broken down during shamanistic rituals and under the influence of hallucinogenic drugs, granting access to this deeper reality. Jivaro communicate not only with other humans, but also with spirits, plants, and animals, all of which are thought to possess wakan or ‘souls’ (Descola 1996:375). This is accomplished through incantations, dreams, and visionary trances (ibid.). Productive exchanges with the environment, such as successful hunts, depend on the observance of rules of etiquette. For example, humans were expected to desist from causing unnecessary suffering to game animals (Descola 1996:114). The latter were thought to bear grudges against hunters who had done so (ibid.). Furthermore, the dead were thought to sometimes inhabit red deer, which were therefore not hunted, as per “injunction of the ancients” (ibid.).

The Jivaro cosmos was suffused with tsarutama, an impersonal supernatural force that animated everything (Beierle 2006). This force, neither good nor evil, was especially strong in powerful entities such as the rain god, the anaconda, the sun and moon, the earth, and the chonta palm (ibid.). Understanding these forces was crucial because “normal waking life […] is simply ‘a lie’ or illusion, while the true forces that determine daily events are supernatural” (Harner 1973:153). Various types of souls played a prominent role, most importantly the arutam soul, which boys and men acquired through a strenuous vision quest. Possessors of strong arutam souls attained great powers. They were immune to sorcery and physical attacks, and some were thought to become immortal (Beierle 2006).

Among the Jivaro, the cosmos is suffused with a logic of reciprocity and retaliation that also characterizes human relationships. This is evident in the concept of the muisak or avenging soul. This soul returns from the dead to avenge slights committed against its bearer: “both the Jibaros and the Canelos Indians believe that old men may, after death or even in their lifetime, appear in the shape of jaguars, anacondas, or other formidable or dangerous animals and in this disguise punish their relatives for neglect of duty” (Karsten 1935:252p). Avenging spirits, though acting out of anger and malice, may thus encourage individuals to fulfill their obligations. Curses and sorcery may play a similar role. A powerful old man is believed to have the power to curse those who anger him to death (Harner 1973:111).

Illness and death were readily attributed to such invisible forces (Harner 1973:152p). However, these powers were fueled by anger at being slighted, not by some higher prosocial authority. Kinsmen who had failed to live up to expectations were vulnerable to sorcery, but so were warriors to the wrath of their victim’s vengeful spirit. The souls of slain enemies seek to exact vengeance on their killer by causing nightmares or accidents (Descola 1996:115). After their return from a successful raid, warriors
had to purify and protect themselves with hen’s blood, a ritual bath, and the application of *genipa* body paint (Karsten 1935:305).

But as we have seen above, the killing of enemies was not met with disapproval. To the contrary, it was encouraged and celebrated. Hauntings from vengeful victims were therefore treated as “very temporary inconveniences [that] amount to very little compared with the glorious feat of arms of which they are the consequence” (Descola 1996:115p) and do not deter further killings. Once cleansed, the head-taker attempted to use the powers of his enemy’s *muisak* “for increasing the power of women who are members of [his] household” (Harner 1973: 192p). Ordinary dead people are thought to bother the living to “bewail their solitude” (Descola 1996:114). Humans placated them with gifts of food and beer to (ibid.). However, it appears that Jivaro treat these hauntings as a nuisance rather than a serious threat (ibid.). It therefore appears that the power of ghosts to inflict real harm is limited to specific circumstances.

**Summary**
The Jivaro believe in an omnipresent supernatural force present in all things, including high gods. However, this was not a moralizing force. Supernatural punishment could come from vengeful spirits, but not for any moralistic reason.

**References**


**World Religions**
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*Note:* the material in this chapter is adapted from *The Seshat History of Axial Age* (ed. Daniel Hoyer, 2019).

**Hinduism**
According to some recent scholarship, there was no such thing as ‘Hinduism’ in pre-colonial India. Prior to European colonization, several religious systems coexisted in the Sub-Continent. Arguably, it was only
during the nineteenth century that these were assembled into a single, unitary religion, arbitrarily labelled ‘Hinduism’ by Western scholars (Frykenberg 1989). There is no consensus on this matter, however, and some have argued that the idea that Hinduism is a recent Western construct stems from a reluctance of modern-day Western scholars to regard Hinduism as a religion, because it is so different from its Abrahamic counterparts, which itself suggests a distorting bias on their part (Asad 1993).

Unlike other “Axial” religions, Hinduism lacks a founder, which makes it difficult to pinpoint its exact origins. Did it originate outside of India, or was it an indigenous development? If it came from outside, where did it come from? Did it emerge as far back as the Indus Valley Civilization (ca. 2500-1500 BCE), or was it more recent? How much did it borrow from preceding traditions, and did it borrow from certain traditions more than others? None of these questions have clear answers, and indeed the subject of the religion’s origins is controversial, as different theories have been used by different political groups to bolster their nationalistic agendas. And even if we were to say that Hinduism began with the earliest known appearance of the earliest Hindu scriptures, the Vedas—which mostly focus on the theory and practice of early Hindu ritual—these have also been difficult to date, with estimates ranging from 1500 to 600 BCE (Whaling 2009: 14-16).

What we can say with some certainty is that, by the seventh century BCE, Hinduism formed the dominant ritual-religious system in parts of what is today Northern India. Between 600 and 300 BCE, the Upanishads were written, sacred texts that codified many essential aspects of Hindu practice including the karma system, namely the idea that one’s actions resulted in more, or less, favorable rebirths after death. They also focused less on the external trappings of religion—group or public rituals, symbolic dress, etc.—and more on worshippers’ interior experience of their faith (Whaling 2009: 17-19). Around the same time, however, Jainism and Buddhism emerged, and they both eventually eclipsed Hinduism in importance, starting with Mauryan rule (322–187 BCE). However, even at this time of relative obscurity, more important Hindu sacred texts were written: specifically, the epic poems known as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, both of which weave popular traditions and Hindu philosophy into the framework of a single extended narrative, and the Bhagavad Gita, a philosophical dialogue meant to teach how to reconcile the religion’s apparent contradictions and how to incorporate religious practices into one’s daily life. Hinduism only really re-emerged as the predominant ideology in the Subcontinent in the fourth century CE, with the rise of the Gupta Empire, whose influence extended to India’s far South. By the end of the Gupta period, around 500 CE, much of the Puranas had been written, though additions were made at least up to 1000 CE. There are eighteen major Puranas and, besides providing instruction on correct moral behaviour and modes of worship, they each also focus on a single deity as the being responsible for the creation of the world and maintenance of cosmic order. Three gods, in particular, accrued increasingly large followings: Vishnu, Shiva, and the Goddess Devi; the cult of Vishnu is known as Vaisnavism, that of Shiva Saivism, and that of Devi Shaktism (Shattuck 1999: 38-51). The shifting focus of Hindu ideology from a large polytheistic pantheon of equally powerful—and important—deities, to the more henotheistic flavor of the Puranas, at times verging towards monotheism, is one of the reasons that Hinduism has been so difficult for modern Western scholars to classify.

From the Gupta period up until the arrival of Islam into the region in the thirteenth century, Hinduism—particularly Saivism (Sanderson 2009)—benefited from the financial support of virtually all dynasties that rose and fell in South Asia. State sponsorship led to the blossoming of religious scholarship, art, and architecture. Hinduism’s dominance mostly came at the expense of Buddhism, whose presence waned in the Subcontinent (Whaling 2009: 25)—precisely as its influence was on the rise in East and Southeast Asia—while Jainism continued to attract followers and some government funding and support (Dundas 2002).

Between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, powerful Islamic polities established themselves throughout North India, most notably the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. As a result, tensions
between the Muslim establishment and the Hindu majority occasionally resulted in violent conflict. However, Islam’s message of equality and straightforward monotheism also attracted many converts, especially among the lower castes. Moreover, practitioners of the more mystical branches of Islam adopted some of the more esoteric elements of Hinduism in their worship and, in the sixteenth century, Guru Nanak combined aspects of Islam and Hinduism into the movement that became Sikhism. In the South of India, the Vijayanagar empire and its immediate predecessors and successors each maintained Hinduism as the dominant ideology, and the most notable religious development in this region at this time was the rise of devotional traditions (Whaling 2009: 26-28). Devotional Hinduism was spread by wandering poet-saints who garnered large followings through their songs, in which they emphasized the personal relationship between worshipper and deity; much of their appeal came from their simpler, more open, and more egalitarian version of Hinduism, evident in part from the fact that both men and women could become poet-saints and that their songs were usually written in the vernacular. Such practices set this devotional worship apart from the more hierarchical, inaccessible mainstream Hindu practice (Shattuck 2015: 58-63).

**Morality Aspects**

According to the karma system, which Hindus and Buddhists share, one’s actions in this life have consequences after death; the more good actions one performs in life, the more merit one accumulates, and the more likely one is to be reborn as a more elevated being and/or in a more ‘heavenly’ realm. By contrast, a preponderance of bad actions leads to one’s rebirth as a lower being and/or in a more hellish realm (Shattuck 1999: 29). Bad actions are actions motivated by hatred, dishonesty, deceit, jealousy, and avarice, while good actions are motivated by benevolence, restraint, and dutiful conduct (Diwedi 2012). Through many iterations of life, death, and rebirth, people seek to break free from the cycle (moksha) and unite with Brahman—a difficult to define sanskrit term denoting the Hindu (and Buddhist) notion of the ultimate, eternal, divine unity of existence. While Hindu deities do not judge human actions or punish moral transgressions, at least compared to the ‘moralizing’ deities of the Abrahamic faiths, the karma system and the conception of Brahman as eternal, unchanging, and perfectly ordered does lend moralizing weight to Hindu thought and practice.

**Buddhism**

In Buddhism, one accumulates "good" karma through the performance of good actions, and "bad" karma from the performance of bad actions. Actions are good when they derive from non-selfish intentions and do not result in harm to neither oneself or others; by contrast, bad actions derive from greed, hatred, or delusion, and they result in harm towards oneself and/or others. After death, those who have accrued more good karma than bad may be reborn in one of several possible "heavens" where they will live long and blissful lives, those who have accrued more bad karma than good will be reborn in a "hell" and/or in the body of a being whose life will be relatively short and/or painful, while those who have accrued similar proportions of good and bad karma will be reborn in the human world (Keown 2013, 32-40).

However, the ultimate aim is not to be reborn in ones of the heavens, but to escape the cycle of rebirths entirely; one can only do this by following a set of eight rules known as the "Eightfold Path". It is worth noting that the Eightfold Path emphasises refraining from bad actions above performing good ones (Keown 2013, 54-56).

Finally, it is also worth noting that Buddhist gods are thought to be subject to the same laws of karma as all other beings; moreover, they take no interest in mortal affairs (Keown 2013, 37). The Buddha (or Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, etc) do not monitor human actions, nor do they punish or reward humans, “because the workings of karma are fully independent of any supernatural observer” (Schlieter 2014: 655).
Norenzayan (2013) suggests that eyes painted on all four sides of many Nepalese stupas represent “supernatural monitoring and policing.” These eyes, however, signify Buddha’s awakening and his compassion for all sentient beings, not monitoring (Schlieter 2014: 655).

**Zoroastrianism**

Much of what is known about the Zoroastrian faith as it was practiced in ancient times derives from the religion’s scriptures, known as the Avesta. Unfortunately, only a small portion of the latter survived Alexander the Great’s invasion in the fourth century BCE, and much of what was reconstructed through the later efforts of Parthian and Sassanid rulers and priests was lost again with the Arab conquest of Iran in the seventh century CE (Nigosian 1993, 46-47). This makes it particularly difficult to understand how the religion evolved through time. The following summary, then, applies most solidly to the most recent and best documented period of Zoroastrian dominance in Iran, the time of Sassanid rule, and can only be cautiously applied to Parthian and Achaemenid rule.

Scholars still debate whether Zoroastrianism was monotheistic, polytheistic, or dualistic. Zarathustra replaced the traditional polytheistic pantheons of Ancient Iran with a system in which the god Ahura Mazda reigns supreme, but which also includes a group of abstract entities known as the Amesa Spentas. Ahura Mazda himself was seen to be "self-created, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, invisible, and beyond human conceptualization" (Nigosian 1993, 71). Indeed, that the system was somewhat complicated may partly explain why a straightforwardly monotheistic religion such as Islam eventually came to replace Zoroastrianism as the dominant religion in Iran (Malandra 2005).

Ahura Mazda was also in charge of punishing those who transgressed moral norms and rewarded those who respected them. Though the most detailed account of the Zoroastrian Hell, the Arda Viraz Namag (The Book of the Righteous Viraz) is "impossible to date with any amount of accuracy" (Stausberg 2000, 238), it does shine a light on the kinds of behaviors that Ahura Mazda was thought to punish: these included stealing, homicide, "neglecting crying and hungry children", "denying hospitality to travelers", "violation of contracts", "selling items with false measures and weights", "making false promises", "disrepect of husband"², "disrepect for one’s parents", "sodomy", "sexual intercourse during menstruation", and "polluting water and fire through excrement and carrion" and "performing worship while thinking that the gods do not exist" (Stausberg 2000, 241). By contrast, gratefulness, generosity, and righteousness were all virtues that Ahura Mazda rewarded (Stausberg 2000, 231-232).

Stausberg (2014:603) provides further details:

In the case of Zoroastrianism ... at least two prominent deities have moral watcher qualities. In the earliest sources, the Gāthās, Ahura Mazdā, whose name points to his quality of knowledge (‘The All-Knowing Lord’ or ‘The Lord who Puts Knowledge’), has an exalted view overlooking everything with truth; this attribute is invoked following a mention of sin and atonement (Y. 31.13); his later Avestan epithets (enumerated in Yt. 1) include ‘all seeing,’ ‘seer of much,’ ‘the best seer of much,’ ‘far-seeing,’ ‘farthest-observing,’ ‘watcher.’ Even though his creative powers are more prominent, there is little doubt that Ahura Mazdā behaves morally. The other relevant deity is Mithra, the surveyor of contracts (his name also means contract), who in Yt. 10 is ascribed ‘thousand ears,’ ‘ten thousand eyes,’ ‘ten thousand spies;’ Mithra is also a punishing god operating from above.


² Note that, as with Hinduism, this marital morality applied only to women; there is no indication of a similar exhortation against the 'disrepect of wife'.
Judaism
Belief in moralistic supernatural punishment and reward is one of the key features of Judaism. Specifically, the Jewish sacred text, the Torah, forbids antisocial behaviours, such as harming others, and promotes prosocial ones, such as supporting the vulnerable, honoring one's parents, and maintaining honest business practices:

"For instance, Israelites are prohibited from oppressing the widow and the fatherless, lest the cry of the abused provoke God's rage, and God 'will put you to the sword and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans' (Exod 22:23). Deuteronomy assures the Israelite that if he distributes the tithe of his produce to the widow, fatherless, stranger, and Levite (the priests), 'the Lord your God may bless you in all the enterprises you undertake' (Deut 14:29). Generosity to the newly released slave similarly brings with an extended life span (Deut 22:7). Honoring parents and using honest weights and measures in commercial transactions is recompensed with 'enduring long on the soil that the Lord your God is giving you' (Exod 20:12, Deut 5:16, 25:15); here the reward may be individual or collective." (Goodfriend 2013: 39)

The Torah also list the rewards that a Jew may be expected to receive in life if they abide the laws of God, and the punishments they may expect if they do not. Rewards include a bountiful harvest, protection from dangerous animals and war, and increased fertility (e.g. Leviticus 26:1-13). Punishments include, among other things, disease, famine, loss in war, and oppression by foreign powers (e.g. Leviticus 26:14-46). The Talmud, another key text for Jewish law and theology, also implies that there may be judgement after death, in a passage that says that when a person dies he will be asked whether "'he carried out his business affairs with honesty" (Rosen 2003: 85).

Christianity
For early Christian ideas of punishment in Hell, the second-century Apocalypse of Peter is essential. It is a popular work that was canonized in some parts of the Empire, giving a list of the crimes punished there and the corresponding punishments. The crimes include blasphemy, adultery, murder, homosexuality, disobeying a parent or master, having an abortion (yep, it does go back to the beginnings of Christianity!), and usury. For reliable discussion and text of it, see Bart Ehrman: The New Testament and Other Early Christian Writings, together with The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings. He probably discusses it in some of his many other books, too.

The fourth or fifth century Apocalypse of Paul is more concerned with curbing priestly and doctrinal errors but also has a catalog of the punished.

According to a number of prominent models of theodicy in Christianity, the suffering that humans often experience in this life is a result of their own moral transgressions, either because it is

Literature
interpreted as direct retribution from God or because it is seen as a direct consequence of making morally incorrect choices (Chester and Duncan 2009: 305). For example, texts written by Christian authors in Syria between the fourth and eighth centuries clearly state that the famines, plagues, and wars that Christian Syrians suffered in these centuries were the result of God’s displeasure: for example, the sixth-century chronicle written by Joshua the Stylite describes the invading Persians as God’s “rod of anger”, and Syrian Christians’ suffering as the direct result of “not [having] shown mercy until those who were delivered unto them; for they have been accustomed to show their pleasure and to rejoice in evil done to the children of men” (tr. Wright 1882, quoted in Villagomez 1998: 212). As another example, several centuries later, European Christians viewed the Black Death as divine punishment for their sins, and devised extreme forms of self-inflicted violence (most notably, self-flagellation) in the hope that of allaying God’s wrath through penance (Dols 1974: 272-273).

References

Manichaeism
The Prophet Mani, who lived in Persian-controlled Mesopotamia in the early 3rd century CE, famously posited a cosmological opposition between the forces of Light and Darkness (Daryaee 2012b: 190). Drawing on a wide array of influences including early Christianity, Gnostic philosophy, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism was a ‘religion of the book’ but a remarkably universalizing and dynamic one (Laine 2014: 86; Sundermann 2009). Manichaeans promoted the idea that every people had their own messenger from god and that the various religions were different paths to the same end: the liberation of the ‘World Soul’ or ‘Living Self’ from its prison of demonic matter (Sundermann 2009). Mani thus presented himself as the successor to Zarathustra, Gautama Buddha, and Jesus Christ: as the ‘seal of the prophets’ whose message was intended for the whole world (Laine 2014: 86; Sundermann 2009). Like the ‘axial sages’ before him, as well as later prophets like Muhammad, Mani became a voice of reform in a Zoroastrian context during the 3rd century CE, stressing universal ideals and the importance of ethical conduct. His activities were tolerated and even sometimes supported by the Sasanian kings Shapur I and Hormizd I, but Hormizd’s successor, Bahram II, had the prophet imprisoned and then executed in 276 CE (Daryaee 2012b: 190-91). It is noteworthy that Mani is almost never included in the company of the other ‘axial sages’, in spite of the commonalities between his message and the other axial traditions as well as the striking similarity of his life to that of other ‘axial’ prophets.

This might be because Manichaeism is the only world religion that has become completely extinct. Wherever it appeared, its followers were usually a persecuted minority, and indeed it seems that by the 7th century it had already died out across the former Roman Empire, by the 11th it was no longer practiced in the Islamic Near East, in Central Asia by the 14th century, and in China by the 16th. The only polities that adopted it as the official state cult were the Uighur Khaganate (c. 740-840 CE) and its successor, the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho (c. 840-1350). Even among the Uighur, during the time of the Khaganate, there is no evidence that Manichaeism spread far beyond the ranks of the elite, and indeed opposition to Manichaeism may have led to a coup in 779 (Sundermann 2009).
Though Manichaean doctrinal texts and hymns mention approximately forty deities, as well as supernatural agents referred to as angels, Manichaean mythology makes it clear that there is only one eternal god, the Father of Greatness, limited only by Evil; all other gods and angels are mere evocations of the Father of Greatness. Because the latter is "often praised and invoked" in Manichaean texts, it seems reasonable to infer that he was believed to be able to intervene in the affairs of the living (Sundermann 2009).

Indeed, the Father of Greatness was also thought determined the fates of souls after death, in the form of a "righteous judge" who sits on a celestial throne and weighs the deeds of the deceased. Manichaean beliefs about the afterlife are relatively complex, with up to fifteen paths to eternal bliss, transmigration, or eternal death, as well as variants regarding the exact sequence of events following the moment demise. Generally speaking, the Elect, Hearers (i.e. laypeople) who had not been especially wicked, and sinners all met different fates (Sundermann 2009).

The Elect were a small elite who followed a highly restrictive ethical code: they were forbidden to lie, kill, eat flesh, drink alcohol, have sex, and hold property (Colditz 2009: 74-80). Their resulting purity meant that, after death, they were welcomed into Paradise (Sundermann 2009).

By contrast, Hearers followed a more relaxed set of rules compared to the Elect. They were to avoid idolatry, any form of dishonesty or unfairness, greed, killing, sex for pleasure, theft, sorcery, holding multiple beliefs regarding their faith, negligence of their work, and disobeying or otherwise failing to respect the Elect (Colditz 2009: 76-80; Colditz 1995: 28), but they were also allowed to perform activities that were harmful to the Light, including agriculture, hunting, and any crafting activities (Colditz 2009: 73). As a result, they could not enjoy eternal bliss after death. Instead, their souls transmigrated into plants, which were then eaten by the Elect. Whenever an Elect ate plant matter, they were thought to release Light particles, thus contributing to the cosmic struggle between Light and Darkness (Sundermann 2009). In other words, though the Hearers' fate after death was not a straightforward reward like being welcomed into Paradise, it was also not exactly a punishment, as it was instrumental to the betterment of the universe.

Finally, sinners, regardless of whether they had been Elect or Hearers in life, were thought to suffer imprisonment in the bodies of animals after death, then fall into the hands of merciless demons, and finally end up eternally trapped in the Darkness (Sundermann 2009).

References


Islam

In many ways, Islam is not very different from Christianity. For one thing, it is monotheistic—though, unlike the Christian God, the Islamic one has no direct children and no parents (Yaran 2007, 23). Moreover, the Islamic God is also omnipresent and omniscient: ‘To Allah belongs the East and the West. Whichever way you turn, there is the face of Allah. Allah is All-Embracing, and All-Knowing’ (Qu’ran 2:115, quoted in Yaran 2007, 24). He is also described as omnipotent (Yaran 2007, 23-24): he created and governs the cosmos, and he actively directs the moral evolution of men and women, sending prophets to teach them proper conduct and, on the Islamic equivalent of the Christian Day of Resurrection (known as the Last Day, or Qiyamat in Arabic), rewarding those who followed these teachings by welcoming them into paradise (Cannat) and punishing those who knowingly disobeyed them by sending them to hell (Jahannat).

Again, the types of moral behavior prescribed by the Islamic God is overall fairly similar to that punished by the Christian and Judaic ones, including punishment for harming the weak (specifically orphans and children in general), cheating on one’s spouse, killing other people (unless for a just cause), cheating in trade, believing falsities, and being prideful:

Do not slay your offspring for fear of want. It is We who provide for them, and for you. Indeed their killing is a great sin. Do not approach adultery, for it is an indecent thing and an evil way. Do not take the life which Allah has rendered sacrosanct, except for a just cause.... Do not approach the property of an orphan except in the way that is best (responsible investment) until he attains majority. Keep your covenants, for one is responsible for one’s covenant. Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with even scales (when you weigh). This is better, and will be the best in the end. Do not go after that of which you have no knowledge, for (man’s) eyes, ears and heart, each of these (senses) shall be closely questioned. Do not walk proudly on the earth (Qur’an 17:31-7, quoted in Yaran 2007, 43-44).

As for positive moralizing commands, there are seven main ones: to acknowledge the existence of only the one God, to show respect to one’s parents, to be righteous (which includes avoiding the above-mentioned sinful behaviors and carrying out the ones mentioned in this current list), to give to the poor, to spend with moderation, to speak kindly, and to be generous (Yaran 2007, 43). Moreover, chastity and modesty is praised both in men and in women (Behold; [...] men who guard their modesty and women who guard (their modesty), [...] Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a vast reward' [Qur’an 33:35, quoted in Yaran 2007, 45]), though, as in Christianity, the question of gender equality within Islam is a fraught one (see below). In general, the Islamic God rewards "[k]indness and equity, compassion and mercy, generosity, self-restraint, sincerity, the moral fellowship of the believers, honesty, truthfulness, the keeping of commitments, fair-dealing, humility, patience, endurance, courage, thankfulness, dignity, purity, modesty and chastity, helpfulness, cooperation, charitableness, hospitality, brotherliness, warmth and lovingness, striving and hard work" (Yaran 2007, 43).

The Islamic God is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent (Yaran 2007, 23-24): he created and governs the cosmos, and he actively directs the moral evolution of men and women, sending prophets to teach them proper conduct and, on the Last Day (Qiyamat, the Islamic equivalent of the Christian Day of Resurrection), rewarding those who followed these teachings by welcoming them into paradise (Cannat) and punishing those who knowingly disobeyed them by sending them to hell (Jahannat). Punishable behaviours include harming the vulnerable, adultery, murder, dishonesty in business, credulousness, and pride:
Islam also abhors human sacrifice: though, being an Abrahamic religion, Islam rests on the founding myth of Abraham's almost-sacrifice of his son Isaac, whom God had Abraham replace at the last minute with a ram, Muslims interpret this to indicate God's preference for animal rather than human sacrifice (Burkert 2013, 444).

In the Qu'ran, disasters generally express God's wrath at human behaviour, or they are meant as warnings of the upcoming punishment of moral transgression, either in the relatively near future or as part of the Day of Judgment (Akasoy 2009). In his writings, sixteenth-century polymath Imam Jalaluddin al-Suyuti stated that disasters constituted divine punishment for a range of transgressions, including adultery and drinking alcohol; the earthquake that struck Cairo in 1576 was widely interpreted as an expression of divine disapproval of the proliferation of coffee houses throughout the city; and some Muslim sources commenting on the Krakatoa eruption of 1883 expressed the belief that it was divine punishment for the acceptance of Christian colonial rule, as well as other sins (Chester, Duncan and Sangster 2012: 114).

**Summary:** Islam is a fully developed MSP religion.

**References**
