Mythemes I

June 25, 2020 Category: History
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Mythemes are timeless motifs in folklore. They can be found in mythology around the world, throughout history. They recur in myriad cultural contexts because there is something in them that resonates with all humans qua humans. The concept was first discussed in James Frazer's "The Golden Bough"; published in installments between 1890-1915. They can be understood as narrative templates that resonate with our (universal) human nature. {1}

Typically, such themes are oriented around archetypes: motifs that seem to crop up in most cultures. Just as with mythemes, archetypes exist across cultures simply because they resonate with something in everyone–irrespective of social milieu. As we'll see, this can be the case with anything from fairies and unicorns…to sky-gods and savior-gods.

While both are reflections of universal proclivities, it is useful to make the distinction between mythemes and archetypes. The former are general THEMES (of stories), the latter are particular TYPES (of things / personas). To illustrate the distinction, let's look at examples of each.

Mytheme: While "mytheme" typically refers to a particular plot-point, we might also look at the recurrence of an entire narrative structure. A favorite plot-line is the dashing hero exiled from his homeland or faced with a daunting challenge (that is: given a "call to adventure")…then embarking on an epic, transformative journey…and eventually to return in triumph.

The general format of this narrative structure dates back to the Bronze Age with the tale of Utnapishtim in **Assyrian / Babylonian lore** (ref. the "Epic of Gilgamesh"). It then continued on through tales of …

- Rama in **Hindu lore** (ref. the "Rama-yana"; see Appendix)
- Siddhartha Gautama in **Buddhist lore** (later popularized by Hermann Hesse)
- Xuan-zang in **Chinese lore** (ref. "Journey To The West")
- Yamato Takeru in **Japanese lore** (ref. the "Kojiki" / "Nihon Shoki")
- Odysseus (later Romanized to "Ulysses") in **Greek lore**
- Joshua in **Hebrew lore** (ref. the Mikra)
- Lucius in **Roman lore** (ref. "The Golden Ass" by Apuleius of Numidia)
- …which was then adapted (with Dionysus as the protagonist) in the "Dionysiaca" by Nonnus of Panopolis in **Hellenic lore**
- Beowulf in **Anglo-Saxon / Norman lore**
- Parzifal's quest for the fabled "holy grail" in **German lore** (later rendered "Galahad" in **Frankish lore**)

This "hero's journey" emerged in **English lore** with Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queen" in the late 16th century (where different journeys by different characters were recounted). The quintessential m odern example is Bilbo–then Frodo–in Tolkien's "Lord Of The Rings".

Sometimes the quest is for something abstract–as with Enlightenment or some kind of transcendence. Sometimes it is for a sacred artifact–as with the philosopher's stone. But whether it's Lancelot searching for the goblet used by Jesus during the Last Supper or Jason searching for the Golden Fleece, there is a

mission. During the quest, the stakes are high, the ordeals offer a growing opportunity, and there is a valuable lesson is to be learned. The protagonist must undergo an existential evolution, overcoming obstacles and enduring tribulation, if he is to succeed–a reality with which we must all come to terms in our own lives.

Joseph Campbell dubbed this the "hero's journey", and explicated the formula in terms of a series of key plot-points. Campbell showed that we needn't resort to mystical mumbo-jumbo to elucidate the universality of this narrative structure. Rather, he posited the global resonance the "monomyth", the existence of which revealed a universal human nature (ref. "Hero With A Thousand Faces").

Archetype: A leitmotif that seems to crop up in different mythologies is the bridge to heaven. This was first found in Persian mythology as the "Chinvato Peretum" (a.k.a. the C[h]invat Bridge): the bridge to "Takamagahara" (where souls are judged by "Rashnu"). In Islamic lore, this bridge is re-named, "Al-Sirat" (alternately, the "Sirat al-Mustaqim")…as if referring to it in Arabic lent it a sheen of authenticity. This was obviously a repurposing of the Zoroastrian meme. The leitmotif of a magical structure leading to the hereafter can also be found in ancient Norse mythology–with "Bifröst": the rainbow bridge leading from Midgard to Asgard (alternately translated as "shimmering path"). Such a bridge makes sense, as it provides the way from this world to the next ("dunya" to "akirah" in CA terms). Some are inclined to depict the trestle as a stairway. Others as a gateway.

Whether a mytheme or an archetype, we find that certain kinds of things hit all the right buttons; and do so regardless of how fantastical they might be. (Sometimes, the MORE fantastical, the more likely they are embraced; see the work of Scott Atran.) Resonance is often a personal thing; but every so often, there is something that has UNIVERSAL resonance. This means that it "strikes a nerve", as it were, with just about anybody–irrespective of cultural milieu, across virtually all geographies and historical periods. The only explanation for this is that there is something in our universal (human) nature to which such things appeal. {14}

Such memetic trends are not limited to ancient folklore. The same psychical mechanisms are exploited when it comes to the architecture of narratives in contemporary culture–as with formulaic books and movies and television shows that are–predictably–big hits. It is no coincidence that certain thematic gimmicks–and even certain plot-points–crop up over and over again. (This is especially the case with romances–be it maudlin Harlequin romance novels or cheesy romantic comedies. But we also find it in detective stories and crime dramas.) Note, for example, the notion of the quintessential seducer: From Don Giovanni (Italian) to Don Juan (Spanish) to Cyrano de Bergerac (French).

The fact that the same narrative patterns crop up again and again, around the world, across epochs, is due to what Dan Sperber dubbed "cognitive attractors": themes and motifs toward which all humans naturally gravitate–irrespective of cultural milieu–due to the shared neurological structure of all homo sapiens. An account of themes / motifs common to virtually all cultures was given by Pascal Boyer in his "Religion Explained". Another list was compiled by Michael Shermer in an appendix to his, "The Science of Good & Evil".

In order to fully appreciate the prevalence of mythemes, one does not need to appeal to the Jungian treatment of archetypes (that is: as Platonic forms dwelling in some collective unconscious-ness). One needn't resort to quasi-mystical conceptions like Carl Jung's "collective unconscious" to recognize a human nature–nor the existence of common threads running through the world's widely variegated myths. (There are, of course, treatments of archetypes other than the Jungian variety. Jung's insight was that there is a psychological explanation for these universal patterns. Little did he know that evolutionary psychology would provide all the explanation we need; no mysticism required.)

An example of a popular theme is the tale of two brothers who find themselves in a fraught relationship, each on his own path. It addresses certain timeless / universal themes, yet is not ubiquitous. This is more than just a sibling rivalry. The brothers represent two different approach to life–an exigency that sometimes involves conflict, but not always; and sometimes involves reconciliation, but not always. {17}

This motif goes back to the 12th century B.C. in Egypt–with the tale of the two brothers: Bata and Anpu. The Biblical tale of Cain and Abel (composed by Judaic scribes in Babylon during the Exilic Period) is a recycling of the antecedent Egyptian legend. This should come as no surprise, as folkloric appropriation invariably occurred throughout the region in ancient times. Archaic tales of the two ORIGINAL brothers even occurred in the Far East. {18}

Oftentimes, the tale-of-two-brothers involves jealousy / betrayal. In the Torah alone, we repeatedly encounter the theme of brother betraying brother: first with Cain vis a vis Abel…then with Jacob vis a vis Esau…and then with the betrayal of Joseph by ALL of his brothers (including the Judaic patriarch, Judah). Typically, the rejection of eldest son was involved: Abel over Cain, Seth over Ham, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, Ephraim over Manasseh, etc. It was a catchy theme, so WHY NOT keep recycling it? The authors of the Bible even threw in a scandalous SISTER rivalry for good measure (replete with resentment, deception, and betrayal) with the account of Rachel and Leah vying for Jacob's hand.

The tale of two brothers is timeless because it addresses important issues. It is no surprise, then, that arguably the greatest novel of the 20th century, Steinbeck's "East of Eden", adapted the classic tale for modern times.

Starting with the Egyptian tale of Bata and Anpu, we find that the notion of an ignoble brother seeking vindication over a noble brother is commonplace throughout world mythology–as with:

- Set[h] (vis a vis Osiris) in **Egyptian myth**
- Ahriman (vis a vis Ahura Mazda) in **Persian myth**
- Acrisius (vis a vis Proetus) in **Greek myth**
- Romulus (vis a vis Remus) in **Roman myth**
- Loki (vis a vis Thor) in **Norse myth**

We encounter a similar dynamic with the parable of the prodigal son in the Gospels.

Other themes crop up again and again throughout the world's religions–as with people displeasing a cantankerous, vindictive deity…then being smote for their insolence. The deity in the Torah is arguably the most temperamental character in sanctified myth (and arguably the most petty). Behold what he did to the insolent people Sodom and Gomorrah (in the Torah) and of A'ad and of Salih [Thamud] (in the Koran)…and then to, well, all non-Christians in the Book of Revelation.

Upon even a cursory survey of the world's religions over the past five millennia, certain mythemes are hard not to notice. Christianity may well be the best-known example of a newfangled Faith co-opting extant leitmotifs–yielding a make-shift pastiche of dogmas. That derivative memetic agglomeration is then fancied as sui generis. The resulting memeplex is presented as a fully-intact, original version of the myth. (Call it "contrived authenticity".) This routine of clandestine appropriation is typical of virtually ALL theologies–as exemplified Islam's extensive cooptation of antecedent Syriac lore (see my essay: "Syriac Source-material For Islam's Holy Book").

In fashioning itself as THE explanation for everything, virtually every religion considers itself pristinely authentic (i.e. not derivative in any way). Its supplicants are thereby reticent to concede that any of its ostensibly groundbreaking ideas may not be quite as resplendently original as they make them out to be. (One sullies the exaltation of X when one concedes that X is derivative in nature.)

As we shall see here, in any given case, a culture adopts its own incarnation of the theme-of-choice; and then proceeds "full steam ahead" with appropriation. The trick is to get a lot of new milage out of nifty motifs that have worked for ages upon ages, and in many places under many circumstances. One might call this "mytheme-milking". In excavating–then "milking"–an enticing (and useful) motif, adopters are behooved to pass it off as their own. (Nobody likes to think of their own instantiation of a mytheme as derivative.) {15}

Here, we will look at a few mythemes that have been "milked" to an especially high degree. We should bear in mind that the appropriation of leitmotifs is USUALLY done unwittingly. (It is not so much a calculated project of meme-poaching as it is an unwitting process meme-adaptation.) Rarely do people conscientiously conduct a meme-mining operation. Themes are not consumer products for which one goes shopping.

The incorporation of mythemes into one's own cultural repertoire is more often the result of happenstance than it is some premeditated (programatic) scheme of co-optation. {5} Indeed, the architecture of any given memeplex is the result of a (mostly) blind selection process analogous to biological evolution. (For more on this, see Richard Dawkins' "The Extended Phenotype".)

And so it goes: People wind up with any given mytheme in their folklore simply because it happens to resonate with them (for psychical reasons) and serves a purpose (for practical reasons)…and eventually ends up "catching on". Certain themes resonate more than others; and certain themes are more useful than others.

There is NOTHING perspicacious about this. It all occurs according to gut instinct–and a general affinity (read: due to some vague sense). Thus people tend to seize onto the resulting ethos rather than the details of that which underlies it. In other words: People fixate more on cultural phenotypes rather than on (the memetic equivalent of) cultural genotypes. Men don't try to mate with attractive women the former is enticed by the particular ways in which the DNA informs protein-folding in the cells of the latter.

Let's start with a familiar example of this cultural process. The story of forbidden love is timeless–starting with the liaison between the ***Paris and Helena***. This provocative mytheme has occurred around the world since time immemorial. The most famous version is, of course, Shakespeare's ***"Romeo And Juliet"*** –itself an adaptation of antecedent versions of the tale, which can be traced back to Ovid's tale of ***Pyramus and Thisbe***.

Forbidden love can be based on race ("Broken Arrow"; see footnote 2), class (Brontë's "Jane Eyre", Austen's "Pride and Prejudice"), or religion (Khouri's "Forbidden Love", Rabinyan's "Gader Haya" ["Borderlife"]; see footnote 3). In each case, the ill-fated lovers come from different tribes. Here are a dozen more occurrences of this mytheme from from different cultures around the world:

- **Greek:** The tale of Paris and Hellena.
- **Roman:** The tale of Pyramus and Thisbe.
- **Persian:** The tale of Khosrow and Shirin.

- **Jewish:** The tale of the Hebrew, Samson and the Philistine maiden, Delilah is another instance–though that liaison was more a matter of deception and betrayal.
- **Arab:** The tale of Qays ibn Al-Mulawah and Layla (a.k.a. Layla and Majnu[n]; literally meaning "night and bewitched lover").
- **Punjabi:** The tale of Salim and Anarkali.
- **Mughal:** The tale of Bhagmati and Quli.
- **Chinese:** The tale of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, "Butterfly Lovers".
- **Japanese:** The tale of Gennosuke and Oboro, "Koga Ninpocho" (a.k.a. "The Kouga Ninja Scrolls").
- **Siamese:** The tale of Kobori and Angsumalin, "Khu Kum" ["Partners Of Sin"] (rendered "Sunset At Chaophraya" in film).
- **Norse:** The tale of Hjalmar and Ingeborg.
- **English / Welsh / Irish:** The tale of Tristan and Isolde.

Around the world, we find that ill-fated lovers is a common theme. Also notable is the romantic tale of Persian prince, Homay and Chinese princess, Homayun (by Khwaja of Kerman; a.k.a. "Khwaju"). In modern times, the classic tale was recast in **American** culture (with Tony and Maria) in "West Side Story" (set between Italians and Puerto Ricans in 1960's Harlem). Star-cross lovers from different cultures doesn't always end in tragedy, of course. The **Frankish** tale of Flores (Moorish) and Blancheflour (French), though a forbidden love, has a happy ending.

Contentious romance clearly has universal appeal; which explains why it crops up in so many different places. The **Elizabethan** version served as the basis for our modern perception of the tale; but this should not lead us to believe that the plot was sui generis. At the end of the day, we all want to believe that love transcends tribal divisions.

SAVIOR-GODS:

The best place to find mythemes is religion; as the world's religions are–by their very nature–reflections of universal schema. Conceptions of the divine are as myriad as people's imaginations are variegated. Ultimately, we find the divine in experiences of what Kant dubbed "the sublime"–which exists in everything from a profound appreciation of the natural world to deepest of human connection.

The "catch", of course, is that we are all inclined to tell ourselves stories about WHAT this divinity might be–rendering what is abstract in concrete terms. The belief that there is some mechanism by which everyone will get their just deserts (a final "settling of accounts") is extremely tempting–more due to its formidable allure than to its plausibility. And we all want to feel like we will be redeemed in the end.

So it's no big surprise that the savior-god motif was standard in the ancient world. A deity representing the notion of salvation actually dates back to the Egyptian "Shed" in the era predating Akhenaten. It also crops up in tales of the Greco-Egyptian hybrid, Osiris-Apis (a.k.a. "Serapis"; a hybridization of Osiris and Apis). Note that Apis was alternately known as [h]Api-Ankh, son of Hathor. Apis was seen as a worldly intermediary between humans and the godhead–alternately considered Osiris (the god of resurrection) or Atum (the paternal Creator-god). This syncretism (between Hellenic and Egyptian theology) occurred during the Ptolemaic era…and was honored across the region, from Babylon (Serapis was effectively a re-branding of Enki) to the Serapeum at Alexandria; as well as the one at Memphis.

In Greco-Roman myth, there was Adonis–likely a Hellenic derivative of Osiris.

In the Middle East, Adonis was adapted from the Syriac "Adon", son of the Semitic goddess, As[h]tart[e]…who was, in turn, an analogue of Attis, son of Cybele. He was alternately rendered "Adonai": a moniker that was thereafter used in Biblical Hebrew to–strangely enough–refer to the

Abrahamic deity.

Also note that Ovid's "Metamorphosis" included familiar tropes: Adonis was immaculately conceived and his blood was shed to give new life (that is: eternal rebirth). There have even been FEMALE savior figures–as with "Tara" in the Newar sect of Vajrayana Buddhism (spec. in Nepal in the 14th century) and the "First Mother" (alt. the "Corn Mother") of Native American lore, who declares "I am love"…and dies in order to bring rebirth to those who return her love. (Some of this might sound familiar.)

The savior-god motif has universal appeal; as it proffers an eminently human (read: more relatable) embodiment of divinity. When a deity is incarnated in human form, it sends a message that the divine powers CARE about mankind. After all, the gods saw fit to do us the courtesy of coming down to our level.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the idea of a divine incarnation (spec. in the form of a prophet / messenger) is found in cultures around the world. In the Ifa Faith of the Yoruba people in West Africa, the "Irunmole" (Prime Orisha) known as "Orunmila" is considered the messenger of the godhead, Olodumare. He is said to have walked on earth as a prophet long, long ago; and is considered the preeminent exemplar of moral behavior. It is he who carried the divine wisdom ("Ifa") to Earth and delivered it to mankind.

The history of religion is rife with savior figures–from the "Saoshyant" in Zoroastrianism to the "mahdi" in Islam–who are expected to return again someday to deliver some kind of redemption (and a final reckoning: a kind of settling of accounts). The Pauline version of Jesus of Nazareth in Nicene Christianity went so far as to EQUATE the savior figure with the godhead, positing the former as an incarnation of the latter. The impending arrival of this figure coincides with a Day of Judgement, in which the dead will be resurrected and held to account. In almost all versions, this will usher in some sort of Golden Age.

The messianic leitmotif is especially potent, as it connects the worldly activity of mere humans to the machinations of the divine. Even the authors of the Koran felt inclined to refer to Jesus of Nazareth as "al-Masih". {6}

As I discuss in the essay, "Nemesis", ANTI-Christ figures are not uncommon–as with Hinduism's nefarious "Hiranya-kashipu" and Islam's nefarious "Dajjal". This antagonist is posited so as to furnish the cosmogony's captivating narrative with a foil. John of Patmos conjured ominous images of "the Beast", personification of the despised Roman imperium.

The "son of god" leitmotif is so commonplace, it is almost pointless to enumerate the countless examples over the course of human history. The trope dates back to the 3rd millennium B.C., with Asar[u]ludu, son of the Sumerian godhead, En-ki [Lord of Earth]. Asar[u]ludu was described as the "namshub" [one who shines]–and thus was depicted as the god of light ("who illuminates our path"). In Assyrian theology, this translated to Marduk (alt. "Asarluhi"), son of the godhead, Ea. {11}

In Egypt, Osiris (god of resurrection, who judged the dead in the afterlife) was believed to be son of the Earth-god, Geb.

One of the earliest versions of this widely-adored leitmotif was the Canaanite "Baal", son of the godhead, "El". The Babylonians worshipped "Nabu", son of the godhead, "Marduk". Meanwhile, the Assyrians worshipped him as the son of their own godhead, "Ashur". (This, even as Marduk / Ashur was initially worshipped as the son of "Enki").

The leitmotif was also used amongst Semitic peoples of the Bronze Age, whereby a potentate was deified, and considered the son of the godhead. For example, the Moabite kings routinely referred to themselves as "son of Chemosh[-yatti]".

In Greek myth, the hero Heracles was the son of a god. The Roman adaptation was Hercules. Here we have a legendary man, likely based on a historical figure (from Argos), who attained cult status long after he lived. He was said to have performed miracles; and was eventually deified. He was subsequently invoked during prayer by those petitioning the gods for favor, and those who were longing for deliverance.

Ring any bells?

In ancient Ireland, Cu Chulainn was alternately the son of–and incarnation of–the godhead, Lugh.
In ancient Norse myth, Hermod[r] is son of the godhead, Odin–and considered the messenger of the gods. (According to Snorri Sturlusson's Eddas, Odin sired several sons via Freya–namely the demi-gods: Thor, Baldr, Vidarr, and Vali.)

Also noteworthy is another figure of the early 1st century: Apollonius of Tyana. Before he was born, his mother was visited by an angel…that notified her that her son would be divine. He grew up to become an itinerant preacher who founded a ministry–performing miracles like casting out demons, healing the sick, and raising the dead. He accumulated followers who believed that he was the son of god. He was a monotheist (god as nous) who preached against materialism, and claimed to absolve men of their sins.
He eventually upset the ruling Roman authorities, and was put on trial. He later ascended to heaven…but eventually returned to notify his followers that he lived on in the heavenly realm; and that all those who partook in the divine could have eternal life.

This should sound oddly familiar.

During Late Antiquity, the indigenous peoples of the Hindu Kush worshipped the godhead, "Imra" and his son: a mythic prophet named "Moni".

In the Far East, we encounter the Chinese legend of Houyi, descended from heaven to protect mankind (though the story ends badly). This was the basis for the convention of referring to the ancient Han emperors as "Tian-zi" ["Son of Heaven"]. In Korea, the first human king was Dangun, son of the deified "Ungnyeo".

As is usually the case, the leitmotif (designated as the rightful king by divine ordinance) was invoked to justify earthly sovereignty. The Zhou dynasty fashioned themselves as ordained to rule via "Tian-ming" ["decree from Heaven"]. The Japanese employed a variation of this vis a vis the goddess, Amaterasu (as the "Mandate of Heaven"). The monarchs of the Holy Roman Empire employed the same scheme ("the divine right of kings", symbolized by the heraldic emblem, the fleur-de-lis).

The locution was also commonly used as an appellation for potentates. Seleucid King Seleucus Nicator fashioned himself as the "son of god". Sure enough, for some time, he was said to be the "son of god" in the empire's folklore. This made sense, as the trope had a long history. Note the idiom found in the second Psalm: wherein Babylonian kings were conceived as "begotten" sons of the Abrahamic deity.
The trope soon caught on amongst the Jews of antiquity (esp. pursuant to the Book of Daniel's use of this idiom). Here, it is instructive to note the hermeneutic parity of the "son of man" and "son of god" idioms. (This might be considered a semiotic isomorphism.) Even Jesus himself declared that those who had Faith would be "sons of the Most High" (as in Luke 6:35). Meanwhile, Jesus is referred to as "the Son of Man" throughout the New Testament (e.g. Mark 2:10). In other words, sons of Man and sons of the godhead were both ways of referring to, well, ALL MEN.

Though the exalted figure was usually male, this wasn't always the case. In Hindu mythology, Ganga descends from heaven to Earth, and subsequently serves as the vehicle for the redemption of the dead…before ascending back up into heaven. This involves a spiritual cleansing, which is why the major river in India is named after her, and its flowing waters are considered sacred.

We should bear in mind that in early Abrahamic lore, "Messiah" was a term used for "anointed ruler" (that is: a leader who was designated by the Abrahamic deity, i.e. as a liberator of Beth Israel). Moreover, "son of god" was an idiomatic expression for FOLLOWER OF god–as we find in Psalm 82:6. In fact, in the Gospel of John, JoN cites that very Psalm when he explains to the Jews: "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'? If those to whom the word of god came were called 'gods', can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am god's son'?" (10:34-36). It's meant a rhetorical question; but it is also a very good question.

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the locution "son[s] of god" ["ben[e] ha elohim" in Classical Hebrew] is used idiomatically–as when angels are referred to as "sons of god" in Job 38:7, even as the "judges" are referred to as "sons of god" in Psalm 82. By the time JoN would have lived, the idiom was already well-known in the Roman Empire. Appellations for Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus included "Son of God" and "Savior", which were both used on numerous inscriptions.

Considering the New Testament was primarily rendered in Koine Greek (dating from Late Antiquity in Rome), the use of idioms does not necessarily coincide EXACTLY with idioms translated from Classical Hebrew (dating from the Exilic Period in Babylon). The heuristic adjusts according to cultural milieu. Nevertheless, it might be noted that in the New Testament, Adam is referred to as the "son of god" ["(h)O (h)Uios Theou" in Koine Greek] in the Gospel of Luke (3:38); and all believers are referred to as "sons of god" in the first letter of John (3:2). The semiotic valance of such phraseology is not a coincidence. After all, the neo-Judaic movement that was inaugurated by JoN came out of Judaism ITSELF, replete with its Palestinian vernacular.

The semiotic continuity is attested by the so-called "Jeselsohn Stone" (a.k.a. "Vision of Gabriel"), composed in Classical Hebrew in the late 1st century B.C. The passage tells of the Messiah ben Joseph of Ephraim, who is–unsurprisingly–referred to as the "son of god". This messianic figure is said to have triumphed over evil with his divine righteousness following three days. (!) The "resurrection on the third day" leitmotif first emerged in Hosea 6:2 (as acknowledged in Luke 24:44). {28}

The locution "son of god" is generally synonymous with "son of man"–rendered "ben adam" in Classical Hebrew (as in Ezekiel 2:1 and Psalm 8:4) and "bar nash[a]" / "bar anosh" in Aramaic / Syriac (as in the Book of Daniel 7:9-14). This parity is illustrated by the fact that JoN refers to himself as "son of man"–rendered "[h]O [h]Uios tou Anthropou" in Koine Greek–FAR MORE than he uses the locution, "son of god" (as in Luke 11:30). Such phrasing is in keeping with the aforesaid use of "son of man" in the Book of Daniel.

The theme of the martyred god, whose blood was shed for mankind, dates back to the Sumerian / Akkadian legend of Geshtu-E. This god's blood was used to create man from clay. (Sound familiar?) {7} In Vedic myth, mankind was created via the sacrifice of the first man, Purusha.

The more narrow theme of vicarious atonement (redemption through the sacrifice of a deified figure) was commonplace in Classical Antiquity–most notably: with Mithra[s]. Indeed, one of the Mithraic hymns begins: "Thou has redeemed us by shedding the eternal blood." An exalted figure suffering–and even sacrificing himself–for the good of mankind was known in early Abrahamic lore. The Judaic version is captured in the famous passage of the Hebrew Bible in Isaiah 53–a passage which likely inspired the Christology that became the hallmark of Pauline Christianity.

The notion of being redeemed via a god is also reflected in an Egyptian poem about Dionysos (c. 400 A.D.) The poem recounts that "Bacchus, our lord, shed tears so that he might bring an end to the tears of mortals" (ref. the "Dionysiaca" by Nonnos of Panopolis). This god-as-redeemer motif has universal appeal, especially when it involves some sort of resurrection myth.

Resurrection (martyr-based or not) has always been a common mytheme since time immemorial.
The Christian and Islamic version of a Day of Resurrection was likely an adaptation of Zoroastrian eschatology (an End Times scenario in which all the dead will be resurrected to face judgement).
The son of the godhead who is resurrected: This is a common motif–as with the Norse "Bald[u]r", son of Odin (the All-Father), who rose from the dead and offered deliverance. Odin HIMSELF is said to have been resurrected. (Odin sacrificed himself by being hung from a tree; and is pierced in the side with a sword.)

Here are a dozen more instances of a resurrected deity:

- Inanna / Ishtar **(Sumerian)**
- Tammuz **(Akkadian)**
- Marduk **(Assyrian)**
- Osiris / Horus **(Egyptian)** {8}
- Melekart, tutelar deity of Tyre **(Phoenician)**
- Dionysus **(Greek)** {9}
- Zalmoxis **(Thracian)**
- Mithra[s] **(Roman)** {9}
- Attis **(Phrygian)** {9}
- Syavush **(Sogdian)**
- Krishna **(Hindu)** {9}
- Quetzalcoatl **(Aztec)**

The resurrection generally involves some sort of subsequent ascent into the heavens.

And even more narrowly still, crucifixion was a common leitmotif. Indeed, myriad mythic figures were crucified and then resurrected. Prometheus (Greek) was said to have been strung up in a manner that roughly resembled crucifixion. The crucified savior was an idea that found purchase in several cultures–including:

- Osiris / Horus **in Egypt**
- Zoroaster **in Persia**
- Baal-Zephon **in Phoenicia**
- Zalmoxis **in Thrace**
- Amirani **in Georgia**
- Thor **in Germanic / Nordic lands**
- Fu-xi / Pao-xi **in China**

- Sommona-Kodom (a variation on Siddhartha Gautama) **in Siam**

More broadly, the notion of a deity being sacrificed in order to CREATE goes back to the the Vedic "Purusha" (a cosmic figure whose sacrifice by the gods created all life). In Norse legend, the sacrificed figure is variously named "Ymir", "Aurgelmir", "Brimir", or "Blainn". In Germanic legend, he was named "Tuisto".

We might note that there were various tales of resurrections in the Roman Empire, some of which spawned cult followings. Virbius (the Roman version of Hippolytus) was said to have been killed due to his father, Theseus', curse; but was then risen from the dead, at the behest of the gods.

It is often supposed that humans can secure some sort of "salvation" through the sacrifice of these deified figures: via a one-off atonement, effected VICARIOUSLY. A state of grace can thus be (vicariously) realized via the resurrection of the divine martyr. Such grace usually includes the promise of immortality (an eternal after-death "life" in Paradise). As the above lists show, this thematic thread is woven into the narrative tapestries of many a sacred lore.

In the end, we find that there was almost nothing novel about Christian lore about Jesus of Nazareth…beyond, perhaps, the exhortation to "turn the other cheek".

But what of Jesus as a SHEPHERD? As it turns out, the shepherd-cum-king leitmotif goes back to the Sumerian king, Etana–the shepherd who ascended to heaven and consolidated all the foreign countries into a unified kingdom. Thereafter, the "lugal" [king] was often depicted as a "shepherd". Note especially kings of Uruk like Lugal-banda and Dumuzid–each referred to by the epithet: the shepherd. This idiom was adopted by the Akkadians, who created history's first empire. The idiom remained in use throughout the Middle East. The Kassite royal moniker, "Kurigalzu" intimated "shepherd of the people".

Per "Krio-phoros", a hallowed figure that was popular at the time (typically depicted as a ram-bearer, and associated with Hermes). Other variations of the leitmotif were adopted by cult figures–notably: the Cretan Messiah, Apollonius of Tyana in the late 2nd century A.D.

In Judaic lore, Moses was sometimes referred to as "Ra'ya Mehemana" (shepherd), as he led his flock out of Egypt. The idiom was nothing new even back then. The Semitic sun god was "Lugal-banda", who was known as "the Shepherd" of his people.

In his "Statesman", Plato referenced ancient Greek theologies in which "god himself was the [Greek forebears'] shepherd". We also find the leitmotif in Greek legend of Endymion–the Aeolian hero who founded Elis. (The Carians claimed that he resided on the mountain of Herakleia, at Latmus.) It was later used in the legend of Gyges of Lydia. Even Hesiod was claimed to have been a shepherd on the slopes of Mount Helicon (home of the Muses) before he was inspired by the gods. {20}

It is natural to conceptualize the divine as a shepherd, and mankind as his flock. We also find the leitmotif in Babylonian lore (with Bel Marduk), Persian lore (with Arda[x]shir), Roman lore (with Faustulus), Romanian lore (with Bucur), and in many other cultures. The Phrygian shepherd-consort was Attis.

The anointed shepherd is a ubiquitous archetype. In Persia, the godhead, Ahura Mazda elected the "good shepherd", Yima "Kshaeta" [later rendered "Jam-shid"] to receive the divine law and bring it to men. Recall that it was the shepherd, Abel, rather than the farmer, Cain, that the Abrahamic deity favored.

Note that Abraham himself was a shepherd–as were his progeny, Isaac then Jacob. {21} Later, Amos of Tekoa was said to have been a shepherd. And, of course, the first great King of Israel, David, is said to have begun his life as a shepherd. This leitmotif almost certainly informed the Christian portrayal of the Christ as a metaphorical shepherd–as with the Koine Greek rendering "poimen o kalos" [the Good

Shepherd] in the Gospel of John (10:2/11-14). {12}

Jesus of Nazareth was a local carpenter in Galilee who, in being anointed King of the Jews, was thought of as the "shepherd" of all mankind–in keeping with the Judaic idiom (wherein the Lord, Yahweh, was famously referred to as "my shepherd" in Psalm 23). By the 2nd century, "The Shepherd of Hermas" was one of the most prominent pieces of Christological folklore (and was even considered canonical by Irenaeus). What was THAT based on? As it turns out, the idiom was even popular in Greek paganism–as with the "moschophoros" [calf-bearer] in the Boeotian cult of "Hermes Kriophoros". Even the Roman "Mithra[s]" was sometimes referred to as "The Good Shepherd".

Further east, the Sikhs came to refer to their godhead as "our shepherd".

The idiom makes perfect sense, as shepherds are GUARDIANS while supplicants are a kind of flock. {23} After all, what good is a deity is he does not WATCH OVER us?

Even the demonic counterparts of the "huriyya", "djinn", are adaptations of the Persian "div" / "daeva". (In 27:39, King Solomon has a dialogue with an evil genie.) Etymologically, the Arabic term is based on the Aramaic "jinnaye", used in pre-Islamic Palmyra…which was, in turn, based on the Semitic root, "J-N-N" (meaning "hidden"). The mytheme in which evil is associated with darkness is discussed in my essay: "Nemesis". The many versions of heaven and hell are discussed in my essay: "A Brief History Of Heaven And Hell".

SKY-GODS:

Sky-gods have played a prominent role in countless theologies. In ancient (Zhou) China, the godhead was "Tian" [Heavens]. Interestingly, the positing of a sky-god as the preeminent deity was a transition from the earlier (Shang) godhead, Shang-di, who was a primordial Earth deity.

The **Vedic** sky-god was Dya[u]s Pita (later, "Varuna" in the Hindu pantheon). An **Indo-European** derivative was the sky-god, "Dyeus"; who ended up as the godhead of pre-Christian Germanic peoples. {10}

Also notable were:

- **Egyptian** sky-goddess, Nut / Hathor
- **Sumerian** sky-god, Tarum / An[u]
- **Akkadian / Assyrian** sky-god, An-shar
- **Kassite** sky-god, Turgu
- **Persian** sky-god, Vayu [followed by the Sogdian version: "Weshparkar"]
- **Hurrian** sky-god (alt. storm-god; god of thunder), Teshub
- **Hittite** sky-god, Tarku
- **Luwian** sky-god, Tarhunta[s]
- **Greek** sky-god, Uranus
- **Roman** sky-god, Caelus [later incorporated with Jupiter to yield "Caelus Aeternus Iuppiter"]
- **Canaanite / Phoenician / Nabataean / Palmyrene** sky-god, Baal Shamim [alt. "Shamayim"]
- **Chuvash** sky-god, Tura
- **Turkic** sky-god, Kayra
- **Slavic** sky-god, Perun
- **Georgian** sky-goddess, Tamar

- **Nubian** (Nuer) godhead: the spirit of the sky, “Kuoth Nhial” [god in heaven]
- **Norse** sky-god, Ullr
- **Mayan** sky-god, Itzamna

Sky-gods proliferate around the world to the present day. In the Common Era, the most prominent has been “Tengri” of the **Turkic and Mongol** peoples–prevalent across the Eurasian Steppes. In Mongolian, the moniker is translatable as “heaven”, “sky”, and “godhead”; meaning the three were considered synonymous. This is the epitome of deifying the “Eternal Blue Sky” [“Munkh Khukh Tengriin”].

This god of “the Eternal Blue Sky” is worshipped by many Mongolians to the present day. He was the godhead of the Mongols at their prime; and seems to have been a derivative of the Xiongnu sky-god.

Sky-gods elsewhere include:

- The godhead and creator-deity in **Ashanti** myth: Nyame (King of Heaven)
- The godhead and creator-deity in **Guanche** myth: Achaman (Father of mankind)
- The creator-deity in **Mayan** myth: Itzamna
- The creator-deity in **Maori** myth: Rangi[nui]
- The creator-deity in **Yoruba** myth: Obatala [alt. Olorun / Olofin-Orun; Sky Father]
- The creator-deity in **Ugandan** myth: Rugaba
- The creator-deity in **Haitian** voodoo: Damballa

In all these cases, the divine was associated with the sky. This stands to reason, as the imperious vault of the sky (the “welkin”, as the Germans call it) appears to pervade all creation–an apt metaphor for omni-presence and omniscience. For the heavens seem to preside over the entire world in a manner analogous to an all-seeing godhead; and it is natural to associate the celestial spheres with the divine.

Hence even godheads that are not explicitly sky-gods are often associated with the “welkin”.
This, of course, includes the Abrahamic deity–regardless of whether in the context of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. We even find this with the godhead of Abrahamic variants–as with Samaritanism, Yazidism, Druze, Baha’i, Sikhism, etc.

The deification of the sky might be contrasted to the ideation of a chaotic void–typically associated with dark, primordial waters, which are–in turn–associated with a monstrous cosmic serpent (as with Tiamat), which must be slain by the godhead (as with Marduk) to bring about the cosmic order. Tiamat was analogous to the “Livyatan” [Leviathan] found in the Hebrew Bible, which was derived from the Ugaritic “Lotan”. In Judaic lore, the godhead slew the serpent (ref. the Book of Isaiah), just as in Babylonian lore.

Meanwhile, “Tiamat” was derived from the Assyrian “tamtu[m]”, which was related to the Ugaritic root, T-H-M [alt. Th-M-T]. Lo and behold: It was from this early Semitic lexeme that the Ancient Hebrew “tehom” (primordial waters) was derived–as found in the opening passage to the book of Genesis.
The moniker was likely adopted from the “Enuma Elish”, as the ancient Babylonian epic speaks of winds blowing across the face of these waters…before the godhead divided it, thereby making the heavens and the Earth…EXACTLY as the Book Of Genesis would later describe it. This is no coincidence; as the Torah was first written down during the Exilic period…IN BABYLON.

The earliest sky-god was the highest Sumerian deity, An[u], father of Enlil and Enki. He was the chief of the pantheon of sub-deities known as the “Anunaki” [alt. “Igigi”]. An[u] represented the first conception of the heavens as a dome (of primordial waters, associated with the feminine “Tiamat”) magically suspended over a flat Earth–a leitmotif also found in Vedic cosmology (the heavens as primordial waters, associated with the feminine “Danu”). Later, we are told of Enlil (later in the Canaanite rendering: “Marduk”) who slew the serpent (the beast of the primordial waters: Tiamat), symbolizing order

triumphing over chaos.

The dichotomy of ORDER (the masculine, typically a sun-god or sky-god) prevailing over CHAOS (the feminine, typically associated with the primordial waters, and portrayed as a serpent) could be found in ancient Egyptian myth–with Ra (associated with Ma'at) and Apep.

The dichotomy of order and chaos has informed mythemes around the world. Already mentioned was Ra / Ma'at and Apep in ancient Egypt. In the Norse Creation myth, the primordial void was called the "Ginnungagap" (ref. Snorri Sturluson's "Gylfaginning"). In the Aztec Creation myth, "Cipactli" was a serpent goddess that emerged from primordial waters, thereby creating the world. Etc. Carl Jung based his posited "archetypes" on this dichotomy, which served as the lens through which he viewed ALL mythology. The mytheme of Creation starting from chaos (from which the Earth and Heavens are cleaved) can also be found in the Chinese myth of Pan-ku [alt. "Pangu"]. In Egyptian myth, the serpent of chaos, "Apep[i]" [rendered "Aphoph" in Coptic; "Apothis" in Greek] was the counterpart of cosmic order, "Ma'at". Etc.

We encounter this motif not only in Sumerian / Assyrian myth, but in myriad ancient origin myths from around the world.

- In Siberia, Tungusic creation myth involves a primordial ocean. The godhead, Buga set fire to these primordial waters, thereby exposing land. He then created light and separated it from darkness.
- The Mongolian creation myth ALSO involves a primordial ocean. The patriarchal Lama, Udan (Old Turkic / Altaic: "Bai-Ülgen") stirred these waters, bringing about wind and fire, thereby exposing land.
- In Hindu theology, the cosmic waters were associated with "Danu".
- In ancient Persian theology, the cosmic waters were called the "fraxkard".
- In ancient Egyptian theology, the cosmic waters were called "[Nu]nu" / "Nu[n]".

The primordial waters correlate with the dome over the Earth; while the LITERAL waters correlate with the ocean. Hence the waters above us (the heavens) and the waters of Earth (the seas), as we find in the first ten verses of (Hebrew) Genesis.

In the Torah, the "rakia" [firmament] is equated with "waters of the sky"; as the Hebrew term for heaven ("shamayim") is derived from combing the Assyrian term for "sky" ("s[h]amu") with the Old Semitic term for "waters" ("mayim"). The primordial waters" motif is also found with the "Tohu wa-Bohu" of Genesis.

Sure enough, these primordial waters would be associated with a cosmic serpent: the Leviathan (Isaiah 27:1, 51:9; as well as Job 41). The Abrahamic deity slays the Leviathan in keeping with earlier myths about the Canaanite godhead, Baal…which were likely inspired by the Babylonian tale of Marduk slaying Tiamat. In the Akkadian "Epic of Gilgamesh", Enkidu slays Humbaba.

The Egyptian "Nu" (often feminized to "Nunet") and "Mehet-Weret" / "Mehet-Urt" ["Great Flood"] were both feminine conceptions of the primordial waters; and were associated with Creation, sustenance, and Rebirth. This is what enabled people to make their way into the afterlife. (The CHAOS aspect is represented by the goddess, Hathor.)

Note that in Ovid's version, the godhead appears and "rent asunder land from sky, and sea from land…[then] forming the seas and [commanding] the plains to stretch out." (This should sound familiar to those who have read the Koran.) The godhead then created man, who was "molded into the form of the all-controlling gods" (echoing the "created in god's image" trope of Genesis).

This motif seems to have ALSO been a common amongst Arabia's Bedouin pagans during the Dark Ages…which explains why it wound up in the Koran.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Another familiar motif is the birth story commonly associated with Moses in the Torah. The Biblical tale of Moses' beginnings is largely based upon the legend of Sargon of Akkad: An infant placed in a reed basket by his biological mother (from Azupiranu in Sumer), and being set adrift in a river (the Euphrates), under the blessing of the godhead (Ishtar)…then being rescued by a midwife in a royal house (in Kish) and ascending to prominence as royalty…before falling afoul of the powers that be…only to be redeemed (via divine grace) and rallying to deliver his people from peril.

Also antedating the Hebrew tale of Moses was the Vedic legend of "Karna", who's Kuru mother (Kunti) placed her infant in a reed basket and set him adrift in a river…which carried him to the court of King Dhritarashtra of Hastinapur…where he was adopted by a courtier and rose to prominence, as "Vasusena" (a.k.a. "Radheya").

Moreover, the Judaic story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt was a reworking of the–much older–Egyptian legend of Osarseph of Heliopolis, a defector who led an uprising against Pharaoh Amenhotep in the 16th century B.C. The oppressed tribe was referred to as the "Hyksos", who dwelled in Avaris on the Sinai peninsula (and whose homeland was purportedly Canaan). As we now know, this tale was recycled by those who composed the Torah in the 6th century B.C. The hagiography of Moses is a classic tale, based on a narrative template going back to the Bronze Age.

Folkloric embellishment has a kind of ratcheting effect. It is, after all, far easier to embellish a narrative to enhance it (make it more catchy, more enthralling) than to UN-DO a titillating part once it's "stuck". Whenever ideology is afoot, memeplexes are deliberately locked into place…as if to ensure there is not back-slippage. That is: efforts are made to keep a SANCTIFIED memeplex "as is"…in perpetuity. After all, the Reactionary's sine qua non is to ensure things remain as they "originally were" (in his own eyes). That religious zealots have always worked so vociferously to ensure nobody EVER tamper with their sanctified dogmatic system is hardly a shocker..

We might think of memeplexes as intricate latticeworks. Memetic lattices are often ductile, and thus amenable to strain. However, they become brittle if they are sacralized. When pliable, memetic lattices can be bent and stretched this way and that–usually to accommodate changing exigencies. Should a memetic lattice become petrified by ideology, though, it becomes frangible. Consequently, the entire edifice might collapse in the event a fissure (read: disjunctive idea) is introduced.

The analogy with material structure is apt. Local distortions in brittle materials are called "crazes". (A craze occurs before a crack begins to propagate.) Once a crack forms in the memeplex, memetic creep ensues. This can eventually lead to a (catastrophic) fracture. Put another way: Fresh new ideas often precipitate semiotic fissures…which threaten to upend the entire edifice.

Fractures in a society's Grand Narrative can precipitate fractures in the body politic; undermining social cohesion. That is: disruption to the sacred lore translates to disruption to the demos. (One might say that a tear in the narrative fabric is concomitant with a tear in the social fabric.) So a people are inclined to keep their Grand Narrative fully intact.

Memetic plasticity is proportional to the sanctity of the memeplex. Hence dogmatic structures that have been consecrated are not built to adapt. Indeed, they are designed for eternal stasis. A consequence of this is that they are unable to withstand the formidable strain of Reform. When perturbed, they tend to crumble. In a sense, ideologues are Reactionary simply because they can't NOT be…lest they risk losing the

scaffolding around which they have built their lives.

Some memetic repertoires are more robust than others. This is why Pauline Christology prevailed over the Gnostic alternative in Late Antiquity. The former–especially as propounded by the ideologue, Athanasius of Alexandria–was far more conducive to institutional-ization (read: more amenable to concentrated power; and ideal for top-down control). Consequently, it was the version championed by the Roman magisterium…and subsequently adopted by the Roman imperium. That the Nicene creed came to define "Christianity" should come as a surprise to no one.

W.V.O. Quine put it well when he referred to a memeplex (a term which had not yet been coined) as a "web of belief". We ALL live within a web of belief. Accordingly, we are inclined to reject / accept propositions based on how well they fit into the pre-existing web of dogmas. This "web" is essentially an integrated network of memes. (Instead of a web, one might also think of it as a scaffolding.) Beliefs at the center are most entrenched, and so deemed sacrosanct; as changing them would require too much retro-fitting; and risk a total collapse of the structure. Consequently, it is only beliefs on the periphery that are up for discussion–as altering them would not upend the entire edifice.

In this sense, dogmatic structures are–in a way–houses of cards. To even consider taking away a central dogma risks bringing the entire edifice down. And in order to consider the amenability of a new proposition, the effects on the integrity of the structure must be taken into account; NOT the credence of the proposition. If the number of things one would have to adjust in order to accommodate the proposition would be too disruptive to the established order, then it must be rejected. Sunk costs prevent one from abiding a complete overhaul of the belief system; as such an overhaul would require one to abdicate coveted "truths"…and risk finding oneself lost at sea. Nobody wants the rug pulled out from beneath their feet.

If novel dogma is introduced that is too disruptive to the established order, those who have a vested interest in maintaining the established order will reject it…and persuade everyone else that it must be rejected.
If it is found that a dogma can play a useful role within the incumbent power structures, it will be incorporated into the repertoire. This is how institutionalized dogmatism works–be it in the form of religion or political ideology. (In the case of theocratic regimes like those espousing Revisionist Zionism, Roman Catholicism, and fundamentalist Islam, it is BOTH.)

There have been attempts to decipher how meme-selection works on the group-level–notably by distilling the motifs of COLLECTIVE consciousness (as some have attempted to do by positing Jungian "archetypes").

Whatever the explanation might be, the resulting concatenation of memes determines the features of an entire culture–replete with religion, politics, and social norms. We find that the motifs that "catch on" do so because they strike certain chords (chords that can be explained via evolutionary psychology) AND because they can be readily integrated with pre-existing motifs. {19} Maladaptive memes are often jettisoned to maintain the integrity of the whole…EVEN IF the whole is woefully dysfunctional and the meme-in-question is may have otherwise been salutary. Nobody wants to upset the applecart…even if the applecart is in need of upsetting.

Memes are rarely adopted in isolation–as we are social animals, and so SHARE in the adoption.
This is especially the case with dogmas–as dogmas like to exist IN CONTEXT (that is: as part of a dogmatic system, where it plays a key role).

Systematized dogmatism (especially when sanctified, as with religion) is a COMMUNAL activity.
It serves as the glue of social cohesion (which is simply to say that it is facilitator of communal solidarity).
This means that we assess any given dogma in light of how it (seems to) mesh with the dogmas to which

we have already committed ourselves; and duly consecrated.

And so it goes: Within any given memetic regime, all beliefs are ostensibly–though rather imperfectly–interconnected. Each MUST exist in relation to every other; and disjunctures are avoided. Memetic discord is frowned upon because it risks causing social fissures within the community, thereby compromising its cohesiveness and ability to function smoothly.

If we consider the veracity of any NOVEL proposition (i.e. a foreign idea), we naturally become worried about how the social harmony on which we depend might be put in jeopardy…were it to actually be introduced. And if we are asked to re-consider any incumbent belief, we ALSO worry about how a coveted social compact might be put in jeopardy…were it to actually be discarded. We are always concerned about upsetting the applecart–especially when that applecart is sacred. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" seems reasonable, even if we cannot necessarily see if something is actually broken.

Consequently, any given dogma is evaluated not necessarily on its own merits, but according to how integral it is to the integrity of–and on-going maintenance of–the overall dogmatic structure we covet (that is: conducive to the incumbent memetic environment, so which we've grown accustomed). It should come as no surprise, then, that assessment is invariably fraught with oodles of biases: choice-supportive bias, confirmation bias, in-group bias, attentional bias, and salience bias. Even when assessment is supposed to be impersonal, it ends up being HIGHLY personal. (Staking one's claim on something entails tremendous emotional investment.) Vested interests–and skews perceptions that favor incumbent dogmas–account for the formidable power of memetic inertia.

When it comes to serious existential matters, the stakes are high–and emotions run deep. As a result, rumination tends to be visceral and intimate (rather than an impartial deliberation). It is easy to get swept up in the fervor of a well-crafted narrative. We are always under the impression that we are being eminently rational, and remaining in touch with Reality (as delusion does not announce itself as delusion; and neuroses are rarely recognized as neuroses); we find ourselves in the thrall of a hypnotic, intoxicating Weltanschauung, no matter how cockamamy it might be. If it hits all the right buttons, we will gladly adopt it.

In sum: The most prevalent mythemes around the world–and throughout history–are:

- Those that are most readily-adaptable to the incumbent memeplex–whatever it happens to be
- Those that (seem to) offer the most benefit to those adopting it

In other words: commensurability and utility are the primary determining factors. {22}

And so it goes: A mytheme exists because it is compatible with different folkloric traditions (able to be incorporated without disrupting a coveted memetic homeostasis). It ALSO exists because it strikes a chord with peoples in different cultures (in psychical terms) and serves a USEFUL PURPOSE (in practical terms) across different social contexts. Thus it is their universal / timeless appeal that accounts for mythemes' appearance in myriad places and times. Hence the widespread incidence of CERTAIN themes is explained; and the incidence of those themes in ANY GIVEN case is explained.

To Recapitulate: We do not conscientiously go shopping for memes–as though they were consumer products at a culture emporium. The architecture of any given memeplex is not derived from pre-established blue-prints; they are largely accidents of history. The most robust schemas persist across epochs, in different incarnations, in different places, each adapted to the cultural milieu within which it exist. They do so because there is something within all of us that they echo. Hence the existence of mythemes.

If a schema cannot adapt, it will be unable to subsist. Homo sapiens are pragmatic creatures; so IF the schema is useful, and it CAN be adapted to the incumbent cultural milieu, then it is adopted. Our imaginations do the rest; for we are–after all–meaning-making machines.

Insofar as a meme can play an integral role in a compelling narrative vehicle, it serves a crucial purpose. It is a mistake, though, to attribute resonance and/or utility with (objective) credence. Memetic success has little to do with credibility; and so mustn't be construed as such. For memetic UTILITY (alt. appeal) is not a dependable measure of verity.

To conclude: It is no surprise that we find certain recurring themes across epochs and geographies–as with Great Flood stories. Be that as it may, we must resist a "reality-by-referendum" approach to epistemology–wherein credence is ascertained according to longevity and/or popularity. In the meantime, we can better understand–and thus more appreciate–any given mytheme by DE-sanctifying it, and seeing how it has been manifested in ALL OTHER instances across time and space. In other words, we can only truly understand mythemes by seeing them AS MYTHEMES.

Virgins And Flying Horses:

Virginity in another theme that has universal resonance; as it intimates PURITY (physical as well as spiritual). Apocryphal tales of a virgin birth (that is: immaculate conceptions) have been ubiquitous since time immemorial. Preternatural birth has been a common leitmotif in virtually every culture to ever exist. Immaculate conception holds special appeal not only because it is fantastical, but because it involves purity. It is no surprise, then, that the notion of a virgin mother has been commonplace in myths around the world.

The notion of a son-of-god via a blessed (mortal) woman could be found in ancient Greek lore with Dionysus–who was sired by Zeus, yet borne via preternatural means by the ill-fated Phoenician maiden, Semele (at a far-off place known as "Nysa"). This was originally a Thracian / Phrygian myth; yet the mytheme clearly resonated throughout the Greek world; and was even adopted by the Etruscans.

The preoccupation with PURITY has existed since time immemorial–and can be found in most religions. Sikhs consider their community to be the brethren of the pure ["khalsa"]. Wahhabis have dubbed themselves the "Brethren of Purity". Etc. Folkloric figures considered virginal is one of many mythemes.

In the Abrahamic tradition, there has typically been an emphasis on purity with respect to WOMEN. Take, for example, the Torah: "When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening" (Leviticus 15:19). The emphasis on women can be explained, in large part, by the urgency that the sex that carries embryos for nine months should be clean and healthy. (A dirty man's sperm can be just as good as a clean man's.)

Generally speaking, virginity and purity go hand-in-hand for obvious reasons. This is why the Greek goddess of purity, Astraea, was a virgin. (Hestia was also a virgin; as well as her Roman counterpart, Vesta.) Virginity was also attributed to Athena (Greek), Minerva (Roman), and the great Anatolian heroine, Artemis. Also note the Arcadian princess / huntress, Atalanta; as well as the Romans' reverence for their "Vestal Virgin" priestesses–who maintained the sacred fire of Vesta.

In Hindu lore, there are the "Panch[a]-Kanyas" [five virgin heroines]: the beautiful Puru princess, Ahalya; Draupadi of Panchala; Sita of Videha (alt. Kunti / Pritha of Hastinapur[a]); Queen Tara of Kishkindha; and Queen Mandodari of Lanka.

Tales of virgin births have been ubiquitous since time immemorial–starting with the Sumerian myth of the birth of Eabani / Enki-ta / Enki-du, conceived from clay via the saliva from the mother-goddess, Aruru. The Cretans of Knossos worshipped a female godhead who was both mother and virgin. Persian legends about the prophet, Mani, also incorporated claims of a virgin birth. And practitioners of Yarsanism (known as the "People of Truth") believe their prophet, Sultan Sahak was born of a Kurdish virgin named "Dayerak Rezbar" (alt. "Khatun-e Rezbar), who was divinely impregnated while sleeping under a pomegranate tree.

In Greek lore alone, we find five instances of virgin births:

- Dionysus from Semele {29}
- Adonis from Io
- The perpetually-renewed virginity of Hera
- Perseus / Adonis from Myrr[h]a {30}
- Helen of Troy from Leda, who was impregnated via preternatural means by Zeus

A variation of the aforementioned Sumerian legend was Enki, who was birthed by the virgin goddess, Nammu. Here are twenty other examples of auspicious figures–be they corporeal gods or special humans–said to have been born of virgins:

- Ra from Neith **(Egyptian)**
- Horus from Isis [alt. Meri] **(Egyptian)** {31}
- Amenkept III from Queen Mut-em-ua **(Egyptian)**
- Marduk from Damkina **(Akkadian / Babylonian)**
- Tammuz from Semiramis **(Assyrian)**
- Zoroaster ["Zarathustra"] from Dughdova **(Persian)** {34}
- Baal from Ashteroth **(Canaanite)**
- Mithra[s] from Anahita **(Hittite)** {32}
- Dushara from Kaabu **(Nabataean)**
- Attis from Nana **(Phrygian)** {33}
- Romulus and Remus from Rhea Silvia of Alba Longa **(Roman; Republic)** {35}
- Emperor Caesar Augustus from Atia [who was impregnated via preternatural means by Apollo] **(Roman; Empire)**
- Lao-Tsu **(Chinese)**
- Qi (a.k.a. "Hou-ji", patriarch of the Zhou) from Jian Yuan; at the behest of the godhead, "Shang-di" **(Chinese)**
- Krishna from Devaki **(Hindu)**
- Rama from Kausalya **(Hindu)**
- Siddhartha Gautam[a] from Queen [Maha-]Maya of Deva-daha **(Theravada Buddhist)**
- Mon King Kalupa [founder of the Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar] **(Mon / Burmese)**

- Huitzilopotchli from Coatlicue **(Aztec)**
- Quetzalcoatl from Chimalman **(Aztec)**

In Judaic lore, allusions are made to a virgin birth of Jacob and Esau from Rebekah, who was described as "almah" in Classical Hebrew (typically translated as "young maiden"). This likely inspired the passage in the Book of Isaiah (7:14-17), pertaining to the Kingdom of Judah's war against the Aram-Ephraim coalition in the 730's B.C. The former was out of Damascus in Syria; the latter was under the aegis of the (pagan) Kingdom of Israel in Samaria. It is addressed to the King of Judah, Ahaz, regarding a sign of protection that would be given from the Abrahamic deity. That war would have post-dated said virgin birth by almost a millennium. Later, the term, "almah" was mistakenly rendered "parthenos" in Koine Greek (then "virgo intacta" in Vulgar Latin). The actual term for a virgin in Classical Hebrew was "na'ara".

The most influential tale of a virgin birth was the Jewish carpenter from Galilee, Yeshua ben Yosef of Nazareth (refashioned the "Kristos" in Pauline theology). Jesus of Nazareth was held to be the archetype of innocence, divinely begotten rather than biologically made. So the need to posit an immaculate conception was encountered. This would later be taken to new heights in Nicene Christianity–especially with the eventual fetishization of the "madonna" in Roman Catholicism. (The association of sexual purity with spiritual purity influenced the Roman Catholic Church's decision that clergy remain celibate.)

The equating of sexual purity with spiritual purity has always existed. In Christianity especially, the doctrine of "original sin" was primarily about a loss of innocence–a kind of STAIN. The moniker for the "virgin Mary" was "Ma-donna" [My Lady], which associated the mother of the Christ with a regal ALL-MOTHER (alternately considered a Queen of Heaven in other idioms). In the second letter to the Corinthians, Saul of Tarsus even describes the church as a virgin.

The Christian fixation on the virginity of the "holy mother", Miriam, is exemplified by the miscellany of Mariolatries around the world (see my essay on "Pilgrimage"). In the Philippines, the (virgin) mother of Jesus of Nazareth (qua Christ) has been deified as "Mama Mary", thereby rendering her a sort of demi-god. It seems Filipinos–like so many others–could not quite curb the polytheistic impulses of their animistic past.

In Christendom, virginity continued to be salient in folklore. It also played a role in the legend of Margaret of Antioch (alt. "Margarita"; "Marina"). It seems to have become a fetish (hence the use of chastity belts in the Middle Ages). Of course, this peculiar fixation dates back to the Torah–wherein we are instructed to stone a maiden to death on her doorstep if she is found to not be a virgin on her wedding night.

This virginal Miriam continued on into Islam. In the Koran, passages like 3:47 and 19:19-20 reaffirm the immaculate conception of Jesus. But while virginity has played a significant role in Abrahamic lore, those who crafted Mohammedan hagiography did not see fit to incorporate the leitmotif into their legend of the Seal of the Prophets. Mohammed's biological mother died when he was an infant. This may have forestalled any inclination to ascribe preternatural features to Mohammed's birth.

Mohammed himself seemed not to focus much on a woman's virginity; at least not nearly as much as it was an issue in Judaic lore (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). This makes sense, as there was so much emphasis on taking women as sex slaves; and thinking fo them as property.

Unsurprisingly, there were various outlandish fables about Mohammed of Mecca concocted during the earliest generations of Islam. It's worth exploring one of the more fantastical tall-tales; as an illustration of the ways in which farce is sometimes incorporated into legend.

Here, let's look at the so-called "Night Journey" (dubbed the "Isra al-Mi'raj")…on which the self-proclaimed prophet embarked c. 620 or 621 (i.e. a year or so prior to the "hijra" to Yathrib); with his

favorite angel, Gabriel, as his tour-guide (17:1). In the first part of the fantastical voyage (referred to simply as the "Isra"), Mohammed travelled from Mecca to "the farthest mosque" ("masjid al-aqsa")–which contemporary Muslims usually identify with the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. This sounds marvelous…except that there was no mosque in Jerusalem in 620; there was only a Byzantine Church (i.e. Church of the Sepulcher)…which was about to be taken over by the (Zoroastrian) Sassanians…and then given to the Jews. Note that the opening verse of chapter 17 describes the sojourn as being from the "sacred place of worship" to the "remote place of worship". The former, which refers to a "masjid" that is "haraam", is (dubiously) presumed to be Mecca. The latter, which refers to a "masjid" that is "aqsa", is (credibly) presumed to be Jerusalem.

In the second part of the fabulous voyage (the "Mi'raj"), Mohammed toured both heaven and hell. {36} During this leg of the trip, Mohammed was afforded the opportunity to converse with Adam (but not Eve), Abraham (Ibrahim), Joseph (Yusuf), Moses (Musa) and his brother Aaron, John the Baptist (Yahya), Jesus of Nazareth (Isa), and other Abrahamic prophets. All of this happened in one night. In the Koran, this is alluded to in 53:6-18. {37}

The biggest problem with this particular tale is that it claims Mohammed reached the upper limit of all human knowledge (at the so-called "Lote Tree"). {38} According to this claim, there is nothing–NOTHING–that the Enlightenment conferred upon mankind that had not already been provided by Mohammed of Mecca (via the Sunnah).

The fantastical tale of the "Miraj" likely originated with a popular book (retroactively referred to as simply as the "Kitab al-Mi'raj") composed by an author from Nishapur in the 11th century–four centuries after Mohammed's lifetime. But where did THAT author get the idea? Lo and behold: the Persian tale of "Arda" [Just] Wiraz[a] (the Book of Arda Viraf) had been put into book form well over a century before.

The Persians told tales of the magical sojourn of the fabled Zoroastrian prophet, Viraf. One night, he goes on a "dream journey" to the next world, where he engages in dialogues with angels (notably: Atar) and past prophets (notably: Sraosha, a variant of the "Saoshyant" figure); and even meets the godhead, Ahura Mazda. The godhead tells the prophet that Mazda-ism is the one true Faith, the only way to salvation. Viraf is also given a glimpse of hell, so that he might witness the torments visited upon the damned. All this should sound very familiar.

The Persian tale of Arda Viraf's celestial journey (ref. the "Arda Wiraz Namag") involved the protagonist being offered libations, holding court with the godhead, and–sure enough–being given a guided tour of hell. It is telling that the Mohammedan adaptation retained all the key plot points of its Zoroastrian precursor. As with so much in Mohammedan lore, it was lifted from Pahlavi and/or Syriac sources–material that was widely available at the time. {40}

In the Mohammedan version, part of the sojourn in heaven included a stop at the "Bayt-al-Mamur" [House of piety; conventionally taken to be a celestial manifestation of the Kaaba]. Mohammed of Mecca is also said to have engaged in negotiations with the Creator of the Universe, talking the deity down to just five obligatory prayers per day–as if such an entity would be one to barter on ANYTHING. The audience is asked to believe that there were no more judicious use of the Abrahamic deity's time than to haggle over the number of daily propitiations. (Indeed, when it came to how mankind should behave, we are to suppose that there were no more pressing matters in need of addressing than frequency of "salat".)

None of this was original. In the "Apocalypse of Abraham", Abraham makes a sojourn to heaven for a guided tour. Other prophets, like Baruch and Levi were also given guided tours in apocryphal texts. In each case, an angel is typically the tour-guide.

But what of the creature that took Mohammed of Mecca on this fantastical journey? It is here that we come to FLYING HORSES. As the story goes, the prophet was whisked away on a winged horse named the "Buraq" [literally: "lightning", based on the Persian "barag"]…transported first from the Hijaz to "the farthest masjid"…and then on up to the heavens. We are given a description in Bukhari's Hadith of a "white beast smaller than a mule, bigger than a donkey" (4/54/429).

The use of preternatural steeds is not uncommon in ancient myth; which is to say that the idea was not unfamiliar to those in the Middle East when Mohammedan lore was first being concocted. Indeed, the leitmotif goes back to ancient Persia (as so many things do); which is where the Arabians likely got the idea. Let's look at TEN MORE well-known instances of flying horses in folklore across the globe:

ONE: The Achaemenid (Persian) Shah, Xerxes the Great is known for having fetishized magical white horses.

TWO: The Greeks told of the winged horse, Pegasus.

THREE: In Kushan lore, Kanishka the Great is said to have ridden a magical white horse (ref. the "Sridhama Pitika" c. 470 A.D.)

FOUR: In Hindu myth, "Uchchaihshravas" is a white, flying horse (often depicted with seven heads) ridden by the sun-god, Surya. Also, the final incarnation of Vishnu ("Kalki") arrives on a magical, white horse–leading an army of righteous souls to combat the forces of evil (thus ushering in a new epoch of peace).

FIVE: Winged horses also appeared in ancient Turkic myths ("tulpar")…and are featured thereafter in Turkish, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Mongolian myths.

SIX: In Mahayana Buddhist myth, Kumarajiva of Kucha (the monk who brought Buddhism to China) is said to have been transported by a magical white horse referred to as "Tian-liu" [Heavenly Liu; referencing the clan of legendary Chinese Emperor Yao]. Tales of winged horses could also be found in ancient Chinese myths of the "qianli-ma" ["cholli-ma" in Korean, "senri-ma" in Japanese]; alternately rendered as "tian-ma" [celestial horse; horse of heaven] or "long-ma" [dragon-horse].

SEVEN: In Confucian / Taoist lore, a unicorn ("qilin") attended the birth of "Master K'ung". {39}

EIGHT: In Siamese lore, legends are told of the flying horse ("ma-ninmangkorn") whisking away the hero ("Sudsakorn") when he embarks on his quest.

NINE: In Celtic mythology, the divine maiden "Rhiannon" rode a magical, white horse (ref. the "Mobinogi[on]" from the 12th century) to and from the Isle of Skye. That story is based on legends dating back to "Taliesin" in the 6th century. In the Irish legend of the princess Niamh of Munster (a.k.a. "Nieve of the Golden Hair"), a flying horse is used to whisk her lover, Oisin away to the magical land of eternal youth, "Tir na-n-Og" (a.k.a. "Mag Mell"). The steed is generally known as a "selkie".

TEN: In Norse mythology, Odin rode a magical horse named "Sleipnir". The Viking hero "Sigurd" rode a magical horse named "Grani". And the golden maned horse "Gulltoppr" was used by the shining god, Heimdallr to bring the blessings of the gods to humanity.

Tales of flying horses also appear in the pseudo-Arabian anthology, "A Thousand And One Nights" ["Alf Layla" in Arabic], itself based on the Pahlavi (Persian) story-collection: "Hazar Afsan".

So what's the big deal with HORSES? Well, one can ride them. The Thracians and Dacians associated their gods with horses. Interestingly, however, the Mongols–to whom the horse was more central than any culture in history–did not opt to deify the animal (though they did associate it with vaunted status).

The most deluded Muslims take the tale of the "Mi'raj" literally–and presumably wonder whether or not a winged horse was able to also whisk Mohammed down to hell…or if some kind of magical gopher might have been required for that leg of the journey. (Was Satan privy to the visit? Did Mohammed solicit dialogue with any djinn during the sojourn to the underworld? And, gosh-golly, how did the guided tour protect Mohammed from all that fire?)

As it happens, tales of an auspicious figure making a sojourn to hell date back to the 2nd millennium B.C. with the Babylonian account of Inanna's journey. The theme is timeless. It was found in Homer's "Odyssey" (late 8th century B.C.)…and was then incorporated into Roman lore by Virgil in his "Aeneid" (1st century B.C.)…which was eventually incorporated into Christian lore by Dante in his "Inferno" (early 14th century A.D.) Thus: Sumerian to Greek to Latin to Tuscan (medieval Italian). In each iteration, the hero is given a guided tour of the underworld.

Enough of farcical equestrian hijinks. In part II of this essay, we will explore archetypes like thunder god and sun gods. We will then look at Flood stories from around the world. We will conclude with one of the most pervasive motifs in mythology: the trinity.

FOOTNOTES:

{1 There is no longer any doubt that there is, indeed, a human nature that is shared by all homo sapiens. This is why absolutist behaviorism is wrong. Evolutionary psychology is conclusive on this point. The best book for dispelling the myth that there is no (universal) nature to the human mind is Steven Pinker's "The Blank Slate".}

{2 Most inter-racial love stories have happy endings, as with "Guess Who's Coming To Dinner" (1967) and "Belle" (2013). Pop culture has replicated the plot-line many times. The 2008 film, "The Other End of the Line" is about an Indian woman and an American man. The 2012 film, "Emperor" is about a Japanese woman and an American man.}

{3 There have been at least three films in which the plot has involved an Israeli Jew and a Palestinian Muslim: "David and Fatima [alt. Layla]" (made for TV; 1983; see footnote 4 below), "Gesher Tzar Me'od" [On a Narrow Bridge; 1985], and "David and Fatima" (unrelated to the former; 2008). The 2005 movie, "David & Layla" is about a Jewish man and a Kurdish woman in New York City.}

{4 Bizarrely, records of this film have been all-but-erased from existence. Until c. 2014, it had been available for DVD rental on Netflix.}

{5 Rarely is the adoption of an enticing leitmotif done deliberately (as a decision to adopt): "Hey, THAT'S a nifty idea. So let's go with it rather than the other alternatives!" Memes propagate due to a (blind) natural selection; not because people are conscientiously "shopping" as if for consumer products in a marketplace of brand-name memes. Universal proclivities are at play; and nobody gets to pick what those are. More to the point: Never has a group undertaken a project of harvesting (and curating) memes in order to construct a custom-tailored memeplex for themselves. That's not how cultures coalesce. Even a bespoke memeplex was designed by a blind process. Though EVERY memeplex is a social construct, no memeplex is seen as such, especially once it is sacralized. It's hard to sanctify something that one recognizes as confectionary. (For similar reasons, narrative vehicles are rarely recognized as narrative vehicles; i.e. as mere vehicles the propagation of certain memes.) And nothing that is derivative can be

deemed sui generis…which precludes consecration.}

{6 The Ahmaddiyya conflate the notions of the "Masih" and the "Mahdi", believing he has already come in the form of Punjabi demagogue, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian (in the 19th century).}

{7 Incidentally, the man-fashioned-from-clay trope ALSO goes back to the Sumerians / Akkadians. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the mother-goddess "Aruru" fashions Enkidu from clay. The Assyrians may well have told similar tales, which makes it unsurprising that it ended up in Syriac lore…and thus into the Koran.}

{8 Parallels with Christian lore: Horus was born of a virgin on the winter solstice beneath a bright star (probably a reference to Sirius), and attended by three kings (see footnote 24 below). He was later baptized in a river (the Nile), had twelve disciples, and was known alternately as the "Lamb of God" and the "Good Shepherd". He was said to have performed miracles–including raising the dead, healing the sick, and walking on water. He was thought of in certain ways as a savior-god. Horus was eventually crucified; then rose from the dead after three days. Wall art in the temple at Karnak depicts the annunciation, immaculate conception, veneration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Horus.}

{9 Parallels with Christian lore: Dionysus was born of a virgin on the winter solstice. He was referred to as the "King of Kings" (see footnote 25 below) as well as the "Alpha and Omega" [the beginning and the end]. He was resurrected and ascended to heaven. Most strikingly was Mithra(s), who was said to have had a preternatural birth on the winter solstice. (See footnote 26 below.) He had twelve apostles (typically associated with the signs of the Zodiac) and is reputed to have performed wondrous miracles. Moreover, he was referred to as "The Way", "The Truth", "The Light"…and even as the "Son of God". After sacrificing himself to save mankind, he rose from the dead after three days…then ascended to heaven. (See footnote 27 below.) Meanwhile: Attis was born of a virgin on the winter solstice, was crucified, and then rose from the dead after three days. Last but not least: Krishna–seen as the incarnation of the god, Vishnu–was born of a virgin and baptized in a river; and is said to have been a carpenter, performing miracles whilst showing people the way to the divine (Brahma). He too was resurrected. Such figures are human incarnations of the divine. Savior gods are often said to have been born of virgins–because such births are PURE.}

{10 Also adopted by proto-Germanic peoples from Indic lore was the swastika, which appears in some ancient carvings in northern Europe, later became an icon for Thor's hammer, and was eventually adopted by the Teutonic Knights. In the 1920's, an Austrian madman appropriated it as the symbol for his fascist movement. Meanwhile, "Dyeus" was derived from the Etruscan pronunciation of "Zeus": "Dias"…which became "Deus Pater" [sky god]…which became "Jupiter" in Vulgar Latin.}

{11 The Akkadian "Enlil" (adapted from the Sumerian "Nunamnir") was alternately posited as the godhead, with the thunderbolt-wielding "Ninurta" (adapted from the Sumerian "Nin-gursu") as his son. Ref. the Epic of Ziusudra (a.k.a. "Eridu Genesis") and the Myth of An-Zu.}

{12 Also note Mark 6:34 and 14:27; Matthew 2:6, 9:36, 25:32, and 26:31. In the Epistles, note Hebrews 13:20 (as well as First Peter 2:25 and 5:4). In this idiom, followers are seen as a flock (alt. as sheep) in need of a shepherd–who will protect and guide them.}

{13 Another interesting case-study is the mermaid–an archetype that goes back to the Assyrians. Such magical aquatic females were associated with the goddess, Atargatis. The ancient Greeks posited "sirens" (ref. Homer's Calypso of Ogygia) and told tales of "nereids" / "oceanids" (as with Persa, Amphitrite, and Ianeira). Meanwhile, "naiads" dwelled in fresh-water lakes. The Persians posited "maneli". During the Renaissance, such enchanting creatures were referred to as "undines"; while "limnaeds" dwelled in freshwater lakes (the most famous of which was the Lady of the Lake in Arthurian

Legend). In “One Thousand and One Nights”, we hear about “Djullanar the sea-girl”. (There are also mermaids featured in the tale of Bulukiya.) Picts / Scots told tales of “ceasg”. French told tales of “Melusine”. Slavs told tales of “rusalki”. Siberians told tales of “alara”. The founding of the Polish capital, War-sawa, was based on the tale of a mermaid named “Sawa”. To this day, American natives of the Amazon tell tales of the mysterious lady of the waters: “[u]Iara”. Hindus and Buddhists tell tales of “apsaras” (notably, the mermaid princess, “Suvann[a]-Maccha”). The Chinese tell tales of the “jiaoren” (ref. the “Classic of the Mountains and Seas”). The Japanese tell tales of “nin-gyo”. And the Siamese tell tales of “pongsa wadarn”. Ethereal female entities don’t just dwell in bodies of water, though. They can also reside in the heavens: see footnote 16 below.}

{14 Recurring motifs have been catalogued (and classified) in the Aarne-Thompson index of folktale types.}

{15 One might refer to this phenomenon as reification-run-amok. Sooner or later, virtually ALL reification invariably runs amok. After all, that is the nature of reification. I explore mytheme-milking in Appendix 2, at the end of part II of this essay.}

{16 The theme of beautiful celestial maidens is, unsurprisingly, quite popular–as there are “Apsara” (Vedic), “Yakshini” (Hindu / Jain) “Vidhya Dhari” (Khmer Buddhist), “Tennin” / “Tennyo” (Japanese Buddhist), and “nymphs” (Greco-Roman). Variations on the theme (female entities who tend to intervene in worldly affairs) include “pixies” (Celtic), “sylphs” (Swiss), and “wights” [alt. disir / puki / hulders] (Norse). The myriad versions of fairies in European folklore (e.g. “[e]sprites”) have populated “fairytales” since the Middle Ages (see footnote 13 above). In the Koran, we find several ideas coopted from other (antecedent) myths–notably the wide-eyed, angelic virgins of “Jannah”: the notion of “huriyya” (a.k.a. “h[o]uri”) as nubile concubines in the hereafter was lifted directly from Persian myths of the “pari”…which would become the basis for the term “fairy”. Meanwhile, the concept of angels originated in Zoroastrian cosmogony: the “yazatas”.}

{17 Ref. Bruno Bettelheim’s “The Uses of Enchantment”; p. 91-93.}

{18 In East India, the Hmar tell tales of Hrum[-sawm] and Tukbem[-sawm] (“sawm” means ten). Also notable is the tale of “The brother and sister of Liendo” [“Lien-do hai unau”].}

{19 For more, see the work of Frans de Waal, Scott Atran, Pascal Boyer, Robert Trivers, and Robert M. Sapolsky.}

{20 It is common for gods to be seen as dwelling on mountains. The most well-known case is that of Olympus in Greek mythology. It is natural to think the godhead resides on a mountain-top, as it is the highest place–inaccessible and closest to the heavens. It is also an optimal vantage-point for seeing the world–ideal for an all-seeing god, looking down upon mere mortals from on high. We find this leitmotif around the world–from Sinjar in Yazidi mythology to Kunlun in Chinese mythology to the home of the Aztec storm-god, Tlaloc. I explore the significance of sacred mountains in my essay: “Pilgrimage”.}

{21 The tale of Abraham’s unconditional Faith being tested by Yahweh (by showing he was willing to kill his own son) was likely a reworking of the ancient Greek legend of Agamemnon of Mycenae. In order to appease the gods (spec. Artemis), the military hero was told that he must sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia. He was willing to oblige, as currying favor with the gods was needed for him to be victorious against the Trojans. At the last minute, he was notified that–having demonstrated his fealty–he could replace his daughter with a stag. The Hebrew version was likely concocted during the Exilic Period; so the the Greek tale likely predates it.}

{22 There may be a trade-off between these two factors. That is: A less adaptable theme might be FORCE-FIT if it proves to have sufficient utility. Otherwise, a theme with middling utility might be adopted simply because it fits so perfectly into the incumbent memeplex.}

{23 Interesting tid-bit: The term for a clergyman who delivers the liturgy, “pastor”, was Vulgar Latin for “shepherd”.}

{24 Commonly referred to as “magi” (from the Persian through Vulgar Latin), these men heralded from key lands of the east: Balthazar (Assyrian), Melchior (Persian), and Caspar (Indian). This symbolizes the accession of Babylonian, Zoroastrian, and Hindu Faiths to the NEW king, and thus to the new Faith. Caspar is probably a distortion of Gaspar, who was based on the Indo-Parthian king, Guda-paras[h]a (Latinized to “Gondophares”). The magi are rendered in Syriac as Larvandad [probably a distortion of “Vendidad”], Hormisdas [probably a distortion of “Ahura Mazda”], and Gushnasaph [probably based on a character in the “Cave of Treasures” by Ephrem of Nisibis]. The fabled north star that the magi are said to have followed was most likely the luminescent planet, Venus. Japanese Buddhists would have referred to Polaris as “Myoken”; the Hindus would have referred to it as “Dhruva”. We now just refer to it as “Polaris”.}

{25 “King of Kings” was a common appellation for great rulers–as with the “Xsayathiya[nam]” / “Shah-e-Shahan” (commonly rendered “Shah-en-Shah”) of Persia. The Turkic-Mongol peoples of the Eurasian Steppes used the honorific “Khan of Khans”–as with “Chin[g]gis Khan” [Universal King].}

{26 The winter solstice is the time of year that the sun (almost) dies, and is then born again (in the northern hemisphere). The descending and ascending sun on the horizon represents darkness temporarily overcoming light…before light once more starts prevailing over darkness. This is the logical time to designate the birth of a savior-figure. In Anglo-saxon tradition, “Modra-niht” (night of mothers) was an auspicious event held on the solstice (mothers being symbols of birth)…going back to the cosmogony of those who erected Stone Henge. The occasion was known as “Yule-tide” in Germanic tradition, “Yol” in Norse tradition. The attendant “three kings” in Christian tales of the nativity may have been based on the three stars on Orion’s belt, which align with Sirius during the winter solstice (see footnote 24 above). Meanwhile, the spring equinox, when day finally overtakes night (in the northern hemisphere) is the logical time for resurrection to take place.}

{27 Given all these parallels (see footnote 32 below), it makes sense that Mithra-ism thrived during the same period of time as early Christianity: from the 1st to 5th century A.D. (by which time it had been eradicated by the Christianized Roman Imperium; being as it was beholden to the Vatican Magisterium). In the Mithraic cults, the deified figure was a Romanized adaptation of the original Indo-Persian icon, which dated back to the early 2nd millennium B.C. (as attested by the Hittite “Bogaz-köy” tablets, written in Old Assyrian cuneiform). Mithra(s) was later adopted as the personification of Light in Zoroastrianism. By the 3rd century A.D., Mithra-ism was the predominant cult movement across the Roman Empire–from the Iberian Peninsula, across Europe, Greece, Illyria, and Anatolia…all the way to Armenia and northern Mesopotamia…and, yes, throughout the Levant. This means that it would have been known to 1st-century Palestinians–including those following a Jewish carpenter from the Galilee. Mithraic ceremonies included ritual suppers, replete with drinking wine and breaking bread. The meal was believed to be presided over by Mithras himself. (Sound familiar?) Mithra-ism’s savior-god motif sated the craving for salvation that was surely widespread at the time…by ALL walks of life. This was the same craving that would be sated by Paulin Christology.}

{28 Typology is, of course, a complete charade–an instance of circular reasoning even a child could recognize. Such legerdemain is a textbook example of “post hoc ergo proctor hoc”. Clearly, authors wrote the various New Testament passages to accord with Old Testament prophecies–which they had readily

available to them. Indeed, the Hebrew Bible was riddled with so many pending prognostications, they likely felt obliged to fulfill them when tailoring their own lore. To be surprised by this is naive. To be impressed by this is to confess idiocy.}

{29 Parallels with Christian lore: Dionysus was born of a virgin on the winter solstice. He was referred to as the "King of Kings" as well as the "Alpha and Omega" [the beginning and the end]. He was resurrected.}

{30 In some versions of the story, Myrr[h]a had sex with her own father, King Cinyras of Cyprus–though in a very abstract, preternatural way. In other versions of the lore, Zeus impregnated Danae, who then gave birth to Perseus.}

{31 Parallels with Christian lore: Horus was born of a virgin on the winter solstice beneath a bright star (probably a reference to Sirius), and attended by three kings (see the discussion of trinities in part II of this essay). He was later baptized, had twelve apostles, and was known alternately as the "Lamb of God" and the "Good Shepherd". He was eventually crucified; and then rose from the dead after three days.
Wall art in the temple at Karnak depicts the annunciation, immaculate conception, veneration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Horus.}

{32 This was also found in Mitanni lore. Parallels with Christian lore: Mithra(s) was born of a virgin on the winter solstice. He had twelve apostles and was referred to as "The Way", "The Truth", "The Light", and even as the "Son of God". After sacrificing himself to save mankind, he rose from the dead after three days…then ascended to heaven. (See footnote 27 above.)}

{33 Parallels with Christian lore: Attis was born of a virgin on the winter solstice, was crucified, and then rose from the dead after three days.}

{34 The coming savior-figure, Saoshyant, is also supposed to be conceived immaculately. For a list of savior-figures around the world, see my essay: "The History Of Exalted Figures".}

{35 In another version, Aemila was said to have been impregnated by Mars.}

{36 Note that this tale bears a striking resemblance to a piece of apocrypha associated with the Ancient Greek philosopher, Parmenides of Elea (from the early 5th century B.C.) According to verse attributed to Parmenides, he gleaned his insights via revelation from a goddess during an otherworldly journey, in which he was taken up to the celestial spheres. How did he get there? You guessed it: By riding a flying mare.}

{37 This was later elaborated upon in Bukhari's Hadith (4/54/429 and 5/58/227). In comparing the "sahih" Hadith to virtually ANY OTHER sacred history, the former come out looking rather adolescent. As with the Koran, the Hadith are crudely hewn apocrypha comprised–in large part–of revamped folklore from antecedent traditions (a topic I explore in my essay: "Syriac Source-Material For Islam's Holy Book".)}

{38 This tree of knowledge is also referred to as the "Sidrat al-Muntaha", located at the end of the 7th heaven. It is ironic, as it was eating from the tree of knowledge that led to mankind's fall IN THE FIRST PLACE. Suddenly, the Abrahamic deity decided that it was a GOOD thing to eat from the tree of knowledge.}

{39 The Korean version of "qilin" was "girin", the Siamese version was "gilen", and the Japanese version was "kirin". Unicorns go back to the proto-Brahmic mythology of the Indus Valley civilization.
The Persians had "Shadhavar". The Russians had "Indrik". Even medieval Christians tried to get in on the action, opting to translate the Hebrew "re'em" in the Book of Job as "unicorn" instead of "aurochs" (a kind of cattle). In pre-Islamic Arabian myth, there were tales of a unicorn-like creature known as the

“shad’havar”, which were ALSO likely lifted from Persian myth. For reasons that are elusive, unicorns–especially winged–came to be the go-to creature for enchantment.}

{40 There even existed Pahlavi Psalters in the region going back to the 6th century–which were themselves based on the (Syriac) writings of the Nestorian proselyte, “Mar” Aba of Asorestan (a.k.a. “Abba The Great”). As mentioned, the idea of the “Sirat al-Mustaqim” (the Ishmaelite version of the “Chinvat Bridge”) and of angelic “houri” were also appropriated from Persian lore (ref. the “Bundahishn”). As I discuss in my essay, “The Syriac Origins Of Koranic Text”, while the majority of Mohammedan lore was appropriated from Syriac material, several Persian memes were co-opted.}

Appendix:

The Vedic epic, “Rama-yan[a]” is an ideal case-study in trans-cultural resonance. It was originally composed by Valmiki in the 5th-century B.C. (ostensibly based on the “Mula Rama-yana” by Narada from even earlier). That was followed by the “Artha-shastra” by Kautilya (a.k.a. “Chankya”) in the 4th century B.C.

Bhavabhuti of Vidarbha then did a version dubbed the “Maha-Vira-Charita” [“Exploits of a Great Hero”] c. 800 A.D. Since then, there have been myriad versions:

- **Vaishnava Hindu:** the “Ram[a]-charit[a]-manas[a]”, “Kannassa Rama-yana[m]”, and Ezhuthachan’s popular “Adhyatma Rama-yana[m] Kilipattu” **(composed in Malayalam)**
- **Shaiva Hindu:** Kambar’s “Rama-vatara[m]” (a.k.a. “Kamba-Rama-yana[m]”) **(composed in Tamil)**
- **Vedanta / Kannadiga Hindu:** the “Kumudendu Rama-yana” and “Kumara-Valmiki Torave Rama-yana” **(composed in Kannada)**
- **Ganga (Orissa):** the “Dandi Rama-yan[a]” (a.k.a. “Jagamohan Rama-yan[a]”)
- **Jain:** the “Pauma-chariya[m]”
- **Marathi:** the “Bhavartha Rama-yan[a]”
- **Kashmiri:** the “Rama-vatara Charita”
- **Bengal:** the “Krittivasi Rama-yan[a]”
- **Assamese:** the “Katha Rama-yan[a]” (a.k.a. “Sapta-kanda Rama-yan[a]”)
- **Nepalese:** the “Bhanu-bhaktako Rama-yan[a]” and then the “Siddhi Rama-yan[a]”
- **Burmese:** the “Yama Zatdaw”
- **Siamese:** the “Rama-kien”
- **Laotian:** the “Phra Lak Phra Ram[a]”
- **Khmer:** the “Rama-kerti” (a.k.a. the “Reamker”)
- **Malay:** the “Hikayat Sri Rama”, the “Kannassa Rama-yana[m]”, and the “Adhyatma Rama-yana[m] Kilipattu”
- **Javanese / Sumatran:** the “Kakawin Rama-yana” [rendered the “Rama-kavaca” in Bali]
- **Filipino:** the “Maradia Lawana” as well as the (Maranao) “Darangen”

During the Chola dynasty of Andhra Pradesh, several adaptations were composed in **Telugu**–most notably: the Ranga-natha Rama-yana, Bhaskar Rama-yana, Molla Rama-yana, and Rama-yana Kalpavriksha[m]. And in the 20th century, a translation in **Kannada** became a classic: Kuvempu’s “[Sri] Rama-yana Darshanam”.

That’s twenty different cultures. ALL of it was, essentially, a variation on the same epic. Clearly, the tale–in its basic form–resonated with people across geography and time. Each was tailored to fit the sensibilities and concerns of the incipient culture (and was then passed off as sui generis). The tale even

makes an appearance in **Sikhism**–most notably, in Guru Gobind Sing's "Dasam Granth" **(composed in Gurmukhi)**.

We find a similar kind of resonance with the tale of "Robin Hood", instances of which I enumerate in the Postscript to my essay: "The Progressive Case For Cultural Appropriation".