

PALAEO-PHILOSOPHY: COMPLEX AND CONCEPT IN ARCHAIC PATTERNS OF THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT: This paper argues that efforts to understand historically remote patterns of thought are driven away from their original meaning if the investigation focuses on reconstruction of *concepts*. It is simply not appropriate to be looking for an archaic *concept* of soul, name or dream, for example, when considering the earliest documents which attest to their writers' (and others') beliefs about certain types of phenomena. Instead, we propose to employ the notion of cognitive *complex* (as elaborated in the work of Piaget, Vygotsky, and Hallpike) in order to investigate some important philosophical themes in Ancient Egyptian, Ancient Iranian, and Ancient Near Eastern documents. Our principal theoretical claim is that archaic thought does not work with concepts but with *complexes* whose salient features are an over-abundance of properties, an over-production of connections, and weakness in abstraction. The basic level of complex formation may be the most inclusive level at which it is possible to form a mental image. Specific studies are focused on ancient texts which exhibit archaic patterns of thought. In Egyptian texts, "manifestation" (*kheperu*) seems to convey something which all categories of beings are capable of becoming, being and having, assuming and leaving; the "name" (*ren*) was considered to be an essential component of the individual's survival; symbolic representations, such as images and words, are causally connected to the 'objects' the image or word signifies. In ANE records the human *etemmu* was plainly the corpse or skeleton of the dead person; on the other hand it was also the shadowy, volatile image of what he was during life. In ANE records the baffling idea of the divine *me* referred to an entire cultural area, an acquisition of civilized life; but at the same time it is also the result of an invention, a divine decision. The complexes involved in these archaic ideas about soul, name and dream are ideas fused with their 'objects'; they have unstable traits and prototypical instances; and are thought at the most abstract level which have concrete images.

KEYWORDS: Concept; Complex; Archaic Ideas; Archaic Images; Vygotsky; Hallpike

I.

This paper argues that efforts to understand historically remote patterns of thought are driven away from their original meaning if the investigation focuses on reconstruction of *concepts*. It is simply not appropriate to be looking for an archaic *concept* of soul, name or dream, for example, when considering the earliest documents which attest to their writers' (and others') belief about certain types of phenomena. Not only does the historian often have great difficulties in identifying and explaining relevant concepts

across vast stretches of time, it may be misleading to look for anything like a concept at all. The basic meaning of ‘concept’ is an idea that can be applied to many ‘objects’, an idea that is universal across a type, and not particular to an instance or token; it is abstract in its intension, i.e. it signifies an object-class in virtue of common features; and general in its extension, i.e. it can pick out numerous particulars that satisfy conditions for class-inclusion. On the Kantian view, a concept is a product of the understanding operating on empirical content supplied by the sensory faculties. Thus a single empirical concept (as opposed to an apriori, categorical concept) has a stable meaning associated with its object-class’s essential properties. The concept is a unity of rule that determines all that is manifold in sensory intuition of objects and limits it to conditions that make possible a conformity to type.¹

With regard to archaic patterns of thought, my thesis is not that different thinkers (or writers) across vast stretches of time had different ideas about mind, soul and spirit, for example—that is true, but trivial. The concept of mind in the Stoics is different than the concept of mind in Aristotle, and different than the concept of mind in Plato; each gives their own account of the nature and functions of *nous*. In the contemporary arena, there is much disagreement about the concept of consciousness: what is the most suitable model or metaphor, what sorts of neural states “count as” the causal support for mental states, whether brain states are identical with mental states, and so forth. However, for any given theory of consciousness—whatever its nature, structure and function are said to be—the *concept* of consciousness applies to, and is exemplified by, all and only those beings that possess it. Despite the bewildering variety of theories about the essential features and operations of consciousness, insofar as any entity is conscious the concept applies to it. My thesis in a nutshell is that the earliest written records (c.1000-1500 BCE) which deploy words like “soul”, “name”, and “dream” do not attest to anything like the *concepts* of soul, name or dream. Close analysis of texts that use soul-like words, for example, do not reveal that there is anything like a general abstract idea of “soul” in virtue of which some kind (or kinds) of thing can be said to have soul. Archaic patterns of thought do not differ from our “modern” patterns in having different concepts, but in not having anything like concepts at all.

The sort of texts suitable for or task are drawn from three quite different cultures and date from approximately the same time, the second half of the second millennium. From the Ancient Near East our sources are *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *Atrahasis the Supersage*, *Adapa and the South Wind*, and *Enuma Elish*. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is the longest and most famous ANE narrative; in many episodes it recounts the story of a hero-king’s quest for fame and immortality. During a state-sponsored surge of literary collection and invention in the Kassite period (c.1500) many widely scattered tablets from this epic were sorted and inventoried. *The Myth of Atrahasis* “the super-sage” concerns a figure of immense prestige and antiquity; known by various names and epithets, his fame spread through many lands and languages; the text of *Atrahasis* in Old Babylonian dates from

1. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A103-106.

c.1700. The *Enuma Elish* (or *Epic of Creation*) is a very well preserved and lengthy narrative, inscribed on seven tablets, whose composition has been very difficult to date; it could be anytime between 1900 and 1100 BCE. The text of *Adapa and the South Wind* is overly brief and incomplete, since it lacks the final scene(s); written in Akkadian, it dates from c.1400-1300 BCE. From Ancient Egypt, our attention will focus on the various *Books of the Underworld* (the best known of which is the *Book of the Dead*) in the New Kingdom (c.1540-1075 BCE), as well as some literary and pseudo-literary texts, such as “The Dispute Between a Man and his *ba*”, “The Eloquent Peasant”, and “Merikare’s Instructions”. From Ancient Iran, the only extant documents in the Avestan language are the Avestan Scriptures, the Sacred Writings of Zarathustra the prophet. One set of central texts, the Gāthās or “Songs”, are considerably older than other texts in these Scriptures, and have only recently been convincingly dated to c.1000-1200 BCE.

II. ABSTRACT GENERAL CONCEPTS AND COGNITIVE COMPLEXES

In contrast with abstract general categories, primitive classification was concerned to impose some sort of order on aspects of experience that are practically or ritually significant for a given society. It was not concerned with a system of logical inferences or with the construction of genus-species taxonomies. Primitive thought is static not dynamic, tied into the phenomenal properties of things and events, and is dominated by concrete associations, in the ordering of which prototypical imagery is of special importance.² In an effort to capture in one word the sort of thinking that operates under these conditions, Piaget proposed the term ‘collection’ and Vygotsky proposed the term ‘complex’. Abstract and formal cognition works with concepts, and although the principles of class (or set) may not be known, it classifies things with a genus-species hierarchy. At an earlier, more fluid stage the “complex grouping may vary from item to item; the intension of different complexes may overlap; and the intension may be dominated by use, function, and association rather than by taxonomic criteria.”³

Piaget said that at an early stage of development the child treats classification as the construction of a complex concrete object which only exists when its parts or elements are in physical relations with the whole. Groups of this sort must behave according to four operatory rules: closure, associativity, identity and inversion.⁴ Vygotsky said that in a cognitive complex, “individual objects are united in the child’s mind not only by his subjective impressions but also by bonds actually existing between these objects.” These bonds are concrete and factual, based on everyday experiences, rather than on generalized abstractions; the elements of the complex have a functional and concrete unity, rather than logical coherence. While a cognitive concept groups objects according to their possession of at least one common attribute, “the bonds relating the elements of a complex to the whole and to one another may be as diverse as the contacts and rela-

2. Hallpike 1979 p. 169.

3. Hallpike 1979 p. 174.

4. Piaget 1972; Seltman 1985 pp. 38-54.

tions are in reality.”⁵ He compares a complex in this sense to a *family* of ideas, such that having any one of a multiplicity of diverse relations is sufficient for an element to be given a family name. In addition to such associative complexes, there are also functional complexes, where both have a nucleus of prototypical elements. In chain complexes, the decisive criterion keeps changing during the selection process, so that there is no nucleus and relations exist only between individual members.

But whatever the type of complex, they all have distinctive features, as Vygotsky explains: “a complex does not arise above its elements as does a concept; it merges with the concrete objects that compose it. This fusion of the general and the particular, of the complex and its elements, this psychic amalgam... is the distinctive characteristic of all complex thinking.”⁶ The cognitive operations of abstraction and generalization are acquired in stages; they are not given a priori and then applied to empirical content in order to generate a genuine concept. To form a true concept, “it is also necessary to abstract, to single out elements, and to view the abstracted elements apart from the totality of the concrete experience in which they are embedded. In genuine concept formation, it is equally important to unite and to separate: synthesis must be combined with analysis. Complex thinking cannot do both. Its very essence is over-abundance, over-production of connections, and weakness in abstraction.”⁷ As long as complexive thought predominates, “the abstracted trait is unstable and easily surrenders its temporary dominance to other traits. Only when the abstracted criteria or traits are resynthesized do genuine concepts emerge.”⁸

Cognitive complexes are also characterized by concrete imagery based on an individual’s experience of prototypes. Archaic proto-categories do not map directly onto an Aristotelian categorical schema, and this is in large part due to a significant difference in their respective understanding of the genus-species relation and the idea of a natural kind. Eleanor Rosch has presented strong evidence in favor of the thesis that object grouping in a hierarchy of more and more inclusive classes has undergone a long evolutionary development. She argues that human-science disciplines have always tended to treat the object-taxonomies of human cognition as basically Aristotelian. In other words, naturally occurring object-groups are conceived as “logical, bounded entities, membership in which is defined by an item’s possession of a simple set of criterial features.”⁹ She offers clear evidence that, in the ordinary everyday world, humans do not rely on any sort of digital ordering of discrete properties in order to ascribe a particular thing as a member of a class. Rather our normal cognitive schema relies on an analogue procedure that assimilates the object and its natural group to a prototype image of an ideal thing. Current research, she says, “suggests that the basic level may be the most inclusive level at which it is possible to form a mental image which is isomorphic to

5. Vygotsky 1962 pp. 61-2.

6. Vygotsky 1962 p. 65.

7. Vygotsky 1962 p. 76.

8. Hallpike 1979 p. 183.

9. Rosch 1978 p. 18.

an average member of the class, and thus, the most abstract level at which it is possible to have a relatively concrete image.”¹⁰

Perhaps more germane to our specific line of inquiry into archaic complexes about human nature are some current findings about ‘primitive’ mentality. Most primitive societies have extensive knowledge and names for species of plants and animals, as well as artifact groups such as utensils, clothes, weapons, and so forth. There is ample evidence that whereas, for example, there are object-groups and names for “dog”, “cattle”, and “pig”, there is often no object-group or name for “animal”. One striking feature of ‘primitive’ thought in this regard, according to C. R. Hallpike, is that the organization of natural objects is “maximized at a particular level of classification, at which more attributes will be common to members of the category than at other levels of classification. It may therefore be more efficient to classify in terms of those basic objects that are at the level of abstraction for which cue validities are maximized.”¹¹

The concept of a *cue validity* refers to a sensible attribute, e.g. four-footed, egg-bearing, water-dwelling, etc. whose efficiency as a reliable indicator of an object-group is proportional to the frequency of association between it and other sensible attributes. Thus, for example, “sheep”, “cattle”, and “pig” are more useful categories than “animal”; and again, “knife”, “ladle”, and “pot” are more useful than “cooking utensil”. Higher-level categories, such as “animal” and “utensil” contain fewer attributes common to all instances of their own category, whereas lower-level categories, e.g. “red-haired wild pig”, “thin short knife”, etc., have such a small reference field that it severely limits its usefulness beyond a narrow context. Hallpike concludes that hierarchical object-grouping in more and more inclusive classes are of “relatively little use in the classification of the world for utilitarian purposes. We are likely to find that... we, as well as primitives, classify primarily at a basic level; that superordinate and subordinate classification levels are of relatively little significance; and that classification systems are much more reflections of real-world structuration and much less dependent on language or on arbitrary cultural factors than anthropologists have commonly supposed.”¹²

Where there are (at least) two naturally bonded sets of objects (species) a complex occurs when: (a) some of the essential features of what makes one group what it is are conjoined with (b) some of the essential features of what makes *the other group* what it is. In other words, in determining the properties of a complexive grouping disjoint properties have precedence over conjoint properties.¹³ The difference between a concept and a complex in part depends on the level of causal explanation invoked to account for properties that members of its class have. It must be the case that the casual explanation of complexive properties does not go far enough down to account for the group being the class that it is. In schematic form, class **[a]** of species **A** comprises four essential

10. Rosch 1978 p. 35.

11. Hallpike 1979 p. 200.

12. Hallpike 1979 p. 200.

13. This crude schema does not capture the fine-grained details of Piaget’s thesis (nor its deficiencies), as spelled out by Seltman 1985 pp. 55-90.

properties {1, 2, 3, 4}, sub-class [b] of class A comprises *some* properties essential to its being a class-member of [a] and *some other* properties, non-essential to [a], and sub-class [c] of class A comprises *some* properties essential to its being a class-member of [a]. In contrast, complex [d] comprises properties found in [b] and [c], none of which are essential to either sub-class being a class-member of [a]. Properties {1, 2, 3} make [b] a sub-class of [a] and properties {4, 5, 6} make [c] a sub-class of [a]; but properties {7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12} are conjoint *differentiae* of [b] and [c] with no traits common to [a].

Class [a] = {1, 2, 3, 4}, where {1}—{4} are essential properties

Sub-class [b] = {7, 8, 9, 1, 2, 3}

Sub-class [c] = {4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12}

Complex [d] = {7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12}

Our methodical, philosophical claim is that archaic thought, as evinced in Ancient Egyptian, Ancient Iranian, and Mesopotamian documents, does not work with concepts but with *complexes* whose salient features are as follows. (1) It does not arise above its elements as does a concept; it merges with the concrete objects that compose it; a fusion of the general and the particular, of the complex and its elements, a psychic amalgam. (2) Its abstracted traits are unstable and easily surrender their temporary dominance to other traits. (3) The basic level of complex formation may be the most inclusive level at which it is possible to form a mental image which is isomorphic to an average member of the class, and thus, the most abstract level at which it is possible to have a relatively concrete image. (4) It has an over-abundance of properties, an over-production of connections, and weakness in abstraction. Hence, (5) the complexes involved in archaic ideas about soul, name and dream are ideas fused with their 'objects'; they have unstable traits and prototypical instances; and are thought at the most abstract level which have concrete images.

III. COMPLEXIVE IDEAS ABOUT SOUL AND GHOST

The principal aspects of human nature according to Ancient Egyptian documents comprise two main groups, one pertaining to the earthly-physical being, the other pertaining to the unearthly-psychical being. The whole person in his earthly life comprises (1) an animate body which contains the heart and the four main organs (except the brain); (2) his name; (3) his shadow. The heart and the four main organs are the loci of powers and exercise functions determined by (or dependent on) the whole person manifest in the earthly physical realm. The name and the shadow are functions of the whole, dependent in their 'nature' on the person whose name and shadow they are, but independent in their meaning of their bearer's being embodied. The whole person also comprises (4) the *ka* and (5) the *ba* whose seat is the whole person and whose functions are manifest in the person's bodily states, but whose 'natures' are independent of the person in his earthly life. After death the person can become transformed into (6) a god-like being, the *akh*. Every *akh* in its eternal changeless state is *netjer* (divine), like the

gods and demons who have always existed in the under-world. The most important idea underlying the Egyptian ‘complex’ of human nature is that there is only one life for all created, finite beings: this life is manifest (*kheperu*) in the earthly realm in the form of an animate, bodily entity, and is manifest in the unearthly life, by way of the mummy and associated practices, in the person’s *akh*.

One of the more unusual aspects of human nature is the person’s shadow, though its role is less clearly defined than the other aspects. Like the *ba* (with which it was often confused), the shadow can become completely detached from the body after death, so that it can move and act freely. As with other ‘complexive’ entities associated with the individual, since it did indeed have a dependent relation with its owner during earthly life, it was thought to be an intrinsic ‘part’ of the individual. Louis Zabkar declares that “the Egyptians conceived of the *Ka*, the *Akh*, and the *Ba* not only as qualities which a being possesses *but also* as entities which a being is or becomes. Thus we often find the term *Ba*, sometimes qualified by an appositive or an epithet, used as an equivalent for a god, indicating that the god is in a state in which his power is manifest.”¹⁴ Elsewhere he says that, “the *ba* which the king possesses in some cases appears to be a quality, a kingly attribute, while in others it seems to be an entity”.¹⁵ The idea that the *ba* is a median between an entity and a power, or perhaps a ‘complexive’ union of both entity and power indicates that it does not fall neatly under the category of substance.

The *ka* is yet another psycho-physical aspect of human nature; its most common hieroglyph was a pair of upraised arms, folded at the elbow. In later texts the *ka*-glyph is shown walking behind a small copy of the individual; this probably inspired the now outdated interpretation of the *ka* as the “double”. Along with the *ba* and the *akh*, the *ka* is a baffling idea, straddling several concepts normally rendered by ideas like life-force, double, and soul. John Taylor says that it is “a highly complex notion, which defies direct translation into a single English word or phrase. The nature of the *ka* was multi-faceted and, as the concept changed over time, the Egyptians’ use of the term was not consistent.”¹⁶ The *ka* came into being with an individual’s birth, fashioned by the potter god *Khnum* on his wheel, and was severed from the individual at his earthly death. Although it was intimately connected with the person’s bodily life, it was not a physical entity, nor did it have a concrete form; it was only given substance through its depiction in funerary texts and images. Pinch says that the *ka* itself is a person’s vital force, without a distinct personality, but when it appeared as an image it was *depicted* as a double.¹⁷

The *ka*, the *ba*, the *akh*, as well as the shadow and the name, are all manifestations of the whole person, in both his earthly and his unearthly life. The Ancient Egyptian word *kheperu*, rendered in English as “manifestation”, is itself over-determined in its semantic range. In her recent study of ritual curses and blessings, Katarina Nordh suggests that our ordinary conceptual vocabulary is basically ill-equipped, if not outright deficient,

14. Zabkar 1968, p. 8.

15. Zabkar 1968, p. 73.

16. Taylor 2001, p. 18.

17. Pinch 1994, p. 147.

in coming to grips with “manifestation”. She says that “the word *kheperu* may express notions of not only the existence-forms but also of the identity and role of a being, for where are the dividing lines between these *concepts*? The limits of the modern concepts appear to be vague and indefinite, and the Ancient Egyptian term *kheperu* would probably connote *all of them and even more than that*. The word *kheperu* seems to convey something which all categories of beings are capable of becoming, being and having, assuming and leaving.”¹⁸ In his recent monograph on Osirian Solar Theology in the New Kingdom, Jan Assmann indicates that some Egyptian scholars now recognize the need for just such a supra-ordinate concept, i.e. a cognitive complex. He says “the basic structure of Egyptian thinking [is] in polar opposites pairs or ‘dual units’ which express an abstract and complex higher concept of ‘unification’ of two concrete and complementary partial concepts.”¹⁹

In their recent study of the characteristic powers and functions of Egyptian deities, Meeks and Meeks arrive at much the same finding about the gods’ manifestations. “A divine form constituted a totality that could not be apprehended in and of itself, for such a form coincided with the very being of the god it belonged to. It lay beyond what could be known or described and could only be grasped—imperfectly at that—through its projections. These projections constituted the *kheperu*, which corresponded to the series of ephemeral individual forms, indefinite in number, that a divinity was capable of assuming. None of them could encompass the totality of what a god was.”²⁰ Nevertheless, Meeks and Meeks argue, these localized specific forms did not constitute a change in the god’s basic nature, instead they showed the god undergoing a process of constant evolution. “Each of these forms was a facet of the god in which he was *fully implied*. By adopting a *kheperu*, a god created for himself the possibility of signifying a state of his being or distinguishing one of his actions by individualizing it. To enter such a state or perform such an act was to inscribe the *kheperu* in visible reality. This projection, called the *iru*, was a perceptible, intelligible manifestation of the god, accentuated, as a rule by various material attributes.” The terms *kheperu* and *iru* often occur in texts as synonyms, so difficult was it to distinguish between their referents; no one form was the exclusive property of a single god. In general, the average person could recognize a god only in his or her *iru*, and Meeks and Meeks argue that only through religious and spiritual practices could a trained person perceive a god’s *kheperu*.²¹ Again, one sees here

18. Nordh 1996, p. 51, emphasis added; the recondite title of her monograph, *Aspects of Ancient Egyptian Curses and Blessings*, belies the fact that the first three chapters offer an informed, up-to-date discussion of Egyptian theology, cosmogony, and anthropology.

19. Assmann 1995, p. 50; note 67 for further references.

20. Meeks & Meeks 1999, p. 54.

21. Meeks & Meeks 1999, p. 55; according to Finnestad, “the Egyptian deities were encountered face to face, in cosmic happenings as well as in temples. They were not invisible, spiritual beings imperfectly revealing themselves in material form. The *kheperu* of the deity **is** the spiritual and material manifestation of dynamic life. The focus of attention is on the becoming of life which... is a divine spiritual and material phenomenon.” Finnestad in *Boreas* vol. 20, 1989, p. 34; for some instances of specialized priestly knowledge of the gods, see Assmann 1995, pp. 17-21.

a clear indication that *kheperu* merges with concrete objects, its traits are unstable, and it is cognizable by way of a prototypical image.

Phillipe Derchain says that the ancient Egyptians talked about numerous aspects of the human person, aspects which are difficult to understand and without equivalent in modern European languages. The commonly accepted polarity between body and soul cannot be applied “in every case” to the Egyptian schema; it is not possible “to trace clear boundaries” amongst the physical, social, religious and magical fields. Derchain suggests ordering all the essential aspects of human nature along two axes, the concrete and the imaginary, arranging them from the most perceptible (observable) to the most private, while noting a displacement between the two series which are not synonymous. According to some texts, the setting or frame in which soul-like aspects are manifest is an ordinary human being, but other texts speak of external entities or properties as falling within the domain of the psychic amalgam. “The limits of the person are not reached by the limits of the body and its faculties.” The inclusion of such items as the stele, the tomb, the birth-stool, and so forth are claimed to be constituents of an individual’s personality; “but since they also belong to other categories of beings, it is impossible to establish an ontological distinction between human and the others.” However, “the difference is only a quantitative one, depending upon the relative participation in the two facets of the world, the imaginary and the perceptible. The imaginary world is essentially composed of the gods, who are connected to the perceptible world through their statues, temples, and diverse manifestations. Human, by contrast, located essentially in the perceptible world, passes into the imaginary through the intermediary of the Pharaoh, who is the incarnation of the idea of human and is in this way on an equal footing with the gods on the level of artistic representation.”²²

In the Ancient Near East, the Akkadian language employs three principal words to mark out distinct aspects of human (and animal) nature: *napishtu* “breath, soul, life-force”, *libbu*, “heart, intention, desire”, and *etemmu* “ghost or double”. The principal meanings of *napishtu* break down as follows:²³ (1) it signifies “life, vigor, vitality, or good health”; the instances cited indicate it is the principle of life, i.e. the life-force. (2) It can be used to signify an abundance or surplus of life-force in the first sense; hence, it is most commonly translated “good health”. (3) It is used as a mass-noun for all living beings, though only in New Babylonian is this extended to include animals. (4) It can be used to mean “someone”, or in the privative sense, “no one”. (5) It can be used as a count-noun, i.e. in the same way that Hebrew *nepesh* or Greek *psychē* can mean numerable living things. (6) It was often used for the first-person intensive, that is, periphrastic for oneself, e.g. the injunction to guard someone’s life as you would your self (= your own life). (7) It has the concrete meaning derived from the verb-form *napāshu* for breath, that is, as the main indication or manifestation of the life-force within. (8) In an externalized general sense it means that which provides one with vitality and good health, viz. provisions or sustenance. (9) In an internalized concrete sense it means the throat

22. Derchain 1992, pp. 220, 223.

23. CAD vol. N, pp. 296-304.

of neck as the conduit for breath and food; and it can also mean (10) an opening or air-hole of any kind.

Entries for the Akkadian word *libbu*²⁴ clearly illustrate the semantic functions of a cognitive complex, since it can mean (1) the “heart, abdomen, entrails or womb”; the large number of instances cited cluster around the thorax, as that which holds or contains the heart-organ. (2) It can be used in an externalized general sense to signify the inside or inner part of an area or building or region. (3) It has an abstract internal sense that varies over several ‘complexive’ ideas: “mind, thought, intention, courage, wish, desire, choice or preference.” Definite nuances emerge from the vast range of dictionary citations: that outward actions or words can belie inward intentions, that the heart is the locus of reflection and deliberation, that it is also the seat of the emotions, that it is more an inner than an outer aspect, and so forth. Entries for the Akkadian word *etemmu*²⁵ clearly show that it was never associated with a living human, though the gods and demons each have (or are) *etemmu*. (1) The gods can become the form of an animal as its *etemmu*, i.e. the god can assume the appearance of an animal. (2) Demons are only ever *etemmu*, or perhaps one should say that they are always *etemmu*-like entities. (3) The gods, demons and dead-human *etemmu* are the objects of rituals and prayers; the *etemmu* are offered food and drink; they are said to eat, drink, and move about. (4) They can sometimes be seen or heard, especially at night and/or in dreams; they can be summoned or called forth, by the “spirit-callers”, magicians who would later be called necromancers. (5) The *etemmu* are often said to cry out and trouble the living, either in an unspecified manner, i.e. by making someone unhappy or depressed, or in a very specific manner, i.e. when its “hand seizes someone” (this perhaps signifies epilepsy).

Based on his extensive knowledge of ANE texts, Jean Bottero offers this summary statement about the apparent relation between the living person and his *etemmu*. After an individual’s death, two things remained: “one was plainly material, numb and paralyzed and then subject to gradual erosion—his skeleton; the other formal, airy, a shady and volatile image of what he was during life, but permanent—his ghost, his phantom, his spirit, his *etemmu*—active and mobile in its own way.... The relations between the two remains were certain and very close, because it still involved the same person who still bore the same proper name after death.”²⁶ Our own conclusion is that *etemmu* is an under-determined cognitive complex: either the complexive idea embraces all of the predicate terms collectively as the *sum of their parts* or the idea can be expressed equally well *by any one of these terms as parts*. Any hope of coming to understand ANE ideas about human nature by appeal to conceptual analyses of terms such as *napishtu*, *libbu* and *etemmu* is likely to be frustrated. An adequate understanding of the way in which ANE texts use words like *naphistu*, *libbu*, *etemmu*, and so forth must take account of cognitive ‘complexes’ not concepts. Human nature cannot be ascribed either immortality or mortality as though these opposed ideas were polarized over the presence or absence of

24. CAD vol. L, pp. 164-176.

25. CAD, vol. E, pp. 397-401; Abusch 1995 pp. 588-94.

26. Bottero 1992 p. 272.

one property or condition, e.g. being death-bound. Although it is certain that a human's earthly life was bound by death, it is *not* true that life as such was bound by death. The fact that the archaic idea of death signified a transition between one state and another does *not* imply that some aspect of human being was free from termination, that it was separable from the host's body at death. Although it may seem incongruous from our modern point-of-view, the archaic 'complex' was more or less upside-down. The true or real being of all living things was manifested in various forms, *one of which* was an individual's earthly form *qua* organic being; hence, an individual's existence in that form was bound to its earthly life, and not to its death.

Zarathustra's thoughts about the human soul are expressed in an archaic Iranian language (Avestan) in a series of "songs"; in their near-liturgical setting they survived in their original form despite acquiring numerous layers of commentary. According to the "Songs", it is the Wise Lord who gives body and breath to humans, who along with other animals have souls (*urvān*). The human soul is often linked with thinking (*mananha*) and reason or intellect (*xratush*). Though the human soul can be misled and follow the false, it can also have (or adhere to) good thoughts and piety through following the truth. But it is not through possession of, or in accordance with, *mananha* that humans are differentiated from other beings, since the bounteous immortals (*amesha spentash*) are also sometimes called *mainyū*, e.g. the good 'spirit' and the evil 'spirit'. Insler comments that two other words are "equivalent" to body and breath; *astvant* for *kerpem* and *ushtāna* for *ammā*.²⁷ This seems to mean that they are strictly synonymous and there are some cases for the latter pair's usage that support this assertion. However, *astvant* and *ushtāna* also seem to have a wider semantic field: *astvant* and *ushtāna* are the physical and psychical *manifestations* of the two orders (or states) of being, later called *getig* and *menog*.²⁸ *Astvant* and *ushtāna* are manifest in a living human as its body (*kerpem*) and soul (*urvān*); it is in virtue of being ensouled that a human can think, have ideas, desires, and so forth. When the human soul is in accord with good thought and piety he is (or becomes) a virtuous spirit, and this is evident in "his understanding, his words, his actions [and] his ideas", as the text states.

In the conclusion of his analysis of the original Avestan texts, Shaul Shaked is rather dubious about any attempt to find a coherent account of human nature. He says that, "there is no Avestan text which gives a comprehensive enumeration of human faculties, powers, members of the body, and spiritual constituents of the person" since each text has a specific didactic purpose. "These texts specify either some of the aspects of the material and earthly existence of man, or deal with the 'soul' components of the person. Each text would thus tend to ignore notions that do not belong to its sphere of current interest and would, on the other hand, tend to use superfluous terms... in order to enforce its own particular point of view." Although this basic incoherence is also present in the Pahlavi texts (some of which preserve 5th C. BCE doctrines) the situation there is even more complex. With regard to the two separate spheres of existence, the

27. Insler's notes to the Gāthās translation, 1975 pp. 169-70.

28. See Boyce 1975, pp. 229-30; Zaehner 1961, p. 200.

spiritual (*mēnōg*) and the material (*gētīg*), each of the soul components has its own ‘place’. According to the *Dēnkard*, Book III, “the soul is the most prominent spiritual element within the material, as it is the entity that maintains and directs the body. A higher layer of spiritual existence within the material is the presence of the ‘essential being’, called in Pahlavi *ox*, within the soul. . . . Just as the soul is spiritual with regard to the material of the body, so *ox* is spiritual with regard to the relative material of the soul. Each one of the various spiritual entities within the [human] body has its own individual function: *anima* [or *anma*] gives it life, consciousness causes it to see, and the soul rules it. The soul has several powers, among which are intelligence, awareness, wisdom, and spirit.” With regard to the peculiar status of spirit, “it is defined as being not an entity by itself, but attached to, or inherent in, an entity. At the same time it acts as ‘the power within the soul’.”²⁹

After four decades of important investigations into the origins and central ideas of Zarathustra’s “true religion”, the great Indo-Iranian scholar H. Lommel had this to say about the complex links between the Avestan divinities and their creations. “For us [today] Good Purpose and the tending of cattle are admittedly two wholly different things. But must it always have been so? Could not at a certain epoch abstract and concrete have appeared to the human spirit as of unified being, *the abstract and inner reality of the concrete*? So that, for instance, Pious Devotion and the Earth were *the spiritual and material aspects of the same thing*.”³⁰ In the chapter on the “Bounteous Immortals” in her comprehensive history of the early period of Zoroastrian religion, Mary Boyce attempts to arbitrate between two Avestan ‘concepts’: the divine ‘persons’ in their individual characters and actual, material manifestations of these powers on earth. The Bounteous Immortals, she says, are “personifications of what was spiritual and desirable and yet at the same time guardians of the physical world in all its solidity.” The prophet himself was responsible for expressing this insight: “Zoroaster wove together abstract and concrete, spiritual and material, seeing mortality in the physical, and apprehending in all beneficent and wholesome things a striving, whether conscious or unconscious, towards the one ultimate goal—the recreation of the [original] harmonious and happy state of being.”³¹ Zaehner drew a very similar conclusion about Zoroaster’s appropriation and transmutation of the traditional pantheon of Indo-Iranian gods which, he says, the prophet made into “abstract concepts”. When Zoroaster turned his attention to the Bounteous Immortals, “he conceived of [them] not simply as abstract notions but as part of the divine personality itself, as mediating functions between god and man, and as qualities which sanctified man can himself acquire through the Good Mind with

29. Shaked 1994, pp. 143-4; Shaked excerpts and translates the relevant passages in Appendix E, pp. 153-160; for the sake of clarity, *mēnōg* is replaced by ‘spiritual’ and *gētīg* by ‘material’ in the quotation.

30. Lommel in B. Schlerath 1970, pp. 31-2; emphasis added.

31. Boyce 1975 vol. I, pp. 220-1; in her discussion of scholarly interpretations of the *fravashi* of the just dead souls, Boyce shows that Lommel and Soderblom could not sort out what they thought were entirely incompatible concepts; in their words, the ideas involved in this Iranian doctrine are “incomprehensible”, “inconceivable”, and “contradictory”, vol. I, pp. 128-9.

which god illuminates him.”³²

IV. WORDS AND NAMES

Our modern understanding of the relation between words and things, between the verbal sign and that which is signified, has been much enriched in the last one hundred years by advances in structural linguistics, the process of language acquisition, “deep” generative rules, phonemic patterns, and so forth. But some of our common ideas about signs, meanings and things remain much as they were thought in the Greek Classical Age, for example, in Aristotle’s treatise on interpretation. It is taken for granted that the graphic or phonic shape of a word is arbitrary, that is, it could have a different sound and still refer to the same thing. The sound or written shape of a word does not resemble what it names in any way. And further that the relation between the word and what it signifies has been established by human convention. But such a common view itself has an historical origin (whatever that might be) before which ideas about words and names were enormously different. As Jean Bottero says about the ANE view of language: “names were not simply *flatus vocis* arbitrarily attached to objects in order to indicate them, *they were the objects themselves*, given a sound. The names emanated from the objects they represented, and hence any similarity in sound was highly significant.” The author quotes an Old Babylonian oracle performed on an excised liver: if there are perforations (*pilshu*) that are pierced (*palshu*), it is an omen for the inhabitants of Apishal who were made prisoner by means of a breach (*pilshu*) in the wall. Bottero comments that “the oracle in question at least helps us to understand how the sequence of two empirically observed events could evolve into a much closer relation between the two, one signifying the other, which constitutes its recording in writing.” The graphic resemblance (near identity) between the signs shows that, given the empirical observation of these events within an oracular context, one can *deduce* the connection between the events from the similarities of their signs’ sounds. With this “scientific” attitude in place, “one could entirely abandon the attention paid to the material succession of events, in order to concentrate on the decipherment of those that presented themselves as being significant and as bearers of written messages, by their bizarre aspect itself. That which was announced by unusual events was legible in the events that announced them.”³³

The lengthy ANE epic *Atrahasis* describes the stages in the creation of the world and human kind; the creatures that appear in this mythical story are entirely identified with their written names. The extent of this name-thing identity is so great that it is possible to discover and know the entire nature of each thing through an analysis of its name. The names of things are not “accidents extrinsic to the object”, but phonic properties of the object. The Ancient Mesopotamians “were convinced that the name has its source, not in the person who names, but in the object that is named. That it is an inseparable emanation from the object, like a projected shadow, a copy, or a translation

32. Zaehner 1961, p. 71.

33. Bottero 1992 pp. 37-38.

of its nature. They believed this to such an extent that in their eyes ‘to receive a name’ and to exist... was one and the same.”³⁴ Much like Jehovah the creator in the opening of the Book of Genesis, Marduk the creator brings the world into being through his verbal edicts. His divine creative powers are synopsisized in a lengthy list of Marduk’s epithets, where each name was the expression of his decision with regard to that which is named. Each name precisely stated the destiny of the named object; an object’s destiny defined the very nature of that entity. Bottero likens the ANE idea that a name confers on a thing its destiny to the idea of an inner program, for example, a genetic code.

In contrast to our modern view that a written word fixes in graphic form the transient sound of a spoken word, for ANE writers the written sign was a transferal into another medium of the actual nature of the thing named. “In the opinion of the ancient scholars of Mesopotamia, the script was fundamentally concrete and realistic. One did not write first of all the word, the pronounced name of the thing, but the thing itself, furnished with a name. The name was inseparable from the thing, *confused with it*... And this written name, equal to the thing, constituted a material given, which was concrete, solid and comparable to a substance of which each portion, even the smallest one, contained all the faculties of the total.... One could also make use of the word, just as much as one could use the thing itself. One could scrutinize the word like the thing, analyze it, reduce it to its elements and thus take out of it all that it contained of the reality and the intelligibility of the thing.”³⁵ Here we see distinct characteristics of the cognitive complex, and not the concept of “word” or “name”; that the word was “concrete”, “inseparable” from what it signified, and “confused” with its object. In its graphic origins the cuneiform sign had been a picture of a thing; but even in the more developed, more schematized shapes of later periods it retained the same causal connections with its object. ANE scholars’ knowledge of the language permitted them passage to the real world; to grasp the meaning of a divine name meant to extract that feature from the divine reality of a god.

According to Ancient Egyptian cosmology, the breath of life which had emanated from the creator god’s mouth was the same thing as the words he uttered. The sound of the creator god’s voice was assimilated to the food needed by created things to sustain life. When the world was still floating on the primeval ocean, the creator god imagined the names of all things; using his voice he pronounced their names in order to endow them with being. The world was created by seven words spoken one after the other. The Egyptian written language consisted of sacred signs (hieroglyphs) instituted by the god Thoth; it did not function independently of spoken language, of which it was only a transcription in another medium. Sacred signs maintained “an a posteriori existence” and were “essentially limited to a commemorative or archival function”. Writing was no more than “putting into form, an information of the world. With its help the gods constituted the archives of important events.... Given the role writing played in the world of the gods, there could be no works of fiction there. Written signs themselves were

34. Bottero 1992 p. 97.

35. Bottero 1992 pp. 99-102.

defined as ‘imprints’ of everything contained in creation. Every living creature and every thing could be utilized as written signs. All divine writings without exception were considered ‘emanations of Re’, or faithful representations of the will of the creator.”³⁶

Written language was a gift of the gods to humans, but language itself had been invented by the god Thoth (whom the Greeks called Hermes). In the Hermetic Corpus (2nd-3rd C. CE), Asclepius informs King Ammon that the Greek language is not suited to expressing divine truths. In contrast, “the very quality of the speech and the sound of Egyptian words have in themselves the energy of the objects they speak of.” Greek philosophy is “an inane foolosophy (*logon psophos*) of speeches, where we, by contrast, use not speeches but sounds that are full of actions.”³⁷ Plotinus had said that Egyptian sacred signs had an intuitive power; “each carved image is knowledge and wisdom grasped all at once, not discursive reasoning nor deliberation.”³⁸ When Iamblichus spoke of Egyptian sacred signs in his treatise *On the Mysteries of Egypt*, he said that there was “an intellectual, divine and symbolic character of divine resemblance in the names, and if this is [now] unknown to us, it is then most august since it is too mighty to be known by determination”, i.e. by human devices to decide about its meaning.³⁹

V. DREAMS AND VISIONS

Studies in genetic psychology conducted by Jean Piaget and others have confirmed that there are three distinct stages in the child’s understanding of the nature of his own dreams.⁴⁰ In the first stage, the dream is regarded as coming from outside and remains an external event; dreams occur where their dream-content is located, and the child dreamer actually participates as himself in the dream-story. In the second stage, the child admits to the subjective, internal origin of his dream, but will not admit that the image is internal and distinct from what it represents, i.e. the dream-content cannot be detached from physical reality. In the third and final stage, both the dream-origin and the dream-content are regarded as internal to the dreamer; just as thought is regarded by the child as “a voice in the head”, so dreams are regarded as “visions in the head”. This shows us that the skeptical trope about waking and dreaming appeals to a level of cognition which recognizes only the second stage of concept formation and disclaims any intelligibility for a hypothetical third stage. For the Ancient Greek, the claim that the source and the content of a dream are entirely internal is itself an hypothesis, as strange as this may seem to us now. Since they have ruled out any appeal to a higher cognitive level, there is no evidence that can count to support such an hypothesis. It is open to the same sorts of doubts as other hypotheses which cannot be verified, such as, in the 4th C anyway, the claim that the earth is actually a sphere moving around the

36. Meeks & Meeks 1999 pp. 103-104.

37. CH XVI Copenhagen 1992 p. 58; and notes on pp. 202-3.

38. Plotinus Enneads V.8.6.

39. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* VII.4.254.

40. Piaget 1962; Hallpike 1979 pp. 375-90.

sun.⁴¹

In ANE texts, the word ‘to dream’ does not constitute a specific state or action; there is no verb for ‘to dream’ in Sumerian or Akkadian. One is said ‘to see a dream’ (*amāru* and *natālu*; also sometimes *naplusu* and *šubrū*), such that the dream content is the object of inner sight, an internal spectacle. In *Gilgamesh*, the God Ea wants to prevent the destruction of the entire human species and thus reveals an impending disaster to the Babylonian Noah. “I have revealed to Atrahasis a dream, and it is thus that he has learned the secret of the gods.” The most archaic example (c.2450) comes from the Vulture Stele, where the King of Lagash, engaged in battle with his enemy Umma, reports how the god Ningirsu appeared to him in his sleep to reassure him of the good outcome. The King Amiditana (1683-47) was warned in a dream that he had to offer a statue of himself to the gods; similar reports were made by Assurbanipal and Nabonidus. Since most of the extant documents concern public affairs perhaps it is not too surprising that such private dream revelations are exceptional.⁴²

Dreamers in the ancient world often felt the need for expert assistance in dream exegesis; when Gilgamesh first dreams of Enkidu, who resembles “a block from heaven”, he goes to his mother for interpretation. Bottero says that such cases are instances of *intuitive* dream divination, and that there is nothing technical or rigorous about this kind of dream unpacking. But deductive divination from dreams is different. First, it was valid for everybody. “There was no longer a question about extraordinary dreams and explicitly supernatural messages, which were perhaps more easily reserved for the great of this world, but of ordinary, current, daily dreams... valuable for all. Whoever dreamed, and whatever his dream was, that individual was the recipient of the message that the dream bore. Only the message was ‘written’ and ‘coded’, and to ‘read’ it one needed a real technician, a specialist initiated in this ‘writing’... an *examiner*, someone who looked closely at and studied the ‘pictograms’ incorporated in the dream, who deciphered them and translated them for the interested party who came to consult.”⁴³ Hence, interpretation of a dream message was conducted in much the same manner as reading written signs, and, since pictorial signs ‘embodied’ the nature of the thing signified, reading a dream message implied attending to the pronouncement (and thus enactment) of events.

The ancient Egyptian language had no verb for “to dream”, only a noun “dream”. In their terms, one could see something “in a dream”, or see “a dream”, as a mental ‘object’. In other words, a dream was the object of a verb of perception—“it was something seen, not done”, as Szpakowska says. “In a sense it was not an event arising from within the dreamer or an activity performed by an individual; rather, it had an objective existence outside the will of the passive dreamer.” This description expresses exactly the same complexive idea of dream sources and dream content that developmental psychologists postulate for small children. “In particular, the use of the phrase “see-

41. Hallpike 1979 p. 387.

42. Also discussed by Noegel in Bulkeley 2001 pp. 45-50.

43. Bottero 1992 p. 113.

ing in a dream” also indicates that the dream was considered as an alternate state or dimension in which the waking barriers to perception were temporarily withdrawn.”⁴⁴ The earliest known references to dreams in Ancient Egypt are found in the so-called “Letters to the Dead” (c.2100 BCE) These letters were written to a deceased relative or friend, usually requesting some sort of favor on behalf of the living person, and then left in the tomb of the addressee. “The dreams in these texts functioned as a sort of liminal zone, a transparent area between the walls of two worlds that allowed beings in separate spheres to see each other.” Szpakowska speculates that this zone was like a two-way window, “allowing the living to see the dead and the dead to watch the living. More specifically, the dreams allowed people on earth to communicate with the inhabitants of the Netherworld.”⁴⁵

Leo Oppenheim, in his highly influential work *The Interpretation of Dreams in the ANE* (1956), said that Egyptian royal dreams were typical of “message dreams” in the ANE. Against this view, Szpakowska argues that these dreams were not typical of the Egyptian literary tradition until the New Kingdom when they make their first rare appearance. With one exception, the dreams usually cited to support this claim are Late Period and Hellenistic descriptions attributed to earlier pharaohs, “which bear little resemblance to the dream anecdotes recorded centuries earlier.”⁴⁶ There is a single, very rare dream-book (Papyrus Chester Beatty III), dated in the reign of Ramesses II; it is the only one-romantic manual that has been found in pre-Hellenic Egypt. It records 227 dreams and their interpretation, divided into three sections. The first is composed of visual images and their interpretation; the second is a spell to counter a bad dream; and the third offers a detailed description of the characteristics of the “followers of Seth”, and then reports of their dreams. This dream-book has been the subject of a great deal of speculation but it is still the only text for dream interpretation until the end of the Nubian dynasty (650 years later). Szpakowska points out that “even this dream book is suspect, for it is not clear that it was ever actually used. It is possible that it was kept as a curiosity or as a literary exercise and did not necessarily require a specialist to be used. For nearly the first 2000 years of Egypt’s history, there is no extant evidence for the mantic use of dreams nor for rituals designed to solicit dreams.”⁴⁷

However, important clues can be discerned with regard to the status of dream images *irrespective* of their approved style of interpretation. Instruction texts from c.2100 mention that dreams can be used as metaphors to accentuate what is insubstantial, ephemeral, or uncontrollable. Medical texts include several prophylactic spells designed to resist bad dreams; sometimes dreams were thought to be undesirable, even hostile forces to be guarded against and repelled in the so-called execration formulae. There are numerous medical-magical remedies listed for relief from nightmares, including poultices, apotropaic spells on pillows, and amuletic decrees worn around the neck

44. Szpakowska in Bulkeley 2001 p. 31.

45. Szpakowska in Bulkeley 2001 p. 31.

46. Szpakowska in Bulkeley 2001 p. 32.

47. Szpakowska in Bulkeley 2001 p. 34.

while sleeping. Examination of these sleep-spells reveals some interesting facts about dreamers and their dreams in the New Kingdom. “They were qualified as having been seen in the past and the future; deities had the ability to change the nature of dreams already seen and as yet unseen, others could see or be caused to see dreams for an individual; and dreams could have an intent.”⁴⁸ Great changes took place in the Late Period and this effected dreams as well: from this time on, solicited oracles and spontaneous wonder signs were woven into the fabric of Egyptian society; this is reflected both in the content of recorded dreams *and* in attitudes to their dreams.

VI. CATEGORY, CLASS, AND GENUS-SPECIES

One puzzling group of ANE texts are known as catalogue treatises, lengthy lists of certain types of observable phenomena. In these catalogues, “each of the categories also had to be scrutinized and inventoried *in all its eccentric forms*, which presupposed a complete and exact notion of their normal appearances... In each Treatise a very well developed operational diagram was systematically used, and it was adapted to the subject matter in question. It was a type of grid that was laid over the object or over elements of it that could be isolated.” Thus, even lexical lists were calibrated with regard to prototypical instances, deviant properties were treated under operational rules (and not abstract ideas); every category comprised an over-abundance of properties and an over-production of connections with other things. “As a framework of inquiry, it permitted recalling anything of its abnormal appearance: [1] size, [2] number or [3] volume; [4] absolute or relative position; [5] shape; [6] coloration; [7] presence of adventitious elements, etc. And the various conjectures about these elements were methodically classified in a constant order with a painstaking rigor. Each eventuality was the object of a separate rubric, and all were exhibited in the same grammatical form, repeated ad nauseam, as so many hypotheses, or ‘protases’, each followed by their results, or ‘apodoses’.”⁴⁹

In addition to the lexical lists and tablets of mantic inferences, there are also individual treatises on specific subjects. “Just like the words in the Lists, the situations in the Treatises represent universal things; prototypes that are everywhere and always valid. Hence, they obtain their character of profound knowledge and of importance to objects in general, surpassing individuality, time and space. In other words, these Treatises have a scientific character that is even more obvious than it is in the Lists.”⁵⁰ Something similar appears in various treatises on dream divination, texts arranged with columnar series in an inductive or inferential format. In the treatise known as “Oh, dream god” (c.900-1000 BCE) “each entry is introduced by an hypothesis (which grammarians call ‘protasis’), to underline the theme of the dream taken as an omen, and ended with an ‘apodosis’ to draw from it the pertinent prediction. As in all other divinatory collec-

48. Szpakowska in Bulkeley 2001 p. 36.

49. Bottero 1992 p. 114.

50. Bottero 1992 p. 114; on the lexical lists, see also Leick 2001 pp. 73-76.

tions and treatises, these omens were carefully classified by their principal elements.”⁵¹ The scientific character of ANE divinatory texts “explains well the elements that are revealed from the oldest Treatises on. Notably the wish to analyze and systematize which strikes the readers of these documents so much. In each treatise the oracular object is taken apart in a sometimes surprising number of ominous appearances.... These analyses and classifications are usually done according to a certain number of recurring categories: [1] the presence of an object or its absence; [2] its quantity and [3] its dimensions; [4] its internal disposition and [5] its relative position; [6] its coloring, which is sometimes extended to some ten different hues around the principal colors, which in those days were red, white, black, and yellow-green; [7] *then the addition or lack of nonessential elements*; and so on. All these eventualities are ranked in an order that is quite rigorous and constant.”⁵²

Thus, what one finds here is something like a common-sense ontology, from which springs a common-sense physics, and a quasi-scientific scheme of induction. Goody explains an ancient Egyptian text-list, the Onomasticon of Amenopē, in the following terms: it exhibits an ordering of discontinuous, discrete elements taken from daily speech and activities; arranged in rows and columns, the items can be read from left to right or right to left, and from top to bottom or from bottom to top. They are bounded at the start and the end, which helps to clarify the categories as well as promote an exhaustive enumeration. Such lists help to encourage the hierarchical arrangement of categories, from general to particular, and the tacit selection of criteria of inclusion. The Onomasticon is entitled by the scribe “the teaching for clearing the mind, for instruction of the ignorant and for learning all things that exist”. The modern editor of the text broke down the 600 entries under the following headings: I Introductory heading; II Sky, water, earth; III Persons, court officials, occupations; IV Classes, tribes, and types of human beings; V The towns of Egypt; VI Buildings, their parts, and types of land; VII Agriculture, cereal, and other products; VIII Beverages; IX Parts of an ox and kinds of meat.

Goody commented that the scribe had aimed at some sort of rational classification, from the highest to the lowest, and from the general to the particular. In reading this vast list, one can discern “the dialectical effect of writing upon classification. On one hand it sharpens the outlines of the categories; one has to make a decision [for example] as to whether rain or dew is of heaven or of earth.” The start and end of each cluster is set off with stylistic marks, providing an easy though fluid grouping. “As the items within a list are set in an implicit hierarchy by the order of listing... so too the first level clusters may be grouped in a similar way, either by further levels of clustering... or in a simple linear hierarchy, which gives some overall order to the clusters and their constituent items.”⁵³ The reader of this catalogue may be reminded of Borges’ delightful

51. Bottero 1992 p. 116.

52. Bottero 1992 p. 134; on ANE divination in general, see von Soden 1994 pp. 153-7; Bottero’s reference to “the addition or lack of nonessential elements” clearly indicates a characteristic of complexes.

53. Goody 1977, pp. 100-104.

citation of the entry for “animal” in an imaginary Chinese Encyclopedia: (a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a fine camel-hair’s brush; (l) others; (m) those that have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that at a distance resemble flies.⁵⁴ Aside from (h) which implies a type-paradox and higher-order logical recursion, the list as it stands might well have been written by an Egyptian or Assyrian scribe.

In ANE records the baffling idea of the divine **me** referred to an entire cultural area, an acquisition of civilized life; but at the same time it is also the result of an invention, a divine decision. Bottero comments that “this term is obscure to us and difficult to understand, as it does not correspond to any of our semantic categories. It translates a point of view that is far removed from ours and that cannot be directly related to our own.” The **me** are always related to the gods who are the only ones who *hold* them. In this sense they are like the specific contents of the *divine plans*, of the destinies assigned by the gods to all beings, animate and inanimate. And precisely because they are only in the hands of the gods, the **me** also indicate the power of each of them over a particular domain.⁵⁵ An important very old myth locates the repository of divine **me** in the ocean deeps under the control of the god Enki. The titular goddess of Uruk, Inanna, carries out a cunning plan to steal the **me** from Enki and relocate them in her city, so that their manifold potential can be actualized. In this context, G. Lieck says that the **me** are “all those institutions, forms of social behavior, emotions, signs of office, which in their totality were seen as indispensable for the smooth operation of the world.” When Inanna liberates the **me** from the ocean’s depths she not only enhances her own power, but also implements their decrees amongst humankind. “The list of **me** includes kingship, priestly offices, crafts and music, as well as intercourse, prostitution, old age, justice, peace, silence, slander, perjury, the scribal arts, and intelligence, among many others.”⁵⁶

Archaic Egyptian and Ancient Near Eastern proto-categories do not map directly onto the Aristotelian categorical schema, and this is in large part due to a significant difference in their respective understanding of the genus-species relation and the idea of a natural kind. Philosophical reflection on the varieties of classification into categories *before* Aristotle’s work show that they were working, not with *concepts* of ‘kinds’, but with complexes which are ideas fused with their ‘objects’, with unstable traits and prototypical instances, thought at the most abstract level which have concrete images. Von Soden says that, “the Sumerians were unable to present their ideas in a connected fashion....

54. Jorge Luis Borges, “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language” in *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*. Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 2000 pp. 229-32; the source for Michel Foucault’s extended reflections in the *Order of Things*, London: Tavistock, 1970, pp. xv-xxiv.

55. Bottero 1992 p. 237.

56. Lieck 2001 pp. 22-23; see esp. G. Farber-Flügge, *Der Mythos Inanna und Enki unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me*. Rome, 1973.

Thus, Sumerian science *lacked the conceptual framework* of formulated principles (what in the West has been called ‘natural laws’), and simply ordered nominal expressions one after the other in a one-dimensional fashion, without any kind of elucidation.⁵⁷ This basic insight, that ANE patterns of thought lacked conceptual stability, is echoed by G. Lieck when she contrasts ANE pictorial and semi-pictorial writing systems with later phonetic writing systems. With the benefit of a writing form that could represent sounds as opposed to images and could refer to ‘objects’ through non-causal (symbolic) relations, abstract thought in concepts escaped from the constraints of under-determined complexes. In her words, “The conceptual ordering of the world was thus freed from the constraints of naming and the confines of the specific written sign. Perhaps this helps to explain the difference between the Greek capacity for abstract and rational thought and the apparent lack of it in Mesopotamian thinking.”⁵⁸

In summary, the Egyptian *ka* and *ba* were median entities, halfway between a substance and a power; much like heat and cold in Presocratic cosmic theory, they were hybrid property-things. The *ka* is a human’s life-force, but it has no concrete matter nor any form of its own; it assumes the form of a ‘double’ when it is depicted in a written sign. The basic pattern of archaic ideas about human nature is the ‘dual unit’, a complexive amalgam of two (or more) lower-level concepts. Egyptian divine manifestation merges with the concrete objects it is projected upon. The ANE word *etemmu* is an under-determined cognitive complex: either the complexive idea embraces all of the predicate terms collectively as the sum of their parts or the idea can be expressed equally well by any one of these terms as parts. In much the same way ANE names were not simply voiced sounds arbitrarily attached to objects in order to indicate them, *they were the objects themselves*, given a sound. The names emanated from the objects they represented, and hence any similarity in sound was highly significant. In Ancient Egyptian and ANE dream texts, there is no verb “to dream”, one can see a dream; it is an act of internal perception, directed at an inner object whose ‘author’ and setting are external to the dreamer. The interpretation of a dream message was conducted in much the same manner as reading written signs, and, since pictorial signs ‘embodied’ the nature of the thing signified, reading a dream message implied attending to the pronunciation (and thus enactment) of events. ANE lexical lists and catalogue treatises, especially ones connected with divinatory practices, attempt to organize words and things within a rigid, overly detailed frame, a grid-like structure superposed on fluid unstable instances. These texts were calibrated with regard to prototypical instances, deviant properties were treated under operational rules (and not abstract ideas); every category comprised an over-abundance of properties and an over-production of connections with other things.

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57. Von Soden 1994 p. 146, emphasis added.

58. Lieck 2001 p. 76.

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