Conjuring (Divine) Authority: The Myth of the ‘Found’ Text

by

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Abstract

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In this study, I classify and examine a literary device that I term 'the myth of the found text' so as to explore how such stories operate to authorize and reinforce, especially religious, authority. Here I contend that individuals or groups in specific socio-historical contexts construct stories of found texts as a kind of conjuring trick, one that functions to confer the storyteller's power and stature. By appealing to the authority of an ancient text allegedly newly recovered, these mythmakers are able to situate social programs and religious reforms in an imagined, ideal antiquity—an exemplary past. The creation and telling of such myths can thus be seen as a political manoeuvre, a manoeuvre that constructs an authority (the 'found' text) that is then cleverly protected from contestation. While we may be quick to impugn such strategies, they have much in common, I argue, with 'religion' and with scholarship itself.

Acknowledgements

No project is a solo effort. At the risk of being indulgent, there are many who need to be acknowledged.

I do not know where to begin to thank my husband, Roger, and my children, Hadley (and Paul), Kate (and Jamie), Rachel, and Clare, for their love, support, and unwavering confidence in my work—work that I am quite sure is of little interest to them in the big picture. This journey has been a longer one than any of us anticipated; they have stood by my side without fail, certain in their convictions of how important 'the work' is to me.

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Not least, thank you to my dear friends (and fellow 'new Structuralists'), Catherine and Laurence, who have been there from the beginning; your meticulous readings, unwavering confidence, heartfelt encouragement, friendship, and ever-welcome senses of humour kept me sane throughout.

Last, I owe so much of my inspiration for this project, and indeed all my scholarly endeavours, to other scholars who have influenced me in untold ways, especially the late Jonathan Z. Smith, Bruce Lincoln, and William Arnal.

For my sister, my sunshine,

Rebecca Joy

(August 8, 1962 – March 15, 2018)

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1

Conjuring Divine Authority

"This is what memory is, a carefully calibrated story that we make up about our past."[1]

Preface

In the epigraph to his 1981 treatise, "Simulation and Simulacra", Jean Baudrillard, waxing philosophical, quotes from Ecclesiastes: "The simulacrum is never that which conceals the truth—it is the truth which conceals that there is none. The simulacrum is true."[2]

This particular passage appears nowhere in Ecclesiastes.

In 1842 (more than a decade after the founding of The Church of the Latter Day Saints), Joseph Smith sent an account of the 'documents' he had discovered to a Chicago newspaper, including a highly detailed description emphasizing their physicality:

> These records were engraven on plates which had the appearance of gold. Each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long and not quite so thick as common tin. They were filled with engravings in Egyptian characters and bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book with three rings running through the

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[1] Noah Hawley, *Before the Fall* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 48.
[2] Jean Baudrillard, "Simulation and Simulacra," in *Jean Baudrillard, Selected Writings,* ed. Mark Poster (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 166.

> whole. The volume was something near six inches in thickness, a part of which was sealed. The characters on the unsealed part were small, and beautifully engraved. The whole book exhibited many marks of antiquity in its construction and much skill in the art of engraving.[3]

Although a number of 'witnesses' testified to the existence of the plates, the plates were never produced for wider examination. Smith maintained that he returned the plates to the angel Moroni after he transcribed and translated their contents.

In 1965, a book titled *Vedic Mathematics* was published in English, a posthumous product of Śaṅkarācārya, Bharti Krishna Tirthaji. Tirthaji's book provides early students of mathematics with strategies for solving arithmetic and algebraic equations based on his 'discoveries'. Tirthaji was born in 1884. At a young age he developed an interest in philosophy, mathematics and Sanskrit. In 1925, he became a Śaṅkarācārya—a title reserved for heads of religious orders or monasteries in the Advaita Vendanta tradition. A scholar of the *Atharva Veda*, in the early 50s Tirthaji "claimed to have found 16 *sutras* which explained all of mathematics."[4] As the story goes, Tirthaji composed sixteen volumes, one on each of the *sutras*. Those volumes—including evidence of the 'found' *sutras*—mysteriously vanished before Tirthaji was able to publish them. He was, however, able to reconstruct the first volume from memory, the basis of which became the posthumously published *Vedic Mathematics.*

While Tirthaji's prescriptions for ways in which to make mathematical calculations less demanding can be attributed to Vedic thought in general, the sixteen *sutras* on which the *Vedic Mathematics* rests its authority do not appear in any part of the extant Vedic corpus.[5]

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[3] As quoted in Terryl Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 3.

[4] Hartosh Singh Bal, "The Fraud of Vedic Maths," in *Creative Indian.* 14 August 2010. Accessed: January 19, 2018.

[5] For a fuller treatment of this story and similar claims see, Vasantha Kandasamy and Florentin Smarandache. *Vedic Mathematics: Vedic Or Mathematics: A Fuzzy and Neutrosophic Analysis* (American Research Press, 2006); K. S. Shukla, "Mathematics: The Deceptive Title of Swamiji's Book," in *Issues in Vedic Mathematics – National Workshop on Vedic Mathematics,* March 1988, eds. H. C. Khare et al. (University of Rajasthan: Motilal Banarasidass Publishing, 1991); Hartosh Singh Bal, "The Fraud of Vedic Maths".

The White House

February 17, 2017

Executive Order – Authorization to Enact the Theseus Protocol, Bringing about the Ninth Conjunction of Spheres and Shattering the Crimson Veil

By the authority invested in me as President by the Constitution and the Laws of the United States of American, including the National Emergencies Act of 1976 (50 U.S.C. 1601-1651), it is hereby decreed, proclaimed and ordered as follows:

Section 1. *Purpose.* That the Twelfth Age of this recension of Creation has run its course, and shall be allowed to expire, in order to bring forth the reign ever-lasting and undying of the Many-Instanced One, whose ninety-nine names and seventy-seven titles shall not be uttered for fear of the unweaving of the Veils; and that the shrieking, lamenting and wailing from this instance shall echo throughout the land, specifically in this case, all 50 states irrespective of Tenth Amendment provisions; and that the dominion in this sphere shall endure forever.[6]

Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505
March 10, 2017

Memorandum for the President of the United States and Heads of all Intelligence and Defense Agencies

Subject: Impending Release of Highly Damaging Blog Post By Jackson Star-Tribune

The Agency has received a credible tip from an informant in Wyoming alerting us that the Jackson Star-Tribune is determined to produce and unleash a defamatory blog post about the administration sometime within the next several days. A junior member of the Star-Tribune's staff was overheard by our source noting that the 300-word post has been planned since President Trump's executive order on illegal immigration and is currently targeted for release on March 13th.

Although the Star-Tribune has not yet succeeded in publishing this destructive opinion piece, the publication's previous posts of "Trump's First Full Week of Troubling Signs for New Administration" and "Trump's Math Doesn't Add Up" reveal it has both the capability and intent to carry out a devastating operation of this scale.[7]

[6] "Theseus Protocol," published online, May 22, 2017 at https://www.theonion.com/the-theseus-protocol-1819594228.
[7] "CIA Memo on Threat Posed by Wyoming Newspaper," published online May 22, 2017 at https://www.theonion.com/central-intelligence-agency-1819594222.

On Monday, May 22, 2017, the satirical online newspaper *The Onion,* released "The Trump Documents", a 700-plus-page collection of classified documents—emails, copies of executive orders, senior advisors' correspondence, and even children's letters—provided to the newspaper by 'an anonymous source within the White House'. The scale of the undertaking (even by *The Onion's* standards) was staggering. While regular readers of *The Onion* are quite familiar with the newspaper's tongue-in-cheek tactics and satirical output, if one is unfamiliar with *The Onion's* Mad Magazine-esque character there are few outward signs of the ruse. In fact, the website devoted solely to the publication of the documents exudes the air of an authoritative source. One has to engage in a more than cursory examination to learn that the documents are a mix of the outright ridiculous ("The Theseus Protocol") and the less-obviously parodic (the "CIA" memo reproduced above).[8]

The documents, of course, are all fictitious.[9]

In 1843, Søren Kierkegaard published what would later be characterized as his first important work, the appositely titled *Either/or: A Fragment of Life.* In the preface to what is presented as a collection of disparate essays and musings, 'editor' Victor Eremita claims that some mysterious papers came into his possession seven years prior "at a second-hand dealer's here in town."[10] There, he maintains, he noticed "an escritoire", a small writing desk with drawers, "not of modern workmanship and rather well used."[11] He unsuccessfully attempted to low-ball the proprietor for a discount on the furniture, but sadly "the dealer was uncommonly

[8] See http://interactives.theonion.com/trumpdocuments/ for the full set of 'leaked, recovered documents'.
[9] A confession is necessary here, one that exposes my own leanings. While I searched high and low hoping to find an example in which Trump, himself, referenced 'found' documents that were clearly conjured (whether later produced as evidence or not), his tactics are of a different kind of brazenness: perhaps the ultimate anti-textualist, Trump is, instead, prone to denying the existence of documents that are 'real'.
[10] Søren Kierkegaard and Alastair Hannay. *Either/or: A Fragment of Life,* trans. Hannay (London: Penguin, 2004), 28.
[11] Ibid.

firm"; at last, after some hemming and hawing, he purchased it, fascinated by its "many drawers and recesses."[12]

A veritable Russian-nesting-doll of a literary work, Part 1 of *Either/or* concludes with a story-within-a-story—*Diary of a Seducer*[13]—, narrated by the diarist, Johannes, and (again) ostensibly edited by Eremita. *Seducer* begins with a preface in which Johannes likewise claims to have discovered some mysterious papers in a secret compartment of an antique desk:

> I cannot hide it from myself, I can scarcely control, the anxiety which overcomes me at this moment, when I decide to make for my own satisfaction a fair copy of the rough transcript which I was able to secure for myself at the time only in the greatest haste and with much nervousness. The situation fills me with the same alarm and self-approach I felt then. Contrary to his custom, he had not locked his secretary, its entire contents were at my disposal. … I did not open a single drawer. One drawer happened to be pulled out. In it I found a quantity of loose papers and on top of them a book in large quarto, tastefully bound. To the side facing me was fixed a vignette of white paper on which he had written in his own hand: *Commentuarius perpetuus No. 4.* Again, it would be futile for me to try to make myself believe that if this side of the book had not been turned up, and if the striking title had not tempted me, I should not have fallen into temptation, or at least should have offered it resistance.[14]

(One can only imagine Kierkegaard grinning Janus-faced at his own audacity, the collected documents (these a parcel of those formerly collected by Eremita) duly labeled a universal commentary on, we are to imagine, 'everything'.)

Noting with "a hasty glance" that the papers are of an unseemly nature, our chronicler, Johannes, approaches the drawer with an "eye alert to every subterfuge", feeling "very much as a police officer must feel when he enters the room of a forger."[15] Johannes then goes on to describe, more fully, the disparate collection of textual artefacts he has purportedly un-graved, all of which convince him that he is clearly "on the right track", his satisfaction "mingled with a certain amount of admiration for these *unmistakable proofs* of study and industry."[16]

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[12] Ibid., 29.
[13] *The Diary of a Seducer* will, somewhat ironically, come to stand as a short 'novella' in its own right.
[14] Søren Kierkegaard, *Diary of a Seducer*, trans. Gerd Gillhoff (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1966), 1.
[15] Ibid., 2.
[16] Ibid.; emphasis mine.

Introduction

> "Here to my great surprise I found a mass of papers that form the content of the present work."[17]

What are we to make of claims such as those recounted above?

A reader's reaction to any appeal to the authority of a discovered document (or documents) may range from the incredulous and outright dismissive (and the concomitant inclination to debunk) through grudging admiration to wholesale and deferential respect. While we may feel smug in our ability to assess the 'appropriate' response to the respective accounts reproduced above—undoubtedly certain in the impressiveness of Kierkegaard's achievement, awed by Baudrillard's cunning machinations (even as we may feel somewhat duped), either taken-in or chuckling at *The Onion's* audacity, and disdainful and dubious of Tirthaji's and Smith's claims—, arguably what colours our responses is what we perceive to be firm notions of the difference between fiction and myth, on the one hand, and facts and history, on the other.

Conceptual Framework

> "In the critic's vocabulary, the word 'precursor' is indispensible, but it should be cleansed of all connotations of polemic or rivalry. The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future."[18]

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[17] Victor Eremita as quoted in: Søren Kierkegaard and Alastair Hannay, *Either/or: A Fragment of Life*, ed. Victor Eremita (London: Penguin, 2004), 30. The editor, Victor Eremita, is, of course, fictitious/pseudonymous but is cited here as a nod to Kierkegaard's "notorious practice of concealing himself behind a barrage of pseudonyms" (6), as Hannay notes.

[18] Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and His Precursors," in *Everything and Nothing,* translated by Donald A. Yates, et al. (New York: New Directions, 1999), 73.

In this study, I categorize, classify, and examine a literary device that I term 'the myth of the found text' so as to explore how such stories operate to authorize and reinforce social identity and religious practices. Refashioning Roland Barthes' formulation of myth as "language-robbery", here I contend that individuals or groups in specific socio-historical contexts construct stories of found texts as a kind of conjuring trick, one that functions to confer the storyteller's power and stature.[19] By appealing to the authority of an ancient text allegedly newly recovered, these mythmakers are able to situate social programs and religious reforms in an imagined, ideal antiquity—an exemplary past. The creation and telling of such myths can, thus, be seen as a socio-political manoeuvre, a manoeuvre that constructs an authority (the 'found' text) that is then cleverly protected from contestation.

Labeling such texts 'political' is, of course, a political undertaking in its own right. Myths about found documents are ubiquitous, especially in Western culture, and have become part and parcel of many sacred traditions. Christopher Flood proposes that we distinguish between 'sacred' and 'political' myths, noting that political myths are those primarily concerned with the narrative construction of collective identity. It is in this sense—in the construction of group identity—that I label the myth of the found text 'political'. Following Jan Assmann's distinction between "myths sacralizing cosmos and reality, and myths sacralizing society and history", however, I contend that "sacredness seems to be present on both sides of the distinction and to be inherent in the very notion of myth."[20] As Assmann maintains, both myths concerned with

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[19] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1972), 131. Barthes speaks of myth as a second-order semiotic system. I use the term conjuring (as does Barthes) to indicate how the myths I interrogate below function authoritatively *because* they conceal their construction—the role of the reader is, in effect, usurped.

[20] Jan Assmann, "Memory, Narration, Identity: Exodus as a Political Myth," in *Literary Construction of Identity in the Ancient World, eds.* Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 3. Assmann here, as elsewhere, follows loosely in the footsteps of Émile Durkheim in his contention that what is 'sacred' is socially constructed by various groups.

'divine' history and those concerned with human history are sacred in the sense that they provide foundational authority.[21]

While my data is for the most part confined to stories from Western traditions, I endeavour whenever possible to suggest ways in which such an examination might be extended to include myth-making strategies found in other cultures and traditions.[22] My primary interest is in how the 'myth of the found text' functions rhetorically as a literary device and politically, in specific socio-historical situations, as what we might label a foundational 'origin' text. Employing the tools of literary criticism, my overarching approach is narrative.

The popularity of narrative theory in academic religious studies' circles has tended to wax and wane; recently, however, there has been a significant resurgence in its use, not only as a descriptive tool but also as a form of critique, especially in interdisciplinary studies.[23] Owing in large part to the close association of narrative theory with biblical studies, the formerly somewhat-cool reception to narrative theory was not without some validity.[24] Much of the twentieth-century saw narrative theory dominated (from thinkers such as Joseph Campbell, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, and Northrop Frye) by structuralist arguments that, despite their valuable insights, are now frequently impugned as ahistorical. From a twenty-first century

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[21] Ibid.

[22] To be clear, I in no way purport to offer a universal theory; rather, I am interested in exploring what makes these constructed myths so effective, potent, and enchanting.

[23] For a comprehensive discussion of philosophical and critical approaches to the use of narrative within a greater intellectual history see, Kent Puckett, *Narrative Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). For Puckett, narrative theory assists us in making the important methodological distinction—and understanding the formal relationship—between *what* is narrated and *how* a thing is narrated.

[24] The use of narrative theory has often been deemed to lie solely within the purview of theological scholarship rather than within the supposedly more objective field of religious studies. Part of the problem rests with the association of traditional narrative biblical criticism with the New Critics. New Criticism (or Formalism), rising to popularity between the two world wars, focused almost exclusively on the text, disregarding the role of the author and his/her particular, biographical, political, and historical situation. Contemporary narrative theorists, cognizant of these concerns, retain the rigour of engaging in a close analysis of text (including, especially, an analysis of rhetorical techniques) while, at the same time, examining the implications of text as situated and socially constructed.

vantage point, these arguments are seen as rudely reductive in that they effectively collapse (à la Derrida) all difference, even if the original authors did not wilfully intend that effect. Contemporary religious studies scholars—now cognizant (post Derrida, Ricoeur, and Habermas) of such critiques—are aware of what is often an underlying colonialism embedded in mid-twentieth century structuralist positions and are further attuned to the role of human agency as critical in the construction and reproduction of society. For the most part, scholars currently employing narrative theory as part of their methodological approach endeavour not to make statements about so-called universal patterns across time and cultures and tend not to assert that they uncover (or discover) preexistent structures in the data they examine. Instead, mindful of the caution that 'map is not territory', most are careful to articulate that 'structure' is something applied or imposed on selected data—applied or imposed in the asking of particular questions. While I suggest a number of similarities between the myths I explore below, my study is similarly couched in an understanding that I am applying the classifications I define as comparative and investigative tools.

In this regard, I am indebted to the work of Bruce Lincoln and, especially, to his comprehensive examination of the history of the term 'myth' in *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* in which Lincoln traces the genealogy of 'myth' as a category marker, delineating how the designation has enjoyed a roller-coaster ride through fetishization and derision. Although Lincoln offers harsh criticism of the structuralist school, he nonetheless admires both the impulse to classify and the rigour that such categorizing entails, pointing for example to Émile Durkheim's "explication of a complex classificatory logic encoded in mythic narratives."[25] Attuned to Durkheim's and subsequent cultural theorists' understandings that

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[25] Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 146.

classificatory systems are always hierarchical, Lincoln is cautious to note that: “taxonomy is hardly a neutral process”.[26] Lincoln’s examination of myth as a taxonomic marker informs much of my work, as does his recognition that narrative is a “particularly attractive and memorable form.”[27] With Barthes and Lincoln, I too maintain that myth “ is not just taxonomy, but *ideology* in narrative form.”[28]

The Problematic Quest for the Historical

“Interpretation is the only game in town.”[29]

The burgeoning academic focus, across disciplines, on problems of interpretation and translation means that it has become somewhat hackneyed and predictable to lament (to paraphrase Fredric Jameson) the loss of ‘a genuine awareness of history’. Here, I do not wish to flog the proverbial dead horse nor to speak ad nauseam about ‘what I am *not* doing’, a practice we (scholars) have become wont to employ. Nevertheless, the telling of ‘history’ is tangled and its methods require examination. As Jameson asserts, history is “today not the opposite of ‘theory’ but rather very precisely itself a lively plurality of various historical and historiographic ‘theories’.”[30]

Over the past few centuries, owing in large part to the ever-expanding field of biblical exegesis, a good deal of (first-rate and necessary) industry has gone into searching for and interrogating the historical basis of texts deemed sacred. This emphasis on uncovering the

[26] Ibid., 147. Lincoln asserts that Durkheim often neglects the political or historical in favour of the social. A more nuanced orientation, according to Lincoln, is one that we see with theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Roland Barthes, and Pierre Bourdieu, who attend to the linguistic as well as the socially determined.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.; emphasis in the original.
[29] Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 446.
[30] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 184.

historical has meant, in some cases, that these investigations are reductive; they end up telling us little about the so-called events of the 'history' they purport to examine. The quest for the historical Jesus has become just such a case in point, one that serves as an example of what becomes problematic when our contemporary insistence upon examining only the so-called 'factual' clouds our ability to examine stories from what may be more fruitful perspectives. In *The Symbolic Jesus*, William Arnal weighs in on the seemingly interminable nature of the narrow quest for the historical Jesus. Eschewing a traditional introduction, Arnal deftly illustrates, by way of a humourous anecdote—"No, Jesus was not crucified in a bunny suit"—, the very problem he wishes to address: "a statement about Jesus … is *always* a statement about something else."[31] Albert Schweitzer's earlier (1906) assertion that historical Jesus questers inevitably 'found the Jesus for whom they were looking' evinced a similar concern, one (as Arnal notes) that effectively put an end to the first quest for the historical Jesus. Arnal's claim that "the *historical* Jesus is *historically* insignificant" likewise may supply the final nail in the coffin of the current quest.[32] For Arnal, if we are to retain any scholarly integrity whatsoever, we

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[31] William Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus: Historical Scholarship, Judaism and the Construction of Contemporary Identity* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005), 2; 7.
[32] Ibid., 76; emphasis in the original.

Arnal's treatment of the quest(s) for the historical Jesus serves as a welcome reminder of the blinders we often wear (and the blunders we may fall into) when examining the 'historical'. For Arnal, "scholarship on the historical Jesus uses the figure of Jesus as a screen or symbol on which to project contemporary cultural debates" (5).

Examining how we impose contemporary concerns on our quest for an historical core, Arnal methodically traces the anti-Semitism inherent in much early exegetical historical Jesus work and notes the shift in contemporary academia to a 'shrill' insistence upon the Judaism of Jesus and the resulting attacks on those whose scholarship even so much as hints at alternative provenances for the historical Jesus (for instance, Cynicism or Jesus' Galilean roots). Arnal exposes what is problematic about the present emphatic insistence upon Jesus' Judaism: (a) that it is a position that operates with the "a priori assumption that 'Judaism' is a stable and consistent entity" (30) and (b), that it fails to recognize "the easy slippage we encounter between 'Jew' as an ethnic classification and as a religious classification" (34). Scholarly accusations against those whose 'Jesus' is rooted in cross-cultural and anthropological studies, he contends, are not only abhorrent but trivialize anti-Semitism and are "offered in lieu of real engagement with the issues and evidence raised by such scholars" (37-8).

far better serve the game that (in his case) is Christian origins' scholarship through explorations of the social-political circumstances and "the collective machinations, agenda, and vicissitudes" of the *mythmakers themselves* rather than continuing the search for the ever-elusive historical Jesus.[33]

A scholar of history, Arnal is not being dismissive of scholarly undertakings focused on historical exegesis. Rather, he prods us to expand our investigations to that which *can* bear fruit. Likewise, I am wary of giving the appearance of trying to undo the considerable work of those engaged in demanding historical-critical inquiries. A large part of my argument, in fact, is that the stories I examine are historically and socially situated. Here, however, I simply assert (with scholars such as Arnal) that with narrow historical quests we may be in danger of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. My purpose, then, is not necessarily to determine whether the stories I examine are rooted in 'fact' or 'history' but, instead, to interrogate what the *telling* of these stories (what the telling of a certain *kind* of story)—and specifically what the *writing* down of such stories—might tell us about the teller and the situations in which such stories were, or are, told. For example, I am uninterested (at least within the confines of this study) in whether an historical Josiah (as described in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles) existed. Rather, I propose an examination of how stories in which the device of the 'myth of the found text' is employed function, —in this particular example, Josiah's account of 'the found book of the law'. My study

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Arnal further attacks what he refers to as the Anglophone scholarship of the third Jesus quest—a quest that has arisen largely in opposition to second-quest techniques and can be seen as "an Oedipal breaking away from the dominance of the field's German forefathers" (41). This third quest, he asserts, is characterized by an implicit acceptance of the gospel narratives as at least plausibly historically accurate and by an overriding desire to forge a new identity (methodologically or otherwise). For Arnal, historical quests must recognize that the "*alleged* events of the gospels are from the distant past" (51) and that even an insistence upon the Jewishness of Jesus does nothing more than betray contemporary agendas—most notably the rather suspect agenda of trying to retrieve Christianity from the horrors of the Holocaust.

[33] Arnal, *The Symbolic Jesus,* 77.

is thus guided by the conviction that stories—even those stories we may regard as historically grounded—are always informed by "compositional ambitions and a will to emplotment".[34] As such, my project is classificatory and comparative in nature.

It is easy, of course, to scoff at the kind of rhetorical manoeuvre or literary device— or, if we are less charitable, the kind of 'lie'—employed by a scholar or politician or religious authority who authorizes his/her work by claiming the recovery of a previously lost document, especially a document for/of which evidence is never produced. What is more difficult, however, is to discern when this technique is employed in writings we deem to be of a sacred nature. It is exactly these latter instances in which I am most interested. Such myths, I contend, cannot be divorced from their political use: These stories do not "consist only of the material means of their transmission (media) or the rules that structure them (genres). Those means and those rules permit and then channel narrative expectations and communicate narrative meaning *to someone* in *some context*, and they are created *by someone* with that intent."[35] As Linda Hutcheon here nudges us to remember, these are constructed stories and, therefore, they are stories we are invited to interrogate. One such example of what emerges when we are attuned to the interplay of the historical and the narrative, hopefully, suffices.

One of the stories I explore below under the taxonomy of 'the myth of the found text' is recounted in two different biblical texts: 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. It is the story of the religious and institutional reforms carried out by Josiah, who was said to have ruled over Judah in the latter half of the seventh century BCE. Those reforms (again, *as described* in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles) resulted in strict rules against idolatry and in the dismantling of regional places of

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[34] Werner H. Kelber, "The Works of Memory: Christian Origins as MemoHistory—A Response," in *Memory, Tradition, And Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity,* eds. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 240.
[35] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 26; emphasis in the original.

worship so as to centralize religious practice in Jerusalem. As the story goes, Josiah placed his high priest, Hilkiah, in charge of renovating the temple, an undertaking funded by taxpayers' monies. While engaged in the repairs, Hilkiah discovered a scroll, which was deemed to be the 'book of the law'—the Torah attributed to Moses. Fortuitously, the religious reforms Josiah desired to institute were authorized by the found scroll, which warned against noncompliance with its regulations and instructions.

In the case of Josiah (at least at the time of this writing), there are no extant extra-biblical references to his reign—that is, there is no mention of Josiah in surviving texts from neighbouring cultures and no archaeological evidence, such as inscriptions, bearing his name.[36] This has not deterred us, however, from searching for the 'historical' Josiah (in the same manner as the quest for the historical Jesus). In fact, much valuable scholarly industry over the past few centuries has gone into tracing and dating the various kings of both the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel so as to construct elaborate genealogies of their kings' respective reigns. What is often forgotten is that in many cases these genealogies serve a rather circular purpose; that is, they establish and reinforce (even if unwittingly) the authority of the texts from which they draw a good deal of their data. Now, it is true that much painstaking work has been done to try to find extra-biblical evidence in order to substantiate the reigns of the biblical kings presented in such genealogical works. That research, however, is often undertaken for the express purpose of corroborating the biblical accounts. That is, the research is already 'motivated'. Such undertakings bring to mind other authorizing endeavours, ones that do not necessarily lay claim to the historical and are quite clearly fictional. Once such example is J.R.R. Tolkien's posthumously published *Silmarillion*, an epic pre-history or mythology (or, better,

[36] Bernard Alpert and Fran Alpert, *Archaeology and the Biblical Record* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2012), 74.

theogony) compiled by Tolkien's son, Christopher. *The Silmarillion* provides the reader of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy with 'missing' background information deemed pertinent to a fuller understanding of Tolkien's constructed world: important dates, histories (including creation stories), and genealogies of the characters therein. Arguably, no one would mistake the data complied—an arduous undertaking in which the younger Tolkien combed through his father's notebooks, marginalia, and letters in order to construct *The Silmarillion*—for history. That is, we understand that this background information is provided simply to enhance our understanding (to a greater or lesser extent depending upon what kind of readers we may be[37]) of the primary texts, in this case Tolkien's trilogy. (Whether such a 'history' becomes accepted as part of the so-called Tolkien canon is, of course, another (related) question.) While Tolkien's work is readily identified as fictional—the devices at work literary—, my contention is that examining sacred 'historical' texts in a comparative framework juxtaposed, as it were, with stories in which such devices are clearly fictional can yield constructive results, even as such examinations may necessarily raise thorny questions.

Methodological Approach and Future Work

> "To unmask realism as illusion or deception—or, more broadly, as a literary artefact—does not detract from, much less explain, its capacity to haunt readers through its strange power of making absent objects not only present but credible."[38]

[37] Our current interest in 'origin hunting'—in historical-genealogical undertakings focused on raw data or facts—may be fuel for an entirely separate study, one perhaps in keeping with Arnal's contention that Jesus functions symbolically to reflect ideas and values contemporaneous with those searching for the historical Jesus.

[38] Lilian R. Furst. *All is True: The Claims and Strategies of Realist Fiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), viii.

My juxtaposition of the seemingly disparate stories that appear at the beginning of this chapter (coming as they do from distinct time periods, geographic settings, and, more pertinently, from disparate genres) serves as an introduction to the overarching methodological approach that informs my study: the serious, scholarly work that is 'play'. In this I owe a tremendous debt to the late Jonathan Z. Smith, the distinguished University of Chicago professor and contemporary theorist of religion who championed innovative, yet always rigorous, comparative scholarship in the field of religious studies. In a fitting tribute to Smith's work, Sam D. Gill describes the playful character of the academic method Smith thoroughly and meticulously practiced and espoused—a comparative method in which juxtaposition plays such a foundational role:

> *Juxtaposition* is [Smith's] initiating operation. He places side-by-side interpretations, quotations and their sources, approaches or ideas in such a way that they demand *comparison*. An engaging juxtaposition motivates … interplay, rather than a resolution, among the elements. That interplay is fueled by *difference*, because it is in difference that the operation is interesting and creative. If the elements can be happily reduced to sameness, the process abruptly ends. Play stops. Difference gives rise to thought, to hypothesis and theory, to explanation. Smith's is a comparative method framed by juxtaposition and fueled by difference directed less toward final resolution than toward raising questions and revealing insights.[39]

Examining the intellectual discourse of ancient Yehud, Ehud Ben Zvi likewise favours a comparative approach, arguing that even as texts must be recognized as contextualized artefacts we can nonetheless interrogate and compare texts across time, especially texts that share "a common, ideological generative grammar".[40]

Crucial to my examination of stories that play with 'the past'—of stories I label 'myths of found texts'—is an understanding that the construction and preservation of group identity is a large part of the work that the thing we call 'religion' does. As such, my study owes much to

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[39] Sam D. Gill, "Play," in *Guide to the Study of Religion,* eds. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: T&T Clark, 2000), 455.

[40] Ehud Ben Zvi, "Reconstructing the Intellectual Discourse of Ancient Yehud," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 39, no. 1 (2010), 7.

theories of adaptation and appropriation (Stott 2005: Hutcheon 2006; Bapat and Mabbett 2017), literary and social memory theory (Eco 1990; 1992; Kirk 2005; Kirk and Thatcher 2005; Kelber 2005; Ben Zvi 2010; Tamm 2013; Danièle Hervieu-Léger 2016), and to social constructionist understandings of religion (Berger 1961; Smith 1996; 2000; Mack 2000; Arnal and McCutcheon 2013). My hope is that the current study will lay important groundwork for future work in larger projects of desacralization—both my own projects and the work of other scholars interested in reading 'text' divorced from the traditional taxonomic frames we have retroactively imposed. To be clear, by the term 'desacralization' I do not mean to demean the narratives/myths in question nor to undermine the importance of those myths to the respective communities that have produced the stories examined herein. Rather, my interest here (as elsewhere) is in analyzing how our scholarly taxonomic undertakings—how our methodologies themselves—paradoxically assist and impede our understandings of the data we classify.[41]

Much of our newfound scholarly interest in narrative and social memory theory for examining the 'historical' can be attributed, I argue, to two roughly concurrent developments. The first is the rising popularity of the study of popular culture and its various narratives in academic institutions. One only need look to current college curricula to see the ubiquitousness of course offerings titled "______ and pop culture".[42] The second development is the emerging academic attention to the cultural, political, and philosophical implications of theories of post-humanism as evidenced in an increasing number of studies (across disciplines) devoted to

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[41] I am acutely aware of the irony that the work I undertake here is of a classificatory nature. This, however, is part of the point: rather than asserting that the classificatory scheme I implement is definitive (or, for that matter, in any way authoritative), instead I hope to demonstrate the value of examining our existing/prevailing taxonomic endeavours in order to 'shake-up' what may have become engrained, unexamined notions.

[42] In a related development, see McCutcheon, "Redescribing 'Religion and …' Film: Teaching the Insider/Outsider Problem," in *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001): 179-200, in which McCutcheon examines the ubiquitousness of the 'religion and ____' formulation in college curricula.

discussions of the weight of 'the human' in the current epoch, an epoch now labeled the Anthropocene because of the significance of the relatively recent role of humans in geographic history. While the majority of these studies tend to focus on the negative repercussions of the impact of humankind on earth's ecosystems, one by-product of this increased interest is a Darwinian-understanding that the ability to make and tell stories is an evolutionary adaptation, a means of survival for the human species. This newfound fascination with the ostensibly evolutionary role of storytelling likewise seems to have pervaded our contemporary social imaginary; note, for instance, the widespread interest in popular history (and science) 'as story' as evidenced by the success of books such as Robert Bellah's *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011) and Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014). In *Sapiens,* Harari identifies story 'making' as an adaptation that is a part of what he labels the cognitive revolution. He asserts that legends, myths, deities, and religion appeared for the first time with this revolution. According to Harari, the ability to speak about fictions—the ability to transmit information about things that are not tangible—is the most unique feature of human language; "only *Homo sapiens* can speak about things that don't really exist".[43]

While marrying narrative theory with social constructionist understandings of religion is not a wholly new endeavour, the examination of religions founded in fiction is a relatively recent area of academic focus and study, one that provides valuable theoretical models. Hitherto, such studies have been largely confined to the exploration of 'new' religions or to the examination of religions based on popular culture, such as Jediism or Elvish. A cursory examination of current social scientific scholarship on religions that have emerged from fictional sources (Possamaï 2012; Cusack 2013; 2016; Kirby 2013; Davidsen 2013; 2016; Petersen 2016) evinces a

[43] See Harari, "A Tree of Knowledge," in *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (Toronto: McClelland Stewart, 2014): 20-39.

predominant interest in the idea of hyper-realities and invented religions. Such studies, however, have wider implications for the study of sacred narratives full stop. Their theoretical applications are especially useful for examining how myths create, construct, and/or appropriate a 'past' to which one owes obsequiousness. While we tend to feel comfortable identifying fictional impetuses for new religions (or, as we are wont to label them, 'cults'[44])—and feel comfortable lauding clearly fictional accounts of 'found' texts as clever literary devices (such as in the example from Kierkegaard's *Either/or* above)—, our labeling of certain myths and texts as 'sacred' precludes, I suggest, plainer readings of the texts in question—plainer readings that may reveal similar strategies at work.[45] In this regard, I follow scholars such as Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Baudrillard (1988) who contend that *all* religion functions by ascribing reality to that which is socially constructed. This study, then, looks to a finite number of myths in which the 'found' text appears as a rhetorical, political, authorizing, and identity-forming device. My hope is that classifying these myths in the manner in which I suggest will pave the way for further study.

[44] While the term cult carries a pejorative connotation, one might argue that what we label 'religion' simply equals cult + time.

[45] The study of 'new religions' is not without difficulties. Fredric Jameson captures this well: "Religion is of course right now a hot theoretical topic, what with all kinds of violent postmodern fundamentalisms and even the left's revival of St Paul as a theorist of cultural revolution; but it is a tricky topic as well, since even to call it 'religion' is to reify it and confirm its status as a non-secular phenomenon. The concept is thereby booby-trapped and you have implicitly acknowledged 'belief' in the throes of an effort to deny such a thing in the first place. But if you call it something else, ideology, say, or ritual, or existential illusions, you at once lose its curious specificity. Meanwhile, any emphasis on the invention of specific religions by individuals, the necessarily 'made-on-purpose' features of these pretentiously redefined 'belief systems', also at once reduces them to something like home-made furniture, and demands a supplement in the form of deep time, ancient cultural custom, or revelation itself – so that the representation of a new religion … is itself a delicate matter." See Jameson's review of Margaret Atwood's *Year of the Flood*, "Then You are Them," London Review of Books, vol. 31, no. 7 (September 10, 2009): 7-8.

Structure / Overview of Chapters

> "What I need is perspective. The illusion of depth, created by a frame, the arrangement of shapes on a flat surface."[46]

Because I owe a large debt to social constructionist theories of religion, in my first chapter proper (chapter two) I situate my study in current discussions of method and theory in the academic study of religion so as to attend to what many scholars maintain is the covert and ubiquitous dehistoricization of 'religion' itself. Such discussions have important implications for how we study religion and myth full stop.

In my third chapter, I define the criteria used for collecting and cataloguing stories in which a myth of a 'found' text appears. There I examine the rhetorical, creative and appropriative acts at work in such myths and attend to both classical and recent work in the theory of myth and narrative, paying special attention to theories that assert that in dealing with representations of 'the past' we are always dealing with a commemorated past.

In chapter four, I present the first of four studies in which I examine how 'the myth of the found text' has operated within particular religious discourses. The first study is the story of the discovery of the 'lost book of the law', as told (respectively) in the Book of Exodus, in 2 Kings, in the *Temple Scroll* found at Qumran, and in the first chapter of the Book or Mormon. In chapter five, I examine the "Donation of Constantine", published in the early ninth-century by Frankish monks as part of the collected Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals. I then unpack the strategies at work in an entirely fictional story of recovered documents, as told in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.* Finally, I turn to a second-century Greco-Roman text, Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales,* so as to demonstrate how a failure to examine the always-political construction of

[46] Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), 165.

the myth-within-the-myth may hinder our ability to assess the claims of the larger text in which the 'myth of a found text' appears.

In my final chapter, bringing into play Jonathan Z. Smith's study of how canon operates as a tool of closure, I address how myths of 'found' texts insulate groups and their ideational positions from attack and critique. To conclude, I move beyond the 'myth of the found text' so as to examine emerging theories of 'religion' as a strategy of social memory making (and keeping) and to point the way to possible avenues for further investigation.

2

Myth as Map; Mapping Myth

"A map *is not* the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a *similar structure* to the territory, which accounts for its usefulness."[47]

Definitions

It is useful to begin my examination of the 'myth of the found text' with a few important definitions. These definitions do not necessarily have all encompassing authority, but are ones that will be used within the confines of this study to provide clarity to the discussion that follows.

The word 'myth' often invites pejorative connotations—some of those connotations acquired precisely because of the political chicanery at work in just the sort of myths I describe herein. The word comes from the Greek, μῦθος (*mythos*); it can mean quite simply a story, albeit one that is usually etiological in nature, "concerning the history of a given people or explaining a social or natural phenomenon."[48] The term first appears (c. 700s BCE) in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and at the beginning of Hesiod's *Theogony.* Citing an exhaustive study by Richard Martin (1989) on the use of *mythos* in the *Iliad*, Lincoln observes (with Martin) "*mythos* is an

[47] Alfred Korzybski, "A Non-Aristotelian System and its Necessity for Rigour in Mathematics and Physics," in *Science and Sanity,* 4th ed. (Lakeville, Conn.: International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishers, 1958), 58.
[48] *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

assertive discourse of power and authority that represents itself as something to be believed and obeyed."[49] What perhaps jars against our modern sensibilities is the extent to which those engaged in ancient myth making (the shrewd and wily Odysseus, for example) are clearly celebrated for their disingenuity. Hesiod begins his *Theogony* by recounting how the Muses "breathed a voice into [him]: a divine one, so that [he] might tell of things that were and will be."[50] Speaking of himself in the third person, Hesiod makes clear that *mythos* comes from the divine realm and that mere mortals without the power of *mythos* are lesser:

> … τόνδε δέ με πρώτιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον,
> Μοῦσαι ’Ολυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο·
> "ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον,
> ἴδμεν φεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,
> ἴδμεν δ’ εὖτ ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι."
>
> … the goddesses first spoke forth this *mythos* to me,
> The Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-bearing Zeus.
> "You field-dwelling shepherds are a bad, shameful lot:
> nothing but bellies.
> We know how to recount many falsehoods like real things, and
> We know how to proclaim truths when we wish."[51]

Hesiod, of course, is playing with us, his self-deprecatory stance giving lie to the elevation of his own words to the divine, authoritative realm. It is not until the Classical Greek period of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE that thinkers such as Heraclitus will challenge the authority of *mythos*,

[49] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 17.
That any given myth is a story that is 'believed' is arguably what makes myth the purview of religious studies scholarship. As Wendy Doniger observes, in the history of religions the term has often been used to mean 'truth': "what makes this ambiguity possible is that a myth is above all a story that is *believed* … and that people continue to believe despite sometimes massive evidence that it is, in fact, a lie" (2). See Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2011), especially the introduction, for further discussion.
[50] Hesiod and Mark. L West, *Theogony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 32.
[51] Ibid., 27-32.

invoking *logos* as the higher form.[52] As Lincoln enjoins us, however, these terms were not (and are not) static. Rather, these words "were the sites of pointed and highly consequential semantic skirmishes fought between rival regimes of truth. … The meanings and values attached to *mythos* and *logos* remained unstable and contested, and the balance of power between them unresolved."[53] But it is when myths become written down, as Lincoln observes, that "the nature of discursive authority changes."[54]

The act of inscribing or inking myths becomes a metaphor for the very wielding of authority, a metaphor perhaps best represented in the metonymic, 'the pen is mightier than the sword'. Moreover, stories indelibly inked are by their very nature closed and protected. In his study of how canon operates as a structure of limitation and closure, Jonathan Z. Smith paves the way for unpacking what is at work in the literary or rhetorical device I am classifying 'the myth of the found text'. Stretching his definition of both 'canon' and 'text' to include examples from non-literate groups, Smith argues that 'canon', broadly understood, is "the arbitrary fixing of a limited number of 'texts' as immutable and authoritative."[55] Smith then goes on to situate 'canon' in a taxonomic model, labeling and defining 'canon' as a subtype of the greater category 'catalog' (itself a subtype of the genre 'list'). While lists are open-ended and arbitrary (that is, nothing connects the items "except where a cross-reference is provided"), catalogs are ordered in such a way that the principles of their ordering can be readily discerned.[56] Catalogs, however, are still open-ended (or, at least, potentially so); the "only formal element that is lacking to transform

[52] Lincoln notes, insightfully, that Heraclitus not only scoffs at the poets who are inspired by Apollo (god of poetry and oracles) but also at religious practices such as purification rituals, the worship of statues, and mystery initiation rites. See Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth,* 25-27.

[53] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 18.

[54] Ibid., 26. See below (chapter three) for my examination of Plato's discussion of the role of 'text' in mythmaking as examined in his *Timaeus.*

[55] Jonathan Z. Smith, "Sacred Persistence: Toward a Redescription of Canon," in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 44.

[56] Ibid., 45. See Smith's endnote 15, p. 144. Here Smith is quoting Hugh Kenner and his examination of the aesthetics of the 'list' in Kenner's, *Flaubert, Joyce, and Beckett: The Stoic Comedians.*

a catalog into a *canon* is the element of closure."[57] As Smith continues, where there is canon, someone (or, better, some group) must be invested in this desire for closure. That is, where we evidence canon we can previse the "*necessary* occurrence [of interpreters], the necessary obsession with exegetical totalization."[58] More, once a canon is closed (or, more accurately, once a 'catalog' is closed and thus becomes a canon), we can witness efforts by invested groups or authorities (interpreters, exegetes, etc.) to "extend the domain of the closed canon over everything that is known or everything that exists *without* altering the canon in the process."[59] Thus, for Smith, while "canon is best seen as one form of a basic cultural process of limitation and of overcoming that limitation through ingenuity,"[60] what is equally critical is that 'canon' itself be understood as a delimiting category—that is, that formations of canon are motivated strategies of closure that function to protect the canon (and, therefore, the group) from outside penetration.

For Smith, a corpus of myth (either oral or written) would not necessarily be labeled 'canon' because myths, much like metaphors, are flexible and fluid, and not (or, at least, rarely) subject to closure. While Smith's distinctions guide my interrogation, I contend that 'the myth of the found text' is a literary or rhetorical device that *does* operate much in the same way as Smith's understanding of the formation of canon: that is, the overriding purpose of such myths is, specifically, to ensure closure. Thus, I assert, this device can be understood as a kind of narrative, storytelling precursor to formal canon formation.

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[57] Ibid., 48.

[58] Ibid.; emphasis in the original. Smith sees the canonical imperative as "most prevalent in five situations: divination, law, legitimation, classification, and speculation" (50). For the purposes of his argument, he turns to the process of divination (what he sees as the primary *Sitz im Leben* of canon formation) as explored by Victor Turner in his study of the Ndembu and by William Bascom in his study of the Yoruba.

[59] Ibid., 48; emphasis in the original.

[60] Ibid., 52; emphasis, again, in the original.

One further distinction regarding vocabulary is important to make at his juncture: that is, how I employ the terms 'fiction' and 'history' in this study, the distinction itself a thorny problem with a long history (if the pun may be excused) of contentious debate. In his exploration of new fiction-based religions—religions that openly acknowledge that their origin stories are fictional (for example, Jediism)—, Markus Davidsen asserts that *history* "refers to narratives that *claim* to refer to the actual world, regardless of the author's honesty (the author could mean to deceive) and regardless of the actual correspondence between the text and the world (the author could be sincere, but mistaken)."[61] In contrast, he argues, *fiction* "is a non-referential narrative … that does *not claim* to tell the truth about the actual world."[62] The key word is 'claim'. Davidsen is not interested, nor am I (at least not here), in whether a particular story is believable or even in whether we can successfully trace an author's declarations to real world events; rather he is interested in whether an author arrogates to herself the 'actual', in which case we understand that that author is (at least claiming to be) writing history. It is in this sense—based on authorial claim—that I employ the terms 'history' and 'fiction' throughout.[63]

Method and Theory in the Academic Study of 'Religion'

Because I am interested in mythmaking strategies that, through a kind of sleight of hand, effectively dehistoricize (even while simultaneously appealing and laying claim to the 'historical'), it is prudent to situate my study in current discussions of method and theory in the academic study of religion so as to attend to what many scholars maintain is the covert and

[61] Markus Altena Davidsen, "Fiction-based religion: Conceptualizing a new category against history-based religion and fandom," *Culture and Religion*, vol. 14, no. 4 (2013), 384-5; emphasis mine.
[62] Ibid., 385; emphasis mine.
[63] Christopher Gill likewise asserts that the difference between 'fiction' and 'history' (or the factual) is based on a contractual obligation between author and audience. See Christopher Gill, "Plato's Atlantis Story and the Birth of Fiction," *Philosophy and Literature* 3, no. 1 (1979), 64-66.

ubiquitous dehistoricization of ‘religion’ itself. Arguing that the category ‘religion’ has been constructed from what is variously termed a European, Western, post-Reformation, Christian, and/or Protestant understanding of what is meant by ‘religion’, these theorists (Asad 1993; Mack 2000; Arnal 2000; Smith 1996; 2000; Kippenberg 2002; Masuzawa 2005; Taylor 2007; Rives 2007; Nongbri 2013; Arnal and McCutcheon 2013) are cognizant of how such constructions establish and authorize normative convictions. As the argument goes, the historical (and almost always retroactive) grouping of disparate peoples and practices under the category ‘religion’ both measures all others over and against a dominant, but veiled, understanding of religion that is embedded in the very explanatory category *and* that marginalizes peoples who do not value the assumptions implicit in such an understanding. What is implicit and unexamined is the notion that ‘belief’ and personal encounter with the divine hold sway above all other forms of expression, are the benchmark, so to speak, of how ‘religions’ are both identified and ordered.[64]

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[64] Questioning the centrality of ‘belief’ as the defining characteristic of what we mean by ‘religion’ has gone hand-in-hand with examining the idea of a religious-secular divide. Over the past few decades, such discussions have been dominated by theories that see the rise of secularism as emerging from—either in continuity with or in opposition to—what is categorized as ‘religion’. The debate is hot and hard. While proponents on both sides think they are at odds with one another, in fact what has emerged is an unacknowledged consensus that ‘secularity’ is not *in and of itself* a distinct, meaningful category, but rather only becomes such when defined over and against ‘religion’.

Recent scholarship has sought to deconstruct the religion-secularism dispute, often by unveiling the constructed nature of the dispute itself. A growing number of scholars are at the forefront of unpacking this debate in order to uncover what becomes problematic with the secular-religious classification. What they seek to expose is that while the taxonomy may emerge from valuable historical and genealogical studies—studies that seek to trace our *contemporary* (Western) stance as one in which belief and unbelief are in tension—, the tension that this taxonomy maps is being erroneously retrojected into texts and onto cultures for whom questions of belief may not have been central concerns.

For further discussion, see (especially) Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age,* trans. Barbara Harshaw (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) in which Kippenberg analyzes the rise of the academic study of the history of religion as, primarily, a ‘project of diagnosis’ entwined with a theory of decline. See also, William Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon, “Maps of Nothing in Particular: Religion as a Cross-Cultural Taxon,” in *The Sacred is the Profane: The Political Natural of “Religion”* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 102-113; Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category,” in *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993): 27-54; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the*

Rather than buying into "the dominant scholarly theory of religion as a personal response to manifestations of 'the sacred'"[65]—a theory that has had a stranglehold (for better or for worse) on scholars of religious studies since, at least, the 1961 publication of Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*—, a number of these scholars suggest that we are better tasked with investigating and trying to explain the conventions and practices that inform social relations. My identification, cataloguing, and examination of 'the myth of the found text' is likewise based in an understanding of the primary role of the scholar of the academic study of religion to be to examine how and where "people manufacture, authorize, and contest ever-changing social identities."[66]

In developing his theory of religion as social formation, Russell McCutcheon relies on Raymond Williams' description of social formation as divided into three stages, stages that are somewhat porous or fluid:

> *Dominant* (when a social system reproduces its authority effectively in the midst of ongoing natural disruptions), *residual* (when a social system formed in the past is no longer able to reproduce its authority and legitimacy yet remains effective in the present), and *emergent* (when, often in the wake of ruptures or disruptions, novel or experimental forms of authority and attendant social organization are developing).[67]

Williams' identification of when and how social systems reproduce authority is particularly pertinent to this study. The 'myth of the found text', I argue, is just such a novel or experimental device, one whose purpose is to reproduce and create the authority to which the social system

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Language of Pluralism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern* Concept (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007).

[65] Burton L. Mack, "Social Formation," in *Guide to the Study of Religion,* ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (New York: T&T Clark, 2000), 289.
[66] Russell T. McCutcheon, "More than a Shapeless Beast," in *Critics not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 15; emphases in the original.
[67] McCutcheon, "More than a Shapeless Beast," 29.

generating the myth then appeals. That authority is further fixed because these particular myths are inscribed. The act of inscribing or writing (as opposed to oral communication) affords a unique opportunity for the construction and preservation of authority by appealing to cultural or social memory. In oral performance, the speaker is accountable to the audience; communication operates "within social and intellectual boundaries that are not merely dictated by the speaker, but delimited by audiences' needs and expectations."[68] The written word, on the other hand, depends upon a physical and temporal distance between author and text. This distance, as Werner Kelber asserts, "effects a lessening of direct accountability and a sense of emancipation from communal pressures."[69] The distance from scribe to audience, however, "may enhance both the desire and the ability to break with tradition, to *canonize* an alternate viewpoint, and thereby implement a form of forgetfulness."[70] The written word then gives the impression that one has solved the problem of recording the past. A kind of conjuring act has taken place.

Entangled as we are in the academic study of religion in a complex dance with theology—a discipline to which we owe our existence—, many scholars recoil at the social constructionist approach[71] to understanding religion, arguing that it misses the mark by

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[68] Werner H. Kelber, "The Works of Memory: Christian Origins as MemoHistory—A Response," in *Memory, Tradition, And Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity,* eds. Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 227. Here, Kelber is espousing theories attributed to Walter Ong. See Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977): 53-81.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid., 228; emphasis mine.
[71] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luchmann introduced the term 'social construction' in their 1966 publication *The Social Construction of Reality*. Arguing that, "theoretical knowledge is only a small and by no means the most important part of what [passes] for knowledge in a society", Berger and Luchmann assert that actors in the social world produce knowledge about the social world through "an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths, and so forth" (65). Social knowledge is thus a human product, "or more precisely, an ongoing human production" (51). Such production appears "as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience" (25). A social constructionist approach thus focuses upon religion and belief as modes of human production. See Berger, Peter L. Berger and Thomas

neglecting ‘experience’ or ‘interiority’. These critiques, evidenced across a number of disciplines, are not without warrant. One impetus for such critiques is the long-standing hegemony of the authority of the written word as that to which we have traditionally turned when examining the past. In recent decades, many scholars have become increasingly uncomfortable participating in and perpetuating this hegemony. Current interest in challenging the hegemony of the written word is evidenced in the scholarly turn to the consideration of rituals, non-literary artefacts, oral expressions, and ‘lived experiences’ as objects of study (objects, too, a charged word rife with problems), and to the unsurprising resultant academic focus in religious studies on ethnographic studies.

What I examine herein is one strategy or device that has been employed historically to create and reinforce the authority of the written word. That it is necessary to engage in a defense of the kind of work I am undertaking—itself an examination of ‘text’—is part of the point of this study, a point to which I return below.[72] Setting aside the irony that scholars trade in the written

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Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Random House, 1966): specifically, 25-69.

[72] One of the valuable lessons we inherit from postmodern theory is, as Edward Said notes, the idea that “texts are protean things” (Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 318), that reading itself is never neutral. In step with theorists such as Anders Klostergaard Petersen, however, I assert that “[by] virtue of being semantic universes, texts also have a semi-autonomous existence independent of particular readers’ engagement with them” (Petersen, 503). As Petersen avers, “despite all the legitimacy of placing emphasis on texts in the hands of the interpretative communities or readers who are using them, I insist on the value of an analytical approach which acknowledges a certain degree of autonomy of the text. … If this were not the case, it would be impossible to embark on any form of textual analysis on which we could possibly ever come to terms” (318). See Petersen, “The Difference Between Religious Narratives and Fictional Literature: A Matter of Degree Only,” *Religion* vol. 46, no. 4 (2016): 500–520.

As do I, Petersen relies on Umberto Eco’s (mature/later) understanding of the relation between text and reader as espoused in *The Limits of Interpretation*. Negotiating the semiotic poles of interpretation and structure—and noting that the dialectics between all the various players “has generated a crowd” (44)—, Eco occupies a reasonable (at least in this author’s opinion) middle ground between complete arbitrariness and textual determinism. For Eco, regardless of the various whims and desires of the reader, texts retain an internal coherence (*intentio operis*) discernable by the informed and careful reader (Eco’s Model Reader). Observing that texts are interpreted both semantically and critically, Eco describes critical interpretation as “a metalinguistic activity a semiotic approach which aims at describing and explaining

word, the purpose here is not to dismiss other valuable ways of approaching our studies. Rather, my concern is that if we assert that 'experience' trumps written record we may have become overzealous in righting a wrong. While it is true that scholars have long favoured the study of 'text' to the neglect of other forms of expression—and that such 'privileging' contributes to perpetuating the ongoing power of the written word, which necessarily favours particular cultures over others—, the recognition of this inequity should not mean that we hold any one means of inquiry (a) as more authoritative than others *because* it has been hitherto neglected or (b) as without pitfalls.

The protection and 'privileging' of what might variously be termed 'interiority' or 'experience' is a phenomenon with a protracted history in the academic study of religion, one that is related to the problem of defining 'religion' from an engrained (and perhaps inadvertently) Protestant perspective.[73] A problem arises, however, when the scholarly appeal to 'experiential

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for which formal reasons a given text produces a given response" (54). See Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), especially 44-63.

[73] We can see the seeds of this approach in the works of religious studies scholars of the twentieth century beginning with Schleiermacher (1928) for whom religion itself is predicated on inner feeling, is a matter of affection: "The essence of religion consists in the feeling of absolute dependence" (Schleiermacher as quoted by Proudfoot, xii). According to Proudfoot, this emphasis on feeling arose from Schleiermacher's "interest in freeing religious doctrine and practice from dependence on metaphysical beliefs and ecclesiastical institutions" (Proudfoot, xiii). See Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1985).

Robert Sharf argues that a "'hermeneutic of experience' was soon adopted by a host of scholars interested in religion, the most influential being William James, and [that] today many have a difficult time imagining *what else* religion might be about" (99). As Sharf notes, Rudolf Otto similarly employed the language of 'creature feeling' to describe religion (99). See Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* ed. by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998): 94-116.

In his description of mystical experiences, James proposed what he termed as four universal features of such experiences: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: *A Study in Human Nature*, ed. Martin E. Marty (New York: Penguin, 1985 (reprint)): 379-382. Again, a problem arises when unsubstantiated (or, more accurately, unverifiable) claims are made that such experiences may be universal. For Charles Taylor, James "stands in the succession of that late seventeenth- and eighteenth- century revolt against intellectualism in religion, following the Pietists and John Wesley in Christianity, the Hassidim in Judaism, which sees the fullness

claims' is seen as having some kind of ultimate authority divorced from how those claims are constructed and situated. In fact, the term 'inner experience' is often used "rhetorically to thwart the authority of the 'objective' or the 'empirical,' and to valorize instead the subjective, the personal, the private."[74] What is problematic for many (Wallach Scott 1991; Katz 1992; Sharf 1998; Mack 2000; Moore and Sherwood 2011; Nongbri 2013; McCutcheon 2014) is whether it is possible to distinguish between so-called core experiences and various cultural expressions of those experiences. As Sharf notes, "we do not have access to mystical experiences *per se*, but only to texts that purport to describe them."[75] One need be mindful, of course, that Sharf neglects to address, adequately, the import of ethnographic studies. His point, however, is that such studies are likewise wrought with difficulties of translation and interpretation, especially when it comes to accessing 'the inner'. Even when conducting ethnographic studies we do not truly have access to unmediated experience—rather, that experience is always at a remove, is always subject to the telling. That said, I by no means mean to devalue experiences or beliefs or feelings of connectedness to something other or transcendent—which are real and significant for individuals and groups alike, religious or otherwise. Rather, I suggest that one way to examine such authorizing appeals is *as* protective strategies.

One of the first religious studies scholars to address the turn to 'interiority' (or, in her case, turn to the 'spiritual') in a systematic fashion was the anthropologist Mary Douglas. In

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of religious commitment as lying in powerful emotions and their expression, rather than in the nuances of doctrine or the perfections of scholarship" (Taylor, 18). Taylor's argument is that because James comes from a Protestant background "one thing that he has trouble getting his mind around is Catholicism" (23). Taylor sees a 'close fit' between James' understanding of religion and some aspects of contemporary culture: "one might easily run away with the idea that what James describes as religious experience is the only form religion can assume today" (21). Taylor's beef is not so much with the appeal to the inner or to experience, but to the resultant neglect of other understandings of 'religion'. See Charles Taylor *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[74] Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," 94.
[75] Ibid., 98.

Natural Symbols, Douglas argues that "philosophical controversies about the relation of spirit to matter or body to mind [should] be interpreted as exchanges of condensed statements about the relation of society to the individual."[76] For Douglas, it is when "the relation of an alienated sub-group to the social whole" becomes an acute political issue that such controversies become relevant as metaphors.[77] As such, she argues that assigning privilege to the spiritual or interior over the material operates as a conceptual metaphor that is about a revolt against established social norms—a metaphor in which the symbolic relationship between the spiritual and the material is employed so as to "insist on the liberties of the individual and to imply a political programme to free him [sic] from unwelcome constraints."[78]

Douglas contends that the elevating of the spiritual over the material (that is, asserting that inner belief trumps other forms of religious expression such as ritual and practice) operates to free the inner from 'unwelcome constraints', even if that freeing remains only figurative or symbolic. Her insights are valuable for an understanding of how this particular kind of appeal to 'the inner' can be understood as an identity-formation strategy, one that protects the individual or group from vulnerability. What is problematic about Douglas's discussion of interiority, however, is the way in which she retrojects an explanation that is situated and specific on to other techniques of revolt making all such strategies about individual rights. While she explains our contemporary turn[79] to the authority of the inner through a Weberian lens focused on the individual's relationship to the group (an understanding that works well for describing post-Industrial, post-Enlightenment, or post-Reformation historical concerns about individual rights),

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[76] Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Barrie & Rockliff, 1970), 165.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid., 166.
[79] By contemporary turn I mean the same turn to (or elevating of) 'interiority' that is identified by scholars of the history of religion as owing its origin to a Protestant ethos.

she then employs that same explanation as a grand theory to explain all social formations, forgetting her explanation's status as historically specific. That is, she forgets—even as she is cognizant that she is talking about how conceptual metaphors come to be employed (for Douglas, the spiritual representing the individual and the material representing the group)—that this does not therefore mean that the metaphor is fixed, apt in its explanatory power for all situations. Elsewhere, Douglas employs her grid-group device to the same end. Such a device, she argues, allows us "to consider social change as a dynamic process."[80] Built into her grid-group device, however, is again the assumption that social formation is always about the *individual* versus the group. That is, everywhere she sees thwarted individual agency: the "person whose soul is in revolt"[81] or "the individual under strong pressure to accept a system of classification which degrades him and commits him to a life of servitude."[82]

Despite these criticisms, Douglas's exploration of symbols as socially constructed rather than naturally occurring provides insights important for any social constructionist theory of religion. For one, she sees social formation not only as a result of power struggles but also as a process of "long-term adaptation between social pressures and classification."[83] As such, she understands that social formation involves the construction and contestation of meaning. For Douglas, that contestation means a push and pull between restricted codes of alienation and restricted codes of inclusion, each dependent upon the other for its existence.

Historian Joan Wallach Scott, too, notes the troubling trend of scholars from disparate theoretical positions and disciplinary backgrounds converging on "the argument that experience is an 'irreducible' ground for history"—an argument that has been smuggled in to a good deal of

[80] Douglas, *Natural Symbols,* 60.
[81] Ibid., 63 and passim.
[82] Ibid., 60.
[83] Ibid., 61.

scholarship "in the wake of the critique of empiricism."[84] Unpacking the recent emergence of 'experience' as a critical term employed in debates about the limits and usefulness of interpretation and post-structuralist theory, Wallach Scott identifies how the critical turn that elevates experience "appears to solve a problem of explanation for professed anti-empiricists even as it reinstates a foundational ground."[85] Calling upon scholars to turn their methodological tools to analyses of the production of knowledge rather than to projects that attempt to reproduce and transmit that 'knowledge', she challenges the notion that evidence for any given phenomenon is apprehended by way of experience: "What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political." [86] McCutcheon, likewise, recognizes the political nature of such strategies that (as he sees it) smuggle in, or attempt to smuggle in, certain ideas as self-evident and incontestable.

Sharf, similarly frustrated, examines the rhetorical use (and political weight) of the term 'experience' in religious studies scholarship. He notes the slipperiness of the term, the meaning of which "may appear self-evident at first, yet becomes increasingly elusive as one tries to get a fix on it."[87] Arguing that in order to define some 'thing' we must always first situate that 'thing', Sharf contends that the problem with the term experience is that "it resists definition by *design*."[88] That resistance, however, does not apply simply to how difficult it is to pin down any satisfactory definition of the term itself; rather, it is the *appeal* to experience that too frustrates further interrogation—in this case, by a kind of sleight of hand that insulates and protects any

[84] Joan Wallach Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991), 778.
[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid., 797.
[87] Sharf, "Experience," 94.
[88] Ibid.; emphasis mine.

‘appeal to experience’ by attempting to make it impervious to scrutiny. The subject is closed, so to speak.[89]

What I argue below is that the literary device of appealing to a found or recovered text can be seen to operate in a similar fashion to scholarly appeals to ‘experience’ or to the ‘inner’. Stories in which this device is employed create and establish authority for their respective tellers; the device furthermore serves as a protective strategy functioning to shield the writer or mythmaker (and the story) from further scrutiny. Both tactics (the appeal to the inner and the appeal to a ‘found’ incontestable text) can thus be understood as strategies of closure. That is, they can both be understood as strategies that effectively protect groups and their ideational positions from further examination and critique. While we do not necessarily have to impugn these manoeuvers (scholarly or otherwise), we are nonetheless bound as scholars to investigate and critique these same strategies.

[89] For a reasoned counter-argument on the merits and rigor of a phenomenological approach suitable for empirical-scientific inquiry, see Ake Sander, "The Phenomenological Method Revisited: Towards Comparative Studies and Non-Theological Interpretations of the Religious Experience. *Argument: Biannual Philosophical Journal* vol. 4, no. 1 (2014): 9-34.

Arguing for what he labels a “‘de-theologized’, non-reductive Husserlian-based interpretive approach” (11), Sander describes a four-step phenomenological methodology, arguing in favour of a “phenomenological reduction (or transcendental turn), in which we [would] turn from natural, non-reflexive (*natürliche Einstellung*) immersion in the ordinary world of factual experience and its determinisms to an attitude that is counter-natural (*widernatürlich*)” (25). This turn, according to Sander, allows for a “kind of phenomenological reflexivity” that enables us to see and intuit ““the things themselves” (*die Sachen selbst*)” (25). As Sander acknowledges, the proper execution of his model is ‘no-easy task’, including the thorny question of whether interpreters are able to describe experiences in terms to which subjects would assent.

One problem with Sander’s approach is his insistence that his is not a *sui generis* understanding of ‘religion’ even as he describes religious experiences as “something beyond culture” and religious traditions (text, myth, ritual) as “cultural forms that mediate the human encounter with the transcendent and sacred” (18).

Arguing that we frequently and mistakenly conflate the *theories* we apply (to data that we have selected) for the *realities* those theories seek to explain,[90] Jonathan Z. Smith has paved the way for self-reflective, theoretical scholarship in the academic study of religion—scholarship that aims for, and expects, exacting definitions, clear methodologies, explicit articulation of guiding theories, and an impressive degree of rigour. Smith, who is wary of all totalizing theories and suspicious of scholars who (wittingly or not) posit that we are *homo religiosi*, nevertheless sees a common (dare one say universal) tendency or shared ethos in the way we make sense of the world. That is, he operates from a position that 'we' are what one might term *homo classificatory.*[91] For Smith, and those who follow in his footsteps, scholarship begins "with the act of creating taxonomies and models for redescribing the behaviors that we witness around us … and that we find intriguing."[92] Theory, therefore, must always come first. "Religion is not something we study"; rather, 'religion' operates as a "theoretically grounded, taxonomic marker," a label we use to map that which we understand to be of significance—to be of

[90] That is, data does not exist as categorized by our theories but rather data is 'neutral' and selected to support our theories.

[91] Both Smith and McCutcheon are cognizant that ontic certainties disappear once we are no longer examining the snapshots we employ for the purposes of scholarship. While a position that we are *homo religiosi* posits an engagement with some transcendent unknown (some unseen reality of which, apparently, we all have an intuitive grasp), by *homo classificatory* I simply am indicating that Smith understands us to have a common (and observable) tendency to categorize and organize that which we encounter, without positing the *essential* nature of what is encountered. (This, of course, does not preclude that Smith may be privately bedevilled by a sense that we are *inherently* classificatory beings—that we have an innate proclivity to divide and subdivide.)

In "More Than a Shapeless Beast," McCutcheon addresses how such distinctions are important for scholarship. It is crucial, he argues, "to distinguish a *metaphysical reduction* (one that claims to have identified the essence of the data…) from a *methodological reduction* (one that only claims to have reduced the data based on the frame of reference provided by the researcher's theory)." See: McCutcheon, "More Than a Shapeless Beast," in *Critics not Caretakers,* 9. [Note: Sander attempts to address McCutcheon's concern, albeit not wholly successfully.]

[92] Russell T. McCutcheon, "The Economics of Spiritual Luxury," in *Critics not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 87.

significance, that is, "depending on the definition and theory of religion we employ."[93] It is the act of scholarship itself that constructs the classificatory categories and provides the definitions. Then, "if we are lucky," as McCutcheon adds, "we may be able to organize all these scholarly acts [classifying, labeling, explaining] by identifying the wider sets of concerns and values that suggest to us in the first place just what type of taxonomy to build."[94]

For these theorists, the classificatory act is the foundation upon which comparative scholarship rests. Stephen Dunning likewise underscores that "we habitually classify people and places and events according to one schema or another."[95] He notes "the difficulties in constructing satisfactory" classificatory schemas, even as he cautions against rejecting such taxonomies altogether: "classification is essential to the process of interpretation that is at the heart of all understanding. The challenge is to go beyond simplistic labels to the construction of types that identify genuinely important characteristics."[96] To make his point, Dunning retells the ancient Greek myth of Procrustes, who ties his guests to a bed stretching those who are too short and chopping up those who are too tall in order that they respectively 'fit the bed'. What becomes problematic, Dunning asserts, is when our classificatory systems result in this sort of Procrustean blindness. That is, it is not that our categorizing need speak to so-called universal truths but rather that such systematic endeavours be employed in the service of telling us something new and academically useful or interesting.

All this is a somewhat long digression to talk further about theory and methodology. In my introduction, I related the story of the scholar who attempted to validate his academic work

[93] McCutcheon, "More Than a Shapeless Beast," 11-12.
[94] McCutcheon, "The Economics of Spiritual Luxury," 87.
[95] Stephen N. Dunning, *Dialectical Readings: Three Types of Interpretation* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 8.
[96] Ibid., 9.

by referring to recovered 'lost' texts, texts that he then refused (or was unable) to produce so as to corroborate his conclusions. While this attempt to lend credence to one's work by appealing to the authority of that which cannot be empirically examined may appear clumsy and dishonest (especially from a twenty-first century perspective), it is, I contend, a literary or rhetorical manoeuvre that is a staple of many 'sacred' stories. More, it is a device that we tend to gloss over, or at least fail to examine more closely, exactly because we have labeled these stories 'sacred'—a taxonomic undertaking that functions to inhibit or preclude plainer readings of the texts in question. What I undertake below is to unsettle a number of mostly so-labeled sacred stories by collecting and classifying them in a somewhat different fashion, collecting and classifying them so as to look with fresh eyes. While my data are myths that employ the device of referring to a found text or texts, rather than focusing on the historical situations in which these myths arose I am more interested in how the *subsequent* classification of these myths as 'sacred' or 'religious' hinders us from considering that the lost text is, more often than not, being constructed within the confines of the present myth told. Again, here I am interested in examining how our scholarly taxonomic undertakings—how our methodologies themselves—paradoxically assist *and* impede our understandings of the data we classify.

My purpose is not to displace other ways of interpreting the myths I interrogate; rather, I hope to complement those methods.[97] As Bruno Latour muses, the critic "is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather. The critic is not the one who alternates haphazardly between antifetishism and positivism like the

[97] Again, my work here is ancillary rather than interested, or invested, in supplanting. As Latour asks (albeit perhaps newly 'hopeful' about academia late in his career): "What would critique do if it could be associated with *more*, not with *less,* with *multiplication*, not *subtraction*?" See Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2004): 225-48.

drunk iconoclast drawn by Goya, but the one for whom, if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution."[98] My aim, then, is to look anew (through a particular classificatory lens) at the authorizing strategies evident in a number of stories that various groups have labeled sacred. The point is not to tear down but instead to revisit these stories through a classificatory scheme of my making, one that maps a literary or rhetorical device we can identify at work across certain myths—a device that is employed to confer (divine) authority and, more mundanely, to insulate persons or groups from attack or critique. While here I explore these devices—whether wholly creative or appropriative—from a critical standpoint, I do not therefore mean to imply that this manoeuvre—this narrative device of appealing to a purportedly found text—is lesser. On the contrary, this device is often quite brilliantly employed, even if and when employed for suspect reasons. A negative valuation is not, herein, my intent. In the manner of Latour, literary theorist Linda Hutcheon likewise cautions against what she terms the "unproductive nature" of the "negative evaluation of . . . adaptations as derivative and secondary and [the] morally loaded rhetoric of fidelity and infidelity used in comparing adaptations to 'source' texts."[99] It would be a mistake, I think, to paint all such creations or appropriations negatively. As T. S. Eliot proclaimed, "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal."[100]

[98] Latour, 246.
[99] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 31.
[100] T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Woods: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen & Company, 1920), 114.

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Indelibly Inked: Authoring Authority

"The Greeks lived in cities founded by people who never lived, shaped by wars that never happened."[101]

"Facts may be correct or incorrect, but myths are beyond true and false. Their truth lies in their function, and their value in the use to which they are put."[102]

In the preface to his seminal work, *Mythologies,* Roland Barthes, intent on tracking down the ideological abuse of appealing to the "falsely obvious," asserts that, "myth is a language."[103] While Barthes was initially interested in a structuralist project of defining and interrogating contemporary myth (and in exposing what he saw as specious mechanisms of bourgeois culture), in *Mythologies* he reasserts the historicity of myth. For Barthes, myths are neither universal nor eternal; rather they are historical and situated, constructed for specific ends. Myths, Barthes argues, function precisely so as to justify the historical as natural and to make "contingency appear eternal"—in other words, a "conjuring trick has taken place."[104]

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[101] Elena Guisti, "Altar of Facts: Truth and Rumor in the Age of Berlusconi," *Eidolon*, https://eidolon.pub/altar-of-facts-dca16d0ef2b5
[102] Jan Assmann, "Memory, Narration, Identity: Exodus as a Political Myth," in *Literary Construction of Identity in the Ancient World*, eds. Hanna Liss and Manfred Oeming (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 6.
[103] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies,* trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 11.
[104] Ibid., 142.

In a nod to Barthes, Lincoln likewise asserts that, due to their narrative form, myths operate to naturalize and legitimize the local as universal.[105] The rhetoric of history, couched as it is in story, can be seen to operate in a similar way, perpetually colouring all that is said and ironically clouding apparent specificity. As Michel de Certeau cautions, the writing of history is time-and-place specific and that writers of history "reinforce or corroborate already extant values."[106] As scholars in disciplines traditionally rooted in a search for the historical become increasingly aware of problems with the 'telling' of history, scrutiny of prevailing methodologies has become de rigueur. Examining the relationship between utopian fiction and historiography, Toby Widdicombe sees history as "a discipline in crisis: uncertain of its definition, unstable in its categories, amorphous in its disciplinarity, and divided in its purpose."[107] Human imagination, Widdicombe asserts, is so powerful that even at the level of memory we become mythmakers. History, in fact, can always be seen as containing elements of what is inherently fictional—as being as much a matter of narrative and point of view as is fiction. This understanding of historiography as a fluid and unstable discipline arguably undermines much of our inherited approach to text. While we tend to think this vexed question is a new one, thinkers as far back as Plato grappled with the nature of the 'historical', especially in relation to the many problems inherent in recording and preserving 'history' in written records.

The role of 'text' in the telling of history

Near the beginning of Plato's dialogue, *Timaeus,* prefacing Timaeus' discussion of his creation story—one that Timaeus claims is an *eikôs mythos* or *logos* (a likely account or best

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[105] See Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth,* 143-147.
[106] Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History,* trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 8.
[107] Toby Widdicombe, "Utopia, Historiography, and the Paradox of the Ever-Present," *Rethinking History* 13, no. 3 (2009), 291.

version)—is the story of the lost city of Atlantis as told by Critias. As is typical of many of Plato's dialogues, the setting is a dinner party, one that begins with recounting the previous day's discussion. With some prodding, Critias relates a story to Socrates, one he has earlier told the other guests: "Let me tell you this story then, Socrates. It's a very strange one, but even so, every word of it is true."[108]

The story Critias tells is at a pronounced remove from the so-called original. It is an "ancient story", one that he has "heard from a man who was no youngster himself."[109] It is attributed to Solon, a story "brought back home with him from Egypt."[110] What complicates the telling of the story even further is the running commentary Critias provides during his own (re-) telling. This is an unfinished story, a story that Solon abandoned—a 'fact' that Critias goes on to lament. According to Critias, Solon recounts that when he arrived in Egypt "the people began to revere him", but when he asked their priests (who were scholars of antiquity) about ancient times, "he discovered that just about every Greek, including himself, was all but completely ignorant about such matters."[111] As Critias tells it, Solon brings up the subject of ancient Greek history, beginning with an account of the first human beings (Phoroneus and Nicobe). He then relates the story of "how Deucalion and Pyrrha survived the flood", goes on "to trace the lines of descent of their posterity", and tries "to compute their dates by calculating the number of years that [have] elapsed since the events."[112] Solon is interrupted by an old priest who "challenges

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[108] Plato, *Timaeus,* trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 20d, 5. The *Timaeus* begins (as do so many of Plato's dialogues) mid-dialogue with Socrates and Timaeus summarizing the discussions of the previous day. We learn that Socrates left his guests with an assignment: to present Athens pursuing a war "in a way that reflects her true character" (20b, 5). It is in this context that Critias tells his story of the lost city of Atlantis, a story that "goes way back" and is intended to "serve the purpose" of the assignment (20d, 5).
[109] Ibid., 21b, 6.
[110] Ibid., 20e, 7.
[111] Ibid., 21e, 7
[112] Ibid., 22b, 7. There is not room here to analyze the startling likeness of Solon's story (via Critias via Plato) to the biblical accounts found in Genesis.

Solon's mythical account and genealogical calculations of the events of antiquity with a historical and scientific account."[113] The priest argues that the tale of the flood is a recurring myth: "no sooner [has a society] achieved literacy and all the other resources that cities require, then there again, after the usual number of years, comes the heavenly flood", one that leaves only the "illiterate and uncultured people behind."[114]

The priest continues, asserting that even though the people remember only one flood there have been many others of which they are unaware "because for many generations the survivors passed on without leaving a *written* record."[115] Fortunately, according to the priest, those accounts have "all been *inscribed* here in [the] temples and *preserved* from antiquity on."[116] Solon is astounded to hear all of this and asks that the priests provide him with a detailed account.[117] The priest continues, noting that he will tell Solon the story for his own benefit and "especially in honor of our patron goddess who has founded, nurtured, and educated our cities, both yours and ours."[118] In yet a further aside, the priest adds, "[at] another time we'll go through all the details one by one at our leisure and *inspect the documents* themselves."[119] He continues to refer to 'the records' that speak of the account of Athens as having at one time "brought to a halt [a vast power] in its insolent march against the whole of Europe and Asia at once—a power that sprang forth from beyond, from the Atlantic Ocean."[120] The story ends with the priest recounting how the Athenian warrior force prevented "the enslavement of those not yet enslaved and generously [freed] all the rest" just before the entire Athenian force and the isle of Atlantis

[113] Ibid. Also see Donald J. Zeyl's commentary, 7n7.
[114] Ibid., 22d; 23b; 8-9.
[115] Ibid., 23c, 9; emphasis here, and throughout my discussion of *Timaeus*, mine unless otherwise noted.
[116] Ibid., 23b, 9.
[117] The account Solon 'hears' in Egypt is variously attributed to priests (plural) and a priest (singular), further complicating the nesting of the tales.
[118] Ibid., 23d, 9.
[119] Ibid., 24a, 9.
[120] Ibid., 25c, 11.

sank below the sea.[121] It was then, the priest advises Solon, that "your city's might shone bright with excellence and strength for all humankind to see."[122]

Returning to the present time of the telling, Critias advises Socrates that what he has just related "is a concise version of old Critias' [his ancestor's/grandfather's] story, as Solon originally reported it"—a story that "has stayed with [him] like the indelible markings of a picture with the colors burnt in."[123] Critias further clarifies that he did not want to interrupt Socrates during the previous day's discussions because it "was so long ago, [that] I didn't remember Solon's story very well. So I realized that I would have to *recover* the whole story for myself."[124] And, even though we have already heard the story recounted above, Critias provides Socrates, *ex post facto*, with the raison d'être for his (re)telling: "I've said all this, Socrates, to prepare myself to tell Solon's story now. I won't just give you the main points, but the details, one by one, just the way I heard it. We'll translate the citizen and the city you described to us in mythical fashion yesterday to the realm of fact."[125] Taking it upon himself to speak on behalf of the entire dinner party, Critias further advises Socrates: "we'll say that the citizens you imagined are the very ones the priest spoke about, our actual ancestors. The *congruence* will be complete, and our song will be in tune if we say that your imaginary citizens are the ones who really existed at that time."[126] Socrates commends Critias' plan, noting its appropriateness, especially since they are "in the midst of celebrating the festival of the goddess"—the reader should be reminded that the goddess in question, Athena, is not only the goddess of the city but also the goddess of 'spinning and weaving'—, and in closing states, "the fact that it's no made-up story,

[121] Ibid., 25d, 11.
[122] Ibid., 25b, 11.
[123] Ibid., 25e, 11; 26c; 12.
[124] Ibid., 26a, 11.
[125] Ibid., 26c, 12.
[126] Ibid., 26d, 12.

but a true account, is no small matter."[127] Here Plato allows Socrates' concluding remarks on the 'truth' of the story to stand in startling contiguity to Critias' clear admission that the account is feigned (even as Critias, too, continues to insist, disingenuously, upon the truth of the story).

Critias' (or, more accurately, Plato's) evident fabrication of the story of the lost city of Atlantis,[128] appearing as it does at the beginning of the *Timaeus,* stands in brilliant juxtaposition to Timaeus' 'likely account' that is the seemingly unrelated cosmogony or creation story that follows. What is especially intriguing is that Critias insists upon the 'truth' of his story of the lost city, while Timaeus' cosmogony is presented much less emphatically as a 'probable' or 'plausible' account.[129] Critias repeatedly emphasizes how the priests situate the authority of the story in written documents and stone inscriptions, documents they explain to Solon (in a rather off-handed fashion) that can be inspected at a later time. The promised inspection, of course, never transpires. What further foregrounds the fabricated nature of the account is that the priests insist that they are telling the story for Solon's *own benefit*. That is, we are provided an additional clue that the story is not necessarily fixed, that it is bent to conform to the needs of its audience.

The Solon of Critias' tale is, presumably, the historical, sixth-century BCE Solon who was responsible for "significant social and political reforms" decisive in the development of Athenian democracy and of Athens as a powerful city-state.[130] Solon's writings are hopelessly fragmentary and further suspect due to extensive later interpolations. We have no contemporary

[127] Ibid., 26e, 12.
[128] As Zeyl notes, the "story of Solon's encounter with the Egyptian priests, and the Atlantis story related to him by the priests, are not attested anywhere before Plato." See Zeyl, f. 4, p. 6.
[129] The question as to whether Timaeus' cosmogony or creation story is to be read literally or metaphorically is a hot topic of debate in contemporary Classics scholarship. For a fuller discussion on reading Timaeus' cosmogony as either a literal or a metaphorical account, see Donald Zeyl (2000), xx–xxv; Sarah Broadie, *Nature and Divinity in Plato's* Timaeus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 243–277, who provides an extended defense of a 'proto-historical' interpretation; T. K. Johansen, *Plato's Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 62–64.
[130] Zeyl, *Timaeus,* f. 4, p. 6.

extant evidence that the historical Solon visited Egypt, although we do have later accounts from Herodotus and Plutarch that such a trip was undertaken. We should be sensitive, however, that it is Plato's fabricated story that may be their only source for Solon's visit.

Rewriting Athens' 'history' forms a powerful rhetorical function, one of which Plato is not only highly aware but one with which he is playing—regardless of whether that play elevates or derides such tactics.[131] The unusual juxtaposition of the story of Atlantis (in which attention is clearly drawn to its constructed nature, despite repeated protestations of its 'truth') with Timaeus' 'likely' creation story (a cosmogony that has been historically read as sincere and as close to Plato's own understanding) challenges the reader to reflect upon the troubling interdependence of mythmaking and the telling of history. With the very structure of *Timaeus*, Plato problematizes authoritative appeals to written texts, playing with notions of fixity and the inviolability of writing. The story of the lost city of Atlantis—*now* indelibly inked and therefore both 'found' and authoritative—, itself functions as commentary on the authorizing strategy that is the appeal to written text. The paradox is that the 'found or recovered texts' (in this case the priestly documents about Atlantis) *do* exist, but not in the way we traditionally expect. Rather, they exist—they gain life—as constructed and told within the confines of the new story.[132] In this

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[131] That Plato is toying with us is not in question. Much scholarly ink has been spilled, however, over what Plato means us to garner from what can be argued is a discussion regarding the value of μῦθος (myth/story) versus λόγος (speech/reason), with most scholars acknowledging that Plato forever elevates direct speech as the bearer of 'truth', while exposing myth as mediated. What is further at work is an extended discussion of the value of speech (λόγος) versus the value of writing (γρᾰφή)—a conversation that will continue throughout the history of thought in the Western world, with writing (for a long time) relegated as secondary and, therefore, lesser.

For a fuller discussion of Plato's stance on μῦθος vs. λόγος, see Luc Brisson and Gerard Naddaf, *Plato the Myth Maker* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, especially Part I, "*Mythos* among the Greeks"; Christopher Lyle Johnstone, *Listening to the Logos: Speech and the Coming of Wisdom in Ancient Greece* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 161-187.

[132] There is no small irony in the fact that countless adventure seekers have sought (and continue to seek) the 'lost' city of Atlantis. Even in antiquity there was no consensus as to whether the story had a historical

sense, what Plato observes (as Barthes and Lincoln will later underscore) is the far-reaching power of myth to reify.[133]

In his use of narrative juxtaposition, of nested stories, and of veiled commentary on the nature of myth and history, Plato seems oddly prescient and postmodern.[134] One notes,

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basis or whether it was meant to be a fable. In his commentary on the *Timaeus,* Proclus Lycaeus (412-485 CE) notes that the third-century BCE philosopher Crantor sent the story to Egyptian priests in order to authenticate it. Theophrastus (c. 371-287 BCE), one of Aristotle's successors, accepted the story as true. Strabo (c. 64 BCE – 21 CE) also seemed to have embraced the story of Atlantis as historically accurate; Pliny the elder (23-79 CE), however, is more skeptical. The third through fourth century Neo-Platonists, Porphyry and Iamblichus, according to Proclus, asserted that the story was meant to be allegorical. For a further discussion of the early reception of the story of the lost city of Atlantis, see Proclus, and Harold Tarrant, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, *Volume 1 - Book 1 - Proclus on the Socratic State and Atlantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[133] Christopher Gill makes the intriguing argument that with the story of the lost city of Atlantis*,* Plato is experimenting with a new genre, one that we might understand as early fiction (as opposed to epic poetry or history or playwriting). Gill argues that because so many hints are provided that indicate to the reader that the story is *not* true, Plato is not trying to deceive his reader. For Gill, Plato "is not only writing fiction but, consciously, playing the game of fiction, the game, that is, of presenting the false as true, the unreal as real. And in his preface, he is inviting his reader to take part in the same game, to pretend (to himself) to be deceived when he is not, to take as true what he knows is false. The reader may, in fact, be deceived; but what Plato wants is a willed self-deception, a chosen suspension of incredulity for the duration of the story" (Gill, 76). Gill supports his argument by pointing to Plato's examination of μῦθος in his other dialogues and, specifically, his discussion of the value of the poet in *Republic* (see especially Book X). He argues, further, that we can find a good deal of evidence of these same kinds of discussions going on in the ancient world (most famously Aristotle's *Poetics*) and of similar tactics in play with writings such as Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus* (c. 360 BCE), which might too be understood as "the first self-consciously semi-fictional history" (Gill, 65).

For a more complete discussion of Plato's position on myth versus history see Gill, "Plato's Atlantis Story and the Birth of Fiction," *Philosophy and Literature* 3, no. 1 (1979): 64-78; Gill, "The Origin of the Atlantis Myth," *Trivium* 11 (1976): 1-11; Warman Welliver, *Character, Plot and Thought in Plato's Timaeus-Critias*, *Philosophia Antiqua*, vol. 32 (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth,* especially 19-43.

[134] I make this statement somewhat cautiously. It seems to me that we conclude, often over-eagerly, that a postmodern stance is entirely new—an invention of sophisticated, modern thinkers. In fact there is ample textual evidence long before the twentieth-century of self-aware authors intruding on text and deconstructing previously held 'absolutes', including discussions of problems with interpretation and translation and with trying to apprehend the 'historical'. One only need look to ancient Greek narrative and plays, the works of the Second Sophistic, the writings of Chinese thinkers such as Zhuangzi and Lin-chi, Cervantes' *Don Quixote* … the list goes on … to see that such evidence abounds.

The Chinese texts are especially rich in what we tend to label postmodern, deconstructive methods. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-chi* is peppered with authorial interruptions and asides, such as the deliciously devilish, "Surely the Buddha wouldn't deceive people!" The *Zhuangzi*—undoubtedly the most

especially, Critias' concluding remarks that it is necessary to 'translate' the citizen and city from the realm of the 'mythical' to "the realm of fact."[135] Contemporary scholarly discourses likewise teem with just such problems of translation and interpretation—problems of historiography. Addressing the methodological dilemma in which all historians now find themselves, Kocko von Stuckrad asserts that beginning in the nineteenth century, 'history' becomes a way of ultimately decoding meaning, albeit meaning that is "optimistic and teleological" and revealing of an essentialist position.[136] For von Stuckrad, if 'history' is always in the process of becoming History we already trade in religious ideas, imposing the personal ('I'll tell the story for your benefit') and engaging in idealization and value judgements. What von Stuckrad bemoans is that, due to the deconstructionist project's inevitable verdict that we can no longer use terms such as 'history' or 'tradition' "in a way that claims objectivity", the discipline of religious studies has simply abandoned the term history altogether.[137] What von Stuckrad advocates is a more common sense approach: while it is true that scholars cherry pick which data we include in our historical narratives, we still understand the greater collection of data to be available to us in a real way—still understand events to have 'happened' independent of our recording of them. Moreover, we can observe that "patterns of habit or thought"—in essence, traditions—operate

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'postmodern' of all ancient, Chinese literature—, includes the following delightful anecdote, one that well illustrates the notion that "name is only the guest of reality" (*Zhuangzi*, 211):

See Yixuan and Burton Watson. *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi: A Translation of the Lin-Chi Lu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 1-18; Phillip J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, eds., "Zhuangzi," in *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), 207-252.

[135] Plato's *Timaeus,* 26c, 12

[136] Kocko von Stuckrad, "Relative, Contingent, Determined: The Category "History" and Its Methodological Dilemma," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 71, no. 4 (December 2003), 906.

[137] Ibid., 907.

with a kind of impetus that remains traceable, even as we understand that we impose the category 'history' retroactively on what we trace.[138]

This ability to 'trace' the historical becomes much more clouded, of course, when we are put in the position of having to distinguish between rhetorical strategies used to shape history and acts of deliberate falsehood (even when, and if—as in the case of the fabricated story of the lost city of Atlantis—, such falsehoods are employed rhetorically for a so-called greater political or philosophical good). Here, we are confronted with discerning the difference between what we label history and what we label fiction. With fiction, however, we understand that a tacit contract between author and audience is operative: "If we describe a narrative as a fiction, we usually mean that it is an account of events which did not actually take place as they are described but which have been invented by the author. This contradistinction, however, does not draw a distinction between falsehood and fiction. Indeed, fiction is distinguishable from falsehood *only* by the presumptions of author and audience: the author of fiction does not *intend* to deceive (nor is the audience generally deceived) about the status of the narrative."[139] The rhetorical device of appealing to a 'found' text further clouds such distinctions.

[138] Ibid., 908. Von Stuckrad argues for a frankness of position as the only way forward from the morass. As he phrases it, the "answer to the dilemma is *making it explicit"* (910). His prescription is to acknowledge "the possibility of arriving at a coherent theory of history that does not hide its constructive elements and nonetheless is able to correlate facts of the past with their (re)presentation in the present under a broad concept of history" (911). See von Stuckrad, "Relative, Contingent, Determined".

[139] Gill, "Plato's Atlantis Story and the Birth of Fiction", 64; emphasis mine. Gill notes that one of the implications of conceding that the story of Atlantis (even though introduced as "the record of a factual event, one that is "absolutely true"" (64)) is an invention is that such an awareness draws into question the veracity of claims from earlier works of literature, such as Homer's epics. As with the quest for the historical Jesus, much scholarly (and lay) effort has gone into asking, 'Was there a Trojan War?' Again, I do not wish to devalue such efforts, rather my interest, here, (as I would argue was Plato's) is in examining the authorizing strategies at work in the construction of myths and how such claims relate to and interact with the historical.

Classifying and categorizing myths of ‘found’ texts

There are a number of possible manoeuvres (and, of course, motivations) at work in stories or myths in which the chronicler founds his/her authority and subsequent prescriptive platform in a ‘found’ text. Such accounts of texts mysteriously and serendipitously materializing can be understood, I contend, as falling loosely into three categories: (a) the text to which the account refers is appropriated or adapted, whether wittingly or not, often from another group or tradition, (b) the text to which the account refers is wholly (and wittingly) fabricated, or (c) the account of the found text is ‘true’ (a discussion of which is outside the purview of the current study).[140] These divisions are not, of course, mutually exclusive. As Kelber cautions, if we approach tradition “with an exclusive interest in historical originality”, we have “misunderstood the operations of tradition altogether.”[141]

In terms of my classificatory endeavours, I suggest a further sub-division within the three categories described above between those myths in which evidence of the ‘found’ text is later produced (even if fragmentary or forged) and those myths in which the ‘found’ text exists only as described and embedded in the overall myth (as, for example, with Plato’s story of the lost city of Atlantis). Here I propose a method of cataloguing the myths identified and collected that pays particular attention to the provenance of (or, better, attributed to) the alleged ‘found’ text (whether that text is wholly creative or attributive or, in more rare cases, actual) in relation to the myth or story in which the details of the found text appear. A catalogue entry for the story of the lost city of Atlantis might, therefore, be rendered as follows:

[140] Even as this writer is of a decidedly skeptical bent and tends to think that very few of these accounts of found texts are ‘true’ in any historical sense, the relative veracity of any given account lessens neither its religious or political efficacy nor its ensuing longevity as foundational for the group in question. One only need look to the story of the ‘found’ Book of the Law (as I do below) as evidence of the enduring weight of some of these stories.

[141] Werner H. Kelber, “The Works of Memory: Christian Origins as MemoHistory—A Response”, 238.

Recovered or 'Found' Text(s): the story of the lost city of Atlantis

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of 'Found' Text(s):** Egyptian temple inscriptions; as related by Critias to Socrates, as told by Critias' grandfather, as told by Solon, as told by Egyptian high priests
> **Alleged Date of 'Found' Text(s):** after 'the flood'; antiquity; in the early days of Athens
> **Genre of 'Found' Text(s):** history

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Timaeus*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Plato; classical Greece
> **Date of Primary Text:** c. 360 BCE
> **Genre of Primary Text:** Socratic dialogue

Category: wholly fabricated; no extant documents or inscriptions describing a city of Atlantis pre-dating Plato's account exist

One possible shortcoming of this suggested classificatory scheme is how to order the entries, especially when the information being gathered is largely of a narrative rather than numeric form. It makes the most sense, I think, to arrange such a catalogue chronologically by the dates of the primary texts in which 'the myth of a found text' is recounted. For practical purposes, of course, it is more likely that any classification of myths in the manner suggested is, or will be, undertaken for comparative purposes (as I do below), in which case the arrangement of selective samplings can be more easily manipulated to emphasize a researcher's particular inquiry.

Labeling these myths as either appropriated or created is no easy task. In fact, the divide between creation and appropriation has always been a vexed and murky one. Below I outline the rationale for cataloguing these myths in the manner in which I do as (a) adapted or appropriated or (b) wholly created or fabricated.

a) Adapted or Appropriated Texts

To appropriate—from the Latin, *appropriare*—means, quite simply, to make something one's own. Examining the evolving forms that goddess cults have taken in the Indic system, Jayant Bhalchandra Bapat and Ian Mabbett assert that, "appropriation takes place when one group adopts an element of practice or belief that was not previously its own in order *to protect or enhance its status* upon the ladder of degree."[142] Integral to such an understanding is a Darwinian sense of natural selection; that which is appropriated is done so in service of survival—in Bapat and Mabbett's examination, the protection and survival of a particular caste. Protection and survival are not necessarily inherently destructive instincts, even as we may tend to decry (at least in the scholarly world) acts of appropriation as unconditionally negative. Appropriative acts, in fact, are evidenced in most forms of social organization and identity-formation. While much postcolonial scholarship pays heed to the evaluation of appropriative acts as incidences of domination and oppression, my work here is of a humbler nature. Rather than attempting to make evaluative assessments of such tactics, I propose (with Bapat and Mabbett) that diverse perspectives are needed in order to make sense of the complex patterns that define the often-fluid relations between social groups. Quite simply, appropriation means "distributing, sharing, assigning, carving-up, dividing or designating."[143] Nonetheless, as Bapat and Mabbett go on to point out, to appropriate can also carry the sense of annexing or usurping or even confiscating from other. Thus, appropriation can convey connotations akin to charges of plagiarism.

A common denominator in the mythmaking enterprise that is the appeal to a 'found' text (whether appropriated or wholly created, and whether nefariously manipulative or more innocently adaptive) is that this particular literary/rhetorical device is used not only in service of

[142] Bapat and Mabbett, 1; emphasis mine.
[143] Ibid., 7

conferring authority on the writer but also for strengthening group identity. Describing such appropriative acts in the Indic context, Bapat and Mabbett argue that the fact that

> Brāhminical religion came to pervade the culture of many or most social groups, is often seen as an initiative by the Brāhmins themselves—a *refashioning* of the religious landscape in the interests of the Brāhminical worldview, giving local cults a subordinate status within a unifying scheme and re-interpreting popular cults as *local* embodiments of the worship of Brāhminical pan-Indian deities prominent in the Sanskrit scriptural corpus. The Purāṇa texts are often thought to exhibit the results of this process, with many goddesses not mentioned in earlier literary sources (and, therefore, likely to have originated from popular oral tradition) being *worked into* the Brāhminical pantheon.[144]

Terms such as 'refashioning' and 'worked into' are apt here, pointing as they do to the constructed nature of these myths. We have a tendency to forget that (at some point) myths are authored, even if that authoring is plural and fluid. While examining authorial intent in text has gone out of fashion in recent decades, perhaps, as Hutcheon urges, "we need to [rethink] the role of intentionality in our critical thinking."[145] Stories, after all, do not emerge in a vacuum. Stories "engage in time and space, within a particular society and a general culture. The contexts of creation and reception are material, public, and economic as much as they are cultural, personal, and aesthetic."[146] Hutcheon entreats us to turn our attention to an examination of the time and place specific particularities from which a text emerges.

For the purposes of classifying, my interest is not in myths in which appropriation happens amorphously over a long period of time but rather in myths in which 'found' texts are deliberately appropriated, often in the guise of coming from the writer's or group's own tradition—that is, I am interested in myths in which the provenance of the 'found' text is feigned for what are, usually, political purposes.

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[144] Ibid., 2-3; emphasis mine.
[145] Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation,* 95.
[146] Ibid., 28.

b) Fabricated 'Found' Texts

Labeling 'found' texts as fabricated documents is just as difficult an undertaking as identifying appropriated sources. In his discussion of the creation of fakes and forgeries during the medieval period, Umberto Eco addresses the semiotics of forgery, unpacking contemporary definitions of terms such as falsification, forgery, Apocrypha, pseudo, counterfeit, and so on to show that our current understanding of such acts places primacy on the intent to mislead or deceive or, worse, to defraud.[147] Eco argues that for medieval thinkers and lay people alike authority was based on the testimony of the past; the writer of any given text could be seen as in league with the entire scribal tradition. The "medieval procedure of recourse to authority has the form of a synecdoche: an author or a single text stands for the globality of tradition and always functions outside of any context."[148] Eco does not state explicitly that such dehistorisizing may be the intent; his point is that while appeals to ancient textual authority arouse us to suspicion, in the past such appeals often went wholly unexamined. This disinterest in a detailed inspection of the texts in question is perhaps best illustrated by borrowing Ricoeur's language of a hermeneutics of suspicion versus a hermeneutics of faith.[149]

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[147] For Eco's full discussion, see "Fakes and Forgeries", in *From the Tree to the Labyrinth: Historical Studies on the Sign and Interpretation*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 223-228.
[148] Eco, "Fakes and Forgeries", 242.
[149] I employ Ricoeur's terms quite loosely here simply to denote a particular stance: that of trust versus mistrust. Ricoeur, on the other hand, was for the most part interested in what he argued was a recovery of meaning, an undertaking that meant that he adopted a phenomenological approach so as to attempt to account for the insider's own understanding of any given position or text free from what he saw as acts of eisegesis, a habit he felt those employing a hermeneutics of suspicion fell into. For a more thorough discussion (in terms of literary theory) of how a hermeneutics of suspicion can be usefully combined with a hermeneutics of faith (albeit one implicitly favouring the latter), see Ruthellen Josselson, "The Hermeneutics of Faith and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Narrative Inquiry* vol. 14 no. 1 (Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Company, 2004): 1-28.

[As an aside, an interesting point of departure for future study might be to examine Plato's construction of the story of the lost city of Atlantis through such a lens. Plato's juxtaposition of a clearly fabricated account with Critias' concomitant appeal to authority could be understood as a discourse on a 'hermeneutics of suspicion', long before Marx, Freud, Nietzsche et al arrive on the scene.]

Eco's examination of how feudal law and practices were sanctioned by custom is instructive for discussions of authorizing practices in medieval Europe—practices that often included recourse to a 'found' text. More generally, Eco's analysis underscores the striking difference between contemporary stances of suspicion as opposed to earlier emphases on (especially ancient) authorities as the bearers of meaning. To illustrate, Eco cites a 1252 CE lawsuit put forward by servants of the chapter of Notre Dame de Paris in Orly against the ruling canons.[150] As Eco recounts,

> [The] canons say the servants must pay tithes because tradition requires it. The oldest inhabitant of the region is consulted and he says that it has been that way 'a tempore a quo non extat memoria'('from time immemorial'). Another witness, the arch-deacon Jean, affirms that he has seen *certain ancient documents* in the chapter which attest to the existence of the custom, and the chapter has put its faith in these documents *out of respect* for the antiquity of the writing.[151]

What is interesting, especially in the context of a lawsuit (a proceeding we are accustomed to associate with evidence-gathering endeavours), is that in the above noted case no one thought to verify either the existence or the nature of the documents upon which the ruling was based. As Eco concludes, for centuries it was simply sufficient to hear from respected authorities that the ancient documents existed: "what was true was true because it had been upheld by a previous authority, to the point that, if one suspected that the authority had not espoused the new idea, one proceeded *to manipulate the evidence*, because authority has a nose of wax."[152]

Eco's final observation—that the wielding of authority belies a certain pliancy when it comes to matters of fact—is one useful for labeling the stratagems at work in myths in which an appeal to the authority of a 'found' text is made. To be clear, attempting to identify whether any

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[150] For clarification, here Eco is using the term 'canon' to denote clergy members who are on the staff of a cathedral, not to denote any collection of laws.
[151] Eco, "Fakes and Forgeries", 242; emphasis mine.
[152] Ibid.

given storyteller is manipulating or manufacturing evidence when deferring to the authority of a 'found' text is an undertaking wrought with difficulties. The myths I identify as cases in which the 'found' text is fabricated are either (a) instances in which concrete evidence for the text in question is never produced or (b) instances in which a close reading of the story in which the myth of the found text is embedded provides compelling clues that creative machinations are at work. Again, the point is not so much to draw attention to the relative truth or falseness of the myths examined but rather to interrogate how these stories function, to show how such myths operate both to confer authority upon the teller and to preserve group identity.

4

Oggetti Mediatori (Impossible Objects of Proof): Part One

> "The best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn . . . to produce an *artificial myth*: and this reconstituted myth will in fact be a mythology."[153]

The scope and length of the present study (the focus of which is primarily theoretical) does not allow for an in-depth examination of the numerous texts from disparate times and cultures that might be classified in the manner I suggest. Below and in the following chapter, I present four examples so as to exhibit the kind of comparative work that might be undertaken based on such a taxonomic scheme. Here I employ the method of cataloguing these stories described above, one that pays particular attention to the provenance attributed to the alleged 'found' text in relation to the myth or story in which the details of the 'found' text appear. Appended to this study is a preliminary catalogue (in its infancy!) of such myths.

Three of the examples have been selected because they are paradigmatic instances, I contend, in which the labeling of these texts as 'sacred' has historically blinded us from recognizing that elusive line between fiction and history. With these myths (and those detailed in the appendix), what we witness at work is the construction and reinforcement of (especially

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[153] Barthes, "Myth Today," in *Mythologies,* 135; emphasis in the original.

religious) authority over and against existing power structures. In the first instance—the story of the 'lost book of the law' as told, respectively, in 2 Kings, the *Temple Scroll,* and 1 Nephi—, it is not until relatively recently (at least in the former accounts) that we have begun to question the existence of the 'found' text(s) in question. In the case of the ninth-century letter, the "Donation of Constantine" (the subject of my second study beginning in chapter five), the 'found' document was deemed authentic for six centuries before it was eventually exposed as a forgery. My third examination is of a fictional story, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.* The juxtaposition of Atwood's novel—an example clearly outside the realm of 'history'—is especially important for recognizing authorizing strategies at work in the 'historical' examples. Moreover, Atwood's novel functions as critical commentary on such tactics. In the case of my final example—an examination of Aelius Aristides' *Sacred Tales*—, not only has the question of the existence of the diaries, medical case histories, and dream sequence narratives to which the writer refers *not* been examined, the overall text in which the story appears (*Sacred Tales*) has likewise been problematically treated as both biographical and historical, treated as a 'faithful' rendering of Aristides' *vitae.*

Study One -The 'Found' Book of the Law

The story of 'the found book of the law' perhaps stands as the paradigmatic case of a myth of recovered documents in which the 'found' texts are subsequently used to confer divine authority—in this instance, the documents a collection of stories and law codes that remain meaningful to many groups to this day. What is further fascinating about the sundry iterations of this particular story of found documents is that each version of the myth of the found 'lost' book

of the law depends upon, borrows from, or otherwise furbelows an earlier myth—an ur-text[154]—of a recovered text: the story of the tablets of the covenant given to Moses as told in the Book of Exodus. The ur-text contains detailed descriptions both of the 'found' laws and of the elaborate means described by the god-figure, Yahweh, to protect those laws and guidelines—the blueprints, as it were, for constructing an ark to house the covenant. In the Book of Exodus, a detailed description of the laws both precedes and follows the account of the writing and recovery of the laws, those same laws now conjured into existence within the text that tells the story of their (written) transmission. Before turning to examine the later myths in which the lost book of the law is found, it is worthwhile to provide a broad sketch of the ur-account—Moses' story of the 'recovered' tablets of the covenant as told in Exodus.

a) The Ur-Text – The Tablets of the Law

Recovered or 'Found' Text(s): the tablets of the covenant/law

Alleged Provenance/Authorship of 'Found' Text(s): Mount Sinai; "the writing of God, engraved upon tablets"[155]
Alleged Date of 'Found' Text(s): 'the time of Moses', c. 1250 BCE
Genre: law codes, behavioural guidelines, and religious observances

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: The Book of Exodus

Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text: a second set of tablets written by Moses, included in the Book of Exodus, which has traditionally been ascribed to Moses; actual authorship unknown
Date of Primary Text: c. 600 – 400 BCE, or later
Genre: 'history'

Sub-Category: constructed/fabricated

[154] I employ the term 'ur-text' and 'ur-account' with some caution. While the Exodus narrative is our only extant account of the 'recovery' of the tablets that detail the laws that have become so foundational for subsequent traditions, that account and the commandments themselves may rely upon or borrow from earlier myths either within the ancient Israelite traditional or as appropriated and adapted from neighbouring cultures, especially Hittite or Mesopotamian. See my comments below regarding the relationship between the laws as outlined in Exodus and the ancient Babylonian Hammurabi Code.
[155] Exodus 32:16. All quotations from biblical texts are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

When we take up the story, Moses and his followers, evicted from Egypt, have been wandering in the desert, seeking the Promised Land. Here, Moses has just ascended Mount Sinai to speak with the god character:

> **18** When God finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant, tablets of stone, *written* with the finger of God. …
>
> Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain, carrying the two tablets of the covenant in his hands, tablets that were *written* on both sides, *written* on the front and on the back. **16** The tablets were the work of God, and *the writing* was *the writing of God*, *engraved* upon the tablets. **17** When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." **18** But he said,
>
> "It is not the sound made by victors,
> or the sound made by losers;
> it is the sound of revelers that I hear."
>
> **19** As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. …
>
> [Upon hearing that the tablets were destroyed], The Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and *I will write on the tablets the words* that were on the former tablets, which you broke. **2** Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me, on the top of the mountain. **3** *No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen* throughout all the mountain; and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain." **4** So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. **5** The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The Lord. …
>
> **27** The Lord said to Moses: *Write these words*; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. **28** He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And *he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant*, the ten commandments."[156]

[156] Exodus 31:18 - 34:5; emphasis mine. Hereinafter, all emphases in quotations from the biblical texts are mine. [Ancient languages, of course, do not employ italics.]

A few things are notable about the ur-account. First is the repeated emphasis on writing, culminating with the god character's divine imperative: "write these words".[157] The import of the written should not go unheeded by a close reader. This theme is woven throughout the biblical texts in which the authority of the written word is at times arrogated, at times sustained. From a rhetorical perspective, the myth of the tablets of the law can be seen to contribute to an ongoing conversation about where divine authority rests: in god's direct (spoken) word or in his mediated (written) word.

Examining this trope in the Book of Jeremiah, Chad Eggleston asserts there are significant clues that speak to such an ongoing conversation, one that "subtly but certainly communicates an Israelite theology of writing and the written," even as that theology is by no means consistent across the disparate biblical texts.[158] For Eggleston, the reader witnesses a push

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[157] A careful reader will note that at times the name of the god character is translated as "God" and at other times as "the Lord". While this project is not a work of biblical scholarship—nor is there space to outline the various hypotheses put forward to explain the numerous discrepancies, contradictions, repeated stories, and lacunae found in (especially) the first five books of the Bible—, scholars agree that these discrepancies attest to the fact that the biblical texts are not a unified whole but rather a collection of stories, laws, and genealogies from various sources.

Scholarship in this regard is extensive. For a brief introduction to source scholarship, refer to Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures,* 3rd edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), especially "Chapter 4 – The Formation of the Pentateuch"; Coogan's *A Reader of Ancient near Eastern Texts: Sources for the Study of the Old Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[158] Chad Eggleston, *See and Read All These Words: The Concept of the Written in the Book of Jeremiah* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 1.

The ongoing conversation regarding a tension between the oral and the written (one seen, too, in the Classical Greek world) is also evident in the later texts that make up the Qur'ān. There we see a theological problem inherent in the Qur'ān's self-description as both the divine spoken word of God and also as 'book' (*kitāb*). In the case of the Qur'ān, William Graham notes that this tension was reconciled by Islamic exegetes who argued that the Qur'ān should be understood "to be 'the Speech of God' (*Kalām* Allāh) preserved in the eternal Scripture of God (*al-Kitāb* or *Umm al-Kitāb*) and written down for human use in earthly exemplars (*masāhif*; sing. *mushaf*)." See Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or Hadīth Qudsī* (Mouton: Mouton & Co., 1977.), 174.

and pull evident in the texts as the Israelite people gradually come to accept writing "as a useful conduit for a divine word."[159] The somewhat convoluted story of god furnishing the tablets of the law to Moses, and subsequently forming a binding covenant so as to ensure said laws are enacted, can be seen to contribute to that conversation. The story communicates and (re) produces the laws therein *and* serves a specific ætiology: to assert the authority of the 'written' in a culture in which orality has previously reigned supreme.

The second thing notable in the story of the tablets of the covenant is the god character's peremptory command for secretiveness. Here we see the writer(s) employ a powerful rhetorical manoeuver, one that insulates and protects Moses (and the story) from further scrutiny. Because the Lord has demanded (in a rather involute manner) that Moses ascend the mountain alone, Moses' authority—his word—is both divinely proclaimed and incontestable. As the myth continues, we learn that Moses remains alone for the proverbial "forty days and forty nights" in which he neither eats bread nor drinks water.[160] Thus, in addition to the necessary stealth and seclusion, his authority is further affirmed by his strict and impressive asceticism.

The third thing of note is the fascinating and somewhat bizarre circumstance that there are two different sets of tablets. Moses purposefully destroys the first set of tablets—those "written with the finger of God"[161]—ostensibly because of the irreverent merrymaking of his followers and because the sight of the golden calf (the golden calf indicating that in his absence the people have been engaging in idolatry) angers Moses. The second set of tablets, this time written in Moses' own hand—a 'recovered' set, as it were—, is then fashioned as recounted

[159] Ibid. See also, ff. 3. For a fuller discussion of the burgeoning authority of the written word, see Eggleston, especially the introduction and chapter one and, again, Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart.*
[160] Ex 34:28.
[161] Ex 31:18.

above. This second set of tablets is (apparently) available for Moses' followers to inspect and (more pertinently for the mythmaker's purposes) available for the reader to examine as reproduced in the text in question. The destruction of the first set of tablets is, of course, fortuitous: 'God's writing' can no longer be examined and Moses' mediated version of the laws now has the necessary stamp of divine authority, authority conferred by the story told. What further fascinates is the circularity of how that divine authority is constructed. The myth—a myth that addresses (and attempts to pre-emptively solve) what may be problematic about the authority of the divine tablets *because* they are mediated through Moses' hand (because they are secondary)—is contained within a likewise written (i.e., mediated) account, an account in which the 'new' laws are now indelibly inked. (As noted above, it is to this vexing conundrum that Plato also speaks.) The ur-story of the tablets of the law is further complicated by the fact that Moses makes a number of trips up the mountain. In fact, the Book of Exodus seemingly includes two different stories of covenants made with Moses at Mount Sinai: one as recounted above and an earlier account recorded in chapters 19-24. The earlier account contains a slightly different set of laws, once again rendered 'actual' within the confines of the story. Here Moses is (again) exhorted to ascend alone up the mountain, this time descending to bid the people, "All the words that the Lord has *spoken* we will do."[162] In an apparent addendum to the text, Moses then goes on "to *write down* all the words of the Lord."[163]

Many possible explanations for the two covenants between Moses and his god have been put forward over the last two millennia. It is not entirely unlikely that here we have two different accounts of the same story, accounts allowed to stand side-by-side by a slightly uninterested

[162] Ex 24:4a.
[163] Ex 24:4b.

editor.[164] According to this theory, we can perhaps see the seeds of an earlier oral myth in the first account in which the divine spoken word was deemed sovereign. More common (though not necessarily more convincing) is the theory that these are stories of two separate covenants: the second story of the tablets (with its focus on the authority of the written word) superseding the earlier covenant in which Moses conveys the Lord's words orally, albeit it with the addendum to 'write down all the words of the Lord'. Regardless, either theory supports the same conclusion: that in the second account, the authority of the written word is upheld.

From an historical perspective, the tablets (or any fragments thereof) detailing the laws given to Moses have never been found; the myth, however, endures. While I am inclined to believe that the story invents the tablets, conjuring them into existence, the fact that we have no archeological evidence for the tablets is not, of course, proof that such tablets detailing ancient Israelite law codes never existed. We only need consider the case of the 1901 archaeological discovery of the c. 1754 BCE stone stele (now housed in the Louvre) that contains the ancient Babylonian Code of Hammurabi as an example. The Babylonian king Hammurabi (fl. 1792-1750 BCE) likewise claimed to have received his code of laws from divine authority, in this case from the Babylonian deity, Shamash. What is of interest here again, however, is not whether such tablets existed but rather how the story of their origin operates to confer divine authority. In the case of the origin story of the Moses' laws, the clever nesting of commentary about the authority of the written word within the story of 'recovered' divine words means that we can read the myth of the tablets of the covenant as itself a myth of a found text; this literary device is then

[164] Unfortunately, there is not room here to discuss various historical-critical approaches to the biblical texts. For the reader unfamiliar with biblical textual criticism, is it sufficient to know that redaction critics—critics who focus on how later editors (or redactors) shaped narratives to express specific theological ends—posit that different versions of many stories are often somewhat awkwardly interwoven in the biblical texts, such as the two versions of the flood story and the two creations stories juxtaposed at the beginning of Genesis. Textual clues (such as the use of different names for the god-character and changes in grammar, syntax, and diction) are employed by both source and redaction critics to support these claims.

replicated (perhaps in homage to the power of this particular ur-story) in later texts within the same tradition.

b) 2 Kings – Finding the Scroll

Stories of textual loss and recovery are a common literary trope in the biblical texts. In the case of ancient Israelite laws and religious guidelines, what subsequently happens to the tablets of the covenant becomes the basis for the later story of the discovery of 'the lost book of the law' as told in 2 Kings (and 2 Chronicles).

Recovered or 'Found' Text(s): the Book of the Law – the Torah of Moses

Alleged Provenance/Authorship of 'Found' Text(s): Moses; according to the biblical text, the book of the law was found by Josiah's high priest, Hilkiah, and in turn delivered to Josiah by the scribe, Shaphan
Alleged Date of 'Found' Text(s): c. 1250 BCE
Genre: law codes, behavioural guidelines, and religious observances

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: 2 King 22-23; 2 Chronicles 34-35

Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text: inconclusive; later considered part of what is labeled the 'Deuteronomistic History'; in Jewish tradition, Jeremiah; Deuteronomistic priests or later Persian authorities
Date of Primary Text: unknown; c. late 7th century through mid-6th century BCE or later
Genre: 'history'

Sub-Category: in all likelihood, constructed[165]

From a narrative perspective, we take up the thread of the story a few books beyond the Book of Exodus in the Book of Deuteronomy, where it is retold in chapters nine and ten. Once again, we witness the interplay between the oral and the written:

[165] Despite a surfeit of scholarship addressing Deuteronomistic History, there is no scholarly consensus on whether Josiah's 'book of the law' is fabricated by the author(s) of 2 Kings (or, less likely, 2 Chronicles). At the time of writing, however, no extant evidence for such a book predating the account in 2 Kings exists outside its (fortuitous) mention in the biblical texts themselves as outlined here.

> [18] You shall put these words of mine in your heart and soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and fix them as an emblem on your forehead. [19] Teach them to your children, talking about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. [20] Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.[166]

The people are implored both to speak the laws and to write them down. Again the laws themselves are contained within the story, here with many additions and revisions, including the divine sanction of the new (as yet unnamed) prophet, Joshua: "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you shall heed such a prophet."[167] Near the end of Deuteronomy, the Lord's requirement for protecting the laws in an ark constructed to his specifications is once again outlined. At this point, the Lord tells us, Moses is close to death and "shall not cross over [the] Jordan."[168]

As the text betrays, the author(s) and editors are not only concerned with how the chosen people will get to the chosen land (and the question of who will be Moses' successor), but also with how the law will be followed and (more importantly) preserved:

> [9] Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. …
>
> [24] When Moses had finished writing down *in a book* the words of this law to the very end, [25] Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, [26] "Take this book of the law and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God; let it remain there as a witness against you.[169]

With Moses' death imminent, we have the necessary narrative introduction (dare one say, foreshadowing) of the idea that the laws are now recorded in a 'book' (or, more accurately, a

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[166] Deut 11:18-20a.
[167] Deut 18:15.
[168] Deut 31:2b.
[169] Deut 31:9; 31:24-26.

scroll[170]) rather than appearing only as written somewhat cumbersomely on the tablets. The import of supplying (yet another) written form of the laws is unmistakable. Here, the writer is careful not to conflate the book or scroll—a new document placed *beside* the ark—with the tablets, which are allegedly housed *in* the ark. This book is then referenced a number of times in Deuteronomy, primarily to attest to the consequences that will result if its laws are not obeyed.[171] (The reader is privy here, of course, to the retroactive construction of laws that meet the known consequences: the 'book of the law' now a permanent 'witness' against the people and their alleged apostasy.) Mention of the book of the law is next made in the Book of Joshua, the final book of the Hexateuch.[172] As Edgar Conrad keenly observes, the book of the law then "*becomes lost* by disappearing from the narrative. … It is nowhere to be found in the stories of the judges or in the stories about the origins of kingship, or for most of the subsequent history of kingship."[173] That is, the book of the law is nowhere to be found *until* the narrator of 2 Kings 14 mentions it, where its power is evoked to defend the murderous acts of King Amaziah:

> **5**As soon as the royal power was firmly in his hand he killed his servants who had murdered his father the king. **6** But he did not put to death the children of the murderers; *according to what is written in the book of the law* of Moses, where the Lord commanded, "The parents shall not be put to death for the children, or the children be put to death for the parents; but all shall be put to death for their own sins." **7** He killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt and took Sela by storm; he called it Jokthe-el, which is its name to this day.[174]

Conrad further emphasizes that it is a narrator who reminds the reader about this book that has effectively "disappeared from the story", a reminder that is providentially proximate to the story

[170] The use of the term 'book' is itself problematic, perhaps indicative of an anachronism in the later scribal recordings of the text, one referencing codices. The 'book' referenced here is more likely a scroll. For a full discussion of the use of the term 'book', see Edgar W. Conrad, "Heard But Not Seen: the Representation of 'Books' in the Old Testament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament,* 17, no. 54 (1992): 45-59.
[171] See, for instance, Deut 28:58-61 and 29:19-30.
[172] See, for example, Josh 8.31, 8.34, 23.6, and 24.26.
[173] Conrad, "Heard But Not Seen", 50-51; emphasis mine.
[174] 2 Kings 14:5-7.

of the found book of the law that will follow in a few short chapters.[175] As Katherine Stott observes, the reader is prodded to think that the book of the law—absent from the story for so long—was presumably "deposited in the Jerusalem temple along with the ark by Solomon in 1 Kings 8."[176]

The early twenty-first century has seen considerable scholarly (in addition to popular, non-specialized) attention directed toward re-examining the story of the discovery of the 'lost' book of the law.[177] This example of a myth of a found text is particularly useful for making the case that it is not until we are able to set aside taxonomies of the 'sacred' that the literary contrivance is unveiled.

The story of the 'recovery' or finding of the so-called 'lost' book of the law first appears in 2 Kings, chapters 22-23.[178] The time is many centuries after the mythic time of Moses.[179] At

[175] Conrad, "Heard But Not Seen", 51.

[176] Katherine Stott, "Finding the Lost Book of the Law: Re-Reading the Story of 'the Book of the Law' (Deuteronomy–2 Kings) in Light of Classical Literature," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30, no. 2 (2005), 154.

[177] For recent discussions of the provenance of the lost book (especially as told in 2 Kings), see Stott, "Finding the Lost Book of the Law" (2005): 153-69; Ben-Dov, Jonathan Ben-Dov, "Writing as Oracle and as Law: New Contexts for the Book-Find of King Josiah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 127 (2008): 232-36; Nadav Na'aman, "The "Discovered Book" and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 1 (2011): 47-62; Eva Mroczek, "True Stories and the Poetics of Textual Discovery," *Bulletin for the Study of Religion,* vol. 45, no. 2 (June 2016): 21-31. For a popular, non-specialized examination, see Chanan Tigay, *The Lost Books of Moses: The Hunt for the World's Oldest Bible* (New York: Ecco, 2016). For a more general discussion of written text and authorizing strategies, see Ehud Ben, Zvi, "Biblical Books and Texts as Self-Contained Sources for the Study of Ancient Israelite History," *Religious Studies and Theology* 25, no. 2 (2006): 211-227; J. W. Wesselius, "Discontinuity, Congruence and the Making of the Hebrew Bible," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament,* 13 (1999): 24-77.

[178] A parallel account of the story also appears in 2 Chronicles, chapters 34-35. For ease of reference, my analysis is confined to the account as rendered in 2 Kings.

[179] Biblical scholars typically assert that we are only truly operating in the realm of 'history' once we start getting to the stories of the reign of David (c. 1000 BCE), of whom there may be extra-biblical evidence (even as there is still no scholarly consensus that such external references refer specifically to David). This topic has been hotly debated. See, especially, the collected papers from the 2005 SBL conference proceedings session, which are somewhat tongue-in-cheek titled, *The Quest for the Historical Israel*: Israel Finkelstein, et al., *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel: Invited Lectures Delivered at the Sixth Biennial Colloquium of the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism, Detroit, October 2005* (Archaeology and Biblical Studies, no. 17. Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

the outset, we learn that Josiah, in the line of David, ascended to the throne at the age of eight. Depicted as a righteous king now in the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah commands his secretary, Shaphan, to go "up to the high priest Hilkiah, and have him count the entire sum of the money that has been brought into the house of the Lord, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people."[180] The taxpayers' money is to be used to help fund renovations to the temple in Jerusalem, part of Josiah's move to centralize authority. It is in the undertaking of said renovations that the book of the law is found by Hilkiah and subsequently entrusted to King Josiah. As brief as the account of delivering the book of the law to Josiah is, some pains are taken to underline the mediated nature of its conveyance. First, Hilkiah announces to Shaphan that he has "found the book of the law in the house of the Lord."[181] Shaphan reads the book of the law and reports back to the king that "the priest Hilkiah has given me a book."[182] Shaphan re-reads the book aloud to the king and upon hearing the words Josiah tears his clothes in anguish. Josiah then commands Shaphan, Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, and Asaiah to go "inquire of the Lord … concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our ancestors did not obey the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us."[183] The group take the book to the female prophet Huldah for interpretation and she advises them that disaster will befall the people of Judah because they have not obeyed the laws as prescribed therein and because they have engaged in idolatry, which the found book of the law strictly forbids. King Josiah, she continues, will be spared from the Lord's wrath. The group takes Huldah's message back to Josiah, who then gathers the people of Judah together:

[180] 2 Kings 22:2-4.
[181] 2 Kings 22:8b.
[182] 2 Kings 22:10b.
[183] 2 Kings 22:13.

> Then the king directed that all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem should be gathered to him. **2** The king went up to the house of the Lord, and with him went all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord. **3** The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant.[184]

Two things are of note here: first, while Shaphan initially read the book aloud to Josiah, Josiah is now able to read.[185] Second, yet another covenant is formed, this one (once again) sanctioned in and by the written word. The authorizing strategies at work are likewise two-fold: the laws are warranted because they are written and what is written is further authorized because a prophet—one understood to speak the will of god—sanctions the written words. Josiah is then able to use the (divine) authority of the book of the law to implement his desired reforms. He subsequently eliminates all forms of idolatrous worship—the "king commanded the high priest Hilkiah, the priests of the second order, and the guardians of the threshold, to bring out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel"—and he deposes many of the high priests whom previous kings had ordained.[186] As well, Josiah dismantles male prostitution rings, removes shrines from various towns of Samaria, reinstitutes

[184] 2 Kings 23:1-3.
[185] One wonders to what extent the story of the conveyance of the 'text' through various intermediaries might be meant to draw the reader's attention to the contrivance. While such an examination is outside the scope of the present study, this particular text might be understood as subversive commentary that impugns, rather than supports, Josiah's reforms, especially as such tactics of embedded, subversive commentary are employed elsewhere in the biblical texts. An example that comes immediately to mind are the conflicting accounts of Saul's reign as told in 1 Samuel, accounts which possibly point to editorial commentary. Such a reading might further be supported by the fact that Josiah, despite the institution of widespread reforms and despite the fact that "there was no king like him", may here be being blamed for the eventual decline of Judah: "The Lord said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there" (2 Kings 23: 27).
[186] 2 Kings 23: 4-5.

Passover celebrations, and effectively moves all forms of religious and political life to Jerusalem. That these reforms are accompanied by violence is not glossed over: "[Josiah] slaughtered on the altars all the priests of the high places who were there, and burned human bones on them."[187] And, it is through these now divinely sanctioned acts of violence that Josiah establishes "the words of the law that were written in the book that the priest Hilkiah had found in the house of the Lord." Moreover, those same found laws secure his place in history: "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the laws of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him.[188] And, lest the authority of the 'book of the law' be further contested, the story of discovering/recovering the book ends with an intriguing rhetorical question, one that references the authority of yet another 'lost' book: "Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?"[189]

The book of the law singled out in 2 Kings "is frequently identified with the Book of Deuteronomy (or an early edition of Deuteronomy) in conventional historical-critical analysis."[190] In a recent examination of the story of the found book of the law—arguing *for* the historical existence of the discovered scroll "as a real artifact"—, Nadav Na'aman provides a brief overview of the "enormous amount of literature [dedicated] to the analysis of the episode and its historical significance."[191] Na'aman notes that it was W.M.L. de Wette (in his 1805 dissertation) who first "pointed out the close correspondence between the Deuteronomic laws

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[187] 2 Kings 23: 20.
[188] 2 Kings 23: 24-25.
[189] 2 Kings 23: 28.
[190] Conrad, "Heard But Not Seen", 50.
[191] Nadav Na'aman, "The 'Discovered Book' and the Legitimation of Josiah's Reform," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 1 (2011), 49; 47.

and the cultic reform carried out by Josiah."[192] Na'aman further acknowledges that most scholars who consider the discovery of the book "a manipulation to push forward the execution" of Josiah's reforms accept de Wette's contention that "the 'discovered' scroll [was] composed not long before its 'discovery'."[193] Nonetheless, Na'aman makes the curious claim that the "*narrator's* emphasis on the *reality* of the scroll as the force that moved forward the sequence of events and its decisive role in the legitimation of the cult reform is in marked contrast to [any] suggestion that the book was a virtual artifact."[194] While insisting that the "majority of scrolls, tablets, and books 'discovered' in antiquity were real artifacts", Na'aman simultaneously concedes that "an author who claims to have discovered an unknown ancient source that contradicts the currently known evidence might expect the request to present it for examination by experts, and would naturally *prepare a copy* of the 'discovered' text."[195] While Na'aman somewhat ironically notes that an author might naturally feel compelled to produce a copy as evidence, he rejects (or does not consider) the possibility that the copy produced may be wholly fabricated.

Na'aman's theory that 2 Kings refers to a previously existing book/scroll is not without merits. In fact, he documents a number of other cases, primarily from ancient Egypt, in which a discovered text can be seen to be a reworking of an earlier autochthonous text or of a text from another culture. What Na'aman proposes, however, does not mean that the myth of the 'found book of the law' need be considered outside the confines of the present study. Rather, if we accept Na'aman's assumption, we can then easily re-categorize the myth of 'the found book of the law' as an instance of a myth in which the found text is appropriated and refashioned rather

[192] Ibid., 47.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ibid., 48; emphasis mine.
[195] Ibid.; emphasis mine.

than wholly conjured within the confines of the telling. What remains problematic, however, is the consequence of Na'aman's insistence upon the historical nature of the discovered book of the law, even as he continues to employ scare-quotation marks around the word 'discovered'. This insistence means that Na'aman understands the larger text (2 Kings) in which the story is found to be, likewise, a work of 'history', a fact he acknowledges in a footnote in which he admits that his "conclusion rests on the *assumption* that Josiah's reform was a historical event and that the account in 2 Kings 22-23 describes it in a *fairly reliable* outline."[196]

While a great deal of scholarship has gone into examining the story of the found book of the law, no consensus has been reached as to the so-called historical nature of the text in question (or as to the historicity of the text, 2 Kings, in which the finding of the lost text is recounted), nor is a consensus likely to be reached unless an extra-biblical version of the book of the law (or the tablets themselves) is (are) found. In keeping with Arnal's discussion of the seeming futility of the quest for the historical Jesus, Conrad argues that rather than "interpreting this lost and found document as supplying information about the origin of Deuteronomy, [we might better] understand the significance of this lost and found document as it functions within its own larger literary context."[197] That function is unmistakable. Within the confines of the narrative, and in the absence of other evidence of Josiah's sovereignty, the myth confers (or conjures) divine authority on Josiah and the laws he wishes to institute *and* (re) produces those same laws.

The story of the 'found book of the law' is by no means the only story of a lost book mentioned in the Hebrew Bible texts. There are numerous books (often called 'missing scripture') alluded to in the texts, including The Book of the Wars of the Lord (referenced in

[196] Ibid., 9: note 7. Again, Na'aman's assumption is not untypical.
[197] Conrad, "Heard But Not Seen", 50.

Numbers 21:14), The Annals of David (referenced in 1 Samuel 27), the Book of Jasher (referenced in both Joshua 10 and 2 Samuel 1, and purportedly 'recovered' in Venice in 1625 CE[198]), and numerous lost books referenced in 2 Chronicles. Most of these 'lost' books have never been recovered and it is unclear as to whether these texts ever existed or if references to such texts serve a solely rhetorical function. What is apparent is that such references function to confer religious and/or political authority, whether on actual or fictional figures. The repeated use of the 'lost' book trope may also speak to or mimic (even if unwittingly) the larger theme of loss and recovery that underpins the ancient Israelite's telling of history. Not only is the temple in Jerusalem (the ultimate site in which divine authority is situated) twice built and destroyed, but that metaphorical death and resurrection—a death and resurrection later performed in the death and resurrection of Jesus—likewise mimics the ancient Israelite experience of being repeatedly conquered and exiled, longing for a return to some kind of homeland. Literary biblical theorist Regina Schwartz suggests the lost book trope is a form of social memory making or memory keeping—is the people's way "of coping with [the] ever pressing crisis of discontinuity. The Book itself is imperilled, lost over and over. And so it must be remembered, recovered, rewritten, and rediscovered over and over."[199] Schwartz is on to something here. That the fixity of a longed-for temple as a centralized place of worship does not endure for the ancient Israelites may be impetus alone for mythically 'fixing' authority in the word . . . or, one might provocatively argue, in the Word.

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[198] For a full account of the story of the 'discovery' of the Book of Jasher, see Yaacob Dweck, *The Scandal of Kabbalah: Leon Modena, Jewish Mysticism, Early Modern Venice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), especially chapter four.
[199] Regina M. Schwartz, "Joseph's Bones and the Resurrection of the Text: Remembering in the Bible," *Journal of the Modern Language Association*, 103 (1988), 117.

c) The *Temple Scroll* - The Law Revisited

Though there is not room here to examine the next instance to the full extent it deserves, this stratagem—the literary device of recovering the 'lost' book of the law—was again repeated in the first century BCE as told in a document known as the *Temple Scroll*, found during mid-twentieth century excavations at Qumran and thought to be one of the remnants of works housed in the library of an ascetic Jewish community living from the beginning of the second century BCE until shortly after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE.[200]

Recovered or 'Found' Text(s): Torah/law of the king

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of 'Found' Text(s):** ancient Israel; one assumes, Moses
> **Alleged Date of the 'Found' Text(s):** antiquity
> **Genre:** law codes

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Temple Scroll*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Qumran sectaries; recovered from cave 11 at Qumran (11Q19-11QT)
> **Date of Primary Text:** first century BCE
> **Genre:** 'scripture', guidelines for religious observance

Category: appropriated as well as newly constructed material

In the *Temple Scroll* we witness the writer (a) appropriating a text that was previously fabricated (or likewise appropriated) as recounted in 2 Kings and (b) weaving it into a new account for similar authorizing purposes. As with the recovery story detailed in 2 Kings, the laws reproduced in the *Temple Scroll* supplement Deuteronomy "filling a perceived gap in the biblical text"; the

[200] The *Temple Scroll* (11QTemple Scroll), which can be viewed digitally at http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/temple, is one of hundreds of written fragments known as the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in the 1940s and 50s in caves at Qumran. For further study, see Dwight D. Swanson, *The Temple Scroll and the Bible: The Methodology of 11qt*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, vol. 14 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1995).

Temple Scroll "fills out what it perceives to be a critical ambiguity in the biblical law of the king … [and] claims to disclose the contents of that Torah, thereby defining the relation of the kings to the priests. It does so by opening a space within Scripture into which it *constructs* that Torah through the exegetical weaving of the verses of Deut 17:14-20 with resonant verses from elsewhere in Scripture."[201] The *Temple Scroll* presents itself as a revelation from god to Moses and operates rhetorically both to question and to reinstitute (now more rigidly) laws of propriety and purity. As in the Exodus account of the Mosaic laws, the scroll includes 'blueprints' for the construction of a temple (never built but much idealized), and again sets forth instructions for housing the ark of the covenant. As Johann Maier observes, the scroll is critical of the design of the First Temple (Solomon's temple). Notable in the proposed design for a new temple is an emphasis on an inner holy space for learned men, perhaps reflecting the nature of the community that produced the scroll.[202]

Just as the scroll discovered in the Second Temple by Hilkiah authorized the reforms inaugurated by Josiah, the *Temple Scroll* implicitly critiques the reigning authorities of its time (centered in Jerusalem) and, in conjunction with other findings at Qumran, sanctions the sect as those who will earn deliverance from coming judgement. Fraade notes that, "such texts are not simply etiological, in the sense of tracing claims of [interpretive] authority back to Sinai. Rather, in dialogically drawing their own readers/students into such interpretive debate they are rhetorically performative and transformative in the here-and-now of their textual

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[201] Steven D. Fraade, ""The Torah of the King" (Deut 17:14-20) in the *Temple Scroll* and Early Rabbinic Law," in *Legal Fictions: Studies of Law and Narrative in the Discursive Worlds of Ancient Jewish Sectarians and Sages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 293; emphasis mine.

[202] The *Manual of Discipline* (sometimes referred to as the *Community Rule*), also found at Qumran, describes in detail the strict rituals for community living adopted by the group. For further information on the nature of the sect, see Fraade (as above); Johann Maier, *The Temple Scroll: An Introduction, Translation & Commentary*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 34 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985); Yizhar Hirschfeld, *Qumran in Context: Reassessing the Archaeological Evidence* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004). Hirschfeld provocatively proposes that the sect was not necessarily strictly ascetic and was much more socially elite than previously thought.

communities."[203] On a more pragmatic level, the scroll reinforces the reconstituted Mosaic laws it reproduces and situates (divinely authored) authority in the officials (self-) appointed to oversee the sectarian community.[204]

d) The Book of Mormon – The Golden Plates

Much more recently, the 'lost' book of the law is yet again recovered—this discovery of Moses' lost book part of the story of the Book of Mormon, itself a recovered lost text and perhaps the most transparent account of a myth of a found 'lost' text told in relatively contemporary times.

The 'found' golden plates that are said to be the Book of Mormon's divine source boast a provenance worthy of Kierkegaard:

> **Recovered or 'Found' Text(s):** *The Plates of Brass*: the five books of Moses and a record of the Jews 'from the beginning'
>
> > **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of 'Found' Text(s):** according to the text, brought by the people of Lehi from Jerusalem in 600 BCE; Moses and, presumably, a later unnamed author detailing Israelite history from the death of Moses to 600 BCE.
> > **Alleged Date of the 'Found' Text(s):** antiquity, to the reign of Zedikiah (fl. 597 -587/586 BCE)
> > **Genre:** law codes, sacred narratives, and prophecies
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> **Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears:** Book of Mormon

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[203] Fraade, *Legal Fictions*, 499.

[204] The *Temple Scroll* is by no means the only account of the period that reclaims the book of the law. The *Jewish Apocalypse of Ezra* (2 Esdras) likewise contains a story of recovering the lost book of the law. This time, the prophet Ezra is directed by god to (re) write the Tanakh and seventy 'secret' books, presumably a reference to the Septuagint.

> **45** And when the forty days were ended, the Most High spoke to me, saying, "Make public the twenty-four books that you wrote first, and let the worthy and the unworthy read them; **46** but keep the seventy that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among your people" (2 Esdras 14:45-47)

See appendix for catalogue listing.

Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text: four sets of metal plates, some engraved by Mormon and his son, the angel Moroni, as well as older engraved plates brought from ancient Israel to the Americas
Date of Primary Text: "in or about the year A.D. 421" (according to the text's self-description); 'found' September 23, 1823; translation published 1830 by Joseph Smith
Genre: scripture

Category: appropriated, as well as newly constructed, material; none of the plates referenced have ever been recovered

This particular story of the recovery of the 'lost book of the law' is multi-layered, appearing as it does in the first chapter of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi—itself a recovered account of the 'lost' Book of Lehi—, and forming an integral part of the (likewise) recovered Book of Mormon proper. The first book of Nephi serves as a kind of genesis story. It is an account of Lehi and his wife, Sarah, and their four sons, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi, and the Lord's command that Nephi build a ship (echoing the Noah story) and cross the waters into 'the promised land', here called Bountiful, (echoing the Moses story). The book is narrated by Nephi, who declares, "I know that the record which I make is true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge."[205] Nephi recounts that his father, Lehi, was given a book of prophecy by angels and that what follows will be a faithful record of the things his father has written, as well as the story of his own life: "Behold, I make an abridgment of the record of my father, upon plates which I have made with mine own hands; wherefore, after I have abridged the record of my father then will I make an account of mine own life."[206] Thus begins the convoluted nesting of stories about a number of different engraved plates, this first set *not* the golden plates engraved by the angel, Moroni, that Joseph Smith has attested to in the preface.

[205] 1 Nephi 1:3, *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ,* trans. Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981. All further references to the Book of Mormon are from this edition, unless otherwise indicated.
[206] 1 Nephi 1:17.

Later, another set of plates is mentioned, this set held by a wealthy Jew, Laban. As Lehi tells Nephi: "behold, Laban hath the record of the Jews and also a genealogy of my forefathers, and they are engraven upon plates of brass. Wherefore, the Lord hath commanded me that thou and thy brothers should go unto the house of Laban, and seek the records, and bring them down hither into the wilderness."[207] Nephi subsequently slays Laban, impersonates him, acquires the plates, and returns with them to his father:

> [10] And after they had given thanks unto the God of Israel, my father, Lehi, took the records which were engraven upon the plates of brass, and he did search them from the beginning.
> [11] And he beheld that they did contain the five books of Moses, which gave an account of the creation of the world, and also of Adam and Eve, who were our first parents;
> [12] And also a record of the Jews from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah;
> [13] And also the prophecies of the holy prophets, from the beginning, even down to the commencement of the reign of Zedekiah; and also many prophecies which have been spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah.[208]

Not only are these found metal plates said to contain the five books of Moses, but they also include details of the entire Israelite history and a genealogy that traces Lehi to Jacob and (by implication) to Abraham, Jacob's grandfather. Although it is Nephi who has found them, the plates containing the 'lost' books of Moses become known as the plates of Lehi or the brass plates. In chapter six, in what seems an unnecessarily complicated aside, Nephi declares that the plates upon which he is now writing will not contain nor repeat the contents of Lehi's plates and will be reserved for 'the things of God'. This aside, however, becomes important for the larger story of Joseph Smith's later tale of his discovery of what are commonly referred to as 'the golden plates', from which the entire Book of Mormon is ostensibly (re)constructed. In a brief explanation about the provenance of the Book of Mormon appended to modern editions, we are

[207] 1 Nephi 3:3-4.
[208] 1 Nephi 5:10-13.

told that four kinds of metal plates are spoken of in the book: the plates of Nephi, the plates of Mormon (which consist of an abridgement by Mormon of the plates of Nephi), the plates of Ether (a history of the Jaredites abridged by Mormon's son Moroni), and the plates of Lehi, which contain the five books of Moses (as described above).

The tale of Smith's discovery of the golden plates has been the subject of a great deal of academic scholarship, lay commentary, and general speculation, including a significant insider industry devoted to disseminating information about the history of Mormonism and to addressing critical opprobrium. Noting that Smith produced "thousands of pages of revelations, translations, correspondence, declarations, discourses, journals, and histories," the online Joseph Smith Papers Project alone houses dozens of documents authored by Smith and cites its mission statement to be "to publish every extant document written by Smith or by his scribes in (sic) his behalf, as well as other records that were created under his direction or that reflect his personal instruction or involvement."[209] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS)—the largest denomination that adheres to and/or loosely follows the teachings as outlined in the Book of Mormon and in the literature produced as a spin-off industry—self-declares a following of 16 million as of December 31, 2017.[210] The Book of Mormon is touted as a work of history, scripture, laws, narratives, and genealogies similar to (and, in fact, an extension of) the collected biblical texts, both Old and New Testaments. The introduction to the version found in hotel rooms across the United States declares, "The Book of Mormon is a volume of holy scripture comparable to the Bible. It is a record of God's dealings with the ancient inhabitants of the

[209] "Introduction," The Joseph Smith Papers. http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/joseph-smith-and-his-papers-an-introduction (Accessed June 7, 2018).
[210] See The Latter-day Saints' official online *Newsroom* statistics: https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/2017-statistical-report-april-2018-general-conference

Americas and contains, as does the Bible, the fullness of the everlasting gospel."[211] An odd, seemingly postmodern construct, the text is unmistakably 'aware' that it is engaged in conversation not only with the biblical texts upon which it relies and quotes but also, I suggest, with late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth century biblical exegesis, especially emerging biblical source theory, which it may be mocking.[212]

In a preface to the first edition (1830), Joseph Smith (or, to be more accurate, 'the author') pre-emptively addresses the reader, speaking to "false reports [that] have been circulated respecting" the work to follow and asserting that the Lord will "confound those who have altered [his] words"—and "will shew unto them that [his] wisdom is greater than the cunning of the

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[211] *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ,* trans. Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Latter-day Saints, 1981; 1st edition published 1830), iii. Readers are also directed to the online site, *The Joseph Smith Papers,* to view electronic copies of the 1830 edition. See, http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830.

[212] This hypothesis is original to the author and one I hope to explore more fully in the future. I am unaware of previous scholarship that suggests that, with the Book of Mormon, Smith (or the 'real' author; see my notes below) may, in fact, be toying with us and playing with what were (at the time of its publication) burgeoning source theories regarding the biblical texts. Evidence for such intertextuality abounds, not limited to the fascinating preface appended to the first (and all subsequent) edition(s) to which I refer below and upon which early reviewers of the Book of Mormon also remarked.

Ever since Mark Twain's declaration that "the book seems to be merely a prosy detail of imaginary history, with the Old Testament for a model; followed by a tedious plagiarism of the New Testament" (111), there has been considerable speculation (lay and academic) both as to the literary 'quality' of the text and as to whether Smith could have written it. See Twain, *Roughing It*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), Chapter XVI, which is devoted to an analysis of the Book of Mormon. While Twain decries the unsophisticated nature of the text, more recent contributions to the conversation (from both LDS apologists and detractors) depict Smith as not educated enough to have produced the Book of Mormon himself.

For a comprehensive examination of whether Smith is the author of the text see "Book of Mormon Authorship" on the website Mormon Think: http://www.mormonthink.com/mormonstudiesauthor.htm.

Avi Steinberg, in his 2014 travelogue retracing the steps of the characters depicted in the Book of Mormon, also suggests that the Book of Mormon may be a more sophisticated literary construction than previously thought. See Steinberg, *The Lost Book of Mormon: A Journey Through the Mythic Lands of Nephi, Zarahemla, and Kansas City, Missouri* (Toronto: Random House, 2014).

Devil."[213] Smith then relays that the account to follow is at a considerable remove from the source, a source he simultaneously "*translated*, by the gift and power of God, and *caused* to be written", all "one hundred and sixteen pages." That first translation—again, one taken from the Book of Lehi, which in turn is an abridged account of the "plates of Lehi, by the hands of Mormon"—has, however, been stolen, "not withstanding [Smith's] utmost exertions to recover it again." Seemingly concerned that a version of the stolen text might be published that does not conform to the one that follows, Smith then relates that the Lord has commanded that he *not* attempt to recreate the first translation but, instead, translate from a second set of plates, the plates of Nephi. Smith is instructed to translate up until he reaches the point of that which he has already translated. (If this story sounds familiar to the reader, it should.) The lost 116 pages that make up the stolen Book of Lehi are then partially preserved in 1 Nephi 1-10 as referenced in 1 Nephi 17. In an aside worthy of Kierkegaard or Cervantes, the preface ends with Smith situating the discovery: "I would also inform you that the plates of which hath been spoken, were found in the township of Manchester, Ontario county, New-York". The preface is then signed, "The Author".[214]

A title page (again emphasizing that Smith is the author and proprietor of the Book of Mormon) and a copyright page (signed by the U. S. District Court clerk, Richard Lansing, attesting that the publication of Book of Mormon is in keeping with an act of Congress that outlines the obligation to publish historical works that encourage learning) precede the formal

[213] "Book of Mormon, 1830," *The Joseph Smith Papers*, accessed January 29, 2018, ii-iv; http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830
[214] All quotations in the above paragraph are from the preface, iii-iv. See, http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830/9.

preface. Lansing's statement is worth reproducing in full, especially as the greater part of it is devoted to quoting Smith's formal, authorizing account of what the Book of Mormon *is*:

> BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the eleventh day of June, in the fifty-third year of the Independence of the United States of America, A. D. 1829, Joseph Smith, Jun. of the said District, hath deposited in this office the title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as author, in the words following, to wit: "The Book of Mormon: an account written by the hand of Mormon, upon plates taken from the plates of Nephi. Wherefore it is an abridgment of the Record of the People of Nephi; and also of the Lamanites; written to the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the House of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile; written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of Prophesy and of Revelation. Written, and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed; to come forth by the gift and power of God, unto the interpretation thereof; sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the Lord, to come forth in due time by the way of Gentile; the interpretation thereof by the gift of God; an abridgment taken from the Book of Ether. Also, which is a Record of the People of Jared, which were scattered at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people when they were building a tower to get to Heaven: which is to shew unto the remnant of the House of Israel; how great things the Lord hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever: and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile, that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting Himself unto all nations. And now if there be fault, it be the mistake of men; wherefore condemn not the things of God, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of Christ. —By Joseph Smith, Jun. Author and Proprietor."
>
> In conformity to the act of the Congress of the United States, entitled, "An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned;" and also the act, entitled, "An act supplementary to an act, entitled, 'An act for the encouragement of learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts, and Books, to the authors and proprietors of such copies, during the times therein mentioned, and extending the benefits thereof to the arts of designing, engraving, and etching historical and other prints."[215]

A visit to popular online resale sites, such as eBay, reveals that there is a healthy market for 'replicas' of the 1830 first-edition of Smith's text. While such copies abound, one of a few verifiable extant copies of the first edition of the text is particularly fascinating in that it includes an owner's signature, the respective prices asked by various sellers for the book, and (fastened to

[215] Ibid., ii. See, http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830/8.

the inside front cover) unmarked newspaper clippings reviewing the book.[216] One such review refers to the Book of Mormon as "without doubt the scariest book published in the 19th century".[217] Another charges Smith with plagiarism, alleging the Book of Mormon is "a free paraphrase of a romance written by Rev. Solomon Spalding in 1816" and averring that

> Smith pretended that the book was discovered to him by revelation and dug up from the side of a hill not far from Palmyra in the county of Ontario N.Y. The claim was made by Smith that the writing on the plates was "reformed Egyptian," which he was unable to read until magic spectacles, which he called his Urim and Thummim, were given to him, enabling him both to read and translate into English. The spectacles and the metal plates have disappeared.[218]

This particular reviewer ends by noting, tongue-in-cheek, the perplexing and ironic fact that the story of the dictation of the book "makes tolerably clear the manner in which the 'Book of Mormon' had its origin."[219]

An extensive note on the title page—bearing markedly similar rhetorical strategies to those employed in the ur-account of the tablets given to Moses by god as told in Exodus—provides the broad details of the 'abridgement' to follow. This 'preface-preceding-the-preface' places particular emphasis on the written records, announces that those records were "written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of prophecy and revelation", and, like the Exodus

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[216] The Joseph Smith Papers website includes digital versions of photo-static copies of the handwritten, original printer's manuscript dated 1823 and a copy of a first-edition text dated 1830. 5,000 first edition copies were produced. While the Joseph Smith Papers online project is run by the Church History Library of the LDS, according to its own statement of intent, it "meets the requisite scholarly and documentary editing criteria, it has earned an endorsement by the National Archives' National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). To ensure accuracy of the texts, project editors undertake three independent levels of text verification for each manuscript, including a final verification against the original."

As with early versions of the biblical texts, the first edition does not include verse numbers, although it does include chapter divisions and an italicized summary heads each book. (Later editions append verse numbers and chapter summaries and are divided in columns, as is common with bibles since the Gutenberg edition.)

[217] "Book of Mormon, 1830"; http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon-1830
[218] Ibid.
[219] Ibid. Again, see my contention in the footnote above that Smith may be toying with us.

account, stresses the importance of secrecy, as the records are now "written and sealed up, and hid up unto the Lord, that they might not be destroyed."[220] Mimicking our understanding of the biblical texts as a disparate collection of smaller 'books', contemporary editions describe the Book of Mormon as comprised of "fifteen main parts or divisions, known, with one exception, as books, each designated by the name of its principal author." Likewise reminiscent of the process of biblical canonization, here we learn that "in or about the year A.D. 421, Moroni, the last of the Nephite prophet-historians, sealed the sacred record and hid it up unto the Lord, to be brought forth in the latter days. … In A.D. 1823, this same Moroni, then a resurrected personage, visited the Prophet Joseph Smith and subsequently delivered the engraved plates to him."[221] While various 'witnesses' closely associated with Smith attested to seeing the recovered plates, the plates were eventually returned to the angel Moroni, forever protected from further examination.[222]

Perhaps the most fascinating thing about any critical analysis of the origins of the Book of Mormon is that church officials have gone to considerable lengths to acknowledge and address inconsistencies and perceived 'borrowing' of the stories found therein. Somewhat ironically, online sites such as Mormon Think or Mormon Heretic (with contributors from both inside and outside the LDS community, many of them choosing to remain anonymous) provide the most up-to-date reviews of critical scholarship, especially scholarship that refutes any claim of the Book of Mormon to the historical. Though largely written by those associated with LDS

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[220] Ibid., i.

[221] "A Brief Explanation about the Book of Mormon," in *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ,* trans. Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), vii.

[222] Appended to the end of the first edition (1830) of the Book of Mormon are two statements. The first, signed by three witness (Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris), states that "an angel of God" showed the witnesses the engraved plates. The second, signed by eight witnesses, alleges that Smith produced the plates for the witnesses' examination. See www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/book-of-mormon.

(either former members or LDS apologists), Mormon Think, for example, states that it aims for complete transparency and presents "information concerning little-known and troubling aspects of Church history and doctrine as comprehensively as possible."[223] The long introductory section of Mormon Think is devoted to responding (presumably fairly and objectively) to the question, "Could Joseph Smith have written the Book of Mormon?"[224] Here the editors present various theories about the historicity of Smith's account of the recovery of the plates, beginning with doubts expressed by Smith's contemporaries. The most compelling theories suggest that the author of the Book of Mormon "was intelligent, educated, imaginative, and well-versed in the Bible, the classics, Roman and Jewish history, and various myths and legends."[225] Comprehensive histories of Joseph Smith, on the other hand, suggest that he "was poorly educated, could not even pronounce difficult words, and was ignorant of some basic biblical facts."[226] Based on extensive textual analysis (reproduced on the online site), the editors of Mormon Think conclude that the early theory that the Book of Mormon borrows extensively from a fictional story by the Reverend Solomon Spalding, published a decade earlier than the Book of Mormon, is the most sound. As with the Book of Mormon, Spalding's manuscript purports to be a history of the inhabitants of America (ostensibly written by a Roman named Fabius) tracing the lineage of both native and 'Gentile' Americans to a biblical ancestry.

Analyzing the rhetoric of Mormon insider scholarship is worthy of a full-length study in its own right, one recently undertaken (2011) by John-Charles Duffy and published online at

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[223] See "Who Are We?" on the website, Mormon Think, http://www.mormonthink.com/whoarewe.htm. Mormon Heretic, despite its name, is likewise an LDS insider site. See https://mormonheretic.org/about-2/.
[224] Mormon Think, http://www.mormonthink.com/whoarewe.htm.
[225] Mormon Think, http://www.mormonthink.com/mormonstudiesauthor.htm.
[226] Ibid. Also see, Howard Davis, et al, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* (Santa Ana, California: Vision House Publishers, 1977).

Sunstone.[227] I conclude my examination of the recovery of the 'lost' book of the law with the example of the Book of Mormon because the subsequent 'faithful' recording of Mormon history is so intricately tied to the way in which we undertake religious studies in the academy, especially in light of our often-abashed self-conscious awareness of our historical, academic relationship to theology. Ever cognizant of (and often sympathetic to) the importance of insiders' self-representations, we nonetheless find ourselves faced with the uncomfortable question of how to position ourselves in relation to histories that are largely told by insiders. The insights of Duffy (himself an insider) in his unpublished 2006 dissertation on the politics of insider-discourse are instructive here:

> The influence of faithful scholarship makes the emergence of Mormon studies a useful case study for examining issues currently debated in the field of religious studies: the insider/outsider problem; the authority of religious insiders' self-representations in the academic study of religion; the relationship between religious studies and theology; the relationship between religious studies and the secular academy; the use of postmodern appeals on behalf of religious perspectives in academia; the place of naturalistic explanation in religious studies. The case of Mormon studies is instructive because it complicates some of the positions that have emerged in these debates, especially arguments made on behalf of expanding the academic authority of insiders' accounts of their religions. Faithful scholarship, as Mormonism's dominant insider discourse, achieved that dominance through a history of fierce contestation within Mormonism across three decades, a history that includes threats of lawsuits, attempts at censorship, covert monitoring of scholars' work by church leaders, excommunications of scholars, and the firing of BYU professors.[228]

As Duffy argues, the Church of Latter-Day Saints uses academic scholarship to expand the church's cultural influence and to negotiate a place for Mormonism in society. The recovery and reproduction of 'lost' manuscripts—manuscripts newly examined, dissected, and interpreted for

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[227] See John-Charles Duffy, "Mapping Book of Mormon Historicity Debates: A Guide for the Overwhelmed." *Sunstone.* Published online October 17, 2011. https://www.sunstonemagazine.com/mapping-book-of-mormon-historicity-debates-a-guide-for-the-overwhelmed/

[228] John-Charles Duffy, "Faithful Scholarship: The Mainstreaming of Mormon Studies and the Politics of Insider Discourse" (Unpublished dissertation: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), 3.

contemporary audiences—is arguably akin to the way in which scholarship itself negotiates power. In this regard, the discipline of religious studies can be seen as a site for "negotiating religions' status and influence."[229] The next example of an appeal to the authority of a found 'lost' document to which I turn similarly calls attention to how deeply embedded religious studies scholars are in defining and negotiating that fine line between theology and religion.

[229] Ibid., 5.

5

Oggetti Mediatori (Impossible Objects of Proof): Part Two

> "D'où vient ce singulier pouvoir, render presents les objets absents, cette 'hantise', comment la chambre imaginaire peut-elle s'imposer à ce point?"[230]
>
> "From where does this strange power come, of making absent objects present, this 'haunting', how can the imaginary room impress itself to this degree."

My next example of a myth of a recovered text is the case of a 'found' letter titled the "Donation of Constantine", which appeared as part of a greater collection of medieval correspondence known as the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals.

Study Two – The "Donation of Constantine"

Recovered or 'Found' Text(s): numerous papal letters, famously including the letter titled the "Donation of Constantine"; legal correspondence

Alleged Provenance/Authorship of 'Found' Text(s): recovered papal correspondence from the reigns of Clement I (fl. 88 – 99 CE) through Gregory the Great (fl. 590 – 604 CE)
Alleged Date of 'Found' Text(s): c. 88 CE through c. 604 CE
Genre: letters/epistles

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[230] Michael Butor. "Le Roman et la poésie," in *Œuvres complètes de Michel Butor,* ed. Mireille Calle-Gruber and Sarah-Anaïs Crevier Goulet. (Paris: Éditions de la Différence, 2006), 8.

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Frankish Gaul; Pseudo-Isidore Mercator (thought to be a collaboration of Frankish clerics)
> **Date of Primary Text:** early- to mid-9th century CE
> **Genre:** papal and legal correspondence widely accepted as authentic until at least the mid-15th century

Category: partially fabricated; the Pseudo-Isidorian anthology is notable in that it includes authentic letters as well as outright forgeries.

While claims of the discovery of a document that is subsequently used to position certain actors to institute reforms and/or to reinforce already tenuous authority are attested throughout history and across cultures, medieval Europe is particularly replete with such asseverations. In his examination of false documents in fifteenth-century England, Alfred Hiatt argues that forgeries produced by (and for) universities, monasteries, and political authorities were not simply acts of deception but rather creative attempts to cloak contemporary concerns with a mantle of the past, a past now reclaimed through the authority of written record.[231] Walter Goffart and Patrick Geary, in their respective examinations of ninth- and tenth-century medieval texts, likewise, construe the past as hotly contested territory: "those who could control the past direct the future."[232]

Described by Johannes Fried as "the most infamous forgery in the history of the world"[233], the story of the *Constitutum domini Constantini imperatoris* (the "Donation of

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[231] For a fuller discussion of forgeries as 'sustained engagements with the past', see Hiatt's full-length study, *The Making of Medieval Forgeries: False Documents in Fifteenth-Century England*, British Library Studies in Medieval Culture (London: British Library and University of Toronto Press, 2004). For a specific case study of the ninth-century Le Mans forgeries, see Walter A. Goffart, *The Le Mans Forgeries: A Chapter from the History of Church Property in the Ninth Century,* Harvard Historical Studies, vol. 76 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).
[232] Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 6.
[233] Johannes Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini*: *The Misinterpretation of a Fiction and Its Original Meaning* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 1.

Constantine") is one of the most well known instances in which a writer (or, here, writers) employs 'the myth of the found text' as a means of reinforcing religious authority. The letter appeared in the early- to mid-ninth century as part of a collection of papal and legal correspondence labeled the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals after Pseudo-Isidore Mercator, a moniker retroactively imposed and used to refer to what is thought to be the collaborative efforts of unknown Frankish clerics operating in the province of Rheims. The collected correspondence, which was widely accepted as authentic until the mid-fifteenth century, is notable in that it includes genuine letters as well as numerous outright forgeries—the "Donation of Constantine" the most infamous of the 'found' letters. The found documents date from the reign of Clement I (r. 88 – 99 CE) through Gregory the Great (r. 590 – 604 CE). Debates regarding the authenticity of the letter attributed to Constantine, specifically, continued well into the nineteenth century.[234]

According to medieval historian Eric Knibbs, this particular anthology of papal correspondence was compiled during a time in which the political stability of the Frankish empire was showing clear signs of deterioration. During the early days of the Carolingian empire, reforms inaugurated by Charlemagne meant that bishops enjoyed considerable political influence, but as stability deteriorated "the episcopate found itself subjected to new and unfamiliar pressures."[235] In 835 CE, in response to an unsuccessful coup against Louis the Pious, who was king of the Franks as well as Charlemagne's son and co-emperor, a great number of prominent ecclesiastical authorities were deposed, not the least being the Archbishop Ebo of Rheims. As Knibbs relates, following the death of Louis the Pious in 840 CE the Carolingian civil war deepened the uncertainty faced by papal authorities. The Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals

[234] Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum Constantini,* 3
[235] Eric Knibbs, *False Decretals of Pseudo-Isidore: An Edition in Progress.* Published online at https://pseudo-isidore.com/. Williams College affiliated. Retrieved April 6, 2017.

materialized in the midst of the melee. Knibbs describes the religious and political purposes for which the correspondence was used:

> [Pseudo-Isidore] strives to shore up the legal protections afforded bishops by enhancing or outright inventing a wide variety of procedural protections for accused prelates. Taken together, Pseudo-Isidore's procedural program extends de facto immunity to accused bishops everywhere. The forgeries also seek to subordinate the Frankish church to the legal oversight of the Roman papacy. While Pseudo-Isidore's view of a Rome-centered Christendom was an ideological conviction that he shared with some of his contemporaries, Rome also functions within the forgeries as a distant venue for appeals at the margins of Carolingian political power. By expanding the legal jurisdiction of the papacy, Pseudo-Isidore hoped to withdraw accused bishops and their trials from the influence of Carolingian rulers and the provincial synod. Finally, Pseudo-Isidore *seeks to establish* the near-absolute authority and autonomy of bishops within their own dioceses, and to protect the property of their churches from the depredations of the lay nobility.[236]

The compilers of the Pseudo-Isidorian documents buttressed the claims of the more contemporary correspondence therein by including the scripts of 'recovered' ancient letters in the collection. The Donation of Constantine's status as the most (in)famous of the 'recovered' letters is in large part due to the authority it accrued over time, an authority it retained up until it was fully exposed by Caesar Baronius in his *Annales Ecclesiastici* (published 1588 – 1607). While the exact authorship of the letter remains a mystery, Fried asserts that the "forger's indulgence in 'Roman' phraseology, which was perhaps intended to give an impression of antiquity, could have been achieved by anyone with a modicum of stylistic talent."[237] The letter describes how Constantine bestowed tremendous power upon Pope Sylvester I (r. 314-335 CE)—and to his successors in perpetuity—in gratitude for purportedly curing his leprosy. That power included authority over the city of Rome and all regions to the west (while Constantine retained power to the east), a division that is said to have led to the subsequent schism between the Eastern and

[236] Ibid.; emphasis mine.
[237] Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum,* 113.

Western Roman empires.[238] It is in this letter, too, that we get the (still subscribed to) story that Sylvester baptized Constantine, who is then said to have converted to Christianity. Examining the surviving textual evidence, Fried concludes that this fiction "transferred worldly and secular power over the whole West of the Roman Empire and, indeed, over all islands of the earth including America to the pope."[239] Fried's seeming hyperbole notwithstanding, the "Donation of Constantine" was used time and time again throughout subsequent centuries as both weapon and defense by both secular and papal authorities—the 'gift' at times lamented, at times celebrated.[240]

Fried's examination of the history of the letter, and the uses to which it was put, is much in keeping with the substance of the present study. As he attests, "[even] forgeries have their place in history. They are not just the product of coincidence, but generally presuppose social or political conflicts, dissent over norms, arguments about the use or control of power, diverging aims or serious omissions, religious controversies and discourses."[241] For Fried, Constantine's letter operates both to preserve cultural memory and to reinforce present religio-political authority. He is careful to distinguish between what he argues are two distinct documents (one tangible and one virtual)—both fabrications, both invested in the creation and preservation of authoritative canons.[242] For ease of speaking about these constructs, he labels the 'original' letter (the mid-ninth-century Pseudo-Isidorian version originating in Carolingian Gaul) the *Constitutum Constantini* and the later version (which, for Fried, exists almost solely in collective memory), the "Donation of Constantine". According to Fried, the latter document was an

[238] An area for further study might be the extent to which the letter, itself, retroactively constructs the 'historical' sources of that schism.
[239] Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum,* 3.
[240] For a comprehensive examination of the various uses to which the letter was put, see Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum,* chapter three, "The origin and fate of the "Donation of Constantine" in the High Middle Ages", 11-34.
[241] Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum,* 111.
[242] Ibid.*,* 5.

invention of the eleventh- and twelfth-centuries, one likewise instigated by canonists and reformers, including Pope Leo IX and Pope Gregory IX. This subsequent 'document'—this recovered but imaginary rendition of the forged original—is what persists, its power far-reaching and immeasurable.

The myth of the 'found' letter of Constantine operates on multiple levels. The word 'forged' is apt here. The letter is forged in the sense that it is something created that has the power to endure, something heated in a furnace forming a lasting bond. But it is also forged because it is fraudulent—any so-called 'original' letter existing solely in its duplicitous reification. Like Fried, theorist Jan Assmann understands the stratagems at work in the kind of authorizing practices apparent in the letter's construction (and reconstruction) as in service to social memory making and keeping:

> We need a term to describe these processes and to relate them to historical changes in the technology of storage systems, in the sociology of groups concerned, in the media and in the structures of storage, tradition, and the circulation of cultural meaning—in short, to encompass all such functional concepts as tradition forming, past reference, and political identity or imagination. The term is cultural memory.[243]

Discussing 'memory' as an analytical category, Kirk and Thatcher assert that cultural memory theory "denies that lines connecting past and present are unproblematic, and highlights the effects of present social realities upon constructions of the past."[244] For Fried, then, the letter is a fiction that "began its triumphal procession as an imperial rescript, the so called 'Constitutum Constantini', only to become in the course of time an image of the past conjured up from memory, that is the 'Donation of Constantine'".[245] What Fried contends is that medieval thinkers and theologians were "fooled by a fake implanted in the cultural memory of Latin Christianity",

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[243] Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory Studies and Early Civilization,* 9.
[244] Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher, "Jesus Tradition as Social Memory," in *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 40.
[245] Johannes Fried, *Donation of Constantine and Constitutum,* 5.

a fake that "crept in through the side door of forgetting, misunderstanding and re-interpretation."[246] This 'recovered'—but now intangible—document directed and dictated political and scholarly action "by prejudices and intentions that were dependent on the interpretation of the text and the memories that were shaped to fit it."[247]

That medieval actors could be seemingly so easily fooled by such forgeries may not sit well with modern scholars, especially in light of our subsequent knowledge of the often-nefarious uses to which the "Donation of Constantine" was put. While I suspect many of us would scoff at the suggestion that we might be hoodwinked by similar tactics, such Procrustean blindness is not an indicator that medieval thinkers were necessarily any less discerning than their modern counterparts. Arguing in the same vein as Eco, Kelber maintains that medieval "theologians, philosophers and historians, far into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were not inclined to entertain interests in the pastness of the past. When discordant records of voices of the past manifested themselves, [these] thinkers were more inclined to harmonize them than to plumb them for historical veracity."[248] What swayed was the power of a certain kind of authority—in this case, papal authority. Whether or not Kelber et al are correct in their assessment of the medieval mindset, this disinclination to examine the historical veracity of any given document or claim has seemingly become anathema in light of our contemporary hermeneutics of suspicion. But arguably such blindness persists when we are tasked with examining myths we hold sacred exactly *because* these myths appeal to an authority to which we are previously disposed. Moreover, any ability to plumb narrative for historical veracity is

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[246] Ibid., 9.
[247] Ibid., 112.
[248] Kelber, "The Works of Memory", 224-25.

complicated by the question of whether the historical can be recovered in any real sense. What can be plumbed—what can be examined—, however, is the relationship of a narrative to its teller and to the time in which the story is told.

Study Three - Pen(is) Envy: Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

> **Recovered or 'Found' Text(s):** "the handmaid's tale"
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> > **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of 'Found' Text(s):** a redacted transcription of cassette tape recordings made by a woman, known as Offred, after her escape from the totalitarian Republic of Gilead
> > **Alleged Date of 'Found' Text(s):** late twentieth-century CE
> > **Genre:** oral diary/journal entries
>
> **Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears:** an academic talk titled "Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*" presented as "a partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, held as part of the International Historical Association Convention"
>
> > **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text**: ostensibly, Professor James Darcy Pieixoto (actually, novelist Margaret Atwood)
> > **Date of Primary Text:** ostensibly, c. 2190s (actually, 1985)
> > **Genre:** ostensibly, historical scholarship (actually, fiction)
>
> **Category:** appropriated/adapted to fit the 'political' needs of the male academics reconstructing it.

My decision to include the case of a found text confined and constructed wholly within a fictional work in the present study is quite deliberate. Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, serves not only as a paradigmatic example of the authorizing strategies at work in 'myths of found texts', it also acts as commentary upon those same strategies, both political and scholarly.

For the reader who is only familiar with the 2017 critically acclaimed television series of the same name (created by Bruce Miller and based on Atwood's book), some background

information about Atwood's novel is germane. A dystopian narrative, *The Handmaid's Tale* is at once a satire, a prophetic warning, a delicious Scrabble game of words, a feminist commentary, a critique of fundamental Christian apocalyptic thought, and a post-Holocaust reflection on totalitarian regimes. Narrated (at least ostensibly) in the first person by Offred (played by Elizabeth Moss of *Mad Men* fame in the television series), the 'handmaid's tale' is actually a tale-within-a-tale, is part of a larger story of a found text. While the story is compelling and chilling in its own right, what is more clever is how Atwood draws the reader's attention to its frame—both to how the tale is told and to the origins of the story—in order to offer a critique of our traditional understanding of 'history making', here exposing what is problematic with an examination of found texts and with the subsequent history of interpretation of those same texts. With the structure of her novel, Atwood further examines the immeasurable influence biblical texts have had both on Western literature and on how we 'do' history, nudging us to be mindful that the reading of biblical texts as (his)tory has largely determined how we have written and interpreted subsequent Western history full stop.

In the dystopian world she inhabits (a post-apocalyptic America), Atwood's narrator, Offred, is a handmaid—a class of women who are reproductively healthy and tasked with bearing children on behalf of others who are unable to do so due to environmental experiments gone awry. As with any Atwood novel, the reader should pay careful attention to wordplay, for Atwood is a consummate punster. Offred's tale is 'oft-read' and 'offered', offered by Offred and (as we shall come to see) offered by the male scholars who have discovered her 'found' texts and

are thus complicit in its re-telling.[249] 'Of Fred' is also a patronym indicating Offred's status as owned.[250] Furthermore, Offred 'offers' herself to men in order to fulfil her role as a handmaid.

Early on in the narrative, Offred reminds us of how much of a remove we are at from her story: "This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction. It's a reconstruction now, in my head … [and] when I get out of here, if I'm ever able to set this down, … it will be a reconstruction then too, at yet another remove."[251] Offred seemingly speaks herself into existence: "I compose myself."[252] She announces that she 'tells' rather than writes, because she has "nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden."[253] Ostensibly, her story is oral and recorded surreptitiously but it is "as if the voice itself were a traveller, arriving from a distant place."[254] The story we are reading is edited and redacted in ways of which we do not become fully aware until we stumble upon the 'historical notes' appended to the end of Atwood's novel, those notes, too, a fiction.[255]

Atwood weaves feminist subtexts skilfully throughout the novel—"whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard."[256] In the Republic of Gilead words have been appropriated by a controlling and paternalistic society. Bibles are kept under lock and key and reading is forbidden to women who, in fact, have few rights. In such a regime, the power of words becomes all-important. The handmaids are controlled by Aunt Lydia's (their overseer's) words; they are "hers

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[249] In addition, 'off-red' plays with Offred's position as the rebel of the handmaids, who are required to don red caps/garments as identifying markers.
[250] The other handmaids are similarly identified by their male affiliations: Ofglen, Ofwarrnen, Ofwayne, and so forth.
[251] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 155.
[252] Ibid., 75
[253] Ibid., 44.
[254] Ibid., 11.
[255] There is a great deal of scholarship on Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.* To the best of my knowledge, no one has yet addressed how Atwood is consciously parodying biblical source theory. Here, I argue, Atwood is playing with source theory (and its history) by asking us to consider what material is included, and what is omitted, in the official 'offered' document, a process similar to the closing of the biblical canon.
[256] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 153.

to define, [they] must suffer her adjectives."[257] The state likewise exerts tight control over words. State officials select the biblical passages that are circulated as part of their propaganda and, in turn, control the interpretation of those passages. The Commander to whom Offred is assigned "has something [the handmaids] don't have, he has the word."[258] When on rare occasions Offred does have the luxury of writing, she conceives the act of writing as that which is powerfully (and even erotically) the purview of the male: the "pen between [her] fingers is sensuous. … Pen is envy."[259] It is men who control the pen, men who hold the power of the word. Here the force of Atwood's pun is unmistakable, 'pen is envy' elided to read 'penis envy'.

Offred is ever conscious of her role as storyteller and of the correlation between what is told and what 'happened'. Moreover, she is well aware that the telling of 'history' presumes an audience:

> I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. … Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance.
>
> If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. …
>
> You don't tell a story only to yourself. There's always someone else.[260]

But, not only does Offred *not* have control over the ending, she does not have control over the very telling. This lack of control is echoed in her role as a handmaid: "I resign my body freely to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject. I feel for the first time, their true power."[261] (There is, for Atwood, no small significance that the words 'authority' and 'author' are consanguineous.) Further, Offred is ever concerned that her story may be merely

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[257] Ibid., 131.
[258] Ibid., 101.
[259] Ibid., 65.
[260] Ibid., 44.
[261] Ibid., 268. Despite Atwood's underlying feminist critique, Offred is desperate for that 'someone else' to exist, is ever conscious that a listener is necessary in order to validate her words. She is all too aware of the slippage between story and reception, aware that it is "in the gaps between the stories" (63) that we live. Elsewhere, in her concern for the fate of what are deemed 'unacceptable' babies, we hear her apprehension for what will be lost if the story—if what is birthed—is abandoned or rejected as unsuitable.

fleeting. She bemoans that what she needs "is perspective. The illusion of depth, created by a frame, the arrangement of shapes on a flat surface. Perspective is necessary. Otherwise there are only two dimensions."[262] But, ironically, the frame that will facilitate that illusion of depth will be provided by the male voice.[263]

Offred's story—the handmaid's tale—is bookended by 'historical notes' that frame the material we have just read. We arrive at the end of her story proper somewhat unsatisfied; escaping from Gilead, our heroine steps into a waiting van unsure of her ultimate fate—unsure because she has "given [herself] over into the hands of strangers."[264] It is a false cliffhanger of an ending, contrived for a certain effect because we know she survives; the text is 'offered' as evidence that she lives to record her tale. Turning the (apparently) final page of the novel, we stumble upon the historical notes in a somewhat jarring fashion. The preceding text, we learn, is "a partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, held as part of the International Historical Association Convention, which took place at the University of Denay, Nunavit, on June 25, 2195."[265] Offred's tale, we discover, is part of a conference paper—the ironically titled "Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*"—presented by Professor James Darcy Pieixoto.[266] The story we have just read has been reconstructed from an incomplete collection of 'found' cassette tapes.

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[262] Ibid., 165.
[263] Of course, it is Atwood's voice (a female voice) that ultimately controls.
[264] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 339.
[265] Ibid., 343. Again, Atwood's wordplay is exceedingly clever; voicing the name of the fictional town Denay, Nunavut aloud we hear 'deny none of it'—Atwood's dig at the scholar's certainty that his version is authentic.
[266] Atwood seemingly does nothing by accident. There are myriad reasons for Atwood deciding upon the name James Darcy Pieixoto for her pompous, self-satisfied academic; for example, a homonym for Pieixoto may be 'pious so and so' (thank you to Dr. Kathleen Venema, University of Winnipeg, for pointing this out). Pieixoto's initials, JDP, may also be a veiled reference to biblical source theory denoting the hypothetical J, D, and P sources first posited by the names appended them by German scholar Julius Wellhausen: the Jahwist, the Deuteronomistic, and the Priestly.

The discordant effect of reading the historical notes, juxtaposed as they are after Offred's story, transforms the 'found' text into an object of study. Molly Westerman, exploring the connection between historical note and history, observes that scholarly historical notes (especially notes describing methodology) usually appear at the beginning of a reconstructed text, setting an agenda and positioning authority. By appending the historical notes to the end rather than the beginning of Offred's tale, Atwood engages "the procedures and problems of history-telling. … This preface-turned-afterword abruptly shifts the ground of a narrative we have already experienced."[267] The text is delivered—as Offred so presciently foretold—not only into, but also from, the hands of strangers.

Atwood's novel, of course, is not history; it is fiction. By furnishing the 'historical notes' as an afterword that reframes the text, Atwood is able to provide meta-commentary on history making, asking us to examine how text and note "shade the other's meaning."[268] As we turn the page of the end of the novel we are still caught in the thrall of (what we think are) Offred's words. Immediately, however, we are forced to revise our assumptions about what we have read. Because Professor Pieixoto makes clear that his study focuses on issues of authenticity and documentation, we are impelled to recognize Offred's account as 'his' story rather than 'her' story. The historical notes render Offred's story a deceit. While we assume that what we have read is the 'found' tale of the handmaid, in fact another hand has made the tale. It is not Offred's tale; it is Professor Pieixoto's.

Introducing his conference paper, Professor Pieixoto describes the discovery of the lost 'texts' to his conference audience:

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[267] Molly Westerman, "'Of Skulls or Spirits': The Haunting Space between Fictional(ized) History and Historical Note," *Clio* 35, no. 3 (2006), 375; 378.
[268] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale,* 373.

> There were some thirty tapes in the collection altogether, with varying proportions of music to spoken word. … The voice is a woman's, and, according to our voice-print experts, the same one throughout. The labels on the cassettes were authentic period labels, dating, of course, from some time before the inception of the early Gilead era, as all such secular music was banned under the regime. … Although the labels were authentic, they were not always appended to the tape with the corresponding songs. In addition, the tapes were arranged in no particular order … Thus it was up to Professor Wade and myself to arrange the blocks of speech in the order in which they appeared to go; but, as I have said elsewhere, all such arrangements are based on some guesswork and are to be regarded as approximate, pending further research.
>
> Once we had the transcription in hand—and we had to go over it several times, owing to the difficulties posed by accent, obscure referents, and archaisms—we had to make some decision as to the nature of the material we had thus so laboriously acquired.[269]

Here Atwood is at her Swiftian best, poking fun at both his air of superiority and the self-congratulatory tone with which the academics conduct the conference. The cassette tapes have been found in an army footlocker.[270] The 'memory' of events they record is deemed incomplete and provisional, and Professors Pieixoto and Wade admit that the reconstruction is based largely on guesswork. Atwood's juxtaposition of Offred's tale against Pieixoto's co-opting of that tale renders Pieixoto's viewpoint suspect. We are reminded of Offred's assessment of the nineteenth-century paintings she earlier describes, "[s]tudies of sedentary flesh, painted by men who'd never been there."[271] Just as Offred conceives of herself as "a blank … between parentheses," Atwood clearly intends for the framing function of parentheses to be emphasized.[272] The male controlled frame defines. Again, just as Offred remembers the pictures she once had in which mother and

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[269] Ibid., 346-47.
[270] That the recordings are on now obsolete cassette tapes is a wonderful piece of irony, placing the twenty-first century reader solidly in the 'future', closer to the academic world of Dr. Pieixoto and his colleagues than to Offred's world.
[271] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 79.
[272] Ibid., 228.

baby are "locked in a frame, for safety", so too does her story exist as framed by a misogynist, patriarchal, and controlling structure.[273]

Atwood provides a number of clues within her novel to suggest that the reader is being nudged to reflect, here, upon the writing and interpretation of biblical texts. At a cursory level, the bible is used politically by the totalitarian regime of Gilead to control its (especially female) citizens. As well, Offred's text is at first oral, then written, then compiled, then transcribed, then edited, and then redacted, just as were the biblical texts. Although we accept Offred's narrative as a unity, she herself reminds us that "it is impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out."[274] The dissonance that arises between the narrative and the historical notes serves to highlight the constructed nature of the story previously proffered. As Atwood underscores, what we "remember now, most of all, is the *makeup*."[275] But, though "several narrative conventions exist in tension with each other challenging the notion of a seamless reality and a unified narrative voice", it is the story that retains power over the reader.[276] "Conventional history", Westerman asserts, "kills everyone off."[277] For Atwood, the real tale is neither ordered nor disciplined: it is emotional and chaotic. She does not, however, allow us to lose sight of the fact that the

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[273] Ibid., 72.

[274] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 155. Atwood was writing *The Handmaid's Tale* at a time in which the texts found at Nag Hammadi (discovered 1945, published (English) in 1977 by James Robinson) had only recently been translated into English and made widely available to scholars. The findings at Qumran (discovered in 1946) were also making scholarly news even as those findings were not published 'fully' (and illicitly, breaking the cartel) until 1991. As a former student of biblical literature (University of Toronto, 1950s), Atwood is well aware that these discoveries brought into sharp focus just how much was left out of the respective biblical canons.

[275] Ibid., 169; emphasis mine.

[276] Karen F. Stein, "Margaret Atwood's Modest Proposal: The Handmaid's Tale," *Canadian Literature* 148, no. 148 (1996), 69. The reader should also note that Atwood was famously a student of celebrated literary theorist and biblical scholar Northrop Frye. Frye was deeply opposed to dogmatic and literal interpretations of the text. He saw the poetic and visionary way in which the Bible attempted to understand our human condition as somehow redeeming history. What matters, he avowed in his introduction to *The Great Code*, is that the Bible "has influenced Western imagination as a unity" (Frye, *The Great Code,* xiii).

[277] Westerman, "Of Skulls or Spirits", 381.

historical notes, too, are a reconstruction—a biased and privileged perspective that is unsettling in its dismissive tone and disconcerting in its mocking of a narrative that Pieixoto and his colleagues deem archaic and somewhat vulgar, even as they insist that we "must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has designed to vouchsafe us."[278]

At the same time that Atwood draws our attention to the relationship between Offred's story and its representation, she calls into question the very existence of the 'found' documents from which the story is constructed. It is Pieixoto who inadvertently first plants the seeds of doubt about the existence of the tapes he claims to have found—Professor Pieixoto who has (with the assistance of Professor Wade) fortuitously "several years *before* … reconstructed a machine capable of playing" the cassette tapes later discovered.[279] Addressing his fellow academics, he describes the possibilities with which they were confronted:

> First, the tapes might be a forgery. As you know, there have been several instances of such forgeries, for which publishers have paid large sums, wishing to trade no doubt on the sensationalism of stories. It appears that certain periods of history quickly become, both for other societies and for those that follow them the stuff of hypocritical self-congratulation. …
>
> Tape like this, however, is very difficult to fake convincingly, and *we were assured by the experts who examined them* that the physical objects themselves are genuine. …
>
> Supposing, then, the tapes to be genuine, what of the nature of the account itself? Obviously, it could not have been recorded during the period of time it recounts, since if the author is telling the truth, no machine or tapes would have been available to her, nor would she have had a place of concealment for them.[280]

The metaphor of planted seeds (the handmaids themselves vessels for male 'seed') gains further purchase as Atwood plays with the problem of the tapes' provenance. Speculating about what *can* be known about the source of the 'found' tapes, Professor Pieixoto cites his own earlier

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[278] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 356.
[279] Ibid., 346; emphasis mine.
[280] Ibid., 247-48; emphasis mine.

paper, “The Notion of ‘Seed’ in Early Gilead”.[281] He holds “no hope of tracing the narrator herself directly”, noting merely that “she appears to have been an educated woman”, and adding (to the conference attendees’ laughter), “insofar as a graduate of any North American college of the time may be said to have been educated.”[282] In a society increasingly sterile, words themselves become seeds, seeds that render the wielder virile. Fatherhood usurps motherhood. As Pieixoto, waxing philosophical toward the end of his seminar presentation and again planting seeds of doubt as to the veracity of the ‘found’ documents, asks: “What male … could resist the possibility of fatherhood, so redolent of status, so highly prized?”[283]

Study Four - Aelius Aristides’ *Sacred Tales*

Recovered or ‘Found’ Text(s): dream sequence narratives; medical case histories

Alleged Provenance/Authorship of ‘Found’ Text(s): Smyrna; dreams sent to Aristides by the god Asclepius
Alleged Date of ‘Found’ Text(s): 130 through 170 CE
Genre: diary entries

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Hieroi Logoi* (*Sacred Tales*)

Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text: Aelius Aristides
Date of Primary Text: c. 170 CE
Genre: fiction (historically treated as autobiography)

Category: constructed

Presented as part diary, part journey narrative, part dream sequence recollection, part medical case history, and part petition to the god(s), Aelius Aristides’ *Sacred Tales* (c. 170 CE) defies easy classification. At the outset, the reader is transported to a point late in the telling whence the

281 Ibid., 355.
282 Ibid., 349; 351.
283 Ibid., 357.

narrator—speaking "like Homer's Helen"—announces that he will "*not* tell all the achievements of the Savior [Asclepius] "nor will he "add that Homeric phrase, 'not if [he] had ten tongues, ten mouths'."[284] Protesting that he could not possibly do justice to the deeds of the god—even should his narrative skill "surpass all human strength, speech and wisdom"—, and proclaiming that he will "submit truly to the God, as to a doctor and do in silence whatever he wishes", what follows is certainly not silence.[285] In fact, the narrator goes on to recount at some length how he has *not* done in silence whatever the god wishes, and what immediately follows his seemingly solemn pronouncements is the (surely facetious) declaration that begins the *Tales* proper: "But now I wish to indicate to you the conditions of my abdomen."[286]

The rationale for classifying Aristides' *Sacred Tales* as a myth of 'found' texts might not be immediately apparent to readers familiar with *Tales*. At a rudimentary level, *Sacred Tales* seems to "narrate about 130 dreams sent to Aristides by the god Asclepius between A.D. 130 and 171 and tell how those dreams proved true."[287] The narrative is ostensibly based on the 'recovered' accounts of diary entries recording Aristides' dreams and on synopses of his medical case history. But, what a focus upon *Tales* as a recollection of dreams and medical histories fails to take into account is the sophisticated narrative self-consciousness evident both in the composition of *Tales* and in the way in which Aristides' insistently draws our attention to that composition. In speaking to the process of recounting his dreams, Aristides (or, better, the narrator) notes that "it is neither easy to recount them nor to fit them into their proper

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[284] Aelius Aristides, "The Sacred Tales," trans. Charles A. Behr, in *Aelius Aristides and The Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968), I:1, 205; emphasis mine. Unless otherwise noted, here and throughout, it is this edition of the *Sacred Tales* to which I refer. For ease of reference, citations are noted by book: paragraph, page number.
[285] Ibid. I:1, 205; I:4, 206.
[286] Ibid.
[287] Lee T. Pearcy, "Theme, Dream, and Narrative: Reading the Sacred Tales of Aelius Aristides," *Transactions of the American Philological Association,* vol. 18 (1988): 377.

chronology."[288] Elsewhere in *Tales,* we are asked to consider the problems involved in any narrative recounting: "Where should one begin, when there are so many different things and at the same time, when all are not remembered?"[289] The narrator reminds us that his particular tale is authoritative and that its recounting is at the behest of the god, Asclepius. Often under the pretence of relating a dream, the narrator likens himself to the god (or gods) upon whom the authority of his narrative rests. Recalling a dream about a visit to the temple of Asclepius in Smyrna, he notices a statue of himself. "At one time I saw it, as if it were of me, and again it seemed to be a great and fair statue of Asclepius. And I recounted to Zeno himself these things which appeared to me in my dream."[290] Addressing his audience in an aside that cannot escape the reader as anything but amusing, the narrator adds: "The part about the statue seemed to be very honorable."[291]

An examination of the history of the interpretation of Aristides' *Sacred Tales* presents us with two distinct, yet seemingly entwined problems: (a) the problematic extent to which *Sacred Tales* has been used to reconstruct a biography of the historical figure, Aristides, and (b) the failure to address, adequately, the question of the genre of Aristides' text—a consideration of which suggests, I contend, a fairly extensive element of parody or satire at work (and previously unappreciated) in *Tales.* As with a good deal of information that we have reconstructed about the ancient world, what little we know of Aristides' life comes from literary sources[292]—the extant selections we have of his own writings and the few works (either of his contemporaries or of

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[288] Aristides, "The Sacred Tales," II:4, 223.
[289] Ibid., II:11, 225.
[290] Ibid., I:17, 209.
[291] Ibid.
[292] It is important to acknowledge that when dealing with ancient *literary* sources one's discussion is invariably limited to the perspective of the intellectual elite. In this investigation, I am primarily concerned with how *Sacred Tales* has been read, both as an historical and as a literary document. It should be noted, however, that extra-literary evidence about Aristides is scant and an interrogation of epigraphic and archaeological information is beyond the scope of the present study.

later thinkers) in which Aristides is cited or mentioned. Many of these sources are fragmentary and some are at a considerable remove from either the time of original composition and/or from Aristides' lifetime. While some recent scholarship has begun to address what appears to be the consciously constructed nature of *Sacred Tales* as a work of fiction, few scholars (if any) have considered that Aristides may be engaged in a parodic undertaking despite ample evidence of similar strategies at work in the writings of the second-century sophists, including other writings attributed to Aristides. Those who do address the literary and rhetorical aspects of *Tales* still fail to consider the possibility that Aristides may be employing a literary device by fabricating the 'recovered' dreams and medical case histories the narrator draws upon—notably, a first-person narrator at whom Aristides may be poking fun. Instead, most scholars assert that there is no distinction between Aristides and his narrator and that he is either a whining hypochondriac or genuinely infirm. At the same time, most scholars maintain that Aristides is a serious and pious devotee of Asclepius, a god to whom he attributes his health and the superiority of his rhetorical skills.[293] That the narrator continues to 'enjoy' ill health throughout *Tales*—and to celebrate, cheerfully, that health despite his incessant descriptions of the diseases and misfortunes he endures and the more oft-times than not *unsuccessful* cures to which he is subjected, —has not been fully explored.[294] In fact lest we miss the ruse, Aristides teases his readers with the rhetorical force of the words he places in his narrator's mouth: "I was filled with strength and lightness, and strung my words together so well that the audience scarcely followed them."[295]

A rhetorician of some fame, Aelius Aristides (117 – c. 180 CE) was a Greek writer and professional orator who lived and practiced in the second century CE Roman Empire. Employing Philostratus' third-century cataloguing in *Lives of the Sophists*, scholars commonly identify

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[293] See below for a more complete discussion of past scholarship on *Sacred Tales.*
[294] I use 'enjoy' with full intention, as the narrator obviously relishes delivering this account.
[295] Aristides, "The Sacred Tales," IV:23, 258.

Aristides as a Second Sophist, a historical and literary designation applied to (usually) Greek writers of the second century who were employed by, or somehow tied to, the Roman empire building machine.[296] Playing with the long history of tension between rhetoric and philosophy dating to debates that began in the Classical world, Philostratus contrasts the art of sophistry with the art of philosophy and sees the role of the sophist to be "to revive the antique purer form of religion and to encourage the cults of the heroes and Homeric gods."[297] This understanding of the Second Sophists as actively engaged in an exercise of retrieval of Classical ideas and tropes informs much contemporary scholarship, as does the concurrent understanding that the Sophists felt free to reinvent/rewrite ancient and contemporary 'history' both in the service of the Empire and (often implicitly) to forward their own agenda. Interpreting the writings of the Second Sophists at face value thus belies the particular position the Sophists occupied locally, historically, and in relation to the ancient texts/ideas with which they were arguably in conversation. At work in their writings is a complicated dance in which we witness an ostensible deference to the social, economic, and political agenda of the governing Roman Empire—a deference, however, that is (a) coloured by the Sophists' position as Greek-speaking intellectual elites earning a living under Roman rule and (b) informed by their engagement with the literary

[296] Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists,* trans. W. C. Wright (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921): 215-16.

By 'second' Philostratus does not mean 'of the second-century,' even as we have come to label the Second Sophists (Dio Chrysostom, Lucian, Aristides, etc.) in this manner. Rather, he labels as 'second' the kind of rhetoric that owes its lineage to Gorgias. Second, then, is what *is lesser in subject matter* than the first sophistic, which is identified by Philostratus as that which "discoursed on courage, … on justice, on the heroes and gods, and [on] how the universe has been fashioned into its present shape." Further, Philostratus advises, we "must *not* call [the second sophistic] 'new'… but rather 'second' [in that it] sketches the types of the poor man and the rich, or princes and tyrants, and handles arguments that are concerned with definite and special themes for which history shows the way" (7). See Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists,* 3-13.

[297] William Cave Wright, "Introduction," in Philostratus' *The Lives of the Sophists,* xix. Wright notes two rival tendencies in the oratory of the period—the "flowery, bombastic," Asianic style and the "purist" Atticist style, in which the author imitates classical writers. He, following Philostratus, places Aristides in the latter group, a group to which Philostratus is more predisposed.

conventions, tropes, and rhetorical and philosophical arguments of a past to which they both pay homage and playfully upend.

Dating the early Roman Empire from the time of Augustus (31 BCE) to the end of Constantine's reign (337 CE), James Rives notes that the phrase 'the Roman Empire' refers "simultaneously to a territory, a form of government, and a period of history."[298] Beginning with a discussion of late fifth century BCE conquests of neighbouring towns and villages, Rives traces the expansion of the city of Rome—an expansion that makes Rome a major power in the ancient Mediterranean world and eventually brings Rome into conflict with, especially, Greek states of the eastern Mediterranean. Rives paints the Greek states as initially 'cowed' rather than conquered by Rome, a distinction that will arguably linger in the Greek imagination for centuries to follow and play an important role in the Sophists' self-presentation. Rives notes that over time local groups began to adopt Roman ways, gradually transforming the empire from "an empire ruled by Rome into an empire of Romans" until it began to collapse in the first century BCE.[299] What follows is a period of Roman rule in which the power of individual emperors is established and extended and in which a 'cult of personality', dependent for its maintenance upon propaganda, emerges.[300] It is in service to (or exploitation of) this 'cult of personality' to which many of the Second Sophists were employed.

Examining the works of Plutarch and Aristides in order to "tease out elements of the complex relationship between epideictic rhetoric, self-promotion, and political involvement", Dana Fields sees Aristides employing his rhetorical skills in an "agonistic elite display", in

[298] James B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 1.
[299] Ibid., 3.
[300] Ibid.

which "his disdain for the Roman political machine is apparent."[301] While the focus of Fields' research is Aristides' orations rather than *Sacred Tales,* her discussion of the rhetorical techniques Aristides adopts in the service of self-aggrandizing raises the question as to what extent Aristides' other works are concerned with responding to, and mocking, his critics. If we read *Tales* mindful of the context in which Aristides is writing, what we find is exactly this kind of mocking, mocking cleverly presented in a narrative parody purportedly about the religious world of healing and medicine, a parody couched in the soteriological language of remedy and cure. From the outset of *Tales,* Aristides' narrator likens the act of submitting to the god to that of submitting to a doctor: "I decided to submit truly to the God, as to a doctor and to do in silence whatever he wishes."[302] Aristides is writing at a time in which doctors are perceived as religious practitioners and in which the definition of 'doctor' has a fluid and highly contentious history, a history arguably still in the making in the second century.[303] The Second Sophists were

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[301] Dana Fields, "Aristides and Plutarch on Self-Praise," in *Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 151; 171.
[302] Aristides, "The Sacred Tales," I:4, 206.
[303] That ancient medical and religious practices cannot be easily delimited has been a topic of much recent scholarship in the field of religious studies, especially in regard to what is meant by 'religion'. While most scholars are now cognizant—following Smith's lead—of what is problematic about applying the conceptual category 'religion' to ritual and everyday practices in the ancient world, nonetheless many have aimed to show what 'religions' might have looked like in the early Roman Empire. For Rives, religions or cults were disparate collections of voluntary associations, local in nature but also influenced by comparable itinerant groups/cults. As such, he paints a picture of what one might argue is a multi-religious empire in which individuals have active relationships, for a vast array of purposes, with many different divine beings who are seen to populate the cosmos.

David Frankfurter depicts the ancient Mediterranean world as "a culture of discrete religious worlds, based in village societies" (165)—a culture eventually challenged by outlying shrines and sites of healing and/or ritual practice operating both in synchronicity and in competition with local worlds. While Frankfurter is primarily concerned with the Classical Greek world, both Rives and Frankfurter identify the tension between local healing and religious practitioners and peripheral, or marginal, practitioners and the on going problem among practitioners of having to demarcate their roles in order to carve out space for their respective professions. Frankfurter further unpacks how the exercise of defining is often a negative one—how categories are constructed by the other "who identifies [a] problem, articulates its scope and nature, and provides effective remedies and *apotropaia* against it" (176). See David Frankfurter, "Dynamics in Ritual Experience in Antiquity: Towards a New Taxonomy of 'Magicians'," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World,* eds. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002): 159-178

likewise engaged in the process of defining (often negatively against one another) and in critiquing and parodying the rhetorical techniques employed by their competitors.

Moreover, the question of the genre of *Sacred Tales* is crucial to an examination of the 'recovered' dreams and medical case histories it is said to document. Past classifications of *Tales* seem almost exclusively motivated by the historical project—by attempts to (re)construct Aristides' biography. In the preface to his now classic translation and discussion of Aristides' *Sacred Tales,* C.A. Behr declares that if this "voluminous and *faithful* record of dream world and waking life … *is correctly employed*, … the barriers of anonymity which surround the inner life" of Aristides will be revealed.[304] Unapologetic for the rashness of his own conjectures—and labeling previous studies as "often inexcusably inaccurate"—, Behr is forthright about casting his work "in the form of Aristides' biography," arguing that the "historical, religious, and emotional background of Aristides' life is an inseparable part of any investigation of the *Sacred Tales*."[305] While an examination of Aristides' life might indeed prove indispensable to an analysis of *Sacred Tales*, that the *Tales* themselves are being used as one of the primary sources for that biography is, I contend, problematic. What further complicates is the insistence by those determined to mine the *Tales* for the 'historical' that Aristides's data are actual recovered records.

Behr is an Aristides' scholar of some note. His 1968 translation of *Sacred Tales* is the standard to which most scholars defer. Accompanying Behr's initial translation are extensive textual notes, a reconstructed biography of Aristides' life, and a number of background chapters and appendices devoted to discussions of polytheism, disease and medicine, dream symbols, and dream interpretation. In Appendix C, "The Tradition of the Aristides *Vitae*", Behr provides a

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[304] C. A. Behr, "Introduction", *Aelius Aristides and The Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1968), xiii; emphases mine.
[305] Ibid.

stemma, in which he traces extant external sources for biographical details about Aristides.[306] While Behr is refreshingly candid about the suspect nature of some of the stories about Aristides, noting where stories seem "too colorful" or when exaggerations cast "doubt on the trustworthiness of information", Behr nonetheless goes on to employ, freely, second (or even third) hand information along with what he has garnered from *Tales* in the (re)construction of what has become the definitive biography of Aristides.[307] Behr's schema (rightly) shows Philostratus' *The Lives of the Sophists* (230 CE) as an account at a chronological remove from Aristides; however, Behr problematically locates Damianus' account (for whom Philostratus is our *only* source) earlier than *The Lives*. Positioning *Fontes* as the other 'early' biographical source is a likewise questionable manoeuvre, especially as the critical comments and literary

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[306] While Behr mentions non-literary sources in passing—for example, "the statue and inscription which the Egyptians raised to Aristides in Smyrna" (142)—, his sources are mainly literary and are (often) second- or third-hand accounts. For instance, he notes how Philostratus (our oldest primary, and not unproblematic, extant source for Aristides' biography) "himself claims that all [his] information (presumably anecdotal) came from Aristides' pupil, the aging sophist Damianus" (142). Thus, the two external 'sources' for Aristides' biography that Behr deems closest to Aristides' own life are Philostratus' second-hand account of Aristides' student, Damianus' musings (an account Behr repeatedly refers to as 'Aristides' biography') and, what Behr terms, the *Fontes*, by which he means literary criticism of, and critical comments on, Aristides' speeches (142).

For more recent discussions of ancient references to Aristides see Christopher Jones, "Aristides' First Admirer," in *Aelius Aristides between Greece, Rome, and the Gods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 253-262 and Raffaella Cribiore, "Vying with Aristides in the Fourth Century: Libanius and His Friends," in the same volume, 263-278. Both Jones' and Cribiore's articles appear in a section of the volume devoted to a study of the reception of Aristides' works. Concerned with reception history, neither Jones nor Cribiore are invested (at least here) in reconstructing a biography of Aristides. In fact, Cribiore is careful to note that the preservation of Libanius' works (from which he examines the reception of Aristides' work) owes much to the fact that Aristides was in favour in late antiquity and in the Byzantine age (263) and, as such, a degree of interpretive fashioning may be at work. Nonetheless, Cribiore frequently cites *Sacred Tales* for biographical purposes, problematically conflating (as, I argue, do so many scholars) Aristides' orations with his *Tales*, as though they are of the same genre. [There is not room here to interrogate the equally problematic question of Aristides' sincerity in his orations; however, for a cursory exploration of his designation as a Second Sophist, and what that might entail, see my discussion above.]

For a discussion of dedications and inscriptions to (and by) Aristides see Christopher Jones, "A New Dedication of Aelius Aristides," *Academia.edu*, unpublished paper, uploaded 2014. See, especially, Jones' references to the work of others in this regard: https://www.academia.edu/7276417/A_New_Dedication_of_Aelius_Aristides.

[307] Behr, *Aelius Aristides and The Sacred Tales*, 142.

criticisms of Aristides' speeches that Behr collects under the term *Fontes* are *as reported* in later tradition.[308] While a good deal of Behr's seemingly exhaustive analysis of *Tales* has not gone unchallenged, what persists is this tendency to treat *Sacred Tales* as an uncontested biographical source, even by those who acknowledge its untrustworthiness.[309] For example, Laurent Pernot argues that an analysis of the composition, rhetoric, and delivery of Aristides's *Tales* evidences a special relationship between "Aristides and Asclepius, between the sophist-patient and the god-doctor."[310] Pernot acknowledges, and even celebrates, Aristides' career as a Second Sophist, yet he takes at face value that *Sacred Tales* is both an authoritative autobiography and the author's sincere recounting of "visions during which the god Asclepius appeared and gave revelations to the author."[311] Likewise, Simon Hornblower labels *Sacred Tales* as "the fullest first-hand report of personal religious experience that survives from any pagan writer."[312] Ido Israelowich also represents *Tales* as a fairly literal account of Aristides' experiences. Israelowich does address the form of *Tales*—including the device of first-person narration—, even asserting that one cannot take Aristides' narrative at face value (at least regarding the author's medical history), yet typical of his analysis are assertions such as, "Aristides meticulously followed Asclepius' instruction to

[308] For example, see Behr's own "Citations of Porphyry's against Aristides Preserved in Olympiodorus," *The American Journal of Philology* 89, no. 2 (1968), 86-199.
[309] Here we encounter an academic blindness, I would argue, that is akin to what is often at work in (even modern) reconstructions of biographies of the first-century CE apostle Paul. While heedful to note (often loudly) that Luke's Acts of the Apostles should not be read as 'history', many scholars nonetheless go on to do just that: to cross-reference Acts when locating and dating Paul's movements and the details of his life in order to corroborate the (retrieved) autobiography they have extracted from Paul's letters (the contents of which, too, may be historically problematic).
[310] Laurent Pernot, "The Rhetoric of Religion." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric,* Vol. 24, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 248.
[311] Ibid., 247.
[312] Simon Hornblower, and Antony Spawforth, "Pulius Aelius Aristides," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 161.

record his dreams, and even at times when he was unable to write himself, dictated the contents of his dreams as soon as they occurred."[313]

Much of the uncritical focus upon the supposed autobiographical details culled from *Tales* means that scholars such as Hornblower, Pernot, and Israelowich may be missing subtleties within Aristides' text that suggest that Aristides is not only assuming a persona while employing the tricks of his trade but also fabricating the dreams and medical cases therein. As previously noted, our sources for Aristides' *vitae* are decidedly limited and thus any reconstruction of Aristides' life is dependent upon the best interpretive tools and means of analyses we have at hand. While I do not wish to disparage the comprehensive and invaluable work that Behr and others have undertaken, what I tentatively wish to suggest is that we may be mistaken when we analyze *Sacred Tales* as expressive of Aristides' inner life and beliefs. This is especially concerning, and even ironic, when so much of the scholarship on Aristides in particular, and on the Second Sophists generally, is devoted to exploring the rhetorical strategies with which they plied their craft.

The question of the genre of *Sacred Tales* presents a number of difficulties. Bruno Keil, for instance, classifies *Sacred Tales* as a series of orations.[314] Keil's cataloguing of *Tales* as six distinct speeches or orations has had a similar definitive effect on subsequent scholarship to Behr's employment of *Tales* as autobiographical. While Keil's labeling of *Tales* as orations has since been challenged—especially by scholars who instead identify *Tales* as a collection of

[313] Ido Israelowich, *Society, Medicine and Religion in the Sacred Tales of Aelius Aristides* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 16.

[314] Much like Behr's English translation, Keil's 1898 Latin translation of Aristides's works is acknowledged as authoritative. Many contemporary scholars, critical of some of Behr's assessments, defer to Keil.

dream narratives or even diary entries—, what many subsequent classifications share with Keil is an emphasis on *Tales* as plural, as a collection of discrete, but multiple reports.[315]

There is much, however, to support a reading of *Tales* as a unified, constructed fiction (rather than a disparate collection of 'recovered' dreams). We, the reading audience—the audience to whom the narrative is being (re)counted and (re)interpreted—, are repeatedly made aware of another audience internal to the narrative, an audience to whom the dreams are reported. That internal audience often participates, along with the narrator and his friends, in the initial interpretation of the dreams and/or diagnoses of his symptoms. To make matters more complicated/clever, there is a third audience (also invested in interpretation) that populates the narrator's dreams. This narrative device of constructed distance from the telling and interpretation of the tales/dreams is the *subject* of the larger narrative to which we (the readers) are audience. Moreover, it is this device that renders *Tales* comedic. Recognition of the conscious construction reveals that Aristides may be far less concerned about piety and devotion to the god(s) than has been traditionally argued. One such example should suffice. Following the repeated refrain, 'no bathing', —the paradoxical remedy proffered by the god after the narrator dreams that he has been in some way befouled—, the narrator recounts,

> On the nineteenth, I dreamed that some Parthians had got me in their power, and one of them approached me and made as if to brand me. Next he inserted a finger in my throat and poured in something, according to some native custom, and named it "indigestion." Later I recounted these things as they had appeared in the dream. And the audience marvelled and said that the cause of my thirst and inability to drink was this, that my food turned sour. Because of this, vomiting

[315] The twentieth-century focus upon *Sacred Tales* as dream narratives can, perhaps, be seen as arising from the deconstructive project—from our fascination with the question of 'what constitutes text?' Whether or not dreams can properly be called narratives and can lend themselves to the kind of interrogation we bring to bear on other texts has been a matter of some interest and dispute. Roland Barthes would, no doubt, include dreams under his rubric, 'numberless are the world's narratives'. Others, however, despite acknowledging that dreams lend themselves to interpretation (à la Freud), challenge the labeling of dreams as narrative, citing structure (dreams do not necessarily begin or end) and lack of thematic interest in solving a problem. For a discussion on dreams as narratives see Patricia A. Kilroe,"The Dream As Text, The Dream As Narrative," *Dreaming,* vol. 10, no. 3 (2000): 125-137.

> was indicated and the Parthian ordered that I abstain from bathing today and produce one servant as a witness of this. No bathing, and vomiting, and comfort.[316]

By treating *Tales* as a mere record of disparate dreams, we fail to address the (constructed) difference between the account itself and the narration of the account, again, a narration consciously controlled. Citing parallels to the Imouthes-papyrus, Pearcy likens *Sacred Tales* to aretalogies (sacred 'biographies' of the attributes of deities) of late antiquity. He cautions, however, that with *Tales* Aristides is not simply mimicking the form but rather is transforming it in an original manner. Both texts, Pearcy contends, "declare that they are a translation or reworking of an earlier document" but, with *Tales,* Aristides "blurs the distinction between reality and his *apographê* [copies of religious texts, as opposed to the originals] in order to emphasize [the distinction] between *aprographê* and *diêgêsis* [storytelling in which an interior world is depicted]."[317]

In Book II (of VI) the reader is prompted to consult the "parchment books and the dreams themselves"—the hypothetical texts upon which the present narrative relies:

> To narrate what came next is not within the power of man. Still I must try, as I have undertaken to recount some of these things in a cursory way. But if someone wishes to know with the utmost precision what has befallen us from the God, it is time for him to seek out the parchment books and the dreams themselves. For he will find cures of all kinds and some discourses and full scale orations and various visions, and all of the prophecies and oracles about every kind of matter. … Now let us begin at some place or other … [318]

For Pearcy, the "facts are there for the curious to seek in [Aristides'] notebooks or *apographai* containing the record of his dreams."[319] But the 'facts' are *not* available for examination; they are

[316] Aristides, "The Sacred Tales," 1:9, 207.
[317] Pearcy, "Theme, Dream, and Narrative," 378-81.
[318] Aristides, "The Sacred Tales," II:8, 224.
[319] Pearcy, "Theme, Dream, and Narrative," 381. Pearcy's work is ground breaking in that he diverges from the work of previous scholars by addressing *Tales* both as consciously constructed and as a cohesive

only accessible as reproduced. What is available—Aristides' seems to assert (or mock)—is the 'inspired' and authoritative interpretation of those records.

Arguing that the more light-hearted aspect of sophistic activity is a force in its own right, Graham Anderson addresses what he sees as an oft-neglected area of scholarship.[320] Anderson observes how the Second Sophist Lucian, for one, uses rhetorical reversal in his biographies to look at what are often the petty foibles and miseries of his characters. In a study of the role of the narrator in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, John Winkler also contends that modern audiences may miss the comedic nature of the Second Sophists' narrative works. For instance, he asserts, so "familiar is the reflex of looking for a god to thank upon the occasion of any recovery that it is the subject of jokes and fables."[321] Arguing that there is no such thing as a genre called *aretology*, but only persons who are *aretologoi,* Winkler asserts that "an aretologos, like a dream interpreter, is a person with a skill to offer who finds his livelihood where he is needed, most often near shrines."[322] The assumption that *aretologos* denoted a 'sacred' office or undertaking has led to misunderstandings when interpreting ancient texts, according to Winkler. What *aretologoi* are known for is their possession of a repository of stories. Their stories "test the boundaries of credulity, relating quite fantastic events, ... sometimes involving the conversion of disbelievers."[323]

Mining connections between Apuleius' *The Golden Ass* and Aristides' *Sacred Tales* may prove a decidedly worthwhile endeavour. An almost exact contemporary of Aristides, Apuleius

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narrative, a narrative that he sees as analogous to the gospels. In this regard, his discussion of the form of *Sacred Tales* is the most nuanced of its kind to date. Nevertheless, Pearcy reads *Tales* as both a serious undertaking by Aristides and as a narrative transformed by religious experience. In this, he follows in the footsteps of those who read *Tales* as autobiographical.

[320] Anderson, *The Second Sophistic,* 169.

[321] John J. Winkler, *Auctor & [and] Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985), 239.

[322] Ibid., 236.

[323] Ibid., 237.

(c. 124 – c. 170 CE) was a Latin prose writer of comedic repute who was also interested in healing cults and their religious rites and practices. In a recent comparative study, Stephen Harrison makes just such a connection. Harrison argues that, in *The Golden Ass*, Apuleius is playing with Aristides' *Sacred Tales,* especially with his depiction of his narrator, Lucius:

> In general, it is important to see the gullible and naïve narrator Lucius, so easily taken in by apparent religious experience, as a satirical comment on the sweeping and self-confident assertions of Aristides, likewise retelling his religious experiences in considerable detail, but questioning nothing of these bizarre incidents or his reactions to them.[324]

What is curious about Harrison's study, however, is his insistence that it is Apuleius who is parodying Aristides. As with much previous scholarship on Aristides, while Harrison is quick to recognize the comedic elements in Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, he does not accord Aristides' *Sacred Tales* the same reading. For Harrison, Lucius is a "telling Apuleian comment on the self-important and self-aggrandising narrative of the middle-aged sophistic superstar, [Aristides]."[325] While Harrison's conclusion that Apuleius 'knows' Aristides' *Tales* may well prove true, what is troubling (once again) is that Harrison reads *Sacred Tales* as an autobiographical work of purported seriousness, failing to hear Aristides' satirical voice or to acknowledge that Aristides, too, may be constructing a narrator from whom he is at remove. What we need to ask, I think, is whether it is possible that *both* Apuleius and Aristides are parodying the often-contentious debates of late antiquity about the function and meaning of illness, especially in regard to those debates relation to sanctity. Further, what may also be at work here are playful parodies of the sophists themselves, parodies of the very profession to which these writers belong.

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324 S. J. Harrison, "Apuleius, Aelius Aristides and Religious Autobiography," in *Framing the Ass: Literary Texture in Apuleius' Metamorphoses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 68.

325 Ibid.

Midway through *Tales,* under the guise of narrating yet another dream (and in a pompous and affected speech in which he dismisses the accomplishments of both Plato and Demosthenes with an offhanded 'whatever'), Aristides' narrator celebrates his own (saving) rhetorical powers by recounting the words of a "distinguished philosopher" who comes to him "inspired and very serious":

> Next he spoke about the great improvement of my speeches. He remembered Plato and Demosthenes, for whatever he remembered each. Finally he added, 'For us you have surpassed Demosthenes in dignity, so that not even the philosophers can scorn you.' The made me feel that everything, which I might do in rhetoric, was less that I should do. … And those present, having learned nothing of the dream before, *but hearing my words* then for the first time, especially approved of their dignity.[326]

Throughout *Sacred Tales* doctors and gods seemingly provide cures and remedies for all that ails and are perceived as saviors, yet what the narrator asserts really 'saves' is the power of words. Reading *Tales* as Aristides' sincere veneration of Asclepius means that we miss the many humourous asides at work in this text and fail to recognize that what is being proffered as saving remedy is not the work of the gods but the self-important narrator's own saving words: "At dawn, my friends, whom I happened to have taken along at my own expense for the voyage, came in haste, calling me, 'Benefactor and Savior'."[327] What surely is Aristides' tongue-in-cheek, playful posture is perhaps most clear in the narrator's descriptions of the various trials he undergoes at the behest of the god. One such passage provides a good illustration:

> When night came, the God ordered me to perform my purgation, and showed me from what. And it was nothing less than by hellebore, as those who had experienced this said, since everything was stirred up by the waves. And he declared everything, how *it was fated for me to suffer shipwreck*. For that reason these things happened; and *how it would be necessary for my safety and in order to fulfill my destiny*, to embark in a skiff and *to arrange it so* that the skiff overturn and sink in the harbour, and that I myself be picked up by someone and

[326] Ibid., IV:20, 257.
[327] Ibid., IV:36, 261.

> brought to land. For thus my fate would be fulfilled. Of course, I did this quite gladly. And *the contrivance* of the shipwreck, which occurred after a real danger, seemed wonderful to all. Wherein we also knew that it was even He who saved us from the sea. An additional benefaction was the purgation.[328]

Here, the narrator's juxtaposition of it 'seemed wonderful to all' with the account of how he must *contrive* to suffer shipwreck in order to meet the god's commands—if not evidence enough of a satirical stance—is delightfully capped by the droll 'an additional benefaction was the purgation'.

Anderson paints a picture of the early centuries CE as a time in which a resurgent sense of the past becomes inseparable from literary production and in which both the impact of a "sophistic ethos" and the "double-think by which educated Greeks [accommodated] themselves to the Empire" forever influenced the subsequent interpretation and production of history.[329] The role of fiction in any discussion of history has, of course, a chequered and storied past. Keith Hopkins asserts that, "serious historians of the ancient world have often undervalued fiction … because by convention history is concerned principally with the recovery of truth about the past. But for social history—for the history of culture, for the history of people's understanding of their own society—fiction occupies a privileged position."[330] Much of the scholarly neglect of the genre of *Sacred Tales* may owe to our contemporary discomfort with how readily the ancients blurred the line between history and fiction—the line itself arguably a modern taxonomic creation anachronistically imposed upon ancient writings. This blurring of fiction and history (or with *Sacred Tales* fiction and autobiography) is not unprecedented in the second

[328] Aristides, *Sacred Tales,* II:14. 226; emphasis mine.
[329] Anderson, *The Second Sophistic*, 105; 118.
[330] Keith Hopkins, "Novel Evidence for Roman Slavery," *Past and Present,* no. 138 (Feb 1993): 6.

century; rather, it is a rhetorical device quite commonly employed.[331] If Aristides is constructing a (somewhat unlikeable) narrator and playing with the form of his text, this opens up the possibility that there may be something more at work in *Tales* than is traditionally recognized. Competing claims for authority by various medical practitioners and the concomitant construction of health/disease as a battlefield of the 'sacred' realm are perhaps being used by Aristides not only to comic effect but also to mirror the long history of tension among ancient thinkers as to the proper vehicle (and subject matter) of the often rival fields of rhetoric and philosophy. If this is the case, the so-called found or 'recovered' dream records and medical case histories of *Sacred Tales* are simply a literary device, a device that allows us to read *Tales* as a clever, funny, and rhetorically sophisticated narrative, a narrative that perhaps points to what human foibles are at work in any exercise of self-promotion.

[331] The reader should note that the second century Greek writers, Celsus (*A True Discourse*) and Lucian (*True Stories*) also engage in playful undertakings that challenge notions of truth. We must, I think, consider that Aristides is likewise engaged in this kind of play with *Sacred Tales.*

6

Swallowing the Scroll

"A myth is like a gun for hire, a mercenary soldier: it can be made to fight for anyone."[332]

In his seminal work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn famously explored the role of paradigm shifts in scientific investigations, noting the extent to which the epistemological frames we construct—and in which we dwell—determine the very questions we pose. His painstaking and thorough analysis of how (ever changing) scientific theories profoundly affect *how* we think is instructive here. Employing the metaphor of a map, Kuhn argued that a paradigm functions

> by telling the scientist about the entities that nature does and does not contain and about the way in which those entities behave. That information provides a map whose details are elucidated by mature scientific research. And since nature is too complex and varied to be explored at random, that map is as essential as observation and experiment to science's continuing development. Through the theories they embody, paradigms prove to be constitutive of the research activity. They are also, however, constitutive of science in other respects … paradigms provide scientists not only with a map but also with some of the directions essential for map-making.[333]

[332] Doniger, *The Implied Spider,* 107.
[333] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 4th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962 (reprinted 2012)),109.

Paradigm shifts, according to Kuhn, result when we step-outside-the-box and approach problems and ideas not only from a new perspective but also with a different set of questions. We see such shifts in thinking operative, for instance, when Copernicus' heliocentric model of the solar system replaces Ptolemy's geocentric model, or when Darwinian notions of natural selection overturn natural theology, or when plate tectonics displace theories of a fixed and stable earth.

Kuhn's work inaugurated a pronounced rhetorical turn in the study of scientific theories, one that called for an examination of "the techniques of persuasive argumentation" within scientific communities.[334] For Kuhn, paradigms, like maps, are indispensable tools of inquiry. As social constructions of so-called reality, however, they reflect the truth-claims, values, and power structures of the cultures that make them. That this results in a certain argumentative circularity does not escape Kuhn:

> Like the choice between competing political institutions, that between competing paradigms proves to be a choice between incompatible modes of community life. Because it has that character, the choice is not and cannot be determined merely by the evaluative characteristic of normal science, for these depend in part upon a particular paradigm, and that paradigm is at issue. When paradigms enter, as they must, into a debate about paradigm choice, their role is necessarily circular. Each group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigm's defense.[335]

The metaphor of map-making is a complicated and powerful one precisely because of the historical and political uses and abuses to which real maps have been put. Literal maps, too, can be understood as authorizing devices analogous to the rhetorical device of 'the myth of the found text'. As Baudrillard would have it, the "territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth it is the map that precedes the territory … it is the map that engenders the territory …

[334] Ibid., 94.
[335] Ibid.

[the map] is the real … whose vestiges persist."[336] This complex relationship between territory and map is, of course, reflective of all human interpretive endeavours.

As scholars, we are well aware that acts of interpretation generate innumerable conflicts; for Dunning, some respond to those conflicts "by yielding to a relativistic viewpoint that undercuts the very purpose of trying to understand, while others retreat into a hermeneutical absolutism that ignores or denies those ambiguities and other difficulties in the text or subject to be interpreted."[337] Doniger likewise observes that as scholars and historians of religious studies, we 'must fight a war on two fronts':

> The first battle is against the covert truth claims of theological approaches to religion that masquerade as nontheological approaches, whether these be self-justifying at the expense of other peoples' religions (bigotry) or self-denigrating at the expense of one's own religion (mindless moral relativism or promiscuous conversion). But the historian of religions must also be on guard against the overt objections of superrationalists, who oppose the study of religion in *any* form or would allow it to be studied only with the sterile confines of an objectivity that is in any case impossible and probably not even desirable.[338]

Borrowing from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" in which Sherlock Holmes makes the famous remark about 'the curious incident of the dog in the night-time' (the reasoning proffered, by Holmes, that the culprit was someone familiar to the dog because the dog did *not* bark when the culprit entered the house at night), Doniger makes a case for the comparative undertaking:

> Only when we view the Christian Eucharist through Hindu eyes, and the Vedic sacrifice through Christian eyes, does it occur to us to ask why the Christian god does not bark at the image of God as a devouring wild animal, and the Hindu dog does not bark at the image of God as a domestic animal who offers himself up for sacrifice. … To borrow the Zen koan, we cannot hear the sound of one hand

[336] Baudrillard, "Simulation and Simulacra," 166.
[337] Dunning, *Dialectical Readings: Three Types of Interpretation*, 3.
[338] Wendy Doniger, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 21.

> clapping. But through the comparative method we can see the cultural blinders that each culture constructs for its archetypes.[339]

Like Smith, Doniger extols the virtues of the comparative method, especially when we are tasked with examining stories others hold dear.

Throughout this study, I have categorized and employed 'the myth of the found text' in a comparative context, as a kind of meta-myth—a myth that, through its artifice, can be used to examine the strategies at work in (especially written) constructions of authority across times and cultures. I have argued (sometimes implicitly, but often explicitly) that one can evidence propinquity between myths in which a 'found' authoritative text is constructed and contemporary, scholarly phenomenological appeals to the 'inner', as practices that function to shield from closer scrutiny what is presented as authoritative. Again, to be clear, I by no means mean to devalue experiences, beliefs, and feelings of connectedness to something other or transcendent—which are real and significant for individuals and groups alike, religious or otherwise. Rather, the argument is that it is extremely difficult either to access or to assess 'experience' or 'the inner' with any kind of methodological rigour. I suggest that one way to examine such authorizing appeals is *as* protective strategies mindful that 'protection' connotes care as well as defense.

Appeals to what is 'inner' and to found 'lost' texts have much in common with Smith's understanding of the how and why of canon formation: that such formations are undertaken to ensure closure. In this sense, 'religion', in its own right, might too be understood as a form of canonization—as a protective strategy, a strategy that identifies and delineates the group from 'other' by constructing a closed, incontestable 'text' as its authority, whether that text be in the form of a myth, or a set of laws, or a divine figure, or in what is presented as 'inner'. That such

[339] Ibid., 136.

strategies of closure take hold so firmly once we begin 'to write' history is no accident. Writing, in and of itself, renders an indelible authority—part of its appeal and its danger—, a vexed problem of which the ancients were well aware.

While Plato seemingly rails against *mythos* in dialogues such as *Phaedrus, Timaeus*, and the *Republic*—rails against what is constructed, mediated, and therefore lesser—, over and over again he constructs his own myths, myths that are intended to replace the (problematic) stories of old. Even as he prefers *logos* (speech, words, account) he knows the persuasive power of *mythos* (story). Moreover, he is well aware of the conundrum: that which he wishes to impart (*logos*) best endures only if couched in story (*mythos*). Plato concludes the *Republic* with the Myth of Er; he concludes his dialogue about the makings of the just city-state with a story. As the story goes, a man named Er dies honourably in battle and journeys to the afterlife, wherein he learns the secrets of the cosmos.[340] *Because* Er's body does not decompose and *because* he does not drink from the river of forgetfulness, Lethe (and, therefore, does not forgot what is 'true'), his account of the cosmos (and of the afterlife) is presented as unmediated. His account is direct and therefore 'true'. That is, Plato presents Er's story as *logos* rather than *mythos*—*logos* as the closest thing possible to a 'true' account as in opposition to *mythos,* a remembered, reconstructed story subject to human machinations and error. The irony, of course, is that both Er and his story *are* constructed. Both gain life—are resurrected, so to speak—in Plato's telling.

Plato's concern with the persuasive power of (written) myth to conjure an imagined, authoritative, 'remembered' past was prescient. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), a student of Durkheim and the scholar who is generally acknowledged to have initiated the modern academic study of memory, differentiated between collective memory—a social construct—and

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[340] In a manner similar to the story told by Plato in his myth of the cave, Er may be representative of the philosopher-king—the philosopher who is in control of the 'true' account, even if his account is not accepted as such.

history—an objective science. Following in the footsteps of Halbwachs, a growing contingent of scholars has produced a good deal of scholarship dealing with cultural memory.[341] Many of them have expressed doubts as to whether historical meaning is even a viable proposition. Discussing Christian origins' scholarship, Kelber argues that since "the presence of the past is always the result of mediated transactions, the past is neither retrievable nor preservable as a historically fresh and memorially [sic] untouched reality."[342] Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) perhaps anticipated the turn to cultural memory studies, emphasizing that historical thinking must take into account its own historicity: "A hermeneutics adequate to the subject matter would have to demonstrate the reality and efficacy of history within understanding itself."[343] Jan Assmann avers that the "present is 'haunted' by the past and the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present."[344] Astrid Erll likewise maintains that whatever "we know about the world, we know through media and in dependence on media. The images of the past which

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[341] See Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); "Memory, Individual and Collective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis,* eds. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 210–24; Jan Assman, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique,* vol. 65 (1995): 125-133; "Communicative and Cultural Memory," *Cultural Memory Studies* (2008): 109-18; *Collective Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); *Religion and Cultural Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture,* trans. S. B. Young (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Patrick J. Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Kelber, *Imprints, voiceprints, and footprints of memory*; Ann Rigney, "The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing," *Cultural Memory Studies* (2013): 345-53; Mark Tamm, "Beyond History and Memory: New Perspectives in Memory Studies," *History Compass,* 11/6 (2013).

[342] Kelber, "The Works of Memory", 226. Kelber's discussion of the Jesus tradition as articulated in the respective gospels is insightful here. For Kelber, Jesus is converted into a "memorially accessible figure"; this is accomplished not by recourse to memory "but to the distant memory of the group. …We encounter here what may be called the archaeology of memory, which operates not merely selectively, [in this case] with regard to Jesus and his subsequent tradition, but archaically, in using a venerable, deep past for present identification and mythicization" (242).

[343] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum) 299.

[344] Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9.

circulate in memory culture are thus not extrinsic to media."[345] Mark Tamm echoes Erll's observations; "shared memories of the past are not accidentally produced by social groups but a consequence of cultural mediation, primarily of textualisation and visualization."[346] Tamm contends that the current popularity of cultural memory studies presents historians with serious challenges, challenges that can be seen to have emerged in the nineteenth century when 'history' began to define itself as a discipline. History, for Tamm, "refers to a specific way of studying and representing the past that has evolved in Western culture over the last few centuries, [while] 'memory' signifies the general relations of the past and the present in a particular socio-cultural context."[347] History is, thus, a subset of cultural memory. Tamm is worth quoting in full:

> In terms of cultural memory, history is a cultural form exactly like, for instance, religion, literature, art or myth, all of which contribute to the production of cultural memory. And the writing of history should be treated as one of the many media of cultural memory, such as novels, films, rituals or architecture. The reduction of history writing to a mere medium of cultural history through which a certain social group shapes its relations with the past does not mean that history writing should give up its scientific pretensions or the epistemological attitudes and disciplinary techniques it has evolved over the past couple of centuries. History writing is simply a very specific medium of cultural memory with its own rules and traditions—one of the most important for as comprehensive an understanding of the past as possible, but certainly not the only or necessarily the most influential one.[348]

For Tamm, the recognition of this shift in the discipline of history has given rise to a new approach, one somewhat awkwardly coined 'mnemohistory' by Jan Assmann. From the perspective of mnemohistory, "the key question of historical research is not about the original significance of past events [something we may never be able to satisfactorily grasp], but rather

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[345] Erll, *Memory in Culture,* 114.
[346] Tamm, "Beyond History and Memory", 461.
[347] Ibid., 463.
[348] Ibid.

about how these events emerge in specific instances and are then translated over time."[349] Rather than focusing upon unanswerable questions about what really transpired, mnemohistory allows the scholar to focus upon "how particular ways of construing the past enable later communities to constitute and sustain themselves."[350]

For scholars such as Tamm and Assmann, the "concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image."[351] Understood through the lens of cultural memory theory, 'the myth of the found text' operates in exactly this manner, as a stabilizing and authorizing force that confers authority upon the teller. That such 'mythologizing' can be weaponized is not beside the point. In *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt discusses the uses and abuses to which 'history' has been (and can be) put. For Arendt, it was "the elite's conviction that history 'was a forgery anyway' that brought about the demoralizing fascination in the possibility that gigantic lies and monstrous falsehoods can eventually be established as unquestioned facts. That man (sic) may be free to change his own past at will, and that the difference between truth and falsehood may cease to be objective and become a mere matter of power and cleverness, of pressure and infinite repetition."[352] Examining the 'unechte Korrespondenz' or fake foreign correspondents' letters in nineteenth-century Germany in which newspapers hired staff writers to pretend they were sending dispatches from abroad, Petra McGillen argues that the twenty-first century proliferation of fake news owes a good deal of its viability to similar strategies. One such case is of Theodor Fontane, a German correspondent employed by the ultra-conservation Berlin newspaper, the *Kreuzzeitung*. According to McGillen,

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[349] Ibid., 464.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity",132.
[352] Hannah Arendt, as quoted by Elena Guisti, "Altar of Facts: Truth and Rumor in the Age of Berlusconi," *Eidolon*, https://eidolon.pub/altar-of-facts-dca16d0ef2b5

"the paper assigned him to cover England, and for a decade, he published story after story 'from' London, spellbinding his readers with 'personal' accounts of dramatic events, like the devastating Tooley Street Fire of 1861. But during the entire decade, he never actually crossed the English Channel."[353] For McGillen, Fontane's correspondence inaugurates the process of fake news reporting. She describes his process:

> By the time he decided to write about the fire, it had already been raging for days, and reports about it were in virtually all the papers.
>
> Fontane sifted through these existing accounts to get a sense for what readers already knew about the catastrophe. He cut up the old articles, picked out the most relevant passages, and glued them together for his own account—this becomes clear from mapping his piece onto these sources. Then, to elevate the drama, he wrote some new passages with details and characters that were completely fabricated, such as a 'companion' with special privileges who allegedly helped him cross the police cordon roping off the burning area.[354]

Today's fake news stories succeed, McGillen argues, because they are constructed (appropriated!) from within a "closed mass media system. … They recombine news bits, names, images, people and sites that we have already seen in similar contexts. Once this backdrop of credibility has been established, the sensational, made-up elements can be introduced all the more convincingly."[355] The nefarious machinations involved in the creation of fake news notwithstanding, Lincoln concludes that our dismissive attitude toward myth owes much to the fact that Plato "stigmatized the category, marking it with the sign of the juvenile and irrational."[356] While I am not completely convinced that Plato disparaged myth to the extent that Lincoln contends, Lincoln's point that myths are powerful ideological narratives that reflect back on the storytellers themselves has guided this study.

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[353] Petra S. McGillen, "Techniques of 19th-Century Fake News Reporter," *The Conversation* (April 5, 2017), https://theconversation.com/techniques-of-19th-century-fake-news-reporter-teach-us-why-we-fall-for-it-today-75583.
[354] Ibid.
[355] Ibid.
[356] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 209.

The extent to which 'religion' itself depends upon the canon-precursor myth-making of the kind I have examined—myth-making in which authority is conjured and constructed as incontestable—is a delicate question, one that the study of 'new' religions brings to the fore. Carole Cusack argues that the contemporary study of invented religions "has the potential to affect the discipline of religious studies through its challenge to the normative definitions employed by scholar."[357] Lonnie Kliever asserts that, "the social structures and cognitive standards of modern societies have conspired to unmask the illusory character of all sacral lifeworlds", so much so that we now understand all religious belief systems to have their origins in the fictional.[358] For Cusack, invented religions betray much about our postmodern predicament and our understandings of historiography; as such they "are the authentic religious manifestation of the [present] age", are the "sites of meaning-making in which play and seriousness are united."[359]

Chapter three of the Book of Ezekiel begins with a curious and telling anecdote, one subsequently referred to as 'the swallowing of the scroll'. The prophet Ezekiel is the teller:

> **2** I looked, and a hand was stretched out to me, and a written scroll was in it. **10** He spread it before me; it had writing on the front and on the back, and written on it were words of lamentation and mourning and woe.
> **3** He said to me, O mortal, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. **2** So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll

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[357] Carole M. Cusack, "Fiction into Religion: Imagination, Other Worlds, and Play in the Formation of Community," *Religion*, vol. 46, no. 4 (2016), 374.

Cusack includes things such as "the Tribunal of the Sidhe, a group who used J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy as scripture (Davidsen 2012, 191–92), Jediism, based on George Lucas' *Star Wars* film trilogy, and Matrixism, based on Larry and Andy Wachowski's *The Matrix* film trilogy (Cusack 2010, 113–40)" as examples of invented religions (373-74).

[358] Lonnie D. Kliever, "Fictive Religion: Rhetoric and Play," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* vol. 49, no. 4 (1981), 663.
[359] Cusack, "Fiction into Religion," 375.

> to eat. **3** He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it; and in my mouth it was as sweet as honey. **4** He said to me: Mortal, go to the house of Israel and speak my very words to them.[360]

Here, Ezekiel's scroll—the inscribed myth—becomes, in the swallowing, quite literally "a moveable feast".[361] The ingestion of the scroll (an ingestion, incidentally, commanded by the god figure) means the scroll can no longer be challenged or contested. We might understand this act as analogous to the way in which an errant youngster ingests a note he/she is caught passing in a classroom, ingests the note so that it cannot be 'read' aloud and, thus, be subject either to question or ridicule. A metaphorical swallowing achieves the same end: the scroll is declared authoritative—and it is subsequently presented as so—but it is shielded from further critique or interrogation because it is now in the domain of the 'inner'; it is only accessible through the writer's description.[362]

Ezekiel's story of the swallowing of the scroll can be read as part of an emerging 'theology' of the written word. In his study of the Book of Jeremiah, Eggleston argues that Jeremiah's narrative—one similarly invested in evolving understandings of the power of the word—lays the groundwork for "an incipient concept of sacred text" and the concomitant "construction of an audience that receives a written text via a skilled lector."[363] The concept of text as sacred, Eggleston observes, "implies that a theology exists to underwrite it and that a

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[360] Ezekiel 3:1-4.

[361] Ernest Hemingway will later draw our attention to writing—to text itself—as a moveable feast. While Hemingway explicitly labels Paris 'a moveable feast', implicit in his appellation is that it is the written text that makes Paris so. See Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (New York: MacMillan, 1964).

[362] For a comprehensive examination of the rhetorical function(s) of the story of Ezekiel swallowing the scroll see Ellen F. Davis, *Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy* (Worcester: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989).

Davis makes the argument that Ezekiel is reshaping prophetic tradition by making the medium of prophecy the text rather than the person of the prophet. In other words, Davis argues that Ezekiel 'sees the writing on the wall' and realizes that a textual revolution is taking place in which the written word will supplant the oral.

[363] Eggleston, *See and Read All these Words,* 3.

community exists both to compose and to receive texts without suspicion."[364] The text—the word—becomes a "transcendent ontic marker of absolute significance,"[365] a paradigm shift that will forever grip the Western world.

The literary or rhetorical device of conjuring a 'found' text plays heavily on and with the authority of the written word as of absolute significance, insulating the myth from close examination because its authority rests in something that is presented as beyond question. When employed in fiction, such devices draw attention to themselves, enabling us to reflect upon and appreciate the artifice. "Fiction, one may say, is a kind of game, in which both participants share in a willed pretense, treating what is unreal as real, and what is invented as actual."[366] When put to political use, such strategies may betray more nefarious motives or be, more simply, tried and true rhetorical methods that are part and parcel of the game of persuasion. Problems arise, however, when we conflate the two, when we become blinded by that which presents itself to us as beyond scrutiny. Further troubling is when we allow such strategies to seep into our scholarly endeavours—the metaphorical equivalent of the 'found' text that cannot be produced. It is one thing to strive to build airtight arguments, another thing entirely to 'swallow the scroll', to expect to be insulated from criticism on the grounds that the 'inner' cannot be adequately apprehended.

In "Scholarship *as* Myth", the provocatively titled epilogue to his study of myth, Lincoln acknowledges that scholarship, too, can be construed as an "another instance of ideology in narrative form."[367] Nevertheless, he is protective of his chosen profession; he finds it essential to salvage "some tattered individual self-respect [and] more important [maintain] a collective sense

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[364] Ibid.
[365] Steven T. Katz, *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 17.
[366] Gill, "Plato's Atlantis Story and the Birth of Fiction", 65.
[367] Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth,* 207; emphasis mine.

of integrity and purpose" in regard to our scholarly endeavours.[368] For Lincoln, it is the footnotes—scholarship's "critical and reflexive moments" that need be stressed—, "the portions of scholarly texts that are less narrative and, perhaps as a consequence, also less ideological" that "graphically differentiate scholarly prose from that of other genres."[369] McCutcheon, who argues that in the field of religious studies we need be critics not caretakers, is likewise invested in protecting scholarship—or, to be more precise, the kind of scholarship that is driven by critical theory and is constrained by its own rather rigorous rules and conventions. He, too, concedes however that 'true scholarship', while proffered openly and publicly and even at times with a spirit of generosity, is constructed as a closed circle, protected by its guiding theories and internal logic, beholden in the end only to itself. In this sense, scholarship shares much with mythmaking and, in turn, with 'religion'.

"The moon's an arrant thief,
And her pale fire she snatches from the sun."[370]

"We can call Eurydice forth from the world of the dead, but we cannot make her answer."[371]

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[368] Ibid., 208.
[369] Ibid.
[370] Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens,* Act IV, Scene 3
[371] Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, 358.

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Appendix: Partial Catalogue / Further Examples of Myths of 'Found' Texts

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Examples of stories of 'found' texts abound across time and cultures. The task of labeling these myths as laying claim to the 'historical' as opposed to those that are clearly fictional is (as described above) not an easy one. In fact any such designation is fluid, dependent on not only a reader's perspective but also on evolving understandings of what constitutes 'history'. Below are a few examples of such stories. For the examples provided, a rather loose division has been assumed, one dividing those texts that purport to be 'historical' from those in which the artifice is clearly a fictional device. That the demarcating line is blurry is, of course, part of the point.

(a) Examples of the Found Text Device in 'Historical' Works

Recovered or Found Text(s): 'terma' or hidden teachings; Example: *Bardo Thodol* (or *Tibetan Book of the Dead*)

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** Padmasambhava
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** 8th century CE
> **Genre:** pedagogy; religious and behavioural guidelines

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *The Treasury of Lives: The Great Compassionate One; The Eight Instructions; The Copper Palace* (the tradition is rampant)

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Tibetan Buddhist; Nyangrel Nyima Özer
> **Date of Primary Text:** c. late 12th century CE
> **Genre:** biography; hagiography; pedagogy

Sub-Category: fabricated or appropriated from earlier fabricated sources

Authority Conferred: status as a theological authority

Recovered or Found Text(s): "Letter of Aristeas"

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** Ptolemaic Egypt; Aristeas, allegedly a courier of Ptolemy II
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** c. 283-246 BCE
> **Genre:** letters

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Life of Moses*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Philo of Alexander
> **Date of Primary Text:** c. 15 CE
> **Genre: '**history'

Sub-Category: fabricated; it is uncertain as to who is responsible for its initial creation. Titus Flavius Josephus recreates parts of it in *Antiquities of the Jews,* vol. XII (c. 93 CE), as does Eusebius in *Praeparatio evangelica* (c. 320s CE), claiming that it is in turn an excerpt from Aristobulus of Alexandria (c. 160 BCE)

Authority Conferred: to establish the authority of the Greek Septuagint; possibly Jewish propaganda

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Recovered or Found Text(s): collected ancient Egyptian-Greek wisdom literature

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** as later 'preserved' by writers of the school of Ammonius Saccas; Hermes Trismegistus, thought to be a contemporary of Moses
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** c. 1200 BCE; later preserved, 3rd century CE
> **Genre:** wisdom literature

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Corpus Hermeticum*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Roman Egyptian as preserved in the 14th century Latin translations by Marsilio Ficino
> **Date of Primary Text:** c. 2nd century CE and later (Ficino's translations appeared between the late 1400s and 1650)
> **Genre:** cosmology; philosophy; theology

Sub-Category: appropriated and fabricated material

Authority Conferred: subsequent authors enjoy the purported imprimatur of Moses

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Recovered or Found Text(s): *The Book of Causes* (*Liber de causis*)

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** Aristotle
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** 4th century BCE
> **Genre:** philosophical proofs

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Elements of Theology*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Constantinople; Proclus Lycaeus
> **Date of Primary Text:** mid-5th century CE
> **Genre:** Neo-Platonic 'theology'

Sub-Category: fabricated (exposed by Thomas Aquinas)

Authority Conferred: to confer 'ancient' authority on Proclus to support his commentary on Plato

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Recovered or Found Text(s): *The Theology of Aristotle*

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** Aristotle
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** 4th century BCE
> **Genre:** philosophy

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Plotiniana Arabica* (*Enneads IV-VI* translated in Arabic)

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Greek; Plotinus (edited and compiled by Porphyry)
> **Date of Primary Text:** c. 270 CE
> **Genre:** treatise

Sub-Category: fabricated (either by Porphyry or Plotinus)

Authority Conferred: furnishes Porphyry with a doubly authoritative voice, as he benefits from the imprimatur of Aristotle and Plotinus

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Recovered or Found Text(s): letter from the Spartans

Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s): King Arius of Sparta
Alleged Date of Found Text(s): c. 150-170 BCE
Genre: letters

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: 1 Maccabees

Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text: Greek 'translation' of a canonical/deuterocanonical biblical text (Catholic; Orthodox); Deuterocanonical (Protestant; Anglican)
Date of Primary Text: c. 50 BCE (or later)
Genre: 'history'

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: asserts that Jonathan and the Spartans have a shared ancestor in Abraham

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Recovered or Found Text(s): the book of the law

Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s): Egypt; Moses
Alleged Date of Found Text(s): c. 1200 BCE; the time of Moses
Genre: law codes; religious and behavioural guidelines

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: Jewish Apocalypse of Ezra (also referred to as 2 Esdras)

Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text: uncertain; possibly Alexandrian, Roman, or Palestinian; ostensibly, the prophet Ezra
Date of Primary Text: c. late first or early second century CE or later (ostensibly fifth century BCE)
Genre: vision literature; 'restored' scripture

Sub-Category: appropriated

Authority Conferred: provides the community from which the text originates with divine authority and sanction via the prophet Ezra

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Recovered or Found Text(s): *Apocalypse of Paul* (*Visio sancti Pauli*)

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** Paul; account of his vision of heaven and hell
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** c. 100 CE
> **Genre:** New Testament Apocrypha

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: Paul-Seneca correspondence

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** the *Apocalypse of Paul* is presented as reconstructed from alleged correspondence between Paul and Seneca and from fragments of Greek 'originals' found at Nag Hammadi
> **Date of Primary Text:** c. 250-400 CE (as recovered)
> **Genre:** letters

Sub-Category: appropriated; both the primary and recovered texts may be fabricated

Authority Conferred: Paul visits the original apostles in 'heaven' and (by implication) is accredited with their authority

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Recovered or Found Text(s): 'alleged' sayings of Muhammad

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** Muhammad
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** 7th century CE
> **Genre:** wisdom sayings

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Fusūs al-Hikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*)

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Andalusian Sunni; Ibn al-'Arabi (Note: some argue that *The Bezels* are falsely attributed to Ibn Al-'Arabi[372])
> **Date of Primary Text:** c. early 1200s CE
> **Genre:** wisdom literature; pedagogy; mystical beliefs

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: helped to confirm saintly status on Ibn al-'Arabi

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[372] See Reynold A. Nicholson, "Some Notes on the Fusúsu 'L-Hikam" in *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* published online at http://www.sacred-texts.com/isl/siim/siim16.htm#fn_461.

Recovered or Found Text(s): *Vymanika Shastra* or "Science of Aeronautics", ostensibly part of a larger lost work called *Yantra Sarvasva*

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** ancient India; Maharshi Bhardwaj, a Hindu guru, is credited as the author
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** ostensibly the Vedic age: c. 1500 BCE through 300 CE; actually eighteenth or nineteenth century
> **Genre:** sacred Vedas

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: a Sanskrit-Hindi edition of the *Vymanika Shastra*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Mysore, India; G.R. Josyer, the founder of an organization called the International Academy of Sanskrit Research Mumbai, India; "Josyer claimed that the opening portion of the *V.S.* was handwritten in a small exercise book brought to him by a guest on June 28, 1951, the very day his academy was inaugurated by the maharaja of Mysore."[373]
> **Date of Primary Text:** 1959
> **Genre:**

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: while since uncovered as solely a product of Josyer's imagination, the claim of recovering the ancient text served to lend credence to Josyer's academy and scholarly credentials

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[373] Siddhartha Deb, "Those Mythological Men and Their Sacred, Supersonic Flying Temples," *The New Republic,* May 14, 2015. https://newrepublic.com/article/121792/those-mythological-men-and-their-sacred-supersonic-flying-temples

(b) Some Examples of the 'Found' Text Device in Literature

The literary device of appealing to a found or recovered text is ubiquitous in literature. Jorge Luis Borges is particularly notable for crafting stories in which the device of a 'found' text appears, stories that comment upon the authority of ancient texts.[374] Below is a small selection of the device as employed in clearly fictional stories.

Recovered or Found Text(s): The story of Wesley (the Dread Pirate Roberts) and Princess Buttercup

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** S. Morgenstern
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** Renaissance era
> **Genre:** fantasy/romance

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *The Princess Bride: Morgenstern's Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** United States; William Goldman
> **Date of Primary Text:** 1973
> **Genre:** ostensibly, the reproduced 'found' text and commentary on it; satire

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: Goldman 'borrows' the authority of fairy tale. Goldman never reveals that the device of the 'found' text is a fiction; in fact, Goldman constructs an elaborate introduction detailing the finding of Morgenstern's text, a ruse that escapes many readers.

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[374] Borges short story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" is a particularly good example. See Jorge Luis Borges, André Maurois, and James E Irby, *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings*, ed. Donald A Yates and James East Irby; trans. Sherry Mangan (New York: New Directions, 1964).

Recovered or Found Text(s): "Pale Fire" (a 999-line poem) and commentary

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** New Wye, Appalachia; Cedarn, Utana (both fictional towns); John Shade (author); Charles Kinbote (editor, literary critic, indexer)
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** late 1950s
> **Genre:** poetry in four cantos

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Pale Fire*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** United States; Vladimir Nabokov
> **Date of Primary Text:** 1962
> **Genre:** fiction; satire

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: Kinbote uses Shade's poem to elevate his own status, scholarly and otherwise, usurping fame from Shade and eventually 'claiming' to be the exiled King Charles of Zembla; Nabokov's novel functions as a satire of academia and of literary criticism

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Recovered or Found Text(s): notes/journal entries found by an unnamed narrator and in turn narrated by Maxim Maximych

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** the Caucasus; Grigory Alexandrovich Pechorin
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** early 1800s
> **Genre:** travel and personal journals

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *A Hero of our Time*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Russia; Mikhail Lermontov
> **Date of Primary Text:** 1840
> **Genre:** novel

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: as does Atwood in *The Handmaids Tale*, Lermontov employs the device to draw our attention to how much weight we place on the authority of the written word

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Recovered or Found Text(s): a quotation from Ecclesiastes

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** ancient Israelite; traditionally King Solomon; Kohelet (the pseudonymous author)
>
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** c. 900s BCE (actually c. 450 – 200 BCE)
> **Genre:** wisdom literature

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *"Simulacra and Simulation"*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** France; Jean Baudrillard
> **Date of Primary Text:** 1981
> **Genre:** essay; philosophical treatise

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: While cleverly commenting upon the power of the simulacrum, Baudrillard embeds one such 'recovered' text in his essay, helping to prove his point

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Recovered or Found Text(s): two sets of documents each espousing a different worldview

> **Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s):** pseudonymous; narrated by Johannes; edited by Victor Eremita
> **Alleged Date of Found Text(s):** unknown; presumably late 18th / early 19th century
> **Genre:** journals; essays

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Either/or: A Fragment of Life*

> **Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text:** Denmark; Søren Kierkegaard
> **Date of Primary Text:** 1843
> **Genre:** philosophical fiction

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: within the confines of the story, personal lived experience is granted authority; this, however, is complicated by the fact that 'experience' is mediated and authorized through/by the 'found' written word

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Recovered or Found Text(s): Ezekiel 25:17

Alleged Provenance/Authorship of Found Text(s): the prophet Ezekiel
Alleged Date of Found Text(s): ancient
Genre: biblical prophecy

Primary Source in which the Found Text Appears: *Pulp Fiction*

Provenance/Authorship of Primary Text: United States; Quentin Tarantino
Date of Primary Text: 1994
Genre: film

Sub-Category: fabricated

Authority Conferred: Jules (Samuel L. Jackson) quotes Ezekiel 25:17, a co-called biblical' text authorizing divine vengeance.