Sibling Rivalry: Sibling Relationships in World Mythology

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Abstract

The study of comparative mythology reviews the beliefs of numerous world cultures in the search of similarities between structure and themes that tie humanity together. Protomyths, referring to an original concept which predates written mythology but can be viewed throughout the cultures of the world, are numerous, including the flood myth narrative and imagery of mother earth and father sky. However, the protomyth of siblings has never been examined fully. Sibling relationships are dynamic and bind humans to one another. The myth of sibling rivalries stretches back to the first siblings in the Christian belief, Cain and Abel, but the same myth structure can also be viewed throughout Egyptian and Roman beliefs as well. Similarities between figures who represent two sides of the natural world or two sides of the human condition presents evidence of humanity's collective understanding of duality and its representation through human sibling relationships. Sibling deities represent the difference between night and day, earth and sky, and life and death. By examining the sibling relationships of mythical beings across a wide range of world cultures, a common protomyth of sibling relationships can be established, demonstrating a human understanding and connectivity between one another which crosses eons and cultural divides.
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Introduction

Myth was a tool for early man to describe the unanswerable questions of the world. Siblings, who represent the closest and sometimes most conflicting relationships in human nature, became symbols of dualism, both in nature and within the human experience. They present tales of harmony between natural facts, like life and death or the earth and the sky, or conflict between opposing viewpoints, like nature versus culture or good against evil. By using sibling deities to represent these closely related forces, myths become tools for explaining existence, from the changing of the seasons to life and death.

While historians utilize comparative mythology to demonstrate similarities between cultures in an attempt to bring humanity closer together, most fail to recognize the core values of those stories.¹ The story of siblings, whether they be in harmony or in rivalry, represent a part of human existence. These myths are timeless because everyone can relate to the close relationships and physical bonds between siblings on a personal level.

Though myths utilize fantastical narratives, such as magic and cosmic beings, at their root they are telling the story of the people who created them. The gods are simply humans, enhanced for entertainment to keep the story alive through the generations. When all mystical elements are removed, myths tell a story of normal humans, be they the first humans to

¹ Many comparative historians focus on similarities between languages or the structure of different cultures instead of focusing on the story and values being represented within. Max Muller utilized the Aryan race theory to promote a common ancestry of European mythology stemming from India, a belief which was misused in Nazi propaganda. By comparing Indo-European languages, comparative mythologists try to connect cultures linguistically but fail to compare their values and morals in the process. Similarly, Max Muller viewed all myths as structurally based on the path of the sun. Many famous comparative mythologists, like Joseph Campbell and Claude Levi-Strauss, focus on themes relating to early man to describe where their stories came from instead of focusing on the story itself. These methods can, therefore, lose the emotional impact of the myths which should be used to tie them together across cultures. Stefan Arvidsson, Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 31-32, 76-84 and Claude Lévi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 224.
experience life and death, such as the biblical Cain and Abel, or royalty who benevolently shaped civilization during its origins and are remembered as divine for their gifts to humanity, such as the Egyptian Osiris and his siblings.

The first myths described the most noticeable and unavoidable facts of human existence, that a human is born, lives, and dies. The earliest tribes worshiped fertility figures, recognizing the importance of female fertility in the continuation of mankind. Death deities, thus, were developed as a counterpart to the fertility deity, presented as their sibling as they were two sides of the same coin. While death was feared and unknown, it was nevertheless honored and treated with respect. Having formed agricultural societies, cultures observed the life and death cycle of crops in nature, adding the rebirth aspect to the circle of life, creating a circular timeline of existence. Not only was the world, nature, and human life created, but everything would someday come to an end and be reborn again.

As agriculture was the basis of civilization, the importance of the fertility deity often placed it at the forefront of cultural pantheons. As a result, the primary deity was the creator of everything and sustainer of life. Its relationship with the rest of nature developed the pantheons of the ancient world. The fertility deity represented the foundation of a culture. Through their benevolent gift of life and teaching of how to grow crops, the fertility deity saved humanity from chaos and developed civilization. However, as a ruler, the deity had to be defeated to explain its disappearance from society. Playing into the rebirth myth, jealousy between siblings often meant the demise of the benevolent ruler so that they could be revived as a deity of rebirth. These myths presented an explanation for the changing of the seasons, as life creates and aids in the growth of crops and death takes them from the world in the winter until they can be reborn in the spring.
These myths of foundation and jealousy also represented the choice of humanity to become agricultural as opposed to the tribal nomads of the past. The jealous sibling represented chaos amongst the order brought by the original founder. By following the lifestyle and rules that the founder established, the civilization could thrive, but outside forces, represented by the jealous sibling, threatened to destroy civilization and thus should be uprooted and destroyed. Only through the use of sibling rivalry could these tales continue to relate to humanity, and they are the tales modern civilizations most often remember.

Through entertainment, humanity remembers the moral themes and cautious tales of the past. The story of sibling rivalry is timeless and exists within the human psyche as its narrative continues to entertain. Like the hero’s journey, which Joseph Campbell described, any culture can retell the story of sibling rivalry and relate the same meaning to everyone. In the hero’s journey, a hero is born and faces supernatural and insurmountable odds, s/he loses but returns with more knowledge and power for humanity. It is a timeless story which can be reinterpreted and reimagined through mythology or common popular culture. Even some sibling myths, like the myth of Inanna/Ishtar and her sister Ereskigal, follow the same pattern as the hero’s journey. The story of sibling rivalry can be broken down into a formula just the same. Siblings are born, one is chosen as the founder of humanity, and the other murders them out of jealousy. The myth was retold through the Egyptian myth of Osiris and Set, the Hebrew tale of Cain and Abel, and the Roman story of Romulus and Remus. By reducing these tales to their most basic elements, the narrative and the focus on the sibling relationship, one can discover the protomyth from which each story derived, explaining its relatability to humanity throughout time and across cultural and social differences.

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Another protomyth regarding sibling relationships in mythology is the story of the hero twins. In this tale, twins are born with a divine or royal birthright, left in the wilderness to perish by a usurper relative, and grow up to return and take back their birthright, establishing a civilization and saving humanity in the process. This tale has many similarities with the hero’s journey but focuses on the close tie of twins as opposed to a lone hero. Sometimes, the relationship between twins is needed to impact the message of the story more powerfully. In the prehistoric era, humanity struggled to survive, but a benevolent force rescued them from the darkness and founded civilization. This protomyth can be combined with the myth of sibling rivalry, as was the case with Romulus and Remus, to tell both stories and increase the impact of the intensity of sibling rivalries.

Siblings represent the closest bond between two humans. As two sides of the same coin, mirror images of one another, siblings also represent life and death, order and chaos, hero and villain, good and evil, light and dark, creation and destruction, and the list goes on. Only through a sibling relationship could these dual elements of nature be explained to ancient cultures, and thus the same story elements reappear between cultures across time. The stories continue to relate to modern humanity today, keeping the ancient myths alive and creating new, relatable stories through modern fiction and popular culture, such as the sibling rivalry between Marvel Comic’s characters Thor and Loki, the battle between the Baratheon brothers in Game of Thrones, or Mufasa and Scar in Disney’s The Lion King. While comparative mythology continues to shed light on historic truth within myths, it should also be utilized to understand the psyche of early man. Humanity has hardly changed, the same stories relay the same points today

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as they did in ancient times, only the characters and cultures have changed. The myths of sibling rivalry represent the harmonious and conflicting powers in nature, from the beginning of time to its end and back again.
Chapter One

Death in the Family: Sibling Deities of Fertility and Death

The most primordial questions in the human psyche revolve around the concept of mortal existence. Through observing the life cycle, early humans, explaining nature through myth, developed deities representing life and death. As death is a reality to human existence, every culture features a death deity and nearly all myths have a fertility or life-giving sibling to counteract death personified. Therefore, as these deities represented two sides of the same coin, they were often depicted as siblings, if not twins. The interconnection between fertility and death deities ties humanity together through common experiences of the life cycle, spreading the sibling myth theme across various different cultures and beliefs.

Before delving into the sibling myths associated with life and death, it is important to understand where and how the myths on these subjects developed. The earliest iteration of recording human experiences are the prehistoric cave paintings, engravings, and sculptures of Paleolithic hunter-gatherer tribes. While most images depict animals and hunting expeditions, recording the daily concerns of survival for early mankind, there is also an emphasis on the female form in cave art. Numerous prehistoric sculptures focus on the female form, exaggerating the parts of the female anatomy attributed to childrearing, such as the breasts, belly, and vulva, while less important limbs like the arms and legs were reduced in size or detail. Retroactively deemed Venuses for their correlation with the Roman goddess of beauty, love, and fertility, these sculptures were discovered across Europe in the twentieth century.\footnote{Fred Kleiner, \textit{Gardner’s Art through the Ages: The Western Perspective, Volume 1} (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010), 3-4.} The sculptures led historians
to theorize that early man worshiped female fertility. A woman can create life, providing an answer to the question of human origins. The mother goddess, therefore, became the first deity.\textsuperscript{5}

Archaeology also reveals the development of burial practices. Paleolithic gravesites reveal that prehistoric humans buried their dead with artifacts such as animal bones, clothing, and tools. These burials reveal that early man recognize death and contemplated what occurred after it.\textsuperscript{6} As civilizations developed, funeral rituals evolved between cultures, but their origins stretch back to the earliest hunter-gatherer tribes. Death was inescapable and all things returned to the earth. Oral traditions developed to explain why the funerary practices existed and what happened after death, thus giving birth to myths of the underworld and afterlife.

While early myths and rituals may never be completely understood, the development of writing preserved traditions and increased the influence and spread of myths throughout the cultures of the world. The first written myths come from the cuneiform of Mesopotamia. Of the various deities of Mesopotamia, the Sumerian Inanna and her Babylonian counterpart Ishtar represent one of the most prevalent mythological archetypes. Evolving out of the prehistoric female fertility figures, Inanna/Ishtar was the goddess of love, fertility, and war. Together with her sister Ereshkigal, the goddess of the underworld and ruler of the dead, Inanna/Ishtar and Ereshkigal represent one of the first and most compelling sibling myths, one in which elements also appear in the mythology of cultures the world over.

There are numerous myths revolving around Inanna and Ishtar, but these tales are fragmented and difficult to decipher. By combining the myths of these two similar characters


into one narrative and forming a linear progression through their story, modern scholars can better understand the basis for the female fertility figure used throughout human culture. As deities are immortal, their tales change over time, making it difficult to create a linear understanding of myths. A deity is born and has numerous adventures, but deciphering when each adventure occurred and their relation to one another becomes difficult. This is the trouble with understanding the myths of Inanna/Ishtar. To form a linear tale, one must refer to each myth in relation to the others, finding where one story references another or where a passage of time can be discerned throughout. Inanna/Ishtar was known as the goddess of female sexuality, known to all Mesopotamians for her many lovers, thus the first myth in her tale must be when she was referred to as a maid.

In the myth “Inanna Prefers the Farmer” Inanna was referred to as a maid and must choose a husband. While the young goddess was infatuated by the hardworking and down to earth farmer Enkimdu, her brother, the sun god Utu, insisted she marry the shepherd Dumuzi. Dumuzi pled his case, explaining how much better he was than the farmer, while the meek Enkimdu cowered away and offered Dumuzi everything he owned to end the debate. The ending of the myth was lost, but in subsequent myths, Inanna was shown married to Dumuzi, suggesting he won the debate and the hand of the maiden goddess.\(^7\)

Dumuzi then proved to be the source of confusion within Inanna/Ishtar’s myths. He was later described as the god of agriculture, perhaps gaining domain over Enkimdu’s farm through the debate. As such, he was associated with the Babylonian Tammuz. Tammuz was referenced in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* when Ishtar attempted to seduce the king. Gilgamesh referred to Tammuz

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as the lover of Ishtar’s youth. Many scholars believed that Tammuz died prior to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, but in the myth’s aftermath, Inanna/Ishtar was shown married to Dumuzi. Therefore, either Dumuzi/Tammuz were the same figure but alive during the reign of Gilgamesh or Tammuz referred instead to the original farmer god, Enkimdu, whom Inanna/Ishtar loved in her youth.

Either way, Inanna/Ishtar’s role in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* was one of the most important myths surrounding her character and one of the most complete tales which has survived to present day. Inanna was the matron deity of Uruk, the city over which Gilgamesh ruled. Inanna’s civilizing power was described in a myth involving the *mes*, the divine blueprints for civilization. Enki, the primary Sumerian deity viewed as the founder of wisdom, controlled the blueprints for art, language, writing, governing, etc. He used the *mes* to found the city of Eridu but Inanna got Enki drunk and stole the *mes*, bringing them to Uruk. The myth displayed the transfer of centralized authority in Sumer from Eridu to Uruk and provided a foundation for Inanna as a civilizing force. Not only was she the goddess of fertility, but also the mother of civilization. Her temple was the center of the Uruk civilization as depicted in the myths surrounding the city and in art. It was a priestess prostitute which civilized the wild man, Enkidu, and the coronation ceremonies of Uruk’s kings were symbolized in a marriage to Inanna.

While the various small myths surrounding Inanna/Ishtar established her prominence in Mesopotamian culture, it was her role in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* which revealed the most about her character and set in motion the conflict between her and her sister, Ereshkigal. Ishtar offered

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9 Kramer, *Sumerian Mythology*, 64-68.

herself to Gilgamesh, but the wise king refused her advances, citing the many misfortunes that befell her numerous previous lovers. Enraged by the insult, Inanna/Ishtar fled to the head of the gods, sometimes referred to as her father, Anu, and demanded he unleash the Bull of Heaven on Uruk. Anu refused until Inanna/Ishtar threatened to raise the dead from the underworld to destroy the living. The Bull of Heaven caused much devastation until Gilgamesh and Enkidu defeated it. As a final insult, Enkidu hurled the hindquarter of the bull at Inanna/Ishtar, striking her in the face, resulting in her cursing Enkidu to die, taking from Gilgamesh his truest friend and companion.¹¹

Not only does the event set in motion the second half of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, but it also continues Inanna/Ishtar’s story through her descent to the underworld. Arguably the second most complete myth around Inanna/Ishtar, the descent to the underworld myth reveals more about her character and family. The Bull of Heaven was married to the goddess of the underworld, Inanna/Ishtar’s sister, Ereshkigal. Ereshkigal represents the duality between her domain over death and her sister’s life-giving sexuality. These siblings represent the two sides of the human life cycle, and the myth involving them reveals how the Mesopotamians explained the cycle.

Following the death of the Bull of Heaven at the hands of Gilgamesh and Enkidu, Inanna/Ishtar traveled to the underworld to attend the funeral. She was stopped at the first of the seven gates by Ereshkigal’s guards as no living being was allowed in the underworld. After Inanna/Ishtar again threatened to break down the gates and release the dead into the world of the living, Ereshkigal agreed to let her enter if she removed an article of clothing at each gate.

¹¹ George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 47-70.
Arriving at Ereshkigal’s throne naked, Inanna/Ishtar was stripped of her powers and became one of the dead, apparently as revenge for the death of the Bull of Heaven.\textsuperscript{12}

With Inanna/Ishtar trapped in the underworld, all sexual activity ceased on the earth, ending the cycle of life. The gods sought to revive Inanna/Ishtar, but in order for her to return to the land of the living, someone had to take her place. Inanna/Ishtar travelled the earth, but as everyone she met mourned for her, she could not bring herself to damn anyone in her place, until she returned home to find her husband, Dumuzi, sitting on her throne, dressed lavishly and feasting instead of mourning. As punishment, Dumuzi was sentenced to take Inanna/Ishtar’s place in the underworld, taking from the world the crops which he presided over. His sister offered herself in his place, dividing the year between the two, explaining the changing of the seasons and the agricultural cycle.\textsuperscript{13}

Joseph Campbell, a comparative mythologist, focused specifically on the journey to the underworld myth in his book \textit{The Hero with a Thousand Faces} which compared hero myths across cultures to create a common “hero cycle” which appeared in nearly every culture. To Campbell, the journey was the peak of the story where everything went wrong for the main character, and out of the darkness of defeat, they find their true self and were reborn with renewed purpose and power. He applied this theory to the Inanna/Ishtar myth and believed that the journey to the underworld served to combine the fertility goddess with her “darker self,” the function of her sister over the dead.\textsuperscript{14} Inanna/Ishtar represented life and thus represented both


\textsuperscript{14} Joseph Campbell, \textit{The Hero with a Thousand Faces} (Novato: New World Library, 2008), 88-90.
sides of the life cycle, including death. By journeying to the underworld, she gained Ereshkigal’s powers and became goddess of life and death.

The Sumerian myths are the oldest surviving written mythologies, and similar elements are present throughout the varying cultures of the world. The story of Inanna/Ishtar reveals how the earliest civilization attempted to comprehend the cycle of life and death as observed through the changing of the seasons and their own lives. Inanna/Ishtar represented the life-giving force which could not be explained, the female power of fertility, from the fertile earth to childbirth. When death befell the land and nothing grew, then the goddess of life must have been trapped in the underworld.

Egyptian culture developed written myths around the same time as the Sumerians. The functions of deities between Sumerian and Egyptian myths remained similar, but one key difference is prevalent, the inversion of gender. While comparative mythologists typically agree that most creation myths revolve around a male sky father deity and a mother earth deity who create all things, Egyptian mythology features a male earth god, Geb, and a sky goddess, Nut. Geb and Nut gave birth to four children, Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys, who are the central focus of Egyptian mythology.

The inversion of the parent and sibling deities’ spheres of influence shows the uniqueness of the Egyptian culture. Many Egyptian myths focus on male masturbation or semen, focusing on male fertility over the power of the female womb. For example, Horus forces Set to consume

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lettuce grown by his semen, placing a part of him within his uncle and proving his dominance against the rival. This represents a shift in biological understanding, focusing on the male contribution to childbirth. Even though this emphasis on male fertility might assume a male dominated society, Osiris and Isis shared in the rule of the kingdom and Egyptian culture followed, with numerous female pharaohs, through the ages, such as Hatshepsut and Nefertiti.

Jealousy sparked conflict between Osiris and Set. Osiris was a male fertility deity who founded all civilization while his brother Set represented storms and chaos. As the founder of civilization, Osiris was made king of Egypt. At a feast hosted by Osiris, a jealous Set offered a challenge to anyone who could fit in a chest he created specifically to his brother’s measurements. When Osiris lay in the chest to test it, Set slammed it shut and sunk it in the river. Later, when Isis returned Osiris to life, Set divided his body and scattered it across the land. While Osiris was dead, all fertility left the land, as in the Sumerian myth. When Isis and Nephthys gathered their brother’s remains and resurrected him, he ascended through his mother, the sky, into the afterlife where he ruled as lord of the dead as he did in life.¹⁸

Here marks a clear separation of Egyptian culture from other myths, where the fertility founder deity was murdered and became ruler of the underworld himself. Yet, Osiris represented both life and death, acting as a guide and king of both while his brother, Set, was cursed to represent the encroaching desert and foreigners, both of which threatened Egyptian society. Osiris represented the Egyptian version of Inanna/Ishtar as the founder of the civilization and a fertility deity. He was murdered by his jealous sibling and the world was lost without the

provider of life. If Joseph Campbell’s theory is correct, then Osiris also represents the union between life and death under a single deity to present the whole life cycle.  

The myths of Egypt and Mesopotamia developed around the same time and as such they influenced the development of other cultures in the Near East. The Canaanite culture combined elements from the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cultures. These early Semitic people ruled similarly to the Egyptians and Sumerians while worshiping similar deities. The father of the gods and ruler of the Canaanite pantheon was El. El had three sons, Hadad, the god of storms; Yam, the god of the sea; and Mot, the god of the underworld. Hadad was a male fertility figure, representing the life-giving force of rain on the earth. He was also called Baal (the Semitic term for lord or king) as the ruler of heaven. He gained the title through a conflict with his father, El, and brother Yam. El named Yam his successor as ruler of heaven and Hadad battled Yam for control. Using tools crafted by the craftsman god, he defeated his brother, taking the title of Baal and constructed a great palace of cedar, silver, and gold.  

He hosted a feast for the gods, but his brother, Mot, only feasted upon human flesh and blood, so the bread and wine provided insulted him. He vowed to tear Hadad apart and devour him, similar to Set being insulted at a feast and dividing Osiris’ body. The Canaanite gods were vulnerable to death, so Hadad dressed a calf as himself to fool Mot. The world, even El, mourned the loss of Hadad as drought and famine spread across the land. While what happened to Hadad is lost to translation and missing sources, what is discernable is that the war goddess, Anat, Hadad’s sister and wife, cleaved Mot in half with her sword, and Hadad returned, bringing

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19 Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, 77.

fertility back with him. When Mot returned later, he was forced to bow to Hadad as El supported his rule over heaven.²¹

Hadad was the storm deity, drawing comparisons to Set while also being the fertility deity as Osiris was. His story echoed Inanna/Ishtar’s as the ruler of heaven, giver of life, and descent into the underworld. Hadad was lost to the world, taken by death, and life vanished from the earth. The world mourned his loss as it did Inanna/Ishtar, and he returned as king of all, forcing Death himself to bow to his rule. While the changing seasons aspect of the story is less clearly stated, it can be discerned that the tale meant the same to the Canaanites as it did the Egyptians and Sumerian, using the death and return of a fertility deity to describe the agricultural cycle. By combining elements of the two civilizations, the Canaanites continued the traditions of the tale and aided in its spread to the developing Mediterranean-centered world.

The Phoenicians, a seafaring people widely thought to have descended from the Canaanites, settled numerous colonies throughout the Mediterranean. They traded extensively and influenced the development of Mediterranean civilizations, including the Greeks and Romans. The Phoenicians colonized the city of Carthage, which grew into one of the largest powers in the ancient Mediterranean. Carthaginian myth borrowed much from its Canaanite origins, worshiping Baal Hamon, a fertility deity of sky and earth, representing both the life-giving rain and the vegetation of the earth. Through trade and contact, the mythic beliefs of the Canaanites merged with the seafaring colonies of the Mediterranean, creating similarities among Mediterranean religions, such as those of the Greco-Romans.

The Greco-Roman tradition equated El, the former ruler of heaven and father of the gods, with Cronos, the Greek Titan, or Saturn, the Roman equivalent. Cronos/Saturn had three sons

who overthrew his rule with magical weapons and took control of the world for themselves: Zeus/Jupiter, the god of storms and ruler of Heaven, Poseidon/Neptune, the king of the Sea, and Hades/Pluto, who was tricked into becoming lord of the Underworld.\textsuperscript{22} The clear similarities with Hadad, Yam, and Mot and the three Greek brothers adds to the probability of a link between the two myths. Zeus created humanity and granted storms for agricultural growth, while Hades counteracted Zeus’ life-giving power, serving as ruler of the dead while Zeus watched over the living. While there was less of an emphasis on the struggle for power between the sky, sea, and death as represented in the Canaanite story, the three brothers did bicker over the lives of humanity, though they ruled jointly over every aspect of existence.

The three-sibling-god-rule became a popular motif throughout European mythology, a motif first recognized by Carl Jung, a psychology student of Sigmund Freud, who traced the use of themes in folklore and mythology. Jung claimed that archetypes, common elements of a story, exist between countless myths.\textsuperscript{23} By looking solely at the archetype of the three brothers, each representing an aspect of the world, gaining power by defeating their father, and reducing the story to those basic elements, it becomes unclear which myth is being discussed, demonstrating their close similarities.

Numerous similarities from Near Eastern myths exist in Greco-Roman myth showing a connection between Greco-Roman culture and other cultures. One of the clearest comparisons is of the love goddess figure. Inanna/Ishtar was the Mesopotamian goddess of love, female fertility, and lust. Her symbol was the morning star, a planet named Venus for the Roman goddess’


association with it as well. Aphrodite/Venus represented the same functions as Inanna/Ishtar and maintained the same characteristics of a powerful deity who did as she pleased. According to one myth, she was an outsider, born of the sea and not related to the rest of the Greco-Roman pantheon. This perhaps symbolized her origins from a foreign source or followed some versions of the Inanna/Ishtar myth which separated her from the other gods genetically.\(^{24}\)

The aspect of fertility in the Greco-Roman culture, however, remained a function of the main pantheon. The Greeks did not worship Zeus as a fertility deity, as were the storm deities of the Near East, but his prolific behavior was legendary. He fathered most of the gods and even more demigods with immortals and mortals alike. Demeter, Zeus’ sister, represented the female fertility aspects of Greek mythology. Demeter represented agricultural fertility so farmers worshiped her to assure a good harvest. However, her daughter, Persephone, gained the attention of her brother, Hades. Hades fell in love with Persephone and stole her from the world, resulting in the loss of fertility from earth just like in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian myths. Demeter negotiated for her return so Persephone spends half the year with her mother and half as the queen of the underworld.\(^{25}\) The myth shows the changing of seasons as Inanna/Ishtar’s, Osiris’, and Hadad’s deaths did, while retaining the struggle between life and death sibling deities, marking a clear uniting factor between the cultures.

Greek culture spread throughout the Balkan region, syncretizing numerous protomythic deities with the Hellenic beliefs. When the early Greek historians came into contact with foreign cultures, they described the foreigners’ beliefs in accordance to their own customs. Many


protomyths in the region already had similar deities, like chthonic gods, who lived under the earth, or fertility figures, like the original Etruscan deity Dis Pater who was god of minerals and wealth, a provider for the people, who became the Roman version of Hades, Pluto. As Greek culture spread, many developing civilizations adopted Greek myths as their own, such as Macedonia, which spread Hellenic culture to the east through Alexander the Great, and Rome, which renamed the Greek gods but kept the stories so similar that the two cultures are nearly inseparable. The Romans conquered most of the known world and enforced their beliefs on the cultures they encountered. Throughout Europe, developing myths followed patterns similar to the Greco-Roman beliefs, proving that the functions of the gods are innate to human cultures as many of these developing cultures were untouched by eastern trade and influence prior to the Roman expansion.

When the Romans encountered a new culture, ancient historians described their beliefs in accordance with Roman myths. Therefore, it becomes difficult to decipher the original European tale from the Roman collaborations. The Roman Empire incorporated developing cultures, like the Celtic Gaul, cutting their myths short, while others, like the Carthaginian civilization which was practically wiped out of existence during the Punic War, were eliminated completely. However, historians and mythographers have searched desperately to find the original myths which were lost to Roman expansion.

What remains of European myths comes from Roman, and later Christian, authors who travelled through the areas and recorded the traditions and beliefs of the people, often equating their mythic figures to Roman equivalents or demonizing them as pagan. While the Romans respected many myths, their actions forced their own culture upon those they conquered and many of the original traditions and myths were lost to the ages. When Rome was Christianized,
the Church attempted to wipe out polytheistic paganism throughout Europe. The Canaanite gods were converted into demons by the Hebrew people in order to distance the monotheistic religion from its roots. For instance, the crown of Baal contained the horns of an ox. As such, Jewish and Christian demons and devils often featured horns and took the names of pagan deities, like Beelzebub which etymologically evolved from Baal as “Lord of the Flies,” a Hebrew expression equating the figure to dung. Similar demonization continued through the Christian conversion process of Europe under Roman rule, but what sources remain reveal the similarities between prehistoric European myths and the established Greco-Roman culture.

For example, according to Lucan, a Roman poet who chronicled the life of Julius Caesar, there existed a deity in the Gaelic mythos who closely resembled Zeus/Jupiter. Known as Taranis, the etymological origin of thunder, he was the main god in the pantheon of Celtic cultures from Gaul to the British Isles to the Danube. He was depicted carrying a lightning bolt, as Zeus and Jupiter were, and a chariot wheel, often equated with the rolling sound of thunder or the wheel around the sky. Taranis had two brothers who formed the Celtic triad, though their powers and roles equated to Ares/Mars and Hermes/Mercury, stripping them from their Gaelic names in the sources.26

With the decline of the Roman Empire in the West, Germanic peoples flooded Europe, each with their own unique but interconnected mythos. As the surviving Christian Church attempted to convert the pagan tribes, they began recording their histories and traditions, incorporating some into the monotheistic religion to gain strong warrior allies. Monks lived amongst the tribal leaders as they solidified control of Europe. These monks recorded the

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26 Lucan, Pharsalia (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1993), 18.
heritage of their people through king lists and mythos. Of the Germanic myths preserved through Christian chroniclers, none are as complete as the Nordic myths of Scandinavia.

Norse mythology is preserved most completely through the Prose Edda, a compilation of Nordic stories which Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson wrote in the thirteenth century. As Roman Catholic missionaries converted the Scandinavian tribes, historians had to pay homage to Church doctrine and navigate the politics of the Christianizing world. As such, the Prose Edda begins by claiming that the Scandinavian people originated, as the Romans had, from displaced Trojans after the Trojan War. While there is no historical evidence for this claim, numerous early historians equate all people’s origins to Troy, such as Virgil tracing Rome’s origins in the Aeneid or the tracing of British kings to the Trojan hero Brutus in the Historia Brittonum. Sturluson explained the development of Norse myths as evolving from these Trojan heroes with their advanced weaponry and battle skills becoming kings to the native Scandinavians. These kings died but were worshiped as gods by the Scandinavians, resulting in the development of Norse myth.

After assuring a historic and Christianized narrative for the myth’s origins, the story shifts to a narrative of an ancient legendary king, Gylfi, learning the Nordic religion from the Æsir, who Sturluson claimed were simply the descendants from the Trojans who became the


30 Jean I. Young, The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson: Tales from Norse Mythology (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1954), 30-33
Swedes, but who in mythology are referred to as the gods. Through a series of questions, Gylfi learned the religion of the Æsir and was converted, diluting the ancient Scandinavian civilizations into believing a pagan religion. While the prologue to the story was Sturluson attempting to appease the Church, the rest of the Prose Edda relayed the traditional myths of the Nordic people. It is the clearest example of Germanic myth which remains, presenting a fairly firm basis for most Germanic cultural beliefs.

Gylfi met with three kings and asks them about the Nordic myths. Through these series of questions, Gylfi learned of the Norse pantheon and traditional tales. According to the story, in the beginning there was a being known as Ymir, a primordial giant who fed from the utter of a cow which in turn licked an ice block for sustenance. The ice was licked away to reveal man named Buri who begat a son Borr who married a giantess named Bestla. Borr and Bestla had three sons, Odin, Vili, and Ve who murdered the primordial giant Ymir and used his body to create the world.

The three brothers became the first gods. The division of a primordial being to form the world is prevalent throughout creation myths and similar to the division of Osiris. The three brothers then created the first humans, named Ask and Embla, similar to Adam and Eve, out of trees and each granted them a gift. Odin granted them life and a soul, Vili granted them intelligence and touch, while Ve granted them speech, hearing, and sight.

Following the creation myth, Vili and Ve are not mentioned again, and their roles in Norse myth are not specified after the origin story. Odin, however, became the most important of

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32 Young, The Prose Edda, 30-36.
the gods. Referred to as the All-Father, Odin fathered most of the other gods and was their king in Asgard, the Norse afterlife. While Odin was the main god and ruler of heaven, his son, Thor, became arguably the second most popular and important deity to Norse mythology. Thor was the god of thunder, representing the strength and ruling power of the sky as the Greek Zeus, Canaanite Hadad, and Mesopotamian Enlil. Thor’s importance to the Scandinavian people often overshadows the myths of other deities, but there were numerous other gods and goddesses in Norse tradition.

Among the Norse pantheon were two deities who were not related to the Æsir. Another race of gods, known as the Vanir, once waged war with the Æsir, but the result of the war was the unity of the two deities into one pantheon. The two most important Vanir were Frey and Freyja, male and female twin children of the sea Vanir, Njord. Frey, etymologically the term for lord as Baal was for the Canaanites, was the god of fertility, associated with the sun and fair weather while Thor represented storms. He represented male prosperity and the fruit of the earth while watching over Nordic kings and promoting peace on earth. Meanwhile, his twin sister, Freyja, whose name means “noble lady,” represented love, beauty, and sexuality similar to Inanna/Ishtar and Aphrodite/Venus. She was also the guardian of an afterlife known as Folkvangr, a realm were half the souls who fall in battle reside.

The afterlife was important to Nordic people. Above all else, the Nordic tribes honored battle. Warriors glorified death in battle and which awarded them in an afterlife where heroes feasted and play battled for all eternity. Odin presided over Valhalla in Asgard while Freyja lived

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in Sessrumnir in Folkvangr. Each took half the fallen soldiers in battle, offering a glorious promise for any warrior and increasing their ferocity in battle. On the other hand, Scandinavians who died naturally of disease or old age went to a bleak afterlife, Hel, named after its ruler, a female death deity. Hel was one of three children of Loki, the trickster deity, punished for her father’s sins. She was half pale and half black and decayed, representing the land she presides over. The value of battle in Norse life was represented in their concepts of the afterlife, making Freyja a very important figure.

Freyja was the goddess of love, noble females, war, and death just like Inanna/Ishtar. Her husband was named Od, and while he was away on numerous travels, she mourned for him by crying red-gold tears. She traveled the world in search of Od, using various aliases which accounted for the many names by which she was known. Meanwhile, her brother, Frey fell in love with a giantess he saw from on high and was downcast and sullen when he realized they could not be together. He agreed to give his sword, a magical weapon which fought by itself, to his chamberlain if he would woo the giantess for him, which he did. As a result, Frey did not have this weapon when he vanquished a giant named Beli and would not have it in the apocalypse known as Ragnarok. These myths serve to prove Frey’s strength and love, along with his sister’s. They were the most beautiful among the gods, similar to the twins Apollo and Artemis of Greek myth, which will be discussed in chapter four.

While Freyja’s myth of her mourning for her lost husband is similar to Inanna/Ishtar’s journey to the underworld, another myth of sibling rivalry is closer to the tale. Baldr was the favorite son of Odin. His mother Frigg was so afraid of his death that she made every living thing swear not to harm him. As such, the gods hurled objects at Baldr for sport, but they

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bounced off him like water. However, one object, mistletoe, failed to swear the oath. Annoyed by the love for Baldr and his invulnerability, the trickster god Loki took mistletoe and crafted a weapon out of it, sometimes described as an arrow or a spear. He then tricked Baldr’s blind brother Hod to throw the mistletoe at Baldr, striking him dead.  

The myth is a traditional fratricidal tale like Cain and Abel or Romulus and Remus, both discussed in chapter two, except this time the murder was an accident. Baldr was the most beloved of the gods and was murdered out of jealousy. The gods hunted Loki down for his crimes and chained him to a rock where a snake dripped poison on his face. His wife caught the poison in a pan, but when it overflowed, Loki writhed in pain, causing the earth to shake, serving as an explanation of earthquakes for Norse culture. They also punished Loki’s three children. His son Fenrir, a wolf, was bound with the strongest chains while his other son, Jormungandr, a snake, was thrown into the sea. His daughter, Hel, mentioned earlier, was made guardian of the underworld where the sick and elderly souls resided.

In accordance with Nordic customs, the gods placed Baldr on a funeral pyre. The gods were grief-stricken to the point of inaction and Hermod, Baldr’s brother, rode to Hel to barter for his return. Hermod was a war deity but etymologically similar to the Greek Hermes who was guardian of souls to the underworld. Hel agreed to release Baldr’s soul if every creature on earth mourned for him, as in the myth of Inanna/Ishtar. However, a giantess, usually assumed to be Loki in disguise, refused, trapping Baldr in Hel forever. The journey to the underworld with grieving as the condition for a soul’s release is persistent from the original Mesopotamian myths through to the Norse tales.

38 Young, The Prose Edda, 80-86.

39 Young, The Prose Edda, 81-84.
While Germanic culture was syncretized with Christianity, their customs and traditions remained, incorporated into the Church practices. The use of “lord” and “king” in the Christian holy texts connect God with the pagan king deities like Zeus, Hadaad, and Frey. The triad foundation of a creator deity who is king of heaven, a fertility or sea deity which provides for humanity, and a death guardian of the afterlife were combined into the singular god of Abrahamic religions. Christianity adopted the Holy Trinity to describe the aspects of God as creator, sustainer, and redeemer, combining the triad of brother gods into one being. All blessings for life and harvest went to the one god, replacing the need to worship an agricultural fertility figure while also acting as judge and protector in a paradise afterlife like Osiris of Egyptian myth. While these parallels were not intentional, they demonstrate the unconscious correlations and symbolism the human mind retains while constructing myths.

The western world’s first myths focused on the unexplainable natural fact of life and death. By realizing the power of fertility, female goddesses became the first deities, creating life and the world. As death was inescapable, effecting humanity and the world, a deity of death and an underworld followed the creation of life. These two figures became siblings as they were two sides of the same coin. Male and female entities took on the separate functions in different cultures, but the stories remained the same. A fertility figure, sometimes the king of heaven, sometimes the goddess of love, travelled to the underworld or died, resulting in the loss of fertility on earth. Their return offered a hope for rebirth as with the changing seasons and created the idea of an afterlife with the afterlife deity becoming a guardian spirit. From the ancient

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Sumerian myths to the last pagan European traditions, life and death deities formed the foundation of western myth.

As stories of sibling deities spread westward from Sumer, they promoted the development of civilizations and western myths from Egypt to Scandinavia. However, the earliest mythic elements are observable in the Eastern mythologies as well. The protomythic motifs of sibling deities representing the counteractive functions of the life cycle can be observed from early Indian Hinduism to traditional Japanese Shintoism.

In the east, the Indus Valley served as a basis for civilization, as Egypt and Mesopotamia based their civilizations around the fertile land of their rivers. The Indus Valley civilization remains a cultural mystery to modern historians as its texts are undecipherable, but judging by the artwork and artifacts which have been discovered, the culture followed traditional female fertility worship like many early religions.41 Existing during the same period as Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilizations, the Indus Valley civilization probably functioned similarly to those cultures. Everything changed, however, when the Vedic culture, so named for their religious text, replaced the Indus Valley civilization. Like the Sumerian culture, the Indus Valley civilization collapsed around 1800 BCE, creating a void that the Vedic culture filled, replacing the early religion with the roots of Hinduism.42

Around the second century, migrating tribes resettled the Indus River Valley and wrote the Vedas, the religious texts which form the foundation of Hinduism. The term Veda means “wisdom,” which is reminiscent of the mes which Inanna/Ishtar stole from the wisdom god Enlil to give culture and civilization to Uruk. They form the foundation of Hindu myth, describing the

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cosmology and lives of the deities as well as describing how to live as a proper human. The Vedic tradition teaches that the soul is eternal and is reborn based on whether it fulfilled its role in life. As such, many gods are manifestations of the same function or multiple versions of the same, singular deity.

The primary deity in the Hindu mythos is Brahman, an indescribable entity which represents reality and the unchanging universe. Brahman is the highest supreme being who represents all that there is and ever will be, maintaining the balance and harmony of existence.\textsuperscript{43} This belief is often equated to the Christian God by those Christian philosophers who apply the philosophies of Plato to Christian beliefs. However, this being does not interact with reality, thus worshiping or praying to it does not affect the world.\textsuperscript{44} While this belief seems monotheistic, Hinduism has numerous deities which do affect the world and its functions. Brahman is said to take on the form of many of these deities to interact with reality while many of these deities take on other forms to interact with humanity.\textsuperscript{45}

While Brahman was the basis for Vedic reality, the principle deities who maintained the world were a triad of beings known as the Trimurti. These deities were Brahma, the creator, who brought the world into existence; Vishnu, the sustainer, who maintains the balance and harmony of the world; and Shiva, the destroyer, who will eventually bring the world to its end. These three figures are essential to Hindu belief, representing three functions of Brahman through different deities who interact with and shape reality.\textsuperscript{46} Known as the \textit{Trimurti}, these three offer another

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{43} Max Muller, \textit{The Upanishads} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 21-24 and Wangu, \textit{Hinduism}, 11.
\item\textsuperscript{44} Paulos Gregorios, \textit{Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 35.
\item\textsuperscript{45} Gregorios, \textit{Neoplatonism and Indian Philosophy}, 190-192.
\item\textsuperscript{46} Lynne Gibson, \textit{Hinduism} (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2002), 14-17.
\end{itemize}
example of the three ruling deities similar to the Canaanite and Greek brother kings. As with the belief in reincarnation, Hindus believe that the world will continue through a cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth known as a kalpa. The kalpa refers to the life cycle of reality showing that the early Vedic tales understood and described the life cycle of the universe based on the life cycle of man. The life cycle of the universe equals one day in the life of Brahman, lasting a little over four billion human years. When the creator awakens, the world begins, and when he sleeps, it falls into chaos.  

As the world is destroyed and reborn, according to the Vedas, their culture existed in the seventh kalpa. According to the Vedic traditions, the Manu, the title for the first humans, founded mankind. The seventh Manu, known as Vaivasvatha, saved humanity from the Great Flood, the Hindu version of the protomyth. Vaivasvatha was the son of the sun deity, Surya, and the cloud goddess Saranyu. His siblings were the male Yama and female Yami, whose names etymologically mean “twin.” These twins were deified, representing the two sides of the life cycle as the Lord of Death and Lady of Life.  

In the Vedas, Yama is the first human to die, thus becoming the Lord of Death. He carries a lasso which pulls the soul from a dead body and carries it to the afterlife. As Hinduism preaches reincarnation, Yama serves as the judge of the soul and decides in what form it will be reincarnated. As such, he is associated with the Hindu concept of dharma, the balance of 

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universal order and harmony.\textsuperscript{51} To interact with humanity, Yama uses Agni, the deity of fire. Agni accepts sacrifices and serves as the messenger to the gods. He is the bridge between human priests and the heavenly deities and as such is the first word in the \textit{Rig Veda} as it is devoted to his honor.\textsuperscript{52}

As with western death deities, Yama’s twin represented his opposing force, life. Yami was also known as Yamuna, which was the main tributary into the Ganges River, the most sacred river to Hindu beliefs.\textsuperscript{53} As goddess of the river, Yamuna represented the life-giving force of fertile rivers to early civilizations.\textsuperscript{54} Bathing or drinking in the Yamuna absolved sin, similar to the Jewish tradition of Tvilah, the act of submerging in a natural form of water, which evolved into Christian baptism after John the Baptist submerged Jesus.\textsuperscript{55} The ceremony remains very similar as a way of purifying oneself in this life to be cleansed for the next. Yami, thus, functioned as the countermeasure for her twin Yama, purifying the soul before he judged it after death.

As the first two humans, similar to the Christian Adam and Eve and the Nordic Ask and Embla, Yami desired to be Yama’s bride to populate the earth. Yama refused, however, as they were twins and the act of union would be incest.\textsuperscript{56} This argument is the earliest recognition of

\textsuperscript{51}Ions, \textit{Indian Mythology}, 33.


\textsuperscript{56} Griffith, \textit{The Hymns of the Rigveda}, 424.
incest as improper in human society, being written between 1500 and 1200 BCE. While the outcome is ambiguous, the argument remains, describing the act as unnatural and offensive to the gods.\(^{57}\) While most western traditions do forbid incest in their cultures, the idea of incest in myth is typically not rejected in religious texts. Isis was Osiris’ sister-wife, as was Hera to Zeus or any descendants of Adam and Eve’s children or those of Noah. The sin of incest is overlooked as a necessity for the continuation of mankind as most myths assume humanity began with one man and one woman. While the Hindu belief was the first to articulate the sin through its religious texts, the Norse list incest along with fratricide, another common protomythic feature, as signs of the apocalyptic Ragnarok.

Whether or not Yama finally accepted Yami’s advances, as twins the two shared a deep emotional connection, and when Yama died, Yami mourned her brother’s death. As there was only day during their lives, the gods took pity on Yami, creating night so that she could understand the passage of time and come to terms with the loss of her twin.\(^{58}\) While this myth does not describe the changing of the season like many protomyths, it does use the mourning of sibling deities to describe a natural phenomenon. The creation of night and day served to aid in the recovery of losing a loved one.

One of the most famous Hindu texts, the *Bhagavad Gita*, explains how to please Yama as the judge of dharma. Dharma referred to a human’s role in life which had to be fulfilled in order to progress through reincarnation. In Hinduism, the only way to advance was to live in accordance to one’s caste in this life and advance in the next when dharma has been fulfilled. Yama, as the god of the dead, thus determined if a person had fulfilled their role properly. Yama

\(^{57}\) Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, 93-95.

\(^{58}\) Bhattacharji, *The Indian Theogony*, 96-98.
lived in a realm known as Naraka which acts as a purgatory where the sins of a soul can be purified through many hellish punishments. After the punishments purify a soul, they can be reborn into the world. Two four eyed dogs, similar to the Greek Cerberus, Hades’ three headed guardian dog, guarded Naraka, compared to the Christian concept of Hell and Purgatory. Krishna, one of Vishnu’s many forms, acted as a guide for humanity between his wife, the lifesaving Yamuna, and her twin, death personified, Yama.59

Yama and Yami represent the life cycle in Hinduism, just like the life and death sibling deities of Mesopotamia and western myths. Hinduism spread eastward and sparked the development of Buddhism. As Buddhism began as Hinduism and formed as a reaction to it, many mythological figures, such as Yama, reappear and are utilized in Buddhist teachings, keeping them prevalent across Asia as Buddhism spread.60

Buddhism followed the reincarnation beliefs of Hinduism and preached for a release, known as moksha, from the eternal cycle of rebirth, known as samsara. Being released from samsara, which the Buddha realized was the path to true happiness, means reaching nirvana, which meant essentially nonexistence, an escape from life and rebirth.61 Though this belief was the basis and goal of Buddhism, as the religion evolved over the years, it took on more religious aspects, such as deities and an emphasis on the afterlife, which allowed it to spread and merge with local folk religions of Asia.62

Traditional Chinese folk religion contained a belief in the afterlife similar to Hinduism. Diyu, the Chinese version of Hell or Purgatory, was a realm where souls were cleansed of their sins before being reborn. Following the merger with Buddhism, Diyu became the traditional hell accepted in Buddhism and Taoism, while the Hindu god Yama became the ruling king of the realm. Yama divided Diyu into ten courts, each ruled by a “Yama king.” These kings judge the souls as they pass through each court depending on the severity of their sins on earth. Then, the soul was purified and reborn into the world.63

While Yama passed from Hinduism, through Buddhism, into Chinese myth, his iconography changed. In Hinduism, Yama is depicted as a blue-skinned deity, said to be dark in color like a raincloud, reminiscent of his twin Yami who was black skinned as the waters of the Yamuna. He wears red clothing and rode a buffalo. He is often depicted with four arms, as many Hindu deities are, and carries his lasso for dragging souls to Naraka. In Chinese tradition, Yama is depicted much more fiercely. He is large, but with red skin instead of blue, and bulging red eyes with a scowling expression. He is dressed as a judge and his crown says “king” referring to his role as ruler of Diyu. Though the image changed to reflect the Chinese aesthetic, the character remained largely the same.

Buddhism merged easily with Chinese folk religion because of the similarities of eastern beliefs. The main deity in Chinese myth was Tian, a supreme entity who represented existence and the universe, similar to the Hindu Brahman. There were numerous immortals and demons which roamed the earth, aiding or making life difficult for humans until the Jade Emperor subdued evil. Chinese myth followed the stories of spirits and animalistic entities while retaining

a historicity of human tribes and dynasties which existed. As the culture became more secular, the legends became mere stories, which is why it was so easy for philosophies such as Buddhism and Taoism to merge into society basing arguments and hypotheticals on classic Chinese figures. Tian was the maintainer of the universe and thus represented the primary primordial force for all philosophy to base its thoughts. Buddhism used Hinduism as its base, but merged these deities with the Chinese figures to connect the theology to the native Chinese.\(^6^4\)

Buddhism impacted further eastern cultures, such as Japan. The Japanese responded to the importation of Buddhism by recording their traditional beliefs into written form, similar to the Norse recording their myths to describe them to the Christian missionaries arriving in their culture. However, as was the case with Norse myth, by recording the history of past beliefs after encountering many new beliefs, it becomes difficult to know what is traditional and what beliefs are imported. Japanese traditional religion is referred to as Shinto which means “the way of the gods.” While its afterlife resemble the Buddhist Diyu, the deities are based in folk tradition, closest to the protomythic motifs which occur throughout world mythologies.

In Shintoism, the first deity, which represented reality like the Hindu Brahman, is Amenominakanushi. This being existed above a chaotic sea in an area known as Takamagahara which was formed of clouds. Many other deities came into existence and interacted with the world through a sky bridge, similar to the Nordic Bifrost or Rainbow Bridge which the gods used to interact with the world. These early deities were genderless, but eventually pairs of male and female deities emerged. Of these pairs were Izanagi and his sister Izanami. The gods tasked these siblings with creating the world.\(^6^5\)


Granted a magical spear, Izanagi stirred the seas of chaos and from the tip of the spear dripped the islands of Japan. Izanagi and Izanami settled the land, building a palace and giving birth to the *kami*, elemental spirits which made the world the way it is. However, when Izanami gave birth to the *kami* of fire, she was severely burned and died. Angered, Izanagi decapitated the fire *kami* and traveled to the underworld to find his sister-wife. Izanami had eaten the fruit of the underworld, a realm known as Yomi to the Japanese, and thus could not return to the land of the living. Izanagi was so in love with Izanami that he refused to leave her in the underworld alone, but Izanami made him promise to never look upon her face, and Izanagi remained in the darkness of Yomi.

Izanagi betrayed his promise, however, and lit his hair on fire to reveal her burned, decayed form. He recoiled in fear and his enraged wife chased him out of Yomi. She vowed to kill a thousand of Izanagi’s creations, becoming the deity of death as the first to die and as an act of revenge against her brother-husband. Izanagi replied that he would create fifteen hundred to repopulate, meaning that life would always prevail over death. Izanagi cleansed himself from his journey to the underworld in a ceremony which formed the foundation of Japanese cleansing ceremony. The process created the sun, moon, and storm *kamis* which became the most important deities in Japanese myth.

Amaterasu, the sun goddess, is the mother of Japanese nobility, granting verification to the imperial rule. She was married to her brother, Tsukuyomi, the moon god, and together they ruled over the heavens. One day, Amaterasu sent Tsukuyomi to a feast hosted by the god of food, Uke Mochi. Uke Mochi produced food from her mouth, revolting Tsukuyomi so much that he murdered her. As a result, Amaterasu could no longer share the sky with her brother-husband out
of disgust, which is why day and night are divided.\textsuperscript{66} This myth thus describes the changing of seasons and cycle of day and night like the mourning myths of Hindu, Sumerian, Egyptian, Greco-Roman, and Norse traditions.

Amaterasu also quarreled with her other brother, the storm god, Susanoo. While the sun represented the female life-giving force of light to the crops of Japan, Susanoo brought destruction, similar to Osiris and Set as fertility and storm dualities. Susanoo destroyed Amaterasu’s rice fields, and in retaliation the sun hid in a cave, forcing the world into darkness.\textsuperscript{67} She was coerced to return, but the tale has similar aspects to that of Inanna/Ishtar fleeing to the underworld to confront her sister, thus taking life from the world. Again, multiple aspects of western sibling myths are shared by eastern traditions.

The Shinto deities Izanagi and Izanami were creator deities, siblings, and married just like the main creators of western myths. Like Yama and Osiris, Izanami was the first person to die and thus became the lord of the underworld. Izanagi sought to save her and journeyed to the underworld to bring her back to the land of the living. The Greek myth of Orpheus tells a similar tale of a lyre player who traveled to the underworld to bring back his beloved under the condition that he not look back at her as he lead her home.\textsuperscript{68} Unfortunately, as with Izanagi, he looked back and she was lost forever. This tale is also similar to the Judeo-Christian tale of Sodom and Gomorrah in which God told Lot’s family to flee the cities and not look back. Lot’s wife looked


back and was turned into a pillar of salt.\textsuperscript{69} While the Christian tale is less about love and devotion and more about obedience to God, it has similar elements.

Protomyths of sibling deities existed in the east as they did in the west, which is why syncretism of myths into various cultures is easy to accomplish, making assimilation of two cultures possible. The myths of European and Asian civilizations retain similar elements which tie the stories to one another despite the vast distance and cultural differences. Siblings represent the forces of life and death, related to one another but on opposing sides of the life cycle.

The same elements of life and death siblings remain across the world’s cultures. One deity provides life for humanity, either by creating them directly or by providing them with life-giving food as agricultural or storm deities. That deity’s sibling then represents death, taking life from the world and forcing a cyclical pattern of life and death both in agriculture and in human existence. While life and death are obviously a constant among every culture, the structure of the story often remains similar as well.

Sky deities are often rulers who provide fertility of rain and the destruction of storms while earth deities represent the fertility of the soil or a river and provide for civilization directly, as opposed to ruling from on high. Whichever deity represents fertility to the culture, its sibling represents death, the ruler of the underworld who judges and commands the souls of the deceased. A conflict pits the two against one another, and life is taken from the earth. The return of the fertility deity from the underworld allows life to begin anew, representing the agricultural cycle and hope of an afterlife. No matter the small details which vary between cultures, the underlining theme remains.

\textsuperscript{69} Gen 19:1-19:29.
Life and death are inalienable facts of human existence. In their never-ending attempt to describe the world around them, various cultures utilized myth to define the life cycle, leading to the formation of sibling myths. If the mystical elements of the myths are removed, a timeless tale of a beloved sibling and a lesser understood sibling represent the humanizing core of the life and death myth. As such, the myths relate to every person, regardless of culture or belief, because they speak to mankind as a story of siblings which just so happens to describe the never-ending cycle of life and death.
Chapter Two

Order and Chaos: Sibling Deities as Founders and Foreigners

One prevalent theme of sibling myths involves the jealousy between a powerful leader and his/her underappreciated sibling. While these stories describe sibling rivalries, they also represent a core element of human civilization, the dichotomy of order and chaos. Foundation myths present a hero as the founder of a city or culture, representing the core values of that civilization, and by introducing a sibling to those heroes, the culture defines what values are to be idealized and meant to be avoided. They represent the prehistoric switch from a nomadic, hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a city-based, agricultural society. As such, sibling rivalry myths represent the basic structure of a civilization and the demonization of outside beliefs.

Humans were hunter-gatherers, relying on a nomadic life for survival. This lifestyle of survival prevented humanity from settling down and contemplating the world around them. During the Neolithic Age, agriculture allowed tribes to settle fertile regions, granting early human the leisure to observe and study nature. The shift also allowed history to be recorded, resulting in foundation myths which show the duality between hunter-gatherers and agricultural civilizations.

In searching for the earliest civilization and earliest written mythology, scholars are often drawn towards the Sumerian culture of Mesopotamia. The Sumerian scholar, Samuel Noah Kramer, regarded the Sumerians as seminal in the development of written language, crop rotation, and culture in general.\textsuperscript{70} Sumerian myths describe the development of civilization and provide a starting point for comparative mythology. In the previous chapter, the sibling

relationship between Inanna/Ishtar and her sister, Ereshkigal, represented the foundation of Mesopotamian civilization and the changing of the seasons. While their myth can also represent the dichotomy between order and chaos, another, more complete Sumerian myth (the *Epic of Gilgamesh*), offers a deeper representation of civilized man opposed to wild outsiders.

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* told the tale of an early king of the Sumerian city of Uruk. According to the poem, Gilgamesh was the fifth king of Uruk, son of the third king and a goddess named Ninsun. As such, Gilgamesh was a demigod with superhuman strength and visions. It is said that he single handedly constructed the legendary walls of Uruk which protected the city from the fourth century B.C.E. into the eighth century C.E. As a demigod, Gilgamesh was described as two parts divine and one part human. His abilities and kingship made him arrogant causing the gods to teach him humility.

Thus, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* began with an arrogant and abusive demigod ruler enticing the gods. To distract Gilgamesh from treating his subjects so poorly, the gods created Enkidu, his exact opposite. Enkidu was two parts animal and one part human, living in the forest among the wildlife, opposed to Gilgamesh’s royal lifestyle and godly origins. The two were created as two sides of the same coin, as if they were siblings, which they later become. As a wild man, Enkidu caused several inconveniences for the local farmers, saving animals from their traps and damaging their crops. The farmers turned to Gilgamesh for help, and the wise ruler civilized the wild man by sending a prostitute to sleep with him. Having lain with a civilized woman, the animals of nature no longer recognized him as one of their own. He had joined the culture of

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72 George, *Gilgamesh*, 2.

73 George, *Gilgamesh*, 1-11.
mankind and was separated from nature forever, an indication of the separation between wild, nomadic humans and agricultural, city-dwellers of the Neolithic Era.

Accepting his fate, Enkidu turned to Shamhat, the harlot who seduced him, and asked to be shown this new world of human civilization. He learned of Gilgamesh’s vanity and challenged the king to prove who was stronger. When the fight ended in a draw, Enkidu and Gilgamesh found they had much in common and became the greatest of friends, as if brothers.\textsuperscript{74} Their adventures featured feats of great strength and skill which remain prevalent throughout heroic myths. Finally, Gilgamesh angered the goddess of love and fertility, Ishtar, the Babylonian equivalent of the Sumerian goddess Inanna. Gilgamesh refused her advances, resulting in the goddess sending the bull of Heaven to kill the pair of friends, but they kill the bull instead.\textsuperscript{75} For their offense, the gods sentenced Enkidu to death and sickness took him. The loss of his friend/brother greatly affected Gilgamesh who mourned for years as if he had lost a wife. Having grasped the concept of death, Gilgamesh finally goes on a quest to find immortality.\textsuperscript{76}

While the two characters were not genetically related, as later myths will describe, they represented two sides of the same coin and their relationship developed in such a way that they were closer than brothers. In the third tablet of the \textit{Epic of Gilgamesh}, after visiting Ninsun, the goddess adopted Enkidu as her son, making the two brothers.\textsuperscript{77} Their love for one another was

\textsuperscript{74} George, \textit{Gilgamesh}, 12-21.
\textsuperscript{75} George, \textit{Gilgamesh}, 47-53.
\textsuperscript{76} George, \textit{Gilgamesh}, 54-70.
\textsuperscript{77} George, \textit{Gilgamesh}, 23-24.
closer than siblings and was even mentioned as being closer than lovers. As a sibling myth, the tale was one of the first articulations of the dichotomy between civilization and life in the wild. They embodied both the civilized and wild ways of life among early humans as well as the dual aspects of human nature, both divine and animalistic.

According to Enlightenment and modern ideology regarding the dualism of human nature, humans consist of a divine mind, which allows them to reason and understand the world they observe, and an animalistic body, which is subject to the whims of desire. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* perfectly described this duality of human nature through the comparison of its main characters, the brothers Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Gilgamesh was born into a cultured society. As the builder of Uruk’s walls, he was a civilizing force, creating protection for the city as well as serving as its king. His supernatural abilities, such as increased strength and visions in the form of dreams, stemmed from his divine heritage and represented why a life of civility, order, and worship should be sought by all humans. He was the ancient equivalent of a superhero, idolized by the population for his powers gained from the gods, thus promoting worship. However, this divine nature made Gilgamesh arrogant as he saw himself as more god than man because of his parentage.

To balance Gilgamesh, Enkidu was created as the opposing force of humanity. As more beast than man, Enkidu was one with nature. He interacted peacefully with the animals of the

78 George, *Gilgamesh*, 11.


81 George, *Gilgamesh*, 3-4.
wild and lived a quiet, though lonely existence. He was naïve and childlike, saving animals from
the hunter’s traps without understanding human survival.\textsuperscript{82} Gilgamesh sent Shamhat, a temple
prostitute, to seduce and civilize the wild man. Through this interaction, Enkidu learned how to
live as a human and was rejected by the animals he once called companions. He was led into
civilization, clothed, and taught how to behave as a ‘true human’.

On his deathbed, Enkidu cursed the trapper and Shamhat for turning the wilderness
against him, blaming civilization for his downfall. However, the god of justice, Shamash, came
to him in a dream to remind him that Shamhat gave him clothes and shelter and taught him how
to be a human and brought him to Gilgamesh, his greatest friend. Without the prostitute priestess,
he would not have gained the love of Uruk, and Shamash promised the whole city would mourn
his loss, easing his troubled soul.\textsuperscript{83} It again proves that only through worship of the gods and
surrender to the laws of civilization could the restless fear of death be resolved. While he
enjoyed great freedom and peace in the wilderness, he was viewed as nothing more than an
animal. Through civilization, Enkidu became a man, and could rest easily having lived a
valuable life.

The overly divine nature of Gilgamesh and the overly animalistic nature of Enkidu
presented the belief that humans were inherently an equal balance of both. Enkidu and
Gilgamesh were only one third human, marking their imbalance as men. Though their origins
granted them enhanced abilities, they could never fully fit in with the rest of mankind. Only after
Enkidu conformed to the social norms of Uruk was he accepted as a human being and not an

\textsuperscript{82} George, \textit{Gilgamesh}, 1-11.

\textsuperscript{83} George, \textit{Gilgamesh}, 58-59.
animal. It can thus be discerned that interactions between primitive, tribal humans and early civilizations resembled the relationship between Enkidu and Gilgamesh.

The civilization-savage dichotomy was a continuing theme throughout world mythology. Nearer to Mesopotamia in distance and time period, the Egyptian mythos revealed a similar tale of civilization. Egyptian mythology consisted of a complicated group of deities which alternated in significance depending on the region and dynasty in charge. However, the most common and prevalent Egyptian myth, the myth of the Earth deity Geb and the sky deity Nut, revealed the origin of their civilization.

Geb and Nut had four children, the first of which was Osiris. At his birth, a heavenly voice called out that the ‘Ruler of All’ had been born. Osiris was followed by his sister Isis, brother Set, and sister Nephthys, each born on one of five days added to the end of the 360-day calendar to outwit a curse placed upon Nut that she would never give birth on any day of the year. Osiris married his sister Isis and was given domain over the black soil of the Nile River while Set married the other sister Nephthys and ruled over the red soil of the desert. While the siblings were the first myth of birth, they were not the first humans as they ruled over the earliest Egyptian tribes. These tribes of early men were cannibalistic brutes, living like animals similar to Enkidu, until civilized by the gifts of the four sibling gods.

Osiris and Isis developed a close relationship with humans. Osiris travelled the river and taught the humans how to plant crops while Isis taught them how to turn wheat and barley into bread. These divine siblings civilized the wild humans by educating them in agriculture, and for their great service the humans declared them the first pharaohs. While Osiris spread civilization


to the rest of the world, Isis ruled in his stead, setting a precedent for female Egyptian rulers which continued throughout the dynasties.\textsuperscript{86} Osiris and Isis, even their sister Nephthys, are depicted in hieroglyphics as human as opposed to the other animal-headed gods of Egypt.\textsuperscript{87} It is entirely possible, if not probable, that they were based upon real early rulers in the region who helped to unify and civilize the populace of the Nile River. As with Gilgamesh, as well as later Greek, Roman, and European cultures, the culture’s historic lists of kings often began with a mythological figure. Myth was the earliest form of history, explaining how a culture began and why rules and regulations are to be upheld.

This basis of Osiris as the first pharaoh allowed subsequent pharaohs to utilize the divinity of the position to control the culture and thereby unify the Egyptian people, connecting commoner to pharaoh. This relationship allowed for the construction of the great monuments to the gods for the pharaohs, elaborate burial rituals, and for expansion and control. But, it also led the Egyptians to see the two divine siblings as heroes beloved by all. Such praise of Isis and Osiris caused jealousy as Set, ruler of the desert, began to hate his successful brother.

In the myth, Set’s jealousy of his successful brother led to a challenge. The adversary, as Set was known, constructed a lead chest and offered it at a banquet to whoever could fit inside. As it was constructed specifically for Osiris, the pharaoh lay within and Set slammed the chest shut, sinking it to the bottom of the Nile.\textsuperscript{88} The conflict between Osiris and Set symbolized the

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\textsuperscript{86} Rivka Ulmer, \textit{Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash} (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 116.
\textsuperscript{87} Hunefer, \textit{Papyrus of Hunefer} (Thebes: Early 19th Dynasty).
\end{flushright}
battle between civilization and outsiders. As pharaoh, Osiris represented order and control while Set represented chaos and destruction which threatened the kingdom.\textsuperscript{89}

Following the sinking of Osiris’ body, the Nile carried the chest to the sea where it landed in Byblos, forming a tree which became part of the king of Byblos’ home. Isis wept for her husband and thus the Nile flooded each year.\textsuperscript{90} The loss of Osiris and the victory of Set were often equated with a period in which the deserts encroached on the fertile Nile lands, explaining a period of hardship in early Egyptian life. The myth continued, however, when Isis recovered Osiris’ body and hid it in the desert. One day while hunting, Set found the body again and angrily tore it into fourteen pieces and scattered them across Egypt.\textsuperscript{91} Once again chaos, represented by Set, was victorious over order and civilization, represented as Osiris.

Isis and Nephthys, Set’s sister and wife, took the form of birds to search for Osiris’ body once more. At each location, they performed the burial rites and created a temple, thus explaining the holy sites and reliquaries throughout the kingdom, creating a sacred space for each city as a site of worship and pilgrimage as well as governance within the kingdom.\textsuperscript{92} The sisters recovered every piece of Osiris except for his penis, which was said to have been eaten by a fish, describing why Egyptians find it taboo to eat fish and the symbolism between fertility and the Nile. With the rest of his body assembled, Isis wrapped the corpse, suggesting an origin for the Egyptian practice of mummification.

\textsuperscript{90} Mojsov, \textit{Osiris}, xx.
\textsuperscript{91} Bierlein, \textit{Parallel Myths}, 213, 215.
\textsuperscript{92} Mojsov, \textit{Osiris}, xx.
With the help of the magic god Thoth, Isis casted a spell that breathed life back into Osiris and they conceived their son, Horus. For Isis’ devotion to her beloved husband, the gods granted Osiris a position as ruler of the dead. He traveled through his mother, the sky, into the afterlife as a symbol of rebirth after death. Osiris thus represented the first agricultural, civilizing force in Egypt, the first pharaoh to rule Egypt, and the first Egyptian to die and be reborn in the afterlife. He became the god of fertility, as represented by agriculture and the Nile, royalty as the pharaoh, and the ruler of the dead.

To replace his father, because of Osiris’ appointment to the underworld, Horus succeeded to the throne of Egypt, dividing the kingdom with Set through a series of conflicts discussed throughout Egyptian mythology.\(^{93}\) Thus, dynastic succession, further solidifying the rule of the pharaohs, has its foundation in the mythology. Set continued to symbolize the barbaric outsiders, the hunter-gatherer tribes of Africa who opposed the Nile River civilization of Osiris. Like Gilgamesh and Enkidu, then, these two sibling deities represented the two lifestyles of early humanity, as desert nomads and settled farmers, as well as the conflict between the two as civilization attempted to expand and dominate outsiders.

Egyptian culture flourished for centuries under the watchful eye of Horus, seen as the protector from evil. Set was symbolically defeated by Horus in the mythos and slightly redeemed as a figure of masculinity and protection himself.\(^{94}\) Osiris offered immortality in the afterlife, resulting in devout followers who dedicated their lives in preparation for the next. The belief in Osiris provided a moral compass for commoners, fearing the judgment of Osiris which would

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\(^{94}\) Velde, *Seth*, 32-41.
result in their soul being devoured by a crocodile. Pharaohs, as the embodiment of Horus, constructed massive tombs and surrounded themselves with rich treasures and servants to aid them in the afterlife governed by Osiris.

Egyptian mythology influenced the Hebrews of the Levant. The origin of the Jewish people continues to be a subject of much debate, especially their connection to the Egyptians. According to the Bible, the Israelites were slaves to the Egyptians who fled Egypt to the Holy Land. However, the lack of Egyptian sources coinciding with the Hebrew story makes historical research into the validity of these events difficult. Nevertheless, a connection between the Egyptian kingdom and the Semitic people of the Levant had to have influenced the writing of the Hebrew Bible.

According to historic records, the New Kingdom of Egypt expanded into the Levant under Merneptah who ruled in the nineteenth dynasty from 1213 to 1203 B.C.E. Often, new rulers were depicted reestablishing their control over conquered people, which would explain the stele depicting the tribe of Israel, the first hieroglyphic mention of the name. The hieroglyphic symbol for Israel depicted a nomad, which was utilized for nearly all non-Egyptian peoples. Here again, the battle between the pharaoh representing civilization under Osiris and the foreign nomads, represented by Set, can be seen in the history of Egyptian conquest.

Other hieroglyphs from the period depict slaves known as Shasu, meaning “move by foot,” referring to their nomadic ways. It has been suggested by linguist Michael C. Astour that one of these tribes, the Shasu of yhw, were the Israelites as yhw referred to Yahweh, the Hebrew

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96 Margaret S. Drower, Flinders Petrie: A Life of Archaeology (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 220-221 and Mojsov, Osiris, 75.
Another theory refers to the *Habiru* tribe, who are recorded settling in Egypt during the thirteenth and twelfth centuries B.C.E. The etymological similarities between *Habiru* and Hebrew drew modern biblical scholars to conclude that the *Habiru* were the first Hebrews in Egypt.

Whether or not actual historical interaction between the Israelites and the Egyptians occurred as depicted in the Bible, a connection between the two cultures certainly impacted the development in the Jewish religion. In Genesis, God promised Abraham that his children would populate the region from the Nile to the Euphrates. After which, Abraham and his wife Sarah traveled to Egypt for supplies where the pharaoh fell in love with Sarah and showered Abraham with gifts, thinking Sarah was his sister and not his wife. When the pharaoh discovered the truth, he told the two to leave and they returned to Canaan, the land promised to Abraham’s descendants. Sarah ultimately gave birth to Isaac, who with his wife Rebekah had twins.

Isaac and Rebeckah’s twins, Esau and Jacob, were said to be fighting within the womb as they would in life, a continuation of the prevalent sibling rivalry myth present in the Bible. God prophesized that they would become two separate nations and the eldest would serve the younger. Esau was born first with Jacob holding his heel as they entered the world. Esau became a skilled hunter and farmer while Jacob became lazy, remaining in tents, which symbolized a civilization-nomadic duality as Esau lived like a hunter-gatherer and Jacob resided indoors. Jacob took Esau’s birthright from him twice, first by forcing the famished elder brother to swear his birthright away for a bowl of pottage, and secondly by tricking their blinding father Isaac by

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pretending to be Esau to receive his blessing. Esau swore vengeance on his brother, so their mother, who aided Jacob in tricking Isaac, sent Jacob away where he fathered eleven sons with three wives. Jacob later returned to Canaan, wrestled with an angel along the way, and took the name Israel, thus making him the founder of the Israelites. He and Esau made amends and buried their father together, signifying the end of their rivalry and reunion of their family as one.  

However, sibling rivalry once again plagued Jacob’s house. His eleventh son, Joseph, was his favorite and his ten elder brothers became jealous. Instead of killing him as they had intended, the brothers decided to sell Joseph into slavery and told their father he had died. Jacob mourned the loss of his son while Joseph became imprisoned in Egypt after his master’s wife feigned rape. While imprisoned, Joseph utilized his ability of divination to interpret the dreams of the pharaoh’s servants. He was called before the pharaoh and made vizier for his talents.

A great famine then befell the Near East, affecting all but Egypt, and Jacob sent his sons to trade for food. Joseph framed his brothers for theft, but seeing that they had changed over the years, revealed himself as their lost brother and the family was reunited. Jacob desired to see his son once more before he died, and the Israelites traveled to Egypt where they multiplied. And thus, according to the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites began living in Egypt, though no other historical evidence corroborates this account. Joseph lived for many years in Egypt, and when he died, he made the Israelites promise to return his bones to the Promised Land. He was placed in a coffin and sank to the bottom of the Nile, a parallel with the Osiris myth as the Egyptian god was first captured in a coffin by his jealous brother and sank in the Nile.

100 Genesis 25:25-29.


Though many stories of the Israelites reflect the sibling rivalry motif, the most famous Jewish sibling rivalry predates the formation of the Hebrew tribe, beginning with the first two siblings of the human race. The story of Cain and Abel is one of the most well-known and studied biblical texts, but its significance to comparative mythology has yet to be realized. The story is brief and lacks detail, though Midrash and monastic commentary have delved deeper into its meaning. In Genesis 4, Adam knew Eve carnally and they conceived a child. Cain was born first and Abel followed. Cain became a farmer while Abel tended to sheep. The two offered their hard earned labor to God who favored Abel’s sacrifice over Cain’s. Out of jealousy, Cain murdered his brother, the first murder in history, and hid the fact from God. God thus marked Cain and forced him to wander the earth.103

Cain had a son, Enoch, and founded a city which he named after his son. The Bible then described Cain’s descendants by their professions of crafting tools and instruments.104 When studying the name of Cain etymologically, its closeness to the Arabic qyn could point to the meaning “metalworker” which would describe his role as a farmer, founder of cities, and father to craftsmen.105 Similarly, Abel can be translated as “herdsman,” describing his role in life.106 The dual roles of the first two humans born into the world reveal again the profound importance of shepherds and farmers in the development of human society. The story is similar to the Egyptian myth, in which Osiris was the first born and represented fertility and agriculture, utilizing it to found cities and civilizations.

103 Genesis 4:1-4:16.


106 Hess, Personal Names of Genesis, 27.
However, the similarity ended there as the emphasis in the story was reversed from its Egyptian counterpart. Whereas the evil Set, an outsider against civilization, murdered his elder brother Osiris out of jealousy in the Egyptian story, it is the elder who slays the younger in the biblical story. Abel, the younger brother who represents the Israelites nomadic life, was chosen by God suggesting God’s preference of the nomadic lifestyle as opposed to the sinfulness of agricultural civilizations. The Sumerian and Egyptian myths emphasize that civilization is the proper course of human society, but civilizations oppressed the Israelites, and to them, God chose their way of life to be correct. Therefore, the roles were reversed though the civilization/nomad dichotomy remains the same.

While only twenty-five lines are dedicated to the story of Cain and his descendants, the siblings’ tale remains one of the most well-known stories in Genesis, next to the Flood and their parents’ creation. The limited information provided about the first humans and first murder left many questions unanswered. To fill the void, rabbis interpreted the Bible’s text in an attempt to explain its hidden truths to the Hebrew people. In the centuries since, the story of Cain and Abel has evolved and become more elaborate. With the Midrash tradition of the Hebrew rabbis, a more detailed understanding of the first two brothers can be discerned.

One of the first issues with the story comes from Cain’s wife. The Bible specifically mentioned the birth of Cain and Abel, but did not mention any other children being born until after Cain’s exile when Eve conceived Seth as a replacement for the loss of Abel.\(^{107}\) If a nonliteral interpretation of the events is presented, the story becomes more similar to the Sumerian comparison. If Adam was created as a man at one with nature and was seduced and civilized by Eve as Enkidu was by Shamhat, then he existed alongside other humans, making it

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\(^{107}\) Genesis 4:25
possible for Cain to have found a wife and founded a city with his son’s name. If meant literally, that Adam and Eve were the first humans in existence, then from where did Cain’s wife come?

According to a minor rabbinic tradition, by interpreting the lines regarding Cain and Abel’s births, it can be discerned that Eve gave birth to more than two children. Eve became pregnant once, birthed Cain first and later Abel. The rabbis suggested that the phrasing of “and again she bore his brother Abel” expressed at Gen. 4:2 implied the birth of children between, described in the tradition as Cain and his twin sister followed by Abel and his twin sister.108 This myth creates an extremely close parallel to the Egyptian birth of Osiris, Isis, Set, and Nephthys, born in the same order as their Hebrew counterparts would have been, probably spread over days in the same way as the Egyptian myth with both sets of children representing the same roles in society. The theory allowed for a wife for both Cain and Abel to continue the lineage of humanity.

The other unexplained issue with the tale of Cain and Abel is motive. Why did Cain kill Abel? From the biblical description, Cain was saddened and upset that God chose Abel’s offering over his own.109 The jealousy of Set over Osiris is repeated in Cain’s jealousy towards Abel. Both were chosen as the correct course of human development, though the roles were reversed in the two myths, and their brothers were made outcasts, forced to jealous violence as a form of retribution. However, in both the Egyptian and Hebrew myth, a secondary motive was established.

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109 Genesis 4:3-4:7.
In late period Egyptian myths, Set claimed that Osiris had an affair with Nephthys, Set’s sister-wife. The result of their union was Anubis, whose jackal appearance implies Set was his true father, but his role as guardian of the underworld and aid to the resurrection of Osiris implied that Osiris was his true father. This jealousy motive was reiterated in the rabbinic interpretation of Cain and Abel in accordance to the belief that Cain and Abel were born with twin sisters, and each sister was assigned to one of them as their wife. However, Cain believed Abel’s twin-wife was more beautiful and the two quarreled over who deserved her hand. Again, a parallel can be seen between Egyptian and Hebrew traditions.

The mythology of Sumeria and Egypt expressed the duality of humanity in its earliest stage of development. The battle between agricultural civilizations and nomadic hunter-gatherers over which form of society was proper and destined to drive humanity forward was depicted in the earliest myths. These two cultures, thus, influenced the development of the Hebrew people, either through direct contact or indirectly through cultural blending, and therefore the Hebrew mythos developed similar themes and structures. These early cultures were closely related to one another, developing naturally from the dichotomy of hunter-gatherers into civilization, and their myths relay that fact. Later European cultures, however, lack this dichotomy of hunter-gatherer opposed to civilization expressed through sibling rivalry.

In Greece and Rome, hunter-gatherer and agricultural aspects of society appear to be melded together peacefully in their civilizations. The struggle to establish civilization as the proper form of society was nearly nonexistent in Greek myth. Instead, civilization evolved

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111 Luttikhuizen, Eve’s Children, 53.
naturally from the hunter-gatherer stage. According to Hesiod, there were five ages of man. Similar to the Hebrew and Sumerian myths, the people of the first age, known as the Golden Age, lived long lives and were peaceful and free of sin. In the second, Silver Age, and third, Bronze Age, humans were violent and destroyed by the gods, the latter in the form of a flood. The fourth age was the age of heroes, while the fifth age referred to the contemporary period of Hesiod and Greek civilization.\footnote{Hesiod, \textit{Works and Days} (Berkley: University of California Press, 1996), 67-73 and McCants, \textit{Founding Gods}, 20.}

The fifth age, described as the Iron Age, was depicted as a time of turmoil and labor.\footnote{Hesiod, \textit{Works and Days}, 73.} As iron tools were used for farming, the people of the Iron Age worked hard to provide for themselves as opposed to the Golden Age where everything was provided for them. The violence of the Silver and Bronze Ages described a period of warfare between the two lifestyles, nomadic herders and city dwelling agricultural civilizations, but by the Heroic Age, civilizations were prevalent and agriculture was the basis for the Iron Age. Therefore, the Greeks focus on their own civilization, rather than the competition with hunter-gatherer societies which posed little threat to their development.

The Greek deities represented the whole of human experience, from wisdom and war to hunting and art. Many of these deities were siblings who represented opposing forces of nature, but their conflicts were often based on human issues like jealousy and power rather than conflicting ideologies. Greek city-states often had mythological foundation stories which
represented the principles on which their civilization was based. Delphi, popular for its oracle, claimed Apollo founded the site by saving his mother from the dragon, Python.\textsuperscript{114}

Apollo became the god of culture through arts, poetry, sports, and prophecy. He represented the core of civilization while his twin sister, Artemis, represented the animalistic side of humanity, through hunting and childbirth. She represented the connection the Greeks had with nature while Apollo connected the people with the gods. The twins were thus the epitome of the human dualism first represented by Gilgamesh and Enkidu. However, the twins did not quarrel, showing that the Greeks recognized and honored both aspects of human nature; animalistic and civilized.

In one of the most well-known foundation myths, Athens was offered two gifts, a horse from Poseidon and an olive tree from Athena. The citizens chose the olive tree and thus named their city Athens after their matron.\textsuperscript{115} The olive tree symbolized their emphasis on trade, wisdom, and strength. As the two rival Peloponnesian powers, Sparta and Athens, struggled for control, and thus their patrons, the half-siblings Ares and Athena, often clash in Greek mythology. While sibling rivalry is prevalent throughout Greek mythology, its relation to the foundation of civilizations is limited to the rivalries of city-states.

In Rome, however, the foundation myth is possibly the most well-known of the sibling rivalries myths. The most widely accepted account of the city’s foundation, even within its own time, was the story of Romulus and Remus.\textsuperscript{116} After a long introduction of the kings list


throughout prehistoric Italy, similar to the kings list of Sumer, most ancient historians come to the tale of the twins.\textsuperscript{117} In the kingdom of Alba, said to be founded itself by the descendants of the Trojan hero Aeneas, the throne came to the brothers Numitor and Amulius. Again, beginning as a sibling rivalry similar to Jacob and Esau, Numitor was the rightful heir while Amulius was granted control of the treasury. With the wealth of the treasury, Amulius easily overpowered his brother and took control of the kingdom, sparking the trail leading to Rome’s foundation.\textsuperscript{118}

As king, Amulius feared usurpation, repeating a common theme throughout Greek and Roman myths of children rising up against their parents, such the myth of Cronus and the gods or Oedipus.\textsuperscript{119} To avoid losing his throne, Amulius murdered Numitor’s son and forced his daughter, Rhea Silva, to become a Vestal Virgin, ensuring that she bore no heir to challenge his rule. Nevertheless, Rhea Silva became pregnant, some claim by Amulius himself while others claim divine conception from the war god Mars.\textsuperscript{120} Whichever the case, Amulius ordered her death for breaking the covenant of the Vestals, the punishment for which was to be buried alive. However, Rhea Silva gave birth to twins before her execution, and the twins were taken by a huntsman to be left in the wild to die.

However, the huntsman could not bear to murder the children, so he left them along a riverbank in a basket. Perhaps because of their divine parentage or destiny to rule, the gods protected the twins. The Tiber River flooded, through divine coercion, and carried the twins in


\textsuperscript{118} Dionysus, \textit{Roman Antiquities}, 253.


their basket safely downstream, which is similar to the Hebrew story of Moses.121 Once safely
ashore again, a she-wolf discovered the twins and nursed them to health while a woodpecker fed
them. Even in the Roman period, historians were skeptical of the legend of the suckling she-
wolf, accrediting the belief to a colloquial nickname for a prostitute to make the story more
realistic and believable to history.122 Nevertheless, the twins were then discovered by a shepherd
and his wife who raised them as their own.

The twins, Romulus and Remus, spent their days herding the sheep. They were natural
born leaders, strong and mighty as demi-gods, and gathered a following of youths. They
quarreled with Numitor’s shepherds over territory and one day, while Romulus was busy making
a sacrifice, Remus was captured by their enemies and taken to Numitor. When Numitor
discovered the child was his grandson, he released him to fetch his twin brother to dispatch the
evil king, Amulius, which they easily did with their superior strength and strategic minds.
According to Plutarch, Remus, who was within the city waiting for trial, rallied the citizens
against the king while Romulus attacked from outside the walls, giving Amulius no escape.123
With Amulius vanquished, the crown of Alba was offered to the brothers, but they returned it to
the rightful owner, their grandfather Numitor.124

Numitor thus offered Romulus and Remus the chance to create a colony for the kingdom
and the two went in search of the perfect location for a new city. While Romulus preferred the
Palatine Hill, Remus desired to construct his city on the Aventine Hill. To settle the quarrel, the

121 Exodus 2:1-2:10
122 Livy, Books I and II, 19.
123 Dionysus of Halicarnassus, The Roman Antiquities of Dionysus of Halicarnassensis (London:
Bookfellers of London and Westminster, 1758), 189 and Livy, Books I and II, 22
brothers turned to divination. Each stood on their hilltops and watched for a flock of vultures, the sacred bird of Roman augury. While Remus spotted his six birds first, Romulus saw twelve birds, and each claimed victory. Romulus constructed his walls, but to prove their ineffectiveness, Remus leapt over it. Out of rage, Romulus slayed his brother, claiming that no one would ever cross the walls of Rome again. Thus, the city was founded from the blood of a slain brother and named after the murderer.\textsuperscript{125} Indeed, the root of Romulus and Remus’ names means “little Rome.”

Romulus instantly regretted his actions and buried and mourned Remus according to tradition. Romulus was then declared king of Rome, and through a series of wars he expanded its territory. Through his life, Romulus was depicted as a heroic leader and warrior. He was credited for the foundation of the legion, patricians, and the senators, thus forming the framework of Roman society.\textsuperscript{126} He ruled as joint king after defeating the Latins, but when his co-ruler was assassinated, he became severely corrupt and despised by the population.\textsuperscript{127} Most accounts agreed he was murdered by the senators, a scene which repeated itself centuries later with the assassination of Julius Caesar. According to the assassination account, the senators ripped Romulus limb from limb into several pieces, reminiscent of the Osiris myth. To keep the murder from the public, the senators claimed Romulus had ascended to heaven as the deified founder of the city, thus beginning the deification of Roman leaders.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{125} Livy, \textit{Books I and II}, 23.

\textsuperscript{126} Plutarch, \textit{Plutarch’s Lives of Romulus, Lycurus, Solon, Pericles, Cato, Pompey, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Demosthenes, Cicero, Mark Antony, Brutus, and Others, and His Comparisons} (New York: John W. Lovell Company, 1889), 16.

\textsuperscript{127} Livy, \textit{Books I and II}, 33-36.

Romulus was credited for nearly every aspect of Roman culture and civilization. He represented Roman values as a warrior culture centered on the pride and protection of its city. The Romans spread their influence, at any cost, because they were chosen by the gods to rule the world. Through the murder of his brother, Romulus proved that nothing could challenge Rome, not even family ties. Everything the Romans did in life was for their city, and thus they became the most powerful empire in the ancient world. The story of Romulus and Remus was influenced by Egyptian, Sumerian, and Hebrew myths, such as the founder twins and jealous sibling murder, and thus influenced several more European tales through the vast influence of the Roman Empire on the continent.

As with Greek myths, Roman myth did not depict the struggle between agrarian civilizations and hunter-gatherer tribes, as the various territories in Italy were established kingdoms similar to the Greek city-states. Civilization thrived around the Mediterranean, having learned from the Egyptians and Mesopotamians. After their myths were established, the Romans came into contact with northern tribal people whom they deemed savages and barbarians. As this interaction occurred after the foundation of Greek and Roman myth, it was not depicted within the myths. Instead, it is recorded in historical records.

Roman myth essentially imitated Greek myth and took on a more historical approach to storytelling. Romulus and Remus were depicted as mortals, possibly demi-gods, but humans who lived, ruled, and died along with real historical figures. The ancient historians relaying their story attempted to make it believable and removed the legendary aspects in their own lifetime instead of writing them off as myths or gods. Gilgamesh and Osiris were depicted as historic leaders and founders of civilizations, just as the Hebrew leaders and Romulus. However, the historical
analysis of the legend by contemporary Roman scholars makes it more difficult to discern history from myth.

It is entirely within the realm of possibility that Romulus and Remus were real figures who founded the city of Rome, whether the details of their legendary birth, survival, and ascension after death were exaggerated or not. The foundation myth established a connection between Rome and fellow neighboring kingdoms and tribes, such as Alba, the Etruscans, the Sabines, and the Latins. It also establishes the basis for Roman culture, both as a monarchy, dual or collaborative rule, and the republic. While it is possible that Romulus was a real figure and founded the city of Rome, his influence on the establishment of Roman culture is likely over exaggerated. The legions were likely assembled by the city’s leader to defend it, which fits with a powerful military ruler as Romulus was depicted. However, the establishment of the patricians and senators as the city elders was more likely a natural progression of society, as was reflected in the myth of Rome’s foundation.

Nevertheless, the Romulus and Remus myth depicted every aspect of Roman society. Nearly every historic event through the course of the Roman Republic and Empire is reflected in the story of Romulus and Remus. Roman politics relied on manipulation and strength to gain power. The importance of the military to defend the city as well as depose an abusive leader, the senior members of society defending the people by ruling in collaboration after deposing a tyrant, the constant flux of political leadership, the joint rule of powerful figures to maintain order, assassinations of opposition to one’s power, the need for expansion, and the deification of emperors are all reflected through Romulus’ life. He not only represented the city’s namesake, but also embodied every aspect of Roman culture, offering an explanation for how Romans lived their lives. Foundation myths depict the most important aspects of the culture they represent.
The earliest human societies utilized myths to explain the world around them and how they lived. From nomadic tribal hunter-gatherers to the first agrarian civilizations, gods and goddesses began as personifications of culture. They describe the struggle between lifestyles, coming into conflict, often with fatal results, in order to describe which choice humanity should take. The story of Gilgamesh, Osiris, Abel, and Romulus explain why civilization, often specific to the civilization they personally founded, should be protected and idealized as the proper course of human society. Jealousy is depicted as the inciting conflict between the sibling figures, which represented opposing forces or courses of action for each specific culture, resulting in the primordial depiction of murder as the most severe of punishments. The similarities between these myths denotes either the unity of human consciousness, each culture developing similar stories innately, or an origin of a primordial myth from which all civilization evolved, reflecting the original tale in their own way.
Chapter Three

Twins: Heroes and Opposites

While there are numerous sibling deities, few share the bond that twins have. Twin deities present deeper examples of duality and sibling relationships. On one hand, twins can be the most powerful of heroes, coming from humble beginnings, gaining strength and skills through their lives together, and saving humanity through great feats of heroism. On the other hand, twins can represent a deeper divide between the dualistic ideologies represented in other sibling myths, most drastically the divide between good and evil. Therefore, twin deities present the most extreme examples of the sibling deity myths, and by studying these myths, one can better understand the sibling myth motif.

Some of the myths already mentioned specifically refer to sibling deities as twins. For example, Romulus and Remus were twin brothers, born of a god and a mortal woman. Their story presented one of the most prevalent twin myths, the story of the hero twins, siblings of divine birth who were abandoned as children, helped each other survive, and prevailed as the saviors, protectors, and founders of a civilization. This storyline can be seen in numerous cultures ranging from the Greco-Romans to Native American cultures. Other sets of twins found in myth, such as Yama and Yami of Hinduism or Freyja and Frey of Norse mythology, represented the duality of life and death, utilizing the close relationship of twins to demonstrate the two sides of an aspect in nature.

While these and other tales specifically detail the close relationship of these siblings as twins, some myths have been left to interpretation. The sibling myth of Inanna and Ereshkigal described the close relation between life and death in the Sumerian culture. The birth of Inanna and Ereshkigal is not recorded in the source stories; they are only described as sisters, but their
closeness in character has drawn comparisons which could point to a twin relationship. According to Joseph Campbell, their similarities were so close that they actually represented two sides of the same deity. By journeying to the underworld, Inanna was stripped of her powers, experienced death, and conquered it by returning to life, gaining power over life and death and, in an essence, replacing her sister in the Sumerian pantheon. Their similarities in character allowed for the syncretism of the two sisters into one deity. Both were powerful females whose rage brought absolute destruction to those who wronged them. Their close characteristics and strong dualistic properties could thus suggest a twin relationship, though it was never specifically described in the myths.

More specifically described was the myth of the birth of Osiris and his siblings. In a traditional creation of the world story, Geb, the Earth, and Nut, the sky, were separated by Ra, the king of the gods, for fear of their offspring overthrowing him. This myth described the separation between the earth and the sky, one of the most common myths. When Ra learned that Nut was pregnant, he forbid her from giving birth on any of the 360 days that made up the year in prehistoric times. To assure the birth occurred, the god of justice and balance, created five new days for each of Nut’s children to be born. As Nut was only impregnated once and gave birth to a different god each day, those gods can be viewed biologically as quintuplets. Therefore, Set was not only Osiris’ brother, but his twin brother, representing his opposite. Furthermore, Isis, Osiris’ sister-wife and co-ruler, was Osiris’ twin, explaining their close similarities and ability to rule side by side as equals, establishing the gender neutrality of Egyptian kingship.

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As with earlier myths, the Hebrew Bible left much to the interpretation of its readers. The birth of Cain and Abel was described vaguely, stating that Cain was born and then Abel without any passage of time or description of the pregnancy to narrow down the relationship between the two brothers. If they were born years apart, then Cain can be viewed as the older brother who failed to look after his younger sibling. However, if the passage was meant to describe their births as being one immediately following the other, then their twin relationship would explain their close characteristics and the jealousy of Cain towards a sibling he viewed as equal, but God chose as superior. As twins, Cain and Abel represented the struggle for superiority within the family from two equal combatants, similar to the later story of Esau and Jacob, who were specifically described as struggling twins.\textsuperscript{131}

These myths present unanswerable questions about the relationship of their siblings, either through lack of description in the texts or by leaving it up for interpretation. The relationship between siblings is often more profound than between siblings with an age difference, and how the myth is interpreted can change one’s perspective on the message the story is trying to relay. For example, the three Greek brothers Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon, differ in age. All possessed equal powers but represented far different aspects of the world, whereas the specifically described twins Apollo and Artemis represented stark contrasts to one another; the two sides of the same whole. The myth of Apollo and Artemis also offered one of the first examples of the hero twin protomyth.

Apollo and Artemis were born to Leto, a Titaness, when she was impregnated by Zeus. Angered at Zeus’ betrayal, as with most of Zeus’ myths, his wife Hera cursed Leto so that she could not give birth on the earth, similar to Ra’s curse on Nut. Leto luckily found the floating

island of Delos and gave birth to the twins thanks to the loophole of it not being a secure island.\textsuperscript{132} Still angered, Hera sent two assassins to slay Leto. The first, the dragon Pytho, was slain by the four day old Apollo with a magical bow and arrow given to him by Hephaestus, the smith god. The second attack was from a giant known as Tityos. This time, both Artemis and Apollo battled the opponent to save their mother, and Zeus sent the giant to Tartarus, accepting his twin children as his own.\textsuperscript{133} Their heroic deeds and use of the bow and arrow became characteristic of the twin gods who represented the balance between wild nature and civilized arts.

Apollo and Artemis were two of the most important deities in the Greek world, offering a place of worship for men and women to honor nature or society, the two halves of Greek culture. Both were the epitome of human beauty and virtue, presenting the model for human behavior. While their origin myth is fairly typical of heroic and godly tales, it presents the mold in which other hero twin myths follow. Twins born of strife to a banished mother are often left to fend for themselves. They grew up together, learning the same skills and thus taking on the same characteristics. As twins, these heroes represented the same heroic whole of a story. They often became masters at war or sport and use these skills to provide for their culture.

Closely following the Greek mold, but solidifying the framework of the hero twin myth, was the tale of Romulus and Remus. The twin brothers were born to Rhea Silva, a banished princess who was impregnated by Mars, broke her oath as a Vestal Virgin, and sentenced to death by burial. Her twin sons were left abandoned in the woods to assure they would not survive


to retake the throne, but nature pitied them and they were raised by a she-wolf. As children they were discovered by a shepherd couple and raised as their own. Their kinship to Mars, however, made them natural warriors and they proved their strategic and militaristic abilities by quarreling with neighbor farmers and thwarting their evil uncle’s rule. Instead of taking the kingdom for themselves, they returned it to the rightful king, their grandfather, and left to found their own society with a following of outcasts.\textsuperscript{134}

Their story then descended into the myth of sibling rivalry. As the two disagreed on where their city should be founded, Romulus killed his brother, setting the tone for Roman history of war and betrayal for the sake of expansion. However, their origin presented a pattern which can be seen through other myths. It was very similar to the tale of Oedipus, a hero who was abandoned as a child, raised in a different kingdom only to return and take his rightful place as king of his homeland.\textsuperscript{135} The Romulus and Remus myth followed the same story, but focused on the twin dynamic. The two Roman founders were born for their roles in life, fated to be warriors and heroes, and together created a new culture around the values they held. This story reappeared in a culture far beyond the scope of trade and cultural syncretism, with the Mayan Hero Twin myth.

The Mayans had a rich mythology which was probably derived from earlier American cultures. These myths were preserved orally and likely hieroglyphically until the arrival of the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. Only three authentic codices from the Pre-Columbian period remain. These are the Madrid, Dresden, and Paris Codices. They each depict rituals regarding


Mayan cosmology. While the codices and hieroglyphs aid historians in understanding Mayan life, it can be difficult to discern myths from imagery alone. Oral and hieroglyphic myths were recorded in a manuscript known as the *Popol Vuh* and disseminated through various Franciscan friars throughout the centuries to better understand the Mesoamerican cultures. Though the original manuscript was lost, the myths were preserved and translated for modern historians.\textsuperscript{136}

The creation myth told of two beings, Tepeu and Q’uq’umatz, collectively known as the Forefathers, who existed in a world of sky and water with no land, similar to the Japanese myth of Izanagi and Izanami.\textsuperscript{137} Though they were not specifically gendered, it was assumed they were both male which departed from traditional creation myths. After they created the earth, they attempted to make life. First they made animals, then two forms of humans, one of mud and one of wood, which were unable to speak and had no souls. Then Xmucane and Xpiacoc, known as the divine grandparents, created man from cornmeal, emphasizing the Mayan dependence on the crop.\textsuperscript{138}

Xmucane and Xpiacoc had twins, Hun Hunahpu and Vuqub Hunahpu. Hun had two sons, Baatz and Ch’oven, translated as “Monkey” and “Howler”, while Vuqub remained a bachelor. Howler and Monkey founded music, arts, and craftsmanship, thus forming culture for the Mayan people. The four of them spent their time playing ball, the traditional Mayan game, all over the earth. Annoyed by the noise, the lords of the underworld summoned the twins to Xibalba, the

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\textsuperscript{136} Munro S. Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel: The Popol Vuh of the Quiche Maya of Guatemala* (New Orleans: Middle American Research Institute Tulane University, 1971), vii.


\textsuperscript{138} Goetz, *Popol Vuh*, 84-88.
Mayan underworld. Hun and Vuqub accepted the challenge, leaving Howler and Monkey under the care of their grandmother, Xmucane, who wept bitterly at their departure.\(^{139}\)

Hun and Vuqub travelled to the underworld and were tricked by the lords into losing the ball game. As punishment, they were murdered and buried. Hun was decapitated and his head was placed on a tree which then bore fruit. The lords of the underworld marveled at the life which Hun’s head created in the realm of the dead and forbade anyone from going near it. However, one of the lords’ virgin daughters became curious and approached the tree. Hun’s skull spitted on her hand when she reached for the fruit and she became pregnant with his twin sons, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. When her father found out, the lords of Xibalba ordered that she be sacrificed, but the maiden escaped to the world above.\(^{140}\)

The pregnant maiden traveled to Hunahpu’s mother, Xmucane, and begged her to let her stay, but Xmucane viewed the maiden as a demon who murdered her sons. The maiden then travelled to a cornfield where Monkey and Howler planted seed, but only one cornstalk grew. She prayed to the fertility goddesses and returned with plentiful food as tribute to Xmucane who realized the power of her grandchildren within the maiden’s womb. However, when the twins were born, they never slept and their crying annoyed Xmucane. Howler and Monkey, jealous of their younger half-brothers, stole the twins away and left them in the wild to die, similar to the way Romulus and Remus were left in the wilderness by their jealous uncle. They grew up in the wilderness, but had great magic to survive.\(^{141}\)


\(^{140}\) Goetz, *Popol Vuh*, 120.

\(^{141}\) Edmonson, *The Book of Counsel*, 58-86.
The twins, Xbalanque and Hunahpu, tricked Howler and Monkey into climbing a tree where they were then turned into howler monkeys, worshiped by the Mayans as founders of arts and music. Later, at the behest of the storm god Huracan, who was the bringer of the Great Flood, the twins defeated a demon bird and its two sons, who were being worshiped as false gods. The twins specialized in trickery and cunning, using their powers to fool their grandmother. Eventually, they discovered their father’s ball equipment and began playing the sport, again angering the lords of Xibalba. After defeating the lords’ numerous tests, the twins lost the ball game on purpose to proceed to the next challenge and defeat the lords again.\footnote{Goetz, \textit{Popol Vuh}, 145-150.}

Finally, during the last challenge, Hunahpu was decapitated. Xbalanque fashioned a false head for his brother and the two won the final game, using Hunahpu’s head as the ball. Angered, the lords tricked the twins into a furnace, which the twins again knowingly allowed to occur, burning them alive and casting them into a river. Using their magic abilities, the twins revived themselves as catfish and were reborn as young men. They travelled around, unknown as the Mayan Hero Twins, performing miracles which caught the attention of the lords of Xibalba once again. Xbalanque cut Hunahpu in half and revived him, wowing the lords and sparking their desire to experience the magic. When the twins murdered the lords, they refused to revive them until they confessed to the murder of their father and uncle.\footnote{Goetz, \textit{Popol Vuh}, 153-160.}

As punishment for their crimes, the twins declared that Xibalba would no longer receive tribute from the mortal world, freeing humanity from fear of death. They then attempted to revive their father, but he was no longer human. They promised he would be worshiped as a god, which many believe made him the maize god, a resurrecting figure promising the rebirth of crops
each year similar to the worship of the resurrected Osiris. The twins then climbed out of the underworld and continued to ascend to the heavens. Hunahpu became the sun while Xbalanque became the moon, watching over humanity forever.  

Again, the same themes and elements occur in the Mesoamerican tale as the earlier Roman foundation story. The twins were left to die in the wilderness, grew together into powerful tacticians and magicians, and used their powers to avenge their father. Not only did they provide the heroic tale of twins, but also provided explanations for similar myths such as the journey to the underworld and the resurrection god of life and death. Their myth provided a solid core for Mayan beliefs based in the story of heroic twins.

While this myth is extremely magical in nature, it could easily be viewed as based in reality. Xibalba is equated with the underworld in Mayan mythology, but the description of the realm in the Hero Twin myth never truly describes the world as an afterlife. It is instead presented as another kingdom, ruled by lords and princesses, just like the land of the living. Therefore, it is entirely possible that Xibalba began as a real rival kingdom which the Mayans defeated in their prehistoric past, establishing a base for the myth in reality. The mystical elements were added on, as is the case with most myths, to keep the story memorable for sharing orally through generations.

Other than the Mayan civilization, most Native American peoples remained tribal throughout the two continents. However, similar tribes often came together and merged their beliefs into confederations of tribes. The similarities of tribal beliefs allowed for ease when conquering or peacefully uniting various tribes together. The successor of Mesoamerican power after the Mayans were the Aztecs who united numerous tribes into a vast empire. Similar empires

144 Goetz, *Popol Vuh*, 163.
were created in South America, such as the Incan civilization, while confederacies, like the Iroquois, were more common in North America. These peoples united under similar governance and culture shortly before European contact. Their united and simplified beliefs made the basis for European understanding of Native American myths.

Most tribes shared similar tales which were merged into a unified belief. For example, the Navajo, Mississipian, and Aztec myths all tell of four worlds which preceded the world in which they lived. Similar to the Hindu belief in various kalpas or the Greek beliefs in different Ages of Man, American tribes believed humans existed in differing states in each world but were punished for their sinful ways and a new world was created. Most myths tell of the destruction of the old world and the last humans surviving into the next, changing their form and character in the process, all the while being guided and protected by various gods. The last destruction is always the great flood, as it is in most other cultures.\footnote{J.F. Bierlein, \textit{Parallel Myths} (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 100-108.}

The symbol of the hero twin continued through many traditions following the Mayan Empire. To the Navajo people of the North American southwest, the hero twins were called “He Who Cuts Life Out of the Enemy” and “Monster Slayer”. They were the sons of the Sun and Changing Woman, the daughter of First Man and First Woman. The Sun impregnated Changing Woman by visiting her hut one night, though she never saw or felt him. When the twins learned who their father was, they raced to his house in the east and, after passing several tests through trickery, they were granted lightning and sun ray arrows to battle the monsters of the world. Together they slayed the Giant, scalped him as a trophy, and scattered his flint armor around the
world for humanity to craft tools from. The Hopi tribes maintain a similar myth of twin war gods slaying a giant in their oral tradition today.\textsuperscript{146}

After slaying the Giant, He Who Cuts Life Out of the Enemy faded from the myth while Monster Slayer continued his quest, murdering numerous beasts. This story element was similar to how Remus faded from significance in the Roman founding myth until his death at the hands of his brother. Monster Slayer left Old Age, Cold, Poverty, and Hunger alive, for without them, humanity would not appreciate life. Afterward, the twins retired, realizing their work was done, and Changing Woman went to live with Sun in the west. Sun then ordered the gods to leave the world to the mortals, ending the mythic cycle of the Navajo.\textsuperscript{147}

Many tribes along the Mississippi told a similar tale, beginning with the twins’ father, Red Horn, a savior hero who vowed to protect humanity from the monsters of the world. Red Horn married a woman in his village and traveled to defeat the giants in a competition of games, the ancient basis for lacrosse, with his friends, Turtle and Storms-as-He-Walks, similar to the lords of Xibalba and the Mayan Hero Twins father and uncle. Red Horn defeated the giants’ best player, a female with red hair just like his. As such, Red Horn married the giant and she became pregnant. At the final game, a wrestling match, only Turtle was victorious and thus the three heroes were murdered by the giants. As Red Horns two wives were both pregnant at the time, their sons were considered twins.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{146} Raymond Friday Locke, \textit{The Book of the Navajo} (Los Angeles: Mankind Publishing Company, 1976), 102-115.

\textsuperscript{147} Paul G. Zolbrod, \textit{Dine Bahane: The Navajo Creation Story}, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), 278.

One day, while seeking a vision, the eldest twin discovered the scalp pole where his father and father’s friends’ heads were hung, similar to the Mayan myth. The twins used special arrows to murder nearly every giant and stole the heads back. Two giants were spared but were thrown across the sea so they would never harm anyone again. The dead giants were ground into powder and spread across the human village. The twins then placed the three skulls in a tent and in the morning Red Horn, Storms-as-He-Walks, and Turtle along with every human ever killed by the giants were revived.\textsuperscript{149} The whole tale was reminiscent of the Mayan Hero Twin myth with a hero who defeated monsters in a sport but was murdered and avenged by his twin sons before being resurrected from his remains.

The close relationship between the Mayan and Native American story can be easily explained as the two cultures were at least on the same continent and probably developed their myths from the same oral tradition. However, the similarities in the thematic elements between the American myth and that of Romulus and Remus demonstrates the universality of the story structure. Twin brothers, born with superhuman abilities, who are abandoned as children and return to save humanity is a tale that exists within the human subconscious, relatable to everyone across cultures and continents.

Another theme found in twin myths is a connection between twins and horses. In both the Hindu and Greek mythos exists a pair of equestrian twin brothers. These brothers are guardians for their respective cultures and tied closely with astrology. While the image of a horse drawn chariot is prevalent in most mythologies, the connection between twins and horses remains more

mysterious. Nevertheless, the imagery of twins as horsemen persists throughout Indo-European cultures.

In the Vedic tradition existed a set of twins known as the Asvins, which translates from Sanskrit as “horsemen.”\textsuperscript{150} Children of the sun and clouds, Surya and Saranya, the Asvins were the brothers of Yama, Yami, and the Manu. They represented the sunrise and sunset, riding shining chariots to offer medicine and good fortune to humanity. They were, thus, depicted as the medics of the Hindu gods.\textsuperscript{151} The association with sunlight and protection came from the primordial fear of the dark which existed within humanities subconscious and thus appeared in early myths. Therefore, the Rigveda offered fifty-seven hymns dedicated to the divine horsemen to ask for protection and healing.

While the mythic narrative between the Hindu horsemen twins and the Greek Dioscuri differed, the symbolism of divine twin horsemen remained prevalent between the two cultures. The Dioscuri were Castor and Polydeuces, twin sons of a Spartan princess named Leda and Zeus, who seduced the woman in the form of a swan. The twins were thus born from eggs, which described the hats they wore as fragments of the shell.\textsuperscript{152} The divine union also produced the twin sisters, Helen and Clytemnestra, who became major instigators in the greatest Greek legend, the Trojan War.\textsuperscript{153} As with their sisters, the Dioscuri were described as attractive and talented. Their association with hunting and athletics mirrored the myth of Apollo and Artemis, also described as attractive twins fathered by Zeus.

\textsuperscript{150} Maurice Bloomfield, \textit{The Religion of the Veda: The Ancient Religion of India (From Rig-Veda to Upanishads)} (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1908), 110-111.

\textsuperscript{151} Arthur Anthony MacDonnell, \textit{Vedic Mythology} (Strassburg: Verlag Von Karl J. Trubner, 1897), 49-54.


Castor and Polydeuces were described and depicted as horsemen throughout Greek art. Their hunting abilities and athletic physique made them ideal role models for cavalry warriors and the closeness of their twin relationship attested to the brotherly bond of military service that the Greeks held so valuably. They were among the many heroes who joined Jason’s quest for the Golden Fleece, representing their heroic stature amongst the Greek legendary figures and their association with naval adventure.\textsuperscript{154} Sailors viewed them as guardians, connecting the horse with the sea in Greek myths along with the myths of Poseidon.\textsuperscript{155} Their main myth, however, described the abduction of their brides, twin sisters known as the Leucippides.

The Leucippides, meaning daughters of the white horse, were Phoebe and Hilaeira, sisters who were betrothed to the princes of Thebes. Similar to the rape of the Sabine women conducted by the Roman twin Romulus, Castor and Pollux abducted the Leucippides and fathered children with them. As vengeance, the Theban princes allowed Helen to be abducted, starting the Trojan War, and then attacked the Dioscuri. When Castor fell in the battle, Zeus offered Polydeuces a choice. Polydeuces could spend eternity on Mount Olympus or split his brother’s time in Hades with him, similar to the season changing myth of Persephone. Polydeuces relinquished his immortality to save his brother, and thus the two became the constellation Gemini, the twins.\textsuperscript{156}

The story of Castor and Polydeuces included many Greek themes, but their tie to equestrianism and twin relationship placed them apart. Their bond was closer than any other heroic pair or sibling relationship. One gladly sacrificed himself for the other, marking a stark

\textsuperscript{154} Sir James George Frazer, \textit{Apollodorus: The Library I} (London: William Heinemann, 1921), 97.  
\textsuperscript{156} Frazer, \textit{Apollodorus}, 31-33.
contrast to the Roman tale of fratricide that was Romulus and Remus. They were also guardians to humanity, who offered heroic examples of athleticism and brotherhood. The horsemen twin symbolism was best described through their representation in art, such as the Fontana dei Dioscuri in Rome or in Rubens Rape of the Daughters of Leucippus. Both the Asvins and the Dioscuri connected horsemanship with heroism through the symbolism of twin mythology.

While the heroic horsemen twins and the hero twin narrative present the twin relationship in a positive and powerful light, a third thematic similarity involving twins exists throughout the world’s cultures. The myth of the evil twin presents the best example of dualism within a culture. While siblings often represent opposing forces in nature, such as the life and death deities or the siblings of chaos and order, these tales present examples of a harmonious relationship within nature. Evil twin myths, however, show the opposition of duality by presenting a hero who works to help humanity and an enemy, the hero’s own twin, who seeks to destroy it. It is a common motif utilized in popular culture, but its origin stretches back to the earliest myths and legends of prehistoric man.

While destruction and death are often equated with evil, most myths do not portray those deities as evil, as they perform a necessary function in maintaining the balance of the universe. While the Hindu god Shiva was the destroyer who will end the world, he was not viewed as evil, simply the end of an ever repeating cycle. Similarly, Ereshkigal and Hades, the death deities of Sumer and Greece respectively, were feared because death was unavoidable and unknowable, but were not depicted as evil. Ereshkigal only killed her sister, Inanna, out of vengeance for the death of her husband. While Hades abducted Persephone from the world, he was not viewed as evil as that act was common in Greek myths, for even the heroic Dioscuri kidnapped their brides. While most cultures do not view death and chaos as pure evil, a few do.
One of the earliest examples of the good and evil dichotomy in mythology came from the Zoroastrian religion of the ancient Persian Empire. Over the centuries, the Zoroastrian religion divided and merged with other philosophical ideas from the surrounding area and by the time of the Sassanid Empire, a heretical branch known as Zurvanism arose.\textsuperscript{157} Zurvanism based its beliefs around a central god, Zurvan, who represented all of space and time, similar to the Hindu deity, Brahma. Zurvan had twin sons, the Zoroastrian god of good and light, Ahura Mazda, and his counterpart, the god of evil and darkness, Angra Mainyu.\textsuperscript{158} This belief in the eternal struggle between the good and evil twin gods formed the basis for Zurvanism and greatly influenced the development of the Christian belief in the devil as an evil counterbalance for God.\textsuperscript{159}

While the dualistic belief in good and evil existed throughout Western mythology and literature, another common tale developed independently amongst Native American tribes. Across several tribal nations, a thematically similar story described the birth of opposing good and evil twins who created the world and battled for control over it. These stories began with the birth of the evil twin, often ripping through their mother in its haste to be born first, killing her in the process. They then described the creation of all things good, crafted by the good twin, and the reactionary creation of hardships from the jealous evil twin. The two were eternally at odds with one another, shaping the world around them and the humans which reside within it.

For example, according to the Iroquois creation story, Earth Woman was impregnated by the West Wind, creating two sons. Evil Twin burst through Earth Woman’s side, killing her, so Good Twin utilized her corpse to create the world. He created everything good, from meadows


\textsuperscript{159} Zaehner, \textit{Zurvan}, 270-271.
and streams to plump animals for hunting, while Evil Twin created treacherous landscapes like mountains and cliffs and created predatory beasts like bears and wolves. The two finally settled their differences with a race, but when Good Twin succeeded, he murdered Evil Twin to free the world of his treachery. Evil Twin thus became the god of the dead, vowing to take the lives of Good Twin’s humans. The two humans created by Good Twin parented the six tribes of the Iroquois Nations.\textsuperscript{160}

This myth has numerous similarities to ancient myths. First, the tale of the twins’ birth described the evil twin as bursting from his mother’s womb. Set, the chaotic brother of Osiris in Egyptian myth, was also said to have torn from Nut’s side.\textsuperscript{161} This myth described early caesarian sections, utilized to save a child, often at the expense of the mother’s life. Another similarity existed between the Iroquois myth and the Shinto tradition. When Izanagi fled the underworld from the sight of Izanami, she vowed to kill the humans he created.\textsuperscript{162} Indeed, Native American beliefs and Asian mythology have many correlations, such as their connection between spirits and nature, which probably migrated along with the earliest humans to cross into the Americas.

In another Northeastern American tale, the origin myth of the Abenaki, the creator, known as Tabaldak, created mankind from the earth and when he dusted off his hands, Gluskab and Malsumis were born. These two male twin deities were given the power to create a good world, but Malsumis sought evil. Gluskab continued to be a benevolent deity, protecting humanity and teaching mankind to survive, similar to most creator or fertility deities. While


these deities were not birthed traditionally, they are essentially twins as they came into existence at the same time. Again, a Native American tribe displayed a myth of good and evil twins.\footnote{Colin Gordon Calloway, \textit{The Abenaki} (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1989), 23-25.}

Another example from the southwestern Yuma people described the twins as arising from the primordial ocean. Kokomaht, the good twin, emerged first and knowing his brother would be evil, he tricked him into opening his eyes underwater, blinding the god, Bakotahl, in the process to impede the spread of his misfortune. Kokomaht stirred the ocean to create land, similar to the Shinto tradition, and from the mud he created humans. Bakotahl attempted to imitate his brother’s creations and instead created imperfect creatures like fish and animals. However, in this myth, Kokomaht became the god of death, showing humans the way so that the world would not become overpopulated, again demonstrating that death was understood as a natural fact to create harmony and balance to the world. The act of sacrifice and having a good god of the afterlife was reminiscent of the Osiris myth as well. Bakotahl then retreated under the earth to cause earthquakes and volcanos, taking on the role of the evil twin and bringer of destruction and despair, similar to Set.\footnote{Stookey, \textit{Thematic Guide}, 190-191.}

The myths of good and evil twins are predominant in Native American beliefs, but the motif began in the philosophies of the ancient Near East. The belief in twin deities as dualistic representations of opposing forces remains universal in the human mind. While siblings represent these dichotomies as well, no myth emphasizes the differences as much as twin myths. The image of evil twins continues today through literature and popular culture as a fictional motif to show the duality of man, just as it did in the myths of old.
Twins represent the closest and most supernatural of sibling relationships, whether they represent heroic brothers who fight for humanity or as opposing forces who shape the world with their constant struggle for supremacy. The same themes and story structures occur across centuries and continents, proving the inherent ideas which reside within the mind of humanity. Hero twins represent the closeness of humanity and the heroic deeds to protect it and create civilization, while the dualism of good and evil twins demonstrates the opposing forces of protection and danger that exists within the world. The imagery of twins increases the impact of those stories tremendously by demonstrating the closeness of dualistic relationships through the closest sibling relationship.
Conclusion

Myths utilize human understanding to describe the unknowable aspects of the world. Close relations between elements in nature are represented through stories of lineage and sibling relationships. Dualistic elements, such as night and day, earth and sky, life and death, were represented as siblings so that early mankind could understand their relationship to one another. Thus, the sibling myths were born, to describe the unknowable forces of nature and human existence. By researching and understanding these myths, mankind continues a long lineage of describing duality, harmony, and morality.

Life is the basis of existence. It is the first unanswerable question in the human psyche and thus is represented in myths the world over. The life deity takes on many forms, be it a feminine fertility goddess from Mesopotamia or a masculine rain god from Scandinavia, but always represents the creation and sustentation of life. Starting with the agricultural deities of earthly fertility who allowed for the life giving fruits and vegetables to grow to the creation deities of human life, life deities formed the basis of most myths. By observing the life cycles of plants and animals, humanity began to understand that life represented the beginning, and death was the inescapable end.

Death deities were thus the counterbalance and opposing force of life. Their existence, though terrifying and final, created harmony within existence. Without death, new life could not begin, but with death, life was not eternal. This harmonious relationship between life and death formed the basis of sibling mythology. As two sides of the same cycle, life and death were siblings maintaining the course of nature through time. Whether they were at odds with one another, or in perfect synchronicity, life and death deities were necessary for the explanation of existence.
In Sumerian culture, this duality was represented by Inanna and Ereshkigal. Inanna, representing all aspects of life, both human and agricultural, was idolized and worshiped for her great gifts to mankind. She brought civilization, food, and sexual pleasure to the masses and was thus beloved by most, though her great anger and misfortune led Gilgamesh to be weary of her. This insult resulted in her journey to the underworld, where her jealous and begrudged sister, Ereshkigal, resided. Ereshkigal killed Inanna, but through her journey, Inanna conquered death and gained a renewed understanding for the world and the humans who adored her.

The tale represented the first of many similar tales in which death took life from the earth, resulting in a period of death, infertility, and stagnation. It was a warning tale to explain why life and death were necessary for existence. The tale spread across cultures, presented in Greek mythology as the myth of Hades and Persephone. Here, agricultural life was represented by the goddess Demeter and it was her brother, Hades, who represented death. Hades fell in love with Demeter’s daughter Persephone, resulting in her kidnap and imprisonment in the underworld. Without Persephone, the plants of the world withered and died, but through negotiation, Persephone was allowed to return to the surface world for a period of time, resulting in the creation of the seasons.

This tale, which is an adaptation of the Sumerian myth, continues to represent the necessity of life and death while simultaneously presenting an explanation for a force of nature. While these tales describe the force of death as a necessary evil, other cultures viewed death more optimistically. In the Nordic tradition, war and death in battle was idealized; a belief which was represented in their concept of the afterlife. Freyja, a female goddess who also represented love and beauty as the Greek Aphrodite and Sumerian Inanna before her, was also the goddess of an afterlife realm where fallen warriors resided after their death in battle. She was the guardian
of the dead who offered them glory and honor in the afterlife. Naturally, her twin brother, Frey, represented her opposing force, life. Frey was the god of fertility and life giving rain. Another agricultural god, Frey represented a male aspect to fertility. The twins were never at odds and offered a more optimistic view of life and death.

Agriculture formed the basis of ancient civilization, as apparent in the focus on fertility deities within mythology. As agricultural deities offered a foundation for society to grow, many deities became worshiped as founders of civilization. Inanna, who stole tablets from the gods to educate humans, represented the first of these founding deities. Another, more famous example is Osiris, Egyptian god of fertility, life, and the afterlife. Osiris taught agriculture to mankind, ending a period of cannibalism and uncivil behavior, and thus founded civilization. As the founder of civilization, Osiris was made king, which angered his jealous brother, Set. Set murdered Osiris but the god was resurrected and served as the guardian of the dead in the afterlife. Osiris thus represented both life and death within Egyptian culture, but his myth offered a new protomyth which continued to spread throughout cultures; the myth of order and chaos.

Described best within the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the duality of human nature creates a conflict within mankind. Humans are both animalistic and rational, described in Gilgamesh as part divine and part wild. This duality continually appears in philosophical works throughout the centuries, as people attempt to understand their conflicting feelings and beliefs. In Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk is one part human and two parts divine, making him more god than man. To punish him for his arrogance, the gods create a being who is Gilgamesh’s exact opposite, two parts animal and one part human. This being, Enkidu, becomes Gilgamesh’s closest friend and ally after they do battle and realize that they are exact equals. Their story demonstrates the duality of human nature.
The dualistic nature of humanity continually impacted the myths of the world, from the Egyptian Osiris and Set, to the Abrahamic tale of Cain and Abel. Early humans were faced with two opposing lifestyles, one of wild freedom within nature or one of structured control of agriculture and culture. For the civilized world, myths forged the justification of an agricultural society over the chaotic lives of outsiders, whom they viewed as barbarians, cursed by the gods to bring disorder and thus expendable. Through these myths of demonizing mankind’s animalistic nature and glorifying the rational order of an agricultural society, civilizations spread across continents, leaving few nomadic peoples cultures alive.

Nevertheless, the duality of humanity remained within structured societies, depicted within the tales of the Greeks, Romans, and European cultures. Though outsiders remained demonized in western myths, within each pantheon was a god or goddess which represented both the wild and rational side of humanity, both equally worshiped and recognized. Utilizing the Greek gods as a metaphor, the nineteenth century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche described the duality of human nature. Nietzsche believed reality was simultaneously chaotic and ordered, which he deemed Dionysian and Apollonian after the Greek gods of wine and art respectively. It is thus the human struggle to choose which side to follow, but no matter which side a culture favors, mankind must always recognize that both are reality’s natural state.\(^{165}\) Retroactively applying Nietzsche’s belief on the myths of the world, the same conclusion is drawn. From the earliest tale of Gilgamesh and Enkidu to the modern age philosophies, these primordial dualistic states continue to motivate human action, and thus their prevalence within the world’s protomyths as the constant struggle between differing cultures, narrated through the universally understood notion of jealous sibling rivalries.

The most powerful of these rivalries are depicted through the myths of twins. Romulus and Remus are the most famous of these mythic twins, beginning as natural leaders who survived the cruelty of the world to become kings, but whose rivalry led to a murder which founded an empire. The use of the twin symbolism increased the impact of Rome’s foundation story. The wolf suckling brothers were heroes who let their rivalries split them apart. Similar tales existed within the Egyptian and Jewish populous prior to the Roman Republic and the tale continued to be popular throughout western mythologies after the fall of the empire, but even more impressive is the presence of such myths within Native American cultures. Separated by centuries and oceans, two cultures told nearly identical tales of hero twins or of good and evil twins battling each other for control. As twins are the closest relation of siblings, their stories describe the closest of bonds between opposing forces. Whether those forces relate to one another harmoniously or contradictorily depends upon the culture.

Siblings represent the close bonds of nature and humanity. In attempting to describe the world around them, ancient humans created stories which humanized nature into relationships with one another. Unexplainable and reoccurring forces of nature, such as day and night and the changing of the seasons, could be understood together through a sibling relationship. Following the sibling nature deities, like gods and goddesses of life and death, myths of human conditions were also explained through siblings. As human nature is dualistic, the two sides are described as siblings. These mythical siblings can represent the constant struggle between two opposing forces or the harmony of two balancing forces working together. While cultures differ and beliefs change over time, the lessons and similarities between these timeless tales continues to impact humanity today.
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