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## A Comparison Of Ancient Egyptian, Indian, Greek, And Early Muslim Religions

Religion as is dates back thousands of years. Throughout history, hundreds of religions have existed, some now completely obsolete, yet immortalized throughout history for what we know of it today. This analysis attempts to take a closer look at what the ancient religions of Ancient Egypt, India, Greek, and early Muslims were like and how they compare to one another. This paper also analyzes how each society influenced religion, rather how one is used to seeing religion work as an influential element to a society.

Ancient Egypt is known for its polytheistic religions in its time, which operated as important parts of civilizations and interactions, like of those within the gods and the people. These gods would interact with multiple areas of life like that of nature and the elements of it. Ancient Egyptians believed the gods were integrated in every part of human society and nature, creating a large dependence on these gods for natural resources or agricultural matters. This short passage from an ancient hymn depicts the idea of Egyptian adoration for the Nile River and all it provided for them: "Adoration of Hapy: Hail to you, Hapy, sprung from earth, come to nourish Egypt! Of secret ways A darkness by day, To whom his followers sing!" (Milestone Documents, River Valley Civilizations: "Hymn to the Nile"). This passage alone from around the years 1990 BCE to 1950 BCE clearly depicts ancient Egyptian esteem for nature, or more importantly, their reverence and praise for their main source of life.

Another interesting way Ancient Egypt interacted with their gods was through an important book called The Book of the Dead (1569-1315 BCE). This book in particular basically guides one into the afterlife once one dies. It is comprised of spells that one can take into the afterlife and use in assistance during their journey through the underworld. It is clearly seen that ancient Egyptians believed in an afterlife and even created a guide for believers to use (Milestone Documents, River Valley Civilizations: "Egyptian Book of the Dead").

Ancient India as well has a very interesting past with its religion. India has always been extremely integrated into religious traditions and beliefs. Still to this day, religions in India permeate themselves into every single aspect of life almost as much as it did before. A wide majority of the population of India practices in the Hindu faith despite there being dozens more religions that exist in India in the modern day. In lecture, it was mentioned that there are about four major religions in India, being Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Some of these religions share basic concepts and often overlap in their teachings and meanings of their texts.

Often misconceived as a polytheistic religion, Hinduism is actually a monolatristic religion where one recognizes many gods but believes in one. In this case, Hindus believe the Brahman, the most powerful deity in the religion, is a manifestation in all the other gods and goddesses in the religion. It is widely known, however, that Hinduism is derived from Buddhism. In the Rock and Pillar Edicts of Asoka, the very first evidence of Buddhism is detected. The Emperor Asoka created these pillars around 257 to 240 BCE to help spread the word of Buddhism throughout his empire by establishing a social and religious dharma or "law", having said certain things like: "Father and mother should be respected and so should elders, kindness to living beings should be made strong and the truth should be spoken. In these ways, the Dhamma should be

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promoted... This is an ancient rule that conduces to long life. Thus should one act.” (Milestone Documents, Ancient India: “Rock and Pillar Edicts of Asoka”). Come 200 BCE, the more commonly known moral-code type of book in Hinduism was that of the Laws of Manu. It was a hybrid between social and religious law as well, often stating social code and laws, but also moral codes like how it is prohibited to limit the authority of the high priests of the Hindu religion. The Law of Manu provides social cues, such as the mention of inter-caste marriages, which was deemed legal except for the lowest caste, the Shudra, that was comprised of criminals, murderers, and servants. This is where India’s caste system becomes a reality, clearly stating its existence and the roles men and women should play (Milestone Documents, Ancient India: “Law of Manu”).

Ancient Greek society was one that was centralized in power, dominance, and militarization. The Iliad, an epic poem written by Homer, was a praise to nobility during the war and siege of Troy setting up a great example of what Greek life and morality looked like during this time (Milestone Documents, The Hebrews and Early Greeks: “Homer: Iliad”). More than anything, the Iliad is a historical text rather than a mythological one as it demonstrates the main aspects that make up the ancient Greek identity. This war was a turning point in Greek culture as it unified the Greek city states into one, which was greatly depicted by Homer’s poems.

It is no surprise that ancient Greek life resembled much of ancient Greek religion, or mythology as we know it today. Greek mythology depicts gods and heroes that are praised for their grandness and power, and these Greek gods alone are no strangers to scandal and feud. Greek mythology is made up of 12 main gods, or Titans, that rule over their respective areas. The strongest amongst these gods is Zeus. In the “Hymn to Zeus” dated from 280 to 276 BCE, dedication and praise to his power is given as such: “Greatest of the gods, God with many names, God ever-ruling, and ruling all things! Zeus, origin of Nature, governing the universe by law, All hail! For it is right for mortals to address thee; For we are thy offspring, and we alone of all that live and creep on earth have the power of imitative speech.” (Milestone Documents, The Hellenistic World: “Cleanthes: ‘Hymn to Zeus’”). However, from what has been learned in lecture, it is obvious that Greek mythology is one of ups and downs. The story begins with that of Chaos and Gaia who birth the twelve Titans, known as Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Dionysus, Hephaestus, Artemis, Athena, Apollo, Ares, Demeter, Aphrodite, and Hermes, but Zeus is the one with the most power. There also exists other deities and in Greek mythology that makes these gods, in sum, problematic with many battles and wars fought amongst them. Some would argue they are not the best examples of what other religions analyzed in this paper would consider to be generally and morally right. Still, the Greeks considered these gods as role models and held them up to worthy praise.

Lastly, early Muslim beginnings were first evident around the sixth century CE, believed to have originated from Mecca. As previously learned in lecture, Islam makes up one of the three Abrahamic religions today, however, it did not always contain as big of an influence as it has today. Islam began small, with not that many followers until after the death of one of the central icons of the religion, Muhammad. The story begins with Muhammad being revealed to by an angel sent by God to spread the beginnings of what would eventually be written into the Quran, the holy text of the Islamic faith (Milestone Documents, Byzantine and Islamic Empires: “The Qur’an”). Quickly, Islam became a religion made up of political and religious authority establishing some of the most important aspects of the religion: The Five Pillars of Islam which state one must recite proclamations of Islam, pray 5 times a day, fast and pray during Ramadan, make a pilgrimage to Mecca once before death, and give money and charity to the

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poor. Mohammed had been successful in bringing most of the Arabian tribes together under Islam. Islam was meant to be a religion based on characteristics of morality, unity, and justice, until a certain division took place.

When Mohamed died in 642, followers were left with no indication of a successor. Thus, came along Abu Bakr and Ali, who had a dispute and consequently produced Abu Bakr as successor. This created the divide amongst Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. Sunni Muslims believed that he was the proper successor, while Shi'a Muslims believe that Ali, who lost the dispute against Abu Bakr, should have succeed Muhammad as caliph. This divide amongst the two groups still exists today, as Shi'a Muslims believe the caliph was to be chosen by God making Abu Bakr the rightful successor, but Sunni Muslims still refuse to recognize him as a rightful heir. Nonetheless, a new dynasty was founded after the spread of Islam, consequently making Bagdad one of the greatest influential political and economic superpowers of the time, which led to further spread of Islam through extensive trade in the surrounding regions.

Ultimately, there can be some comparisons made between Ancient Egyptian, Indian, Greek, and Early Muslim Religions. The first major difference that separates each ancient religion from another is that of the set of moral codes that they hold. For example, there is much overlap in the idea of right and wrong in ancient Egyptian, Indian, and Islamic religions in that their main God is pure, perfect, all powerful and especially just. Ancient Greek mythology does not have a perfect God as the other religions depict their god to have, rather the Greeks believed and praised many gods, the Titans, who are rather "mortal" or humane in their actions, impulsive, war-driven, and made noble because of it.

Overall, it is widely implied that each religion is influenced by its society, rather how we are used to seeing religion to work as it being the influential element to a society. It is depicted in ancient Egypt and how they had a religion that was created out of admiration for agriculture and what it provided for them. Likewise, in ancient India the Law of Manu, although religious in its nature, further solidified what was expected of social dynamics with the mention of inter-caste marriages and the commonly known caste system. The ancient Greeks as well are proof that a society as lively and military-driven as it was, could also be depicted in the very own gods of their religion in which scandal existed amongst them. Islam too was well established into the Arabian civilizations and quickly spread after Mohammad's death due to on-going trade at the time. This spread was great for relations amongst neighboring civilizations and trade, creating economic gains for those of the early Islamic faith.

Ultimately, it is fascinating to analyze the diversity of religion and just how impactful it was and continues to be to this very day. The most interesting part of it all is how many ancient religions have turned into mere mythology, yet some still persist to have billions of followers worldwide to this day due to social, political, and economic influences. It's an interesting thought to consider what direction, rise, or falls religion could go potentially into within the next couple hundred years.