

Patriarchal Cosmotheism—The Aryans

1. Welcome to this next video lecture on the co-evolution of Religion and Technology. This lecture explores the Aryans, a people who emerged into history on the Eurasian grassland steppes north of the Black Sea in the fourth millennium BCE.
2. They would eventually migrate west into Europe, south into Iran and Northern India and west to the Chinese frontier. Since the Nazis efforts to weaponize their own Aryan heritage, the Aryans are today more commonly referred to as the “Indo-Europeans”. The Aryan or Indo-European language family today includes billions of speakers. It is the largest linguistic family on the planet.
3. Like other neolithic cultures, Aryan religion likely began with a maternal cosmotheism associated with earth and water, life, death and fertility. However with (1) the domestication of the horse, (2) the invention of the wheel and (3) the forging of bronze, these ancestral nature goddesses were displaced by a supreme male sky God of fire and light governing an increasingly stratified sacred order of society, or in other words, a patriarchal heirarchy --“hierarchy” taken from the Greek for “sacred” (*heiros*) and ordering principle (*archē*).
4. In the Aryan Avestas of the Iranian plateau for example, Anahita, the nature goddess of lake and river, stream and spring, mist and rain, as well as the fertility goddess of fields and herds, pregnancy and childbirth is demoted to now being but the daughter of an even greater, (1) more powerful sky God, Ahura Mazda. She is also now a sister to another equally, if not more important, god, (2) Mithras, a personification of the Sun, who is the guarantor of contracts and the defender and extender of society’s sacred order. Thus a maternal cosmotheism of village farmers, rooted to the earth, water sources, moon and the watery deep, becomes a patriarchal cosmotheism of mountain heights, fire and light. The largely communitarian, cooperative and egalitarian farm life of the neolithic village correspondingly becomes an increasingly competitive, stratified and violent life of expansionist, migratory herders.
5. Similarly in religious ritual, while fire and water are both common, fire takes precedence over water. In the Avestas no ritual takes place without the presence of a sacred fire, which must be kept burning continuously. (1) Eternal flames at national tombs or before tabernacles, the Olympic torch and flame, all are vestiges of this ancient Aryan religious

sensibility. (2) The ritual fire was even deified in its own right in the Vedas as Agni or Igni.

6. This video lecture begins by exploring how the domestication of the horse, the invention of the wheel and the forging of bronze on the Eurasian steppes catalyzed such a social, cultural and religious revolution.

(1) To begin at the beginning. As Jared Diamond emphasized in his geographical anthropology published in "Guns, Germs and Steel," the ancestral Aryan homeland lies on an east-west axis rather than a north-south one. (2) Sharing a common latitude provided a common climate across the boundless, featureless grasslands extending for thousands of miles.

7. The domestication of the horse made the Aryans a predominantly mobile herding culture. Unlike cattle and even sheep and goats, horses eat grass to their very roots. Thus grazing horses sooner or later exhaust their food supply. Herds must be perpetually on the move, ever on the lookout for "greener pastures." Indeed "wide pastured" becomes a divine epithet. However these migratory herders are also different from their nomadic hunter-gatherers forebears. Not only have they domesticated their prey, but they are now able to amass and haul tools, even heavy tools such as clay pots and forges with them as they move, (1) thanks to carts, the first use of the wheel, and draft animals such as cattle and horses. The relatively poor soil of the steppes also contributed to the lack of a permanent village culture. For as we saw in the neolithic, it is farming in particular that invests one in a particular place. (2) The Aryans lived in mobile tents rather than permanent mud brick homes. They could always pull up stakes when pasture was exhausted, danger threatened or opportunity arose.
8. Gods of fertility and the hearth were still revered by the Aryans, but their worship was subordinated to new powerful gods of energy, movement and violence. Horse and cart were also soon weaponized to become the swift and formidable chariot. Bronze, an alloy of copper and tin, similarly weaponized neolithic stone axes and wooden plows into swords, shields and armor. Raiding relatively defenseless villages became endemic.
9. Within bands cooperation remained crucial, but now reputation was measured by martial virtues of trust, loyalty and cunning, to be immortalized in story and song. And while now led by a raider chieftain, wealth and authority remained otherwise largely egalitarian

within the band. As we shall see in subsequent video lectures on the Bronze Age, It would take agricultural surplus and the rise of cities to catalyze substantial wealth and status inequality.

10. Goddesses also changed with the times, from lovers, mothers and matrons to virile young virgins, strong, chaste and cunning. (1) Anahita and her new brother Mithras were now a fighting team, (2) like Athena and Apollo. A new age had dawned.
11. But raiding was not yet systematic warfare, nor were raiders a separate warrior class. Among the Vikings, all adult males would both engage in occasional raids abroad while continuing to farm and herd at home. Going on one's first raid was a Viking rite of passage to adulthood for all young men. (1) Throughout Aryan Europe boys were initiated (2) into the raider brotherhood (the Männerbunde) culminating in a communal rite of passage as important as the neolithic fertility rites of spring. (3) A night ride of young boys ritually possessed by the spirit of their heroic raider ancestors would raid their own village, causing mischief and mayhem, demanding gifts from neighbors and even extended family under the menacing threat of punishment.
12. Such night rides were a carnivalesque inversion of the social order, where the young adult males would ritually overpower their elders, in the person of their elders' elders, the band's common heroic ancestors whose power and personality they would channel. It was a shamanic possession ritual induced in part by alcohol and psychotropic herbs, but this time not to be possessed by the wild spirit of their prey, but by the intimidating strength and raider fury of their heroic ancestors.
13. We may yet see a vestige of the night rides in the "trick or treat" ritual on Halloween. During the Celtic Fall feast of Samhain, the ancestral dead would roam the villages after dusk to visit the living. (1) Woe betide anyone who had neglected to offer gifts to their ancestral dead! Their forebears might well "trick" them with mischief or curse them with illness or other bad fortune.
14. While still an oral culture, we can reconstruct much of this Aryan raider religion by studying later collections of sagas and rituals transcribed by scribal monks and priests at the extremes of the Aryan migrations: the Eddic sagas of Iceland, the Avestan scriptures of Iran, and the Rigveda of Northern India. The Norse sagas, transcribed by Christian

monks a mere century or two after Iceland's final conversion to Christianity offers a stark example of the worldview and virtues of the Aryan raiders.

15. The Chief of the divine band of raiders was Odin, Wotan among the German tribes. He is an all seeing god of avenging justice, who rides a sun chariot across the sky monitoring and judging all men below. He is assisted by a pair of ravens who also observe and report back. In a shamanic quest for wisdom and prophetic vision, two particularly valuable gifts for leading a band of raiders, Odin has one of his ravens pluck out one of his eyes. He then (1) speared and suspended himself for nine days on the sacred ash tree (2) at the center of the world, Yggdrasil. For in raider religion suffering, particularly suffering born in battle is redemptive.
16. Those fallen in battle are gathered by the Valkaries (literally, in Old Norse, the "choosers of the slain"). (1) Half were then taken by them to Valhalla, a vast meeting hall where every day ancestral warriors feast, get into drunken brawls and go on raids, to be resurrected the next morning to do it all over again. A raider's paradise.
17. Odin ruled over a band of kith and kin. Principal among them were (1) Thor the god of thunder who wielded a magical stone axe and could scorch his opponents with bolts of lightning. He was the personification of the ideal raider. Thursday is literally "Thor's Day". (2) Tyr is his warrior companion, the personification of band loyalty, courage and strength. Tuesday was Tyr's Day. (3) On the other hand, Loki was a trickster god, the companion in arms to keep a wary eye upon, who can be counted on only when it suited his own schemes. In contrast to the principled Thor, and the loyal Tyr, Loki is opportunistic. His cunning and trickery can prove both a great asset and a great liability when planning and executing a raid. But he did not warrant a day of the week in Saxon England. But Odin or Woten did of course. Fittingly, Wednesday, the central day of the week, is Wotan's Day. Finally, there was also a fertility goddess in the band, (4) Freya, beautiful and alluring. Friday is Freya's Day. She too collects the dead on the battlefield, but takes her share to a more serene, bucolic paradise than the raucous Valhalla.
18. Norse mythology also envisions an end to this world of the raider. It depicts a final battle between the gods and a race of earthen giants. Odin's band had originally raided and defeated the giants to win their place in the sun. But the giants would eventually regroup, and through the treachery of Loki, they would storm Valhalla and kill off the gods for

good. This final battle, Ragnerok, is similar to the Jewish and Christian Armageddon, except that here the forces of violence win and the world ends in utter destruction. Just as Valhalla embodied a raider's paradise, so Ragnerok foreshadows raider risk and existential dangers.

19. The Avestas, a common source for both Zoroastrian Iran and Vedic India were less violent, with less emphasis on raiding, but as we have already seen it did worship a male sky God, Ahura Mazda, (1) Mithra his fighting champion, and (2) Anahita all fighters' inspiration. But Mithra is also the god of contracts, enforcing cooperation, accompanied by Asa, literally "truth," the god of law and justice, a god tellingly absent from the Norse pantheon. In addition there were seven luminous immortals or *Spenta* surrounding Ahura Mazda and a multitude of lesser spirits, split into two camps: the Ahuras or "Lords" who fight for justice, and the Daeva's who personify the raider spirit.
20. The Daeva's are led by Indra, the Avestan storm god, the very embodiment of raider prowess and fury. In the Rig Veda Indra's power and fury intensifies. (1) He rides a swift, bronze, horse drawn chariot or a yet more fearsome, (2) elephant. Like Thor, Indra wields the power of lightning. But if anything, Indra is even more violent than Thor, often hopped up on haoma, soma in the Vedas, the sacred psychotropic drug of both Avestan and Vedic religious rituals.
21. One of Indra's main feats in the Rig Veda was the conquest of the dragon Vritra who had been hoarding rain clouds inflicting a great drought upon humanity's fields and pastures. Upon his defeat Indra unleashed the waters in the monsoon.
22. As befits such a powerful warrior in an emergent warrior society, in the Rig Veda Indra rose into the ruling triad, displacing the goddess Anahita, (1) while Ahura Mazda would be replaced by Varuna, the god of the waters above the heavens.
23. Once having reached the Punjab of Northern India, the Aryans began to settle down. No longer on the steppes, but now on rich fertile land, watered by seven rivers draining the Himalayas, (1) they return to village life and farming while still retaining their now traditional raider values of ferocity and cunning in battle as evidenced in Indra's ascendancy.
24. The Rigveda mostly consists of liturgies and hymns for sacred feasts. And as competition for wealth and status grew, the feasts could be spectacular—hundreds of bulls burned at

one sitting. The most elaborate, and costly were horse sacrifices that could go on for days and feed hundreds.

25. Vedic religion followed the Avestas in holding cows sacred. (1) For as we noted in earlier videos on the neolithic, cattle are used for plowing and hauling. To eat your cattle is like selling your tractor. (2) And *cows*, female cattle, provide abundant food and drink in the form of (3) milk, (4) butter and (5) cheese, and of course, (6) calves. It is thus bulls, not cows, that are sacrificed in religious rituals as it takes only a few males to impregnate a herd of females. And it is of course cows (7) that supply the bulls. Thus while cows personify nurturance and beneficence, bulls embody warrior virtues of power and virility. Indra can also be seen riding a bull.
26. Social stratification begins in earnest in Vedic India where the conquering Aryans govern conquered neolithic farmers and still more remote Mesolithic hunter gatherers in the forests. (1) Brahmins constitute the priestly and scribal caste, (2) Kshatriyas, rulers and an emergent warrior caste, (3) Vaishyas, village merchants and landowners. (4) These are the historical descendants of the invading Aryans. (5) The conquered neolithic herders and farmers form the lowest, fourth caste, the Shudras, (6) They are also employed as servants and day laborers for the Aryan castes. Even below the Shudras however lie the “outcasts,” today referred to as “dalits,” Sanskrit for “the oppressed.” They are assigned the dirtiest jobs, such as scavenging, removing snakes from homes or smelly unhealthy jobs such as laundering clothes or leatherworking. Finally there are the “tribals” who still live “outside” Indian society proper in more remote rural areas.
27. Now this caste system was legally abolished in the Indian constitution upon independence from Britain, thanks in part to the presence on the drafting team of the extraordinary B. R. Ambedkar, a dalit jurist, economist and social reformer with doctorates from both Columbia University and the London School of Economics. (1) However religious traditions die hard and the caste system’s effective hold on Indian society remains as pervasive and intractable as racism in the United States.
28. Finally, I would like to end this lecture by turning to the ethical reform of Aryan raider religion sparked by the priestly prophet Zarathustra, or Zoroaster in Greek. Zoroaster sought to domesticate the raiders wreaking havoc stealing from the village farmers, especially cattle and young women. While keeping the traditional Avestan pantheon, he

translated the illustrious immortals around (1) Ahura Mazda (Lord Wisdom) into personifications of the virtues, especially the sacred trinity of Good Thought, Good Words and Good Deeds.

29. Ahuras remained, but Zoroaster condemned Indra and his band of daeva raiders as evil demons, under the overall leadership of an anti-Ahura Mazda, Angra Mainyu, the Prince of Darkness and Deceit. Zoroaster depicted the cosmos as a battlefield between these forces of good and evil, light and darkness, order and violence.
30. Finally, the Avestan myth of creation and its moral retelling by Zoroaster captures the contrast between Norse and Vedic raider religions and the more peaceful Avestan heritage and its moral reform by Zoroaster. (1) As noted in the previous lecture, in maternal cosmotheism creation is modeled on the egg, the symbol of fertility encircled by a snake, the Uroboros, inhabiting the waters circling the earth. By contrast, in the Avestas Ahura Mazda (2) builds a home within a rock hard crystalline shell visible in the clear arid sky of the Iranian plateau. In terms of the technology of the age, one can imagine it as two mortars, one atop the other, rim on rim. Indeed, the Avestan word for sky, *asmän*, originally meant stone. Pythagoras would later speak of hearing in the still silence of his meditation, the harmony of a nested sequence of rotating celestial spheres. Rock crystals continue to evoke mystical connotations to this day.
31. The full work of creation was in seven acts.
 - (1) Having created the crystalline shell, in the second act of creation, (2) Ahura Mazda fills the lower half with water. (3) In his third act, Ahura Mazda overlays a circle of muddy silt at the center of the primordial sea, now encircling it. (4) A single mountain peak rises from the center of this central circle of dry land.
 - Having thus built our home, in the fourth act of creation Ahura Mazda begins to furnish it, (5) with the creation of a plant. This first, primordial plant is identified as the *haoma* or *soma* plant, whose sap as we saw had hallucinogenic properties and was used in ritual sacrifices.
 - The (6) fifth act of creation was the fashioning of an animal, a primal bull and the (7) sixth, that of the first human being, literally “the mortal one”. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, in which the first human, Adam, “the earthen one,” is named after

the primordial clay into which God breaths life, in the Avestas our forefather is defined by his mortality.

- Having thus built and furnished the cosmos, in the final, seventh act of creation Ahura Mazda (8) lights it up, both visually and elementally by suffusing it with his own divine life, that is in fire, evident not only in the vitality of plants, animals and humans, but also visible in both daylight and lightning arcing across the sky in storms and congealing in the celestial fires of sun, moon and stars....
- Now in the beginning all creation was perfectly ordered but that also meant perfectly still and static. The sun stood still, high in the stone sky, as at noon; the waters were flat and calm; the original plant, bull and man, created fully grown, lived in the center of an otherwise empty world.

32. Ahura Mazda then provisioned our cosmic home by performing the first sacrifice. It was a threefold sacrifice, (1) of the original soma plant, ground into pulp and poured over the land and into the waters, (2) the first-born bull, slaughtered and burned on the cosmic fire altar that is the earth, (3) and the ancestral man, in an archaic act of human sacrifice. From their pulped, carved and burned bodies, the three original living beings became food for new life that then exploded in all of its diversity.
33. In the eternal reenactment of this primal sacrifice, through sacred rituals throughout the year, the cosmos becomes a revolving wheel of becoming. As in maternal cosmotheism, these ritual sacrifices re-enacts life's cyclical rhythm of birth, flourishing and death, to feed new life. Later Vedic ritual will revere and address this creative movement of becoming in the deity Vishnu. It will revere and address the inevitable dissolution of life into multiplicity and death in the deity, Shiva.
34. Tellingly the basic plot line of the Avestan creation account is replicated in Genesis except that (1) in Genesis light is moved from the last act to the first and (2) death is introduced not through a cosmic sacrifice but through a cosmic punishment for Adam's disobedience. Thus for the Israelites, death was not part of God's original plan for creation but the wages of sin. For the Indo-Aryans however death, in the original sacrifice, it is the first divine act after creation. It is a blessing rather than a curse to enable humanity, and plant and animal life as well, to multiply and fill the earth.

35. In Zoroaster's ethical reform, he will revise the Avestan myth of creation by having Angra Mainyu, the god of darkness and violence (1) raid Ahura Mazda's perfect crystalline creation. It is then Angra Mainyu and his raider band of demons who cut all life to pieces. Death for Zoroaster was no longer part of the rhythm of nature, nor a sacred sacrifice but an evil curse. As in Genesis, it is a casualty of the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil, order and deceit, light and darkness. (2) Ahura Mazda responds by calling upon his own forces of light, both the luminous cosmic spirits, the *Spenta* and his angelic *fravashis*, the latter volunteering to take on bodies to do battle with the demons. The spiritual persona of each one of us is one of these pure spirits. The cosmic battle that ensues between the good spirits of virtue and order and the evil raiders of vice and chaos is fought in every human heart.
36. In the next couple of lectures we will look at the rise of urban city life in Mesopotamia and Egypt and the rise of scribal literacy upon which the sacred order of society is now dependent. We will find that creation will still be modelled on homebuilding, but now that home is god's home, a temple built by his human subjects. A fitting home must also be built for god's human viceroy, the king, in a royal palace rivaling the divine temple in size and splendor. As god's vicar, the king's task will be to supervise the building, furnishing and provisioning of god's home. His task will also be to enforce the sacred order of society as well as to extend that order to neighboring rival kingdoms. Such neighbors will not merely be raided however but as in Vedic India, they will be conquered, their wealth confiscated wholesale, and their people subjugated when not fully enslaved to further enrich the victors and their patron god. We shall explore how new Bronze Age technologies might have catalyzed this explosion of violence and how religious ritual would evolve to deal with it.