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Between *Veritas* and *Communitas*: Epistemic Switching in the Reading of Academic and Sacred History

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We compared how 8 religious believers (historians and clergy) and 8 skeptics (historians and scientists) read a series of documents on 2 topics: the Biblical Exodus and the origins of the first (American) Thanksgiving. Readings by religiously committed historians differed from those of their non-religious peers. Navigating between the competing commitments of their faith communities on the one hand and an academic guild on the other, religious historians engaged in *epistemic switching*, varying epistemological criteria to align with the allegiances triggered by the document under review. To explain these findings, we propose that historical understanding be conceived not as a unitary construct but as a form of coordination between multiple axes: a vertical axis of increasing intellectual sophistication as defined by the discipline; and a horizontal axis of identification and commitment, along which individuals move between a variety of allegiances and affiliations as they engage the epistemological criteria of sacred history. Implications for future research in the learning sciences are discussed.

Combining an argument for the liberal arts with a nod toward globalization, the 2006 Harvard Task Force Report on General Education hardly seemed the stuff of controversy. Yet one aspect proved particularly thorny: a proposed course whose goal was to offer students “a fuller understanding of both local and global issues

involving religious faith” (Harvard University, 2006, p. 3). Goals were not the sticking point. Harvard already had many courses on the books that explored religion, culture, and society. Instead, the controversy was ignited by two words in the course’s title. The proposed *Reason and Faith* set off a firestorm that catapulted a bureaucratic curriculum report to the editorial pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and *Newsweek*.¹

Leading the charge was the Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology, Steven Pinker (2006). “There is an enormous constituency of people who hold that faith and reason are two routes to knowledge,” he wrote. “This is a mistake.” For Pinker faith meant “believing something without good reasons to do so,” a way of thinking that had “no place in anything but a religious institution.” Universities should teach “reason, pure and simple”; teaching Harvard students anything less constituted, in his words, “a terrible mistake.” No doubt Pinker’s claims would have come as news to Harvard’s founders, who emblazoned their college crest with the word *Veritas*, short for *Veritas Christo et Ecclesiae*, or “Truth for Christ and the Church.”

Harvard’s curriculum flap ended predictably in compromise (“Reason and Faith” morphed into “What It Means to Be a Human Being”). But the issues behind the controversy still boggle scholars at Harvard and elsewhere. Is there but a single path to *Veritas*—that of reason—or multiple paths? If multiple, can these paths be combined, or must they be assigned to different institutions separated by thick walls? Can the same person walk multiple paths, and, if so, can these paths be traversed simultaneously?

Notions of truth and knowledge don’t just concern Harvard professors wrangling over a new curriculum. Anyone attempting to acquire, produce, or evaluate knowledge relies, at least implicitly, on assumptions about what knowledge is and how it should be justified. It is thus no coincidence that research in the learning sciences has devoted much attention to epistemology, the branch of philosophy dealing with knowledge.

The empirical study of people’s conceptions of knowledge began with Jean Piaget, whose enduring legacy continues to shape much contemporary research. In broad contour, Piaget charted the development of epistemological understanding along a vertical course from infancy into adulthood, in which the child moves from egocentric thinking to an ever more reflective stance toward knowledge (see, e.g., Piaget, 1970). Studies conducted over several decades following Piaget’s groundbreaking work extended and refined this model, documenting shifts that occur after adolescence (e.g., Chandler, 1975; Kitchener & King, 1981; Perry, 1970), distinguishing among various dimensions of epistemological belief (e.g., Schommer, 1990, 1993), and comparing developmental trajectories across

¹*Newsweek*, Beliefwatch, January 22, 2007, p. 7; John Schmalzbauer, December 15, 2006, *Wall Street Journal*, “Harvard Loses Its Edge: Nixing a Religion Requirement Will Hurt the University.” Retrieved from <http://www.opinionjournal.com/taste/?id=110009391>

different domains (e.g., Hallett, Chandler, & Krettenauer, 2002; Kuhn, Cheney, & Weinstock, 2000; Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam, & Lewis, 2004).

These studies tended to confirm that people's conceptions of knowledge undergo shifts much like those Piaget described (cf. Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; King & Kitchener, 1994). However, researchers diverged widely in their descriptions of when such shifts take place. As Hallett et al. (2002, p. 289) noted, regarding the emergence of a child's recognition that not all questions have a single answer, "One could read selectively from the literature . . . and, with good reason, conclude that such abilities put in their appearance at either 4 or 6 or 8 or 12 or 16 or 20, or in receipt of a Ph.D."

To resolve such discrepancies, researchers reexamined the core assumptions of neo-Piagetian accounts, questioning the comprehensiveness of shifts in people's beliefs about knowledge and paying closer attention to context (e.g., Elby & Hammer, 2001; Hammer & Elby, 2003). Some studies focused on the domain dependence of epistemological beliefs (e.g., Hallett et al., 2002; Kuhn et al., 2000; Wainryb et al., 2004), others on their multidimensionality (e.g., Schommer, 1990, 1993). More recently, researchers have begun to examine how the development of epistemological beliefs varies across cultures (Chan & Elliott, 2002; E. Gottlieb, 2007; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Zhang, 1999). Such studies have suggested that, rather than being a process exclusively of individual psychological growth, epistemic development has a social dimension rooted in bonds of affiliation, belonging, and attachment (cf. E. Gottlieb, 2007).

Research that embeds epistemology in social community raises new questions about disciplinary knowledge and its referents in the school curriculum (Herrenkohl, 2006; Stevens, Wineburg, Herrenkohl, & Bell, 2005). For example, in history, how should one regard claims about a past in which God plays a leading role? As Mircea Eliade (1954, 1961) and countless others have noted, beliefs about the past and God's role in it are pillars of the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In each tradition, subscription to certain historical beliefs is a prominent marker of membership. Consider, for example, the belief that God revealed the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai, or that Jesus died on the cross at Calvary and rose again, or that Muhammad received revelation from Allah in the cave on Mount Hira. All are beliefs about past events in specific locations occurring at specific moments. But each is also a creed to which allegiance is presumed when one identifies as a Jew, Christian, or Moslem. How do community norms affect thinking about these particular events and about the past in general? Do participants in these traditions treat such claims differently from those that make fewer demands on their identity and social attachment? Put simply, how do people think about history that matters to them as individuals and as participants in community?

Furthermore, a consideration of the sacred past raises new questions about the nature of historical understanding, at least as that construct has been

operationalized by psychologists and learning scientists (e.g., National Research Council, 2005; Polman, 2006; Seixas, 2007; Voss & Wiley, 2006; Wineburg, 1998; Wolfe & Goldman, 2005). For example, are knowledge-seeking and identity-defining aspects of historical consciousness distinct either/or mechanisms? Or do individuals use them simultaneously to think about the past? Is the hallmark of mature historical thinking the understanding that knowledge is constructed and fallible? Or is it the ability to remain firmly committed to one's heritage *despite* this knowledge?

The present study tackled such questions by examining a group of readers as they confronted documents about the sacred past. We strategically sampled readers who varied on two dimensions: their commitment to religious faith communities and their level of historical expertise. We focused on the story of the ancient Hebrews' release from bondage as told in the Book of Exodus, the foundational event in the formation of Jewish peoplehood and one of the crowning examples of God's intercession in history. As a point of comparison, we created a second task around a less charged topic: the origins of the first Thanksgiving, the American holiday that falls on the fourth Thursday of November. Three broad questions guided our analysis: (a) By what criteria do sophisticated thinkers evaluate historical claims? (b) How do these criteria vary with the kinds of documentary material under consideration? And (c) how do these criteria relate to the reader's academic training and socioreligious commitments?

TERMINOLOGY

One unfortunate byproduct of the empirical study of epistemology is a proliferation of terminologies and operational definitions. Even when two researchers use the same term, they often mean different things by it.² In the present study,

²Researchers use a bewildering variety of phrases to describe people's evolving conceptions of knowledge—*epistemological understanding* (Kuhn et al., 2000), *epistemological beliefs* (Schommer & Walker, 1995), *epistemological theories* (Hofer & Pintrich, 1997), *epistemic development* (Hallett et al., 2002), *epistemic metacognition* (Kitchener, 1983), *reflective judgment* (King & Kitchener, 1994), *personal epistemology* (Hofer & Pintrich, 2002), and *ways of knowing* (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), to mention only the most common. It is becoming increasingly popular among psychologists to refer to a person's conception of knowledge as his or her *personal epistemology*. Yet researchers differ considerably in their definitions of what a personal epistemology is. Some limit the term to a person's beliefs about the nature of knowledge; others include also beliefs about the process of learning (Hofer, 2004; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997). Some operational definitions limit personal epistemology to people's explicit statements about knowledge; others also include conceptions of knowledge implicit in practical activities such as creating, seeking, evaluating, and justifying knowledge (cf. E. Gottlieb, 2002; Sandoval, 2005). Some would even go so far as to argue that the very term *personal epistemology* is misleading, because it mistakenly locates epistemology in individual persons rather than in the practices of discourse communities (cf. E. Gottlieb, 2007). Our notion of epistemology

we use the term *epistemology* in its broad, philosophical sense to refer to people's overall conceptions of knowledge—including their beliefs about the nature of knowledge and their practices of knowledge evaluation. When referring to conceptions of knowledge in or about a particular domain, we add modifiers such as *historical* or *religious*. When referring specifically to psychological processes that relate to people's conceptions of knowledge, we use the adjective *epistemic* rather than *epistemological* (e.g., *epistemic development* rather than *epistemological development*).³

METHOD

Sample

Our 2 × 2 design crossed religious commitment with historical training. Our sampling scheme was *purposive*: We recruited participants with attributes that we believed would have a theoretical bearing on our results (cf. Patton, 2001). Our goals were exploratory and guided by theory generation rather than by a desire to generalize to an entire population (cf. Firestone, 1993). We drafted a sample of 16 adults (ages 35–65), all living in the Pacific Northwest, selected from four groups: (a) professional historians who defined themselves as religiously committed Christians or Jews; (b) professional historians who defined themselves as non-religious, either agnostic or atheist; (c) clergy and religious teachers from Christian and Jewish denominations with no academic training in history; and (d) research scientists and engineers who defined themselves as non-religious and who also possessed no advanced historical training (see Table 1). Our sample included 11 men and 5 women. This gender imbalance reflects the general underrepresentation of women in the professions from which we drew our sample (see, e.g., National Research Council Committee on Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine, 2011; Townsend, 2010; Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor, 2008).⁴

includes both procedural and declarative elements (cf. E. Gottlieb, 2002, pp. 301–305), and our study examines both what people *say* about knowledge and what they *do* with regard to knowledge. Thus, our research sits in neither of Sandoval's (2005) "formal" and "practical" camps; rather, it conceives of epistemologies as comprising both beliefs and practices.

³We do this to emphasize that such processes—particularly processes of *change* such as "epistemic switching" and "epistemic development"—are often piecemeal and unconscious rather than comprehensive and fully articulated. *Epistemological* literally means "regarding a theory of knowledge," whereas *epistemic* means "regarding knowledge."

⁴Although some theorists have argued that women and men have different "ways of knowing," empirical support for this claim is drawn from a very small number of qualitative studies of women's epistemological beliefs (e.g., Belenky et al., 1986). A much larger body of empirical research, conducted with samples that included both male and female participants, has produced no compelling

TABLE 1
List of Participants

<i>Name</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Place of Employment</i>	<i>Religious Standing</i>
Professor A	M	PhD (history)	Public university	Believer (Jewish)
Professor B	M	PhD (history)	Private college	Believer (Evangelical Christian)
Professor C	M	PhD (history)	Public university	Believer (Jewish)
Professor D	M	PhD (history)	Private university	Believer (Catholic)
Professor E	F	PhD (history)	Public university	Agnostic
Professor F	M	PhD (history)	Public university	Agnostic
Professor G	M	PhD (history)	Private college	Atheist
Professor H	M	PhD (history)	Private college	Atheist
Reverend I	F	BA (business); MDiv	Church (Episcopal)	Believer
Reverend J	M	BA (Biblical studies); MA (theology)	Church (Evangelical)	Believer
Rabbi K	M	Rabbinic ordination (Orthodox)	Parochial school (Jewish)	Believer
Principal L	F	BA (education), MA (religious studies)	Parochial school (Jewish)	Believer
Dr. M	F	PhD (biophysics)	Public university	Agnostic
Dr. N	M	PhD (electrical engineering)	Public university	Atheist
Dr. O	F	MA (material science); PhD (engineering education)	Public university	Agnostic
Dr. P	M	PhD (genetics)	Public university	Atheist

Note. For ease of identification, we refer to the historians as *Professor* (all eight were professors) and the scientists and engineers as *Doctor*. M = male; F = female; PhD = doctor of philosophy; BA = bachelor of arts; MDiv = master of divinity; MA = master of arts.

Participants were recruited from local colleges, universities, research laboratories, and religious institutions in the Pacific Northwest. Participants were briefed about the topics of the study and answered a series of questions about their religious beliefs and academic training.

Instruments

We designed a think-aloud task (cf. Ericsson & Simon, 1984) around the story of the Biblical Exodus. Entering Egypt as the tribal clan of Jacob, the Hebrews

evidence of significant gender differences either in epistemological beliefs or in the trajectories by which these beliefs develop (see, e.g., E. Gottlieb, 2007; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997; King & Kitchener, 1994; Kuhn, 1991). In the present study, no significant gender differences were observed with respect to any of the beliefs or strategies investigated.

(“those who cross”) marched out of Egypt after 10 plagues wreaked havoc on the country. Jews recall the Exodus every spring during the festival of Passover, when they congregate in their homes for the *Seder* (literally, “the order”) to retell the story using a codified form known as the *hagadah*, or “telling.”⁵ For Christians, the Passover takes on special meaning because of Jesus’s association with the Paschal lamb, whose blood was shed so that others could live. The story figures prominently in New Testament themes and narrative, not the least of which is the *Seder* that forms the backdrop for the Last Supper. The materials for the Exodus task consisted of eight short documents: a picture and a text from children’s books, verses from the Bible, excerpts from scholarly articles, and current opinions drawn from newspapers and electronic media (see Appendix A).

To provide a comparison to the religiously charged documents in the Exodus task, we designed a parallel task that explored the origins of Thanksgiving, a major holiday in the cultural landscape of the United States. Like the Exodus documents, the Thanksgiving set included pictures, textbook accounts, primary sources, contemporary scholarship, and lay opinion (see Appendix B). Contemporary celebrations of Thanksgiving recall an amicable feast between Pilgrims and Indians, but the evidence for such an event rests on a single ambiguous document (see Appendix B, Document 11). Not until after the Civil War did the holiday come to be associated with the messages of multicultural goodwill that American children learn in school (Siskind, 1992). In this sense, Thanksgiving parallels other national traditions that tend to privilege contemporary preoccupations over evidence in the documentary record (cf. Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992; Lowenthal, 1998). We hypothesized that the issues raised by Thanksgiving would be broadly familiar to participants and would elicit only modest affective reactions, especially compared to documents that cast doubt on a foundational event at the heart of Judeo-Christian belief.

Procedure

We told participants that our aim was to explore how people from different backgrounds read historical documents of various kinds. Participants were taught the think-aloud procedure using an article on amateur astronomy (Iovine, 2002) from the Science section of the *New York Times*. Participants read the article aloud and verbalized everything they “heard themselves thinking.” We showed them a list of guidelines for eliciting verbal protocols borrowed from Perkins (1981), such as “Say whatever’s on your mind,” “Don’t overexplain or justify,” “Don’t worry about complete sentences,” and so on.

⁵Hebrew transliteration follows the system of the American Library Association/Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpsa/romanization/hebrew.pdf>).

After completing this training, participants read the documents. We placed asterisks at the end of every other sentence to remind participants to think aloud. Participants went through the documents in the same order but were allowed to go back and reread previous documents at any time. At the end of the think-aloud task, we asked the participants a number of general questions about how they approached the documents and how they felt while reading. However, our coding and the analyses were limited to talk that was produced “online,” as participants read.

Coding

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. Protocols were parsed into conceptual units that focused on a single idea. To ensure consistent parsing, we defined a conceptual unit as all talk between text readings and/or interviewer prompts. A unit could be as short as a few words or as long as several lines of protocol. To guarantee consistent measurement, we used a standard document format for the protocols (12-point Times Roman text in a double-spaced Microsoft Word 2003 document with a 2.54-cm justified left margin and a 3.17-cm right margin). When interviewee talk exceeded 8 lines of protocol text, the end of the unit was defined as a natural break in speech between 8 and 10 lines from the unit’s start. When a single unit straddled multiple codes, only the dominant code was assigned (cf. Wineburg, 1998).⁶

We developed our coding scheme by selecting an initial interview for independent analysis. Each of us analyzed the transcript independently and then proposed a set of categories to account for the forms of thinking we identified. After we had each coded a transcript, we compared categories and constructed a revised scheme. We then used the new scheme to code a second transcript. After further trials with additional transcripts, we tested the coding scheme for interrater reliability. In the end, we arrived at five broad codes that capture the kinds of moves readers made within and across document sets.

Context. Comments under *context* marshaled pertinent background knowledge to interpret documents and often included parallels to other historical events, situations, or types of inquiry. Also included were intertextual references either to other documents in the set or to textual references provided by the reader.

Sourcing. Comments under *sourcing* (cf. Wineburg, 1991) referenced the circumstances of the document’s creation by focusing on its author, date, or method of production or by making statements about the document’s genre.

⁶Detailed coding rules are available on request.

Evidence. We coded as *evidence* statements about the probity, provenance, reliability, and trustworthiness of a particular claim or of the entire document. Also included were statements about the nature of evidence and the principles of historical inquiry.

Membership. This category covered instances in which readers labeled themselves in relation to one or more groups. Membership comments were typically introduced with preliminaries such as “As a historian . . .” or “Being Christian . . .” Other times participants simply shifted to talking about themselves in relation to a particular group (e.g., “when I teach this in my Western Civilization course” or “when I conduct Mass”).

Sensemaking. We included as *sensemaking* free associations, speculations, and assertions that did not fit into the other four categories.

Reliability

Two coders tested interrater reliability. One of the coders (the first author) participated in the creation of the coding scheme; the other (a research assistant) did not and was blind to the study’s hypotheses. We conducted reliability tests on four complete interview transcripts (25% of the total data set). Inter-coder agreement was 96% ($\kappa = 0.95$). Disagreements were resolved by discussion, and the remaining transcripts were coded by a single coder.

RESULTS

Because the number of conceptual units varied by participant and task, we transformed frequencies for each category into percentages before conducting between-task and between-group analyses. To do this we divided the frequency that participants used a category by the total number of conceptual units they generated. Because of our small sample size, we used nonparametric procedures, as we could not assume normality and homogeneity of variance. Alpha was set to .05 and alphas for individual analyses adjusted for Type I error using Holm’s sequential Bonferroni method.

We first present the major findings for each category. We then focus on the membership category, exploring key qualitative findings. Finally, we zoom in further to explore in more detail the strategies participants used to coordinate between their various communal affiliations.

Context

A Mann–Whitney *U* test showed that historians used context more frequently than non-historians ($Z = 2.84, p = .005$). Furthermore, a Wilcoxon signed ranks

test found that participants used context more frequently when reading about Thanksgiving than about Exodus ($Z = 2.90, p = .004$). Follow-up tests found this within-participants difference to be significant for historians ($Z = 2.51, p = .012$) but not for the non-historians ($Z = 1.54, p = .123$). This pattern makes sense given historians' backgrounds. Although specializations varied, all historians were American-born and employed at U.S. colleges and universities and could thus be expected to have some degree of expertise in American history. At the same time, the variability in historians' contextual knowledge about the ancient Near East was not surprising.

Between-participants and within-participants differences in context are illustrated in Figure 1. The two columns at the center of the graph display historians' greater use of context (irrespective of religious affiliation) relative to non-historians. The heights of the Thanksgiving columns relative to those for Exodus show that participants used context more frequently for Thanksgiving than for Exodus.

Variations in background knowledge help explain these differences. For example, when examining the Thanksgiving picture (Document 9), Reverend I noticed that something was amiss about an image in which "everyone looks clean and well fed," but this clergyman possessed no specific knowledge to challenge this depiction. Historians pointed to similar features but contextualized comments with facts

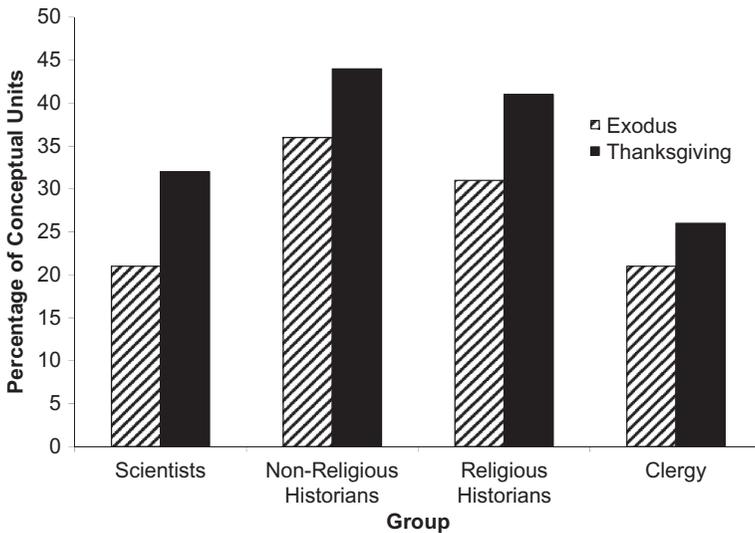


FIGURE 1 Percentage of conceptual units in which context was dominant, by group and topic.

(e.g., Professor G objected to the depiction of clergy in the picture by noting that there was “no minister in Plymouth in 1621”). Furthermore, historians drew on disciplinary constructs like *anachronism*, the tendency to use present-day conceptions to understand the past, to categorize such inaccuracies. Thus, Professor E dismissed the Thanksgiving picture as “a twentieth-century sociological version of how seventeenth-century people conducted their affairs.” Pointing to the turkey at the center, he noted that wild fowl from the 1600s looked quite different from this depiction, which in his words bore a striking resemblance to a “Butterball turkey from Safeway.”

A crucial aspect of reading for context is the awareness that language itself is historical (Leinhardt & Young, 1996; Wineburg, 1998). At key junctures, differences in participants’ sensitivity to language placed them at opposite ends of the interpretive spectrum. Focusing on the opening lines of Document 12, George Washington’s Thanksgiving Proclamation, both clergy and scientists interpreted phrases like “providence of Almighty God,” “great and glorious Being,” and “beneficent Author of all the good” as proof positive of a deep-seated piety that swept post-Revolutionary America. Yet historians, reading the same words, came to opposite conclusions. Six of eight interpreted these phrases as a retreat from an all-embracing religious worldview, hearing in them the echoes of *deism*, the Enlightenment philosophy that eschewed a personal God who intervened in human history. Rather than viewing Document 12 as “heavy on the God stuff” (Dr. P) or indicative of a “nation that believed in God” (Rabbi K), a view shared by all eight clergy and scientists, most historians understood the source as one that co-opted religious symbols to advance civic and secular aims, thus paving the way for the separation of Church and State.⁷

Sourcing and Evidence

Contrary to our expectations, Mann–Whitney *U* tests found no significant differences between historians and non-historians in the number of references to either sourcing or evidence.

However, although the quantity of references for both categories did not differ, their quality often did. It is not uncommon for educated readers to look to the source of a document before engaging its substance. Such was the case here. However, once a source was noted, what participants did with it varied depending on their academic background.

Consider the differences in how the scientists and the historians treated the same bibliographic information for Document 5. Two of the scientists acknowledged the document’s source by repeating the names of the two archeologists and

⁷Six of eight historians explicitly referred to deism or secularism in their comments. Readers can contact us for further examples and quotations from the protocols.

their publisher, the Free Press. But with the exception of Dr. O's tongue-in-cheek aside ("Is it really free?"), neither went beyond the information given. Professor G, a historian, also did not recognize the names of the authors. But he mined each word for as much information as he could:

The Bible Unearthed, a recent work. [The title] suggests that it might be an archeological work; Free Press, hmm. I think of [it] as a quite reputable publishing house. . . . I think it is a "free press," it's not academically associated, and I kind of associate them with somewhat radical or leftist [stances], at least within history.

The book's title oriented the historian to its topic, whereas its date and its publisher gave rise to a hypothesis about the book's political stance. Together, these are astute conjectures based on minimal information. In some circles, *The Bible Unearthed* is indeed viewed as a leftist attack that undermines notions of unbroken Jewish continuity with the Holy Land, thus bolstering Palestinian claims of national sovereignty (cf. Shanks, 1998).

A similar pattern was observed for evidence. References to evidence were roughly equal in number for historians and non-historians, but historians' comments typically provided broader and more nuanced interpretations. The word *evidence* appears only once across the two document sets, when Finkelstein and Silberman (Document 5) claim that the archeological surveys of Mount Sinai have "yielded only negative evidence." Dr. O spoke for three of the four scientists when he commented,

I would imagine that somewhere before this, they have a reason as to why they would be pursuing this line of investigation, that they either have something beyond a statement that says there's no evidence. That tends to be the boring story. The more exciting story is there's no evidence of that, but there's evidence of something else.

Historians were similarly galled by the argument from negative evidence. However, acquainted with the period under discussion, three of eight marshaled contextual information to account for the dearth of evidence. For example, Professor H suggested that despite the lack of archeological remains,

a lot of stories circulated in Greco-Roman times about the Jews in Egypt being expelled because they were lepers or criminals and so on, which is regarded by some historians as the origins of anti-Semitic stereotypes of the Jews from Greco-Roman ethnographers. Tacitus for example uses that. It begins with Hecateus of Abdera who wasn't an anti-Semite, but he recorded the fact that the Jews, although they now live in Judea, came from Egypt. It was believed [that] the Jews originated in Egypt and that Moses was an Egyptian who led them out of bondage to found a nation.

Sensemaking

We expected that sensemaking would be most prevalent when participants struggled with material they found unfamiliar or difficult. Accordingly, we expected that the category would be used more frequently by scientists than by any other group and that it would be more prevalent for Exodus than for Thanksgiving. Both expectations were met. A Mann–Whitney U test found that sensemaking comments were more common among scientists than others ($Z = 2.91, p = .001$). Furthermore, and consistent with our other results, a Wilcoxon signed ranks test found that participants used it more frequently for Exodus than for Thanksgiving ($Z = 2.17, p = .003$).

Membership

We hypothesized that membership would be invoked most when a text triggered some kind of conflict or tension in the reader, such as a conflict between the commitments of a religious Jew, for whom the deliverance from Egypt is at the core of religious belief, and the claim that the Exodus never occurred. Alternatively, conflicts might arise from the reader's simultaneous identification with multiple groups, each of which carries distinct and possibly contradictory commitments (e.g., between the historian's rejection of divine agency as an explanatory category vs. a believer's commitment to it). In both instances, we assumed that readers would seek to locate themselves in relation to the text and to the communities with which they identified.

The Exodus task contained several texts that challenged the Biblical account or assumed relations of a particular kind between religious belief and historical inquiry (see Document 8). The Thanksgiving documents, in contrast, touched on issues of religion and faith less frequently and more indirectly. Accordingly, our predictions were twofold: We expected first that membership would occur more among religious participants than among non-religious ones and second that this difference would be specific to the Exodus task.

Both predictions were confirmed. Mann–Whitney U tests showed that religious participants used more membership talk than did non-religious participants when reading about the Exodus ($Z = 2.31, p = .021$) but not when reading about Thanksgiving ($Z = 1.05, p = .328$). As Figure 2 illustrates, the increase in column heights from left to right shows the greater incidence of membership talk among religious participants. Similarly, the discrepancies in height between Exodus and Thanksgiving columns among clergy and religious historians (compared with the slight, oppositely directed discrepancies among non-religious historians and scientists) illustrate that within-participants differences in membership across the tasks were significant for religious participants but not for non-religious ones.

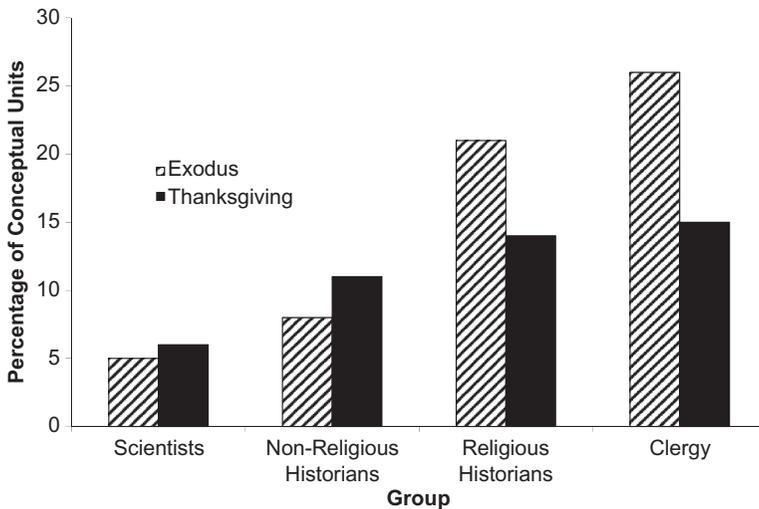


FIGURE 2 Percentage of conceptual units in which membership was dominant, by group and topic.

Membership Explored

We coded for membership when readers marked themselves as belonging to one or more groups. Sometimes they used explicit clauses like “As a historian . . .” or “We Jews.” Other times they referenced membership indirectly. For example, Professor E, who defined herself as a “lapsed Catholic,” commented on the Bible story (Document 2): “Catholics in my day didn’t read the Bible, we read *about* the Bible, we read *these* stories. Makes my skin crawl.” Rather than defining herself explicitly as a Catholic, Professor E alluded to membership. She shifted from third-person “Catholics” to the first-person “we,” implying equivalence between the two. Also, her mode of identification was negative. She described not so much what she *is* as what she *is not* or what she *is no longer*. Her desire to distance herself from her background took on almost visceral force.

We noted other instances of identification by negation, but rarely ones as clear cut. Readers’ qualifications typically conveyed ambivalence rather than outright rejection. Thus, Reverend I commented on the Thanksgiving documents: “There’s a sense of shamefulness for me in this overkill celebration of coming and taking land; that we didn’t give a thought to whom else might be living here. There’s an embarrassment.” Although Reverend I used “we” to identify herself as a (real or imagined) descendent of White colonialists, she sought to distance herself from this chapter in American history.

These two examples are instances of readers labeling themselves in relation to a single group, Catholics in the former and European colonialists in the latter. Other readers positioned themselves *between* groups or signaled simultaneous membership in *multiple* groups. For example, Professor G remarked after reading the same storybook to which Professor E had responded so viscerally, “As an historian, since there’s no divine intervention involved, and since I’m not a theistic believer, I’m inclined to give this one the greatest historicity since it’s about human agency.” Here Professor G’s dual membership in the community of historians and the community of nonbelievers might be thought of as congruent or additive, as he experienced no conflict between the identifications and their associated commitments. Indeed, the historian’s rejection of divine intervention as a legitimate form of historical explanation fits hand-in-glove with the nonbeliever’s skepticism about the existence of God.

Multiple memberships, however, were not always so harmonious. Historians with religious commitments felt the competing pulls of their professional guild on the one hand and the religious communities with which they affiliated on the other. These dual commitments sometimes led to visible tensions. It is to these tensions and an analysis of the strategies our participants used to navigate them that we now turn.

Strategies of Coordination

We use the term *epistemic switching* to describe how participants dealt with the multiple memberships evoked by these texts. This term denotes a participant’s use of multiple frameworks of epistemological assumptions (e.g., historical, theological, scientific) for interpreting documentary evidence. We prefer the term *epistemic switching* to *membership switching* because when such switches occurred, they typically involved more than a shift from one self-description to another. They generally signaled a shift from one set of assumptions about the nature of knowledge to another.

The following excerpt from Professor D illustrates a shift. A Jesuit priest and history professor at a Catholic university, Professor D paused when Document 2 referred to the Egyptians who joined the Israelites in the Exodus:

This was an interesting paragraph for me because it made me think as both a theologian and a historian. Because I was thinking: I wonder if Scripture says that there were Egyptian refugees? And then the historian in me says: Even if Scripture doesn’t say that, it’s quite probable that would have happened.

Here Professor D identified with two communities at once, theologians and historians. In each case he tied his identification to each group’s characteristic

epistemic practices: validation by Scripture for the former and contextualization by analogy for the latter.

Professor D coordinated between these two epistemologies because he cared about each. However, when only a single epistemology was considered worthy—as was the case with most of our non-religious historians and scientists—coordination between epistemologies meant either ignoring a competing epistemology or rejecting it out of hand. Consider the reaction of Professor G, a non-religious historian, to Document 6’s claim that the Bible constitutes a form of evidence in a class of its own: “This kind of credulousness of faith seems to me completely at odds with the whole historical enterprise.” Similarly, Professor E, referring to the question of the Bible’s historicity, commented with visible impatience, “I turn my whole mind off to this whole thing. Like I said, I have problems with religion and I don’t like to think about the Middle East. I just ignore it a lot of the time.”

Confronted with excerpts from Scripture and claims that disputed them, religious readers did not always have it so easy. Whereas some used multiple epistemologies serially (as in the previous example of Professor D, who began with Scriptural validation and switched to historical contextualization), others used them simultaneously. Whereas some granted equal weight to distinct epistemologies, others privileged one epistemology over another. Table 2 summarizes the *strategies of coordination* that participants used to navigate multiple epistemologies. Each of the four strategies is illustrated and described here.

Simultaneous-parallel, Professor B. Professor B taught American history at a liberal arts college under evangelical Christian auspices. Faculty at this institution signed a mission statement (which hung prominently in Professor B’s office) committing themselves to the divinity and person of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

For Professor B, being a Christian and a historian were fused. He shifted smoothly between religious and historical language, sometimes in the same breath. Indeed, a recurring theme in his reading was his “dual role” as Christian and historian. His reading was a finely tuned balancing act between these two roles.

From the first document, Professor B was reminded of Bible stories from his youth, and he filled in the uncaptioned picture with details of the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea with the Egyptians in hot pursuit. At Document 2, the Exodus story as recounted in a children’s book, he immediately sourced it, reading the first line of the text but skipping to its attribution. When the text mentioned that some Egyptians “hoped for freedom in the promised land,” he noted that the text “doesn’t resonate particularly well” with his Christian understanding. Similarly, when the text noted that the first Passover was celebrated “three thousand years

TABLE 2
Strategies of Coordination

Strategy	Dimension		Example
	<i>Synchrony: Is More Than One Membership Engaged at Once?</i>	<i>Priority: Is One Membership Privileged?</i>	
Serial-parallel	No	No	"On what day of the week? When I'm teaching my class or when I'm in the synagogue?" (Professor C)
Serial-hierarchical	No	Yes	"I definitely went through years where this is where my conversation was . . . [but now] I would probably say, bottom line, so what? Whether or not . . . that episode happened in Egypt . . . the lesson that it's teaching us is a grand lesson." (Principal L)
Simultaneous-parallel	Yes	No	"I can't not be a historian when I think about matters of faith . . . but then, I can't not be a Christian when I do historical scholarship." (Professor B)
Simultaneous-hierarchical	Yes	Yes	"Though I blush as a historian to say this, at a certain point maybe the details of what they actually did on that day aren't that important compared to the value they were trying to convey . . . so this made me happier than anything I've read." (Professor D)

ago," he used the first-person possessive to invoke his own faith community: "My tradition would push it back a tad more." In this encounter with a Jewish paraphrase of the Exodus, Professor B read with an implicit touchstone: his own Christian understanding of the Biblical account.

It was at Document 3, Exodus 12:17, that Professor B explicitly described his dual lenses:

As historian and Christian, I am very interested at the interface of belief and scholarship. So ultimately I would play with something like this reflectively . . . I could entertain the possibility of a history at one and the same time governed by human choice and Divine will. Because I'm a historian, because I'm a practicing Christian, I'm forced to ask those questions of each of these dimensions of my life. The flip

side of that is to ask to what extent faith is . . . rooted in that which can be demonstrated according to canons of historical evidence, and to what extent does that faith require at the human level an exploration into the genuine, the documentable, the authenticable, historical narrative.

As a historian, Professor B gave priority to claims based on verifiable evidence, but he simultaneously embraced the possibility that an oral tradition (such as the one in Exodus) might be valid even in the absence of corroborating evidence. Thus, Professor B drew parallels between Finkelstein and Silberman's "argument from silence" in Document 5 and the patronizing—and ultimately mistaken—scholarly dismissal of the Native American "Bridge of the Gods" tradition (e.g., Lyman, 1915). Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest likened the volcanic Mount St. Helens to a princess who pined for her lover, Mount Hood, on the opposite banks of the Columbia. According to Indian lore, the lovesick Mount Hood hurled a footbridge across the river to reach his beloved, a tale that according to Professor B was looked at "contemptuously by the first Whites, affectionately by later anthropologists"—that is, until geological surveys lent it scientific support. "Behaviors attributed to Wy'east [Mount Hood] including hurtling of hot rocks from gaping holes, sending forth streams of liquid fire . . . and choking of valleys of rocks," noted a recent survey by the U.S. Geological Service, seem to be "fair descriptions of Mount Hood's reconstructed activity over the past two millennia" (Scott et al., 1997, p. 14). If nothing else, argued Professor B, examples like the Bridge of the Gods story should temper historians' arrogance toward oral traditions that have been lovingly preserved across generations:

The ways in which the faithful assume on the one hand that that which is described in Scripture is equivalent to historical narrative seems simplistic. But equally simplistic to me are interpretive stances by scholars that assume that if no record exists, save this initially oral, ultimately written tradition, then clearly we have a case of a tradition that is mythical in the sense of being fictional. That's what the first sentence [of Document 5] says. It raises my dander because I prefer, as they say, a hermeneutic of reserved judgment rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Professor B's "hermeneutic of reserved judgment" functioned as the balance point between religious faith and the desire for evidence. On the one hand, he refused to reject a claim because of lack of evidence. On the other hand, faith did not trump the historical project of carefully sifting through and evaluating evidence. He explained:

All of that is part of me . . . [historian and believer] are not contradictory, they are not compartmentalized. They are supplemental in a sometimes mysterious way . . . I can't not be a historian when I think about matters of faith and the narratives of the tradition. But then, I can't not be a Christian when I do historical scholarship.

Serial-parallel, Professor C. Professor C was also a historian and a believer. And like Professor B, he too refused to privilege one epistemology over another. However, whereas Professor B used both epistemologies simultaneously, Professor C used them sequentially. Consider Professor C's response when we asked him, after he had completed the think-aloud, which Exodus document best represented his own views.⁸ He looked puzzled and asked, "On what day of the week? When I'm teaching my class or when I'm in the synagogue?" Professor C's response brought into focus the choice of guilds before him: Should he affiliate at that moment with the guild of professional historians he joined every Monday morning at the university or the body of co-religionists who engaged with these texts quite differently in synagogue on Saturday morning? He elaborated:

When I'm teaching my courses I'm bound by the rules of historical research and I have an obligation to explain to my students what the tradition of historical scholarship has to say about this material. . . . Now when I'm in a synagogue, I'm not going to be talking about the historical evidence of the Exodus, I'm going to be doing pretty much actually what the guy I laughed at [Daniel Navid Rastein, Document 7] does—contemporizing, metaphorizing, allegorizing—because essentially my task there is to make the traditional come alive and address people where they live. To do that, as I said, the historical veracity of the business is hardly relevant at all.

Professor C distinguished between different forms of reading, each of which he associated with participation in different communal activities. And yet, Professor C identified unapologetically with both communities, viewing the forms of interpretation native to each as mutually corrective rather than mutually exclusive. In his words, Monday history frees humanity from the "collective representations of the past that we all grow up in" and as such is "part of maturity." At the same time,

maturity is about understanding the value of the past as represented in tradition because, really, people don't live and die as historians, they live and die as people (laughter) . . . [People] need nourishment from the past; they need people around them who share common ideas and ideals, and an ethos and a moral framework. And historical reasoning, when it's directed at penetrating mythic ideas, is designed to free people from that. But once they're free from it, what are they going to fall into? Usually some kind of ideology or another, which is equally specious, like nationalism or socialism or fascism, whatever *ism* is around. That's what replaces the debunked religious myth. All of those *isms*, although claiming to be scientific, appeal to science as a mythic reality rather than as an empirical tool.

⁸As noted in the Method section, comments made after the think-aloud were not coded. We cite this comment by Professor C only because it illustrates so succinctly the strategy of coordination he used throughout his reading. Because this particular comment was not produced "online," we did not code it or include it in our quantitative analyses.

Simultaneous-hierarchical, Professor D. Professor D taught at a Catholic institution that, according to its website, “promotes independent critical thinkers informed by the humanities, open to finding and serving God in all things.” Professor D embodied these values in his personal biography and in how he approached these texts. Prior to joining the professorate, Professor D completed parallel forms of professional preparation, receiving a PhD in history from a major university and training and practicing as a Jesuit priest.

Professor D displayed an acute awareness of the multiple interpretive traditions he brought to these tasks, noting at each moment when he shifted from one epistemology to another. Encountering the Biblical text in Document 3, he went into priest mode:

I knew instantly this was Scripture. I saw the numbers so I knew it was versed. And the language immediately was clear to me and so scriptural. And since I am a priest and the language of the Eucharistic prayers in the Catholic Church is very much into the memory of the meal and all that kind of stuff, it felt as I read almost as if I was presiding over Mass.

Professor D displayed similar self-awareness when he switched into other roles. At Document 9 (the Thanksgiving picture), he responded as a teacher: “I’m afraid I’m going to immediately see through the lens of the course on race I’m teaching right now.” At Document 5 (Finkelstein and Silberman), he responded as a man of faith: “As a believer . . . I was finding that the guy was pushing my buttons.” At Document 10 (the children’s storybook of Thanksgiving), he responded again as a priest, offering moral counsel: “I guess I agree with that because, as a clergyman, we’re supposed to encourage thanksgiving.” So attuned was Professor D to switching that he used the metaphor of interpretive “caps” that he mentally donned and doffed to describe his different responses. At Document 12 (Washington’s *Thanksgiving Proclamation*), he remarked, “This is one where I was unusually conscious of the historian’s cap coming on, recognizing the document almost immediately and wanting to analyze it instantly.”

On its face, Professor D’s overall strategy of coordination combined elements of Professor B’s with elements of Professor C’s. Although most of his switches were serial (as in the example above), some were simultaneous (e.g., “As a teacher and also as a priest”). Similar to Professors B and C, he also appeared to treat competing epistemologies as parallel perspectives, with no single perspective taking precedence. However, a closer inspection revealed an implicit hierarchy at work. The first clue of this hierarchy came when Professor D finished reading Document 8, the last in the Exodus set:

I tend to hold to a theology which says God operates through events . . . so I’d be a little less inclined to emphasize miraculous elements in the story. I would see those

as literary ways of dramatizing the fact that God was present. In other words, if the parting of the Red Sea did not occur precisely in the way that the Scriptures describe, that wouldn't cause me a faith crisis. I would simply say that the chronicler wanted to get across the point that God led them through that obstacle. And how that may have happened, I don't know. But I don't think you have to necessarily rely on the details that the chronicler makes up, what, seven, eight hundred years later.

Here the historian and the theologian work in tandem. The historian takes chronology and precision seriously, whereas the theologian takes gaps in historical detail in stride. Ultimately, the story's significance, not its details, matter most. This hierarchy, however, should not be construed as a slight to the commitments of academic history. As Professor D demonstrated throughout his reading—and indeed by his choice of careers—he takes history very seriously indeed. He seeks to temper, not silence, the critical historian's voice.

Professor D's recognition of the limits of critical history and the importance of other forms of meaning-making was illustrated in his reading of Document 14, whose authors argued that the meaning of Thanksgiving transcends questions of factual accuracy:

I like that. That actually comes closest to my own feeling of anything I've read in either set of documents. It's the idea that buried deep within the details is this fundamental virtue, which is: It's good to give thanks to God. And even though I blush as a historian to say this, at a certain point, maybe the details of what they actually did on that day aren't that important compared to the value they were trying to convey and that has been passed down. So this made me happier than anything I've read.

Professor D's "blushing" indicates his commitment to critical history and his bemusement at disregarding one of its cardinal principles. At the same time, his "happiness" with the document's underlying message shows his readiness to temper his commitment to academic history in favor of ideals that he values even more. It is telling that Professor D's approbation of Document 14 is voiced plainly and wholeheartedly in the first person: "*I like that . . . my own feeling . . . made me happier.*" His "blushing," however, is more oblique and comes with a good deal of reservation: "though I blush as a historian to say this." Though he is able to move fluidly between epistemologies, Professor D's strategy of coordination is both simultaneous and hierarchical. In the case of Document 14, it is his meaning-making and identity-seeking commitments, not his fidelity to the discipline, that command the greater allegiance.

Serial-hierarchical, Rabbi K. Rabbi K, a British immigrant to the United States, taught at a Jewish high school and directed an advanced Talmud study

program for local rabbis. He was a graduate of rabbinic and post-rabbinic programs at two of the most prestigious yeshivot (rabbinical academies) in the contemporary Orthodox world—Gateshead Yeshiva in England and Kol Torah in Jerusalem. Rabbi K matriculated from high school with exemplary grades but never attended university. However, between the two yeshivas, he had devoted more than 10 years of his adult life to the full-time study of religious texts.

Rabbi K's antipathy for critical history blazed from the first sentence of Finkelstein and Silberman's *The Bible Unearthed* (Document 5): "This person has a problem with religion and that's why he's saying this." To the archeologists' claim that the Israelites are nowhere to be found in Egyptian court records, Rabbi K shot back, "Why should they be? The Egyptians were massacred."

This comment is puzzling. When Pharaoh had a change of heart (Exodus 15) and ordered his soldiers to apprehend the fleeing Hebrews, the text describes how God hurled their chariots into the sea, plunging them to the depths like stone. Yet this description, which Jews recite in daily prayers as *Shirat HaYam*, the Song at the Sea (Exodus 15:1–18), makes no mention of wholesale destruction of the Egyptian monarchy, only the crushing defeat of the brigades that tried to overtake the Hebrews.

Rabbi K's comment, as well as others fired off in rapid succession—that Egyptian bondage lasted 210 years instead of the Bible's reckoning of 400, that the Hebrews enjoyed a bountiful water supply during their wanderings, that the manna was so pure that it was digested whole—come not from the Biblical account but are drawn instead from more than 2,000 years of rabbinic commentary. Indeed, Rabbi K's protocol on Document 5 was the most densely contextual reading in our entire data corpus, with 14 separate intertextual references, or 1 per every 18 words of the text reviewed (see Figure 3, displayed in the format of intertextual rabbinic commentary). Yet none of these references, each claiming authority to an unbroken oral tradition delivered to Moses at Sinai along with the Ten Commandments, would be considered legitimate sources for establishing the Exodus as a documentable historical event.

Indeed, Rabbi K's epistemology is shaped by assumptions that differ quite dramatically from those that govern the academy. At its heart stands the singular act of revelation, the unparalleled moment when Moses received the Torah at Sinai. Yet for at least the past 2,000 years, the understanding of Torah has been shaped by rabbinic commentary, a compendium of legal rulings, case law, stories, and legends known as the Oral Law (*Torah sh'Baal Peh*). This literature is filled with spirited disputation and open disagreement between contending rabbinic schools, often leaving issues of religious law unsettled for future generations to decide. Despite such differences of opinion, the rabbinic tradition takes as a given that the Torah is divinely revealed and that God is the prime mover in human history. The same epistemological spirit has obvious Christian parallels, as when the Russian Orthodox philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev summarized Christianity as simply "the revelation of God in history" (cited in Cracraft, 2007, p. 138).

¹ Well, why should there be? All the Egyptians were massacred . . . That's why the Jewish people always say when they're in the wilderness, "let's go back to Egypt." Why would they want to go back to Egypt? It's the land of slavery! The point is they knew there was nothing left there. So, again, I think this person has made an assumption, has decided his conclusion before he started reading. I think he's out to prove the Bible wrong. I think he has problem with religion.

² Nomadic groups? They stayed there for 210 years. So it's not the Jews.

³ No, they weren't a 'group of people' already living in Canaan. They were a small family. Jacob and twelve sons. They had a lot of children, seventy. That doesn't make them a group. And why would they be historically recorded?

⁴ So, Egypt, why, good, that's a good question on your historical proof. I mean, if you want to put that against the Torah, I'm sorry, I go for the Torah's accounts. But, um, why's it absent? Interesting observation . . . I don't know enough about history to know where it should be recorded . . . The Ramban says that there were many other nations [in Egypt], that there were many taxes, and that it wasn't only the Jewish people being enslaved.

⁵ Why would you expect archeological traces of their generation-long wandering in the Sinai to be apparent? What are you looking for? Coke cans? I wonder what they think is going to be around there . . . unless it was the animals, just bones, maybe the whole bunch of slaw (quail) . . . [These archeologists] have to remember that [the Israelites] were surrounded by the Ananei Hakavod (Clouds of Glory). That's number one. Number two, I don't know why HaShem (literally "The Name," a common appellation for God) would have any interest in there being archeological traces for anyone to observe.

⁶ They had water from the Be'er shel Miriam (Well of Miriam) . . . They had their own food, the man (manna). So they had these Ananei Hakavod, which surrounded them and provided them with clothing. . . I mean, they were living a supernatural existence. They didn't have any excrement because they ate the man. Why would you expect there to be archeological remains?

"Egyptians were massacred" The Torah describes the destruction of Pharaoh's army at the Sea of Reeds (Exodus 15:1-18) but says nothing about the Egyptian nation being left in waste. In asserting Egypt's destruction, Rabbi K draws on a body of *midrashim* (singular, *midrash*), collections of rabbinic commentaries, sayings, and exegeses compiled between 400 C.E. and 1200. He may have been referring to this *midrash* from *Shemot Rabbah* (Vilna edition) section 24:2: "When the [Israelites] saw the drowned corpses of the Egyptians . . . they said, 'Not a single person is left in Egypt; let us turn around and return.'" **"for 210 years"** Rabbi K's accounting disputes the plain meaning of Exodus 15:12, where the exile is said to last 400 years. This figure, however, does not align with

a genealogical sequence in Exodus 8, and to resolve the contradiction Rabbi K draws on Rashi, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105). Employing creative mathematics, Rashi dates the exile from Isaac, who was 60 at the birth of his son Jacob, who in turn was 130 when he went down to Egypt. Adding Isaac's age to Jacob's, and subtracting it from 400 leaves 210, a number that squares with the earlier genealogical sequence. **"a small family"** Cf. Genesis 46:27 and Exodus 1:5. **"Ramban"** Rabbi K references Nachmanides (Rabbi Moses Ben Nachman), a Catalan scholar, philosopher and Biblical commentator (1194-1270). Nachmanides may have been drawing on the *midrash*, which expands on Exodus 14:5: "[The Egyptians] said: What have we done that we have let Israel go from serving us?" The *Yalkut Shimoni* (Collection of Simon), *Parshat Beshlach*, 230-247) embellishes: [The Egyptians] said, 'Now all the nations will beat us like the clapper striking the bell's side' . . . for [the nations] will say, 'if they allowed the Israelites to leave why should we pay taxes and [become] slaves and maidservants?' **" bunch of slaw"** Rabbi K uses the Hebrew word for quail, which provided the Israelites with an unexpected and bountiful food source (Exodus 16:13). **"Ananei Hakavod"** Clouds of Glory (Exodus 14: 20-21) enveloped the Israelites from the time that they left Egypt to the time they entered Canaan, protecting them from the elements, wild beasts, and providing a host of other magical benefits (see below). **"Be'er shel Miriam"** Here Rabbi K draws on a *Midrash* (Song of Songs Rabbah 4:14) describing "Miriam's Well," a rolling rock that accompanied the Jewish people on their wanderings and which provided a constant water source in the parched desert. **"man"** Exodus 16:31 describes

the manna as "like coriander seed, it was white, and it tasted like a wafer with honey." **"provided them with clothing"** Here Rabbi K quotes the literal meaning of Deuteronomy 8:4, "Your clothes did not wear out, nor did your feet blister," a miracle that assumes even greater proportions in rabbinic literature. Rashi draws on a *midrash* from *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* (92a), which describes how the Clouds of Glory would rub up against the Israelites' clothing, effectively laundering and pressing them. Moreover, as their children grew, the clothes on their backs miraculously grew with them, like a "snail's shell grows along with the snail." **"any excrement"** Here Rabbi K references a discussion from the Talmud, the central text of Jewish law compiled in Babylonia in the 5th century C.E. In Tractate *Yoma* 75b, the rabbis debate the nature of the manna, drawing on a verse from Psalms (78:25), where manna is called the "bread of angels" (*lehem avirim*). In the ensuing discussion, Rabbi Yishmael puns on the word *avirim* (angels), suggesting the manna would be more aptly called *lehem eivarssem*, the bread of one's limbs, for it was so pure that it was completely absorbed by the limbs, thus leaving no waste products. True to form, other rabbis dispute Yishmael's claim, and the discussion goes on at some length.

If a great mass of fleeing Israelites had passed through the border fortifications of the pharaonic regime, a record should exist. Yet in the abundant Egyptian sources describing the time of the New Kingdom in general and the thirteenth century in particular, there is no reference to the Israelites, not even a single clue.¹ We know of nomadic groups from Edom who entered Egypt from the desert.² The Mernepth stele refers to Israel as a group of people already living in Canaan.³ But we have no clue, not even a single word, about early Israelites in Egypt: neither in monumental inscriptions on walls of temples, nor in tomb inscriptions, nor in papyrus. Israel is absent – as a possible foe of Egypt, as a friend, or as an enslaved nation.⁴ . . . Even if the number of fleeing Israelites... is wildly exaggerated... the text describes the survival of a great number of people [living] under the most challenging conditions. Some archeological traces of their generation-long wandering in the Sinai should be apparent.⁵ However, except for the Egyptian forts along the northern coast, not a single campsite or sign of occupation from [that] time . . . has ever been identified in Sinai.⁶ And it has not been for lack of trying. -- *Israel Finkelstein & Neil Asher Silberman (2001) The Bible Unearthed, New York: Free Press*

FIGURE 3 Rabbi K's comments on Document 5. The central column is an excerpt from Document 5. The left column records Rabbi K's comments as he read this excerpt; the superscript numbers preceding each comment refer to the text in the center column. The right column is our commentary on Rabbi K's reading; the bold, italicized quotations that precede each comment refer to the underlined phrase in the left column.

Even a concept as fundamental as time distinguished Rabbi K's approach from modern disciplinary practice. Historians take for granted that time moves linearly and that explanations must obey temporal sequence, if not in their narrative unfolding then at least in their explanatory framework. Accordingly, later events cannot be adduced as causal explanations for earlier ones (thus, the Korean War cannot be said to have caused the bombing of Hiroshima). In the same vein, historians assume that texts written hundreds or thousands of years after the events they explain are less probative than documents and artifacts closer to the time. Oblivious to the documentary record, later accounts, historians teach us, are susceptible to interpolation, mythmaking, and wishful thinking.

These assumptions are so basic to historical inquiry that historians often ignore them in their undergraduate classes (cf. Wineburg, 2001, 2003). Yet these assumptions do not seem to drive Rabbi K's reading. A different principle cuts his interpretive path. Rabbinic hermeneutics pivots on the assumption of *eyn muqdam 'o meu'har ba'torah* ("there is no earlier or later in the Torah," cf. Rashi, on Numbers 9:1–2 and Talmud *Pesa'him* 7a), the notion that Biblical events are arrayed not by chronology but by a sequence that maximizes their instructional force. Thus, drawing on rabbinic sources and commentaries known to him in 11th-century France, Rabbi Shlomo Ben Yitzhaki (1040–1105), or Rashi, the undisputed superstar of medieval commentators, could speculate about the composition of various enslaved groups in Egypt before the Common Era not by reading Pliny or Herodotus or by deciphering inscriptions during an ethnographic tour of the region but by sitting in his study in Troyes and consulting a library of theological works that derived religious and historical truth by an internal referentiality largely, but not entirely, impervious to outside critique. On the occasions when critique did penetrate, it did so by raising questions the tradition had not yet considered. Then, using the tradition's exegetical tools, rabbinic commentators would formulate responses in the same spirit as Rabbi K does in Figure 3: What did the Israelites do for water for 40 years in the desert? The *midrash* says that they drank from Miriam's Well. Why are there no remains of dwellings from the Hebrews' sojourn? Encircled by a Cloud of Glory, they led a supernatural existence. Why are the Hebrews absent from Egyptian court documents? Because Egypt was left in ruin. Rabbi K plays the claim-and-evidence game adroitly, except that he plays it by his rules. His is a reading both deeply contextual and stunningly ahistorical.

To put it mildly, Rabbi K's epistemology is at odds with academic practice. As Dipesh Chakrabarty (2007) noted, the modern historical tradition—indeed the entire edifice of Western science—pivots on the assumption of "ontological singularity," in which

Gods and spirits are . . . "social facts," that the social somehow exists prior to them.

I try, on the other hand, to think without the assumption of even a logical priority of

the social. One empirically knows of no society in which humans have existed without gods and spirits accompanying them. . . . Being human means, as Ramachandra Gandhi puts it, discovering “the possibility of calling upon God [or gods] without being under an obligation to first establish his [or their] reality.” (p. 16)

Based on his embrace of “ontological multiplicity” and his assumptions about the relationship between claim and evidence, one might assume that Rabbi K would continue to reject the archeologists’ assertions with the same force that non-religious readers dismissed Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb in Document 6. It is precisely this expectation that makes Rabbi K’s final comments so intriguing.

Deuteronomy 8:4 provides Rabbi K with an answer about what happened to the Israelites’ clothing (it never wore out; see Figure 3) but leaves open the question about why no bones have been found from the Israelites who perished in the desert:

I wonder what [the archeologists] would expect to be there, for a nation that was only there for a short amount of time . . . The longest place that they camped in was a year. . . . Maybe there are places where they stayed for more than a year. Even still. Now, they did bury their dead in the wilderness. So I suppose there should be . . . some bones. But I wonder if they didn’t look and didn’t find any bones of people. That’s a good point. There should be bones there. That’s interesting. There are no bones there. Interesting. I don’t know.

This transcription only approximates the puzzlement in Rabbi K’s voice, his labored fits and starts as he paused with genuine uncertainty, a stance quite different from the acerbic ripostes he had hurled just a few sentences before. Confronted in the next document with the apologetics of Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb, who asserts that one must adopt the Biblical account as whole cloth rather than picking and choosing among its threads, Rabbi K refused to abate:

You have to also look for bodies. . . . The *Gemara* [Talmud] does say that they went out and dug their own graves . . . so there was definitely a period of time when people were dying in the wilderness.⁹ I wonder what they did with those bodies. It doesn’t necessarily say they buried them there. Maybe they took those bodies back to Israel, in which case that would explain why there’s no bodies. Or maybe they just haven’t looked for bodies. Or maybe they did find bodies, but didn’t think that was such a tremendous thing, finding dead bodies in a desert, because you’d expect to find dead bodies in a desert. Okay. Okay. Okay, but I think that’s a good point.

⁹Rabbi K again drew on a well-known *midrash* (Lamentations Rabba 32) that records the tradition that each year on the ninth day of the month of Av, the Israelites would dig their own graves, lie down in them, and find on awaking the next morning that 15,000 of them had perished during the night.

The “good point” that stumps Rabbi K is the nagging question of why no bones have been found. Yet never does he question the Torah’s account, a fact that reflects his unwavering commitment to revelation. However, as he wrestles with the question of the bones, steadily working through possibilities and laying out options, he seems less the theologian falling back on stock answers from the rabbinic tradition than a genuine historical inquirer, critically reasoning about hypotheses, thinking about evidence, and resisting premature closure.

DISCUSSION

We studied a group of educated adults as they read historical documents about two topics, the Biblical Exodus and the origins of the first Thanksgiving. The latter topic was straightforward and similar to those commonly used in studies of historical cognition (e.g., Rouet, Favar, Britt, & Perfetti, 1997; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish, & Bosquet, 1996). The former was of a different order. Situated at the borderlands of history and religion, Exodus tells the story of the Israelites’ redemption from Egyptian bondage, a narrative in which God appears in the starring role. The very topic triggers tensions between competing ways of understanding the past—the careful sifting of the documentary record for the academic historian, the primacy of sacred texts and traditions for the religious believer. Secular academic history shows an expansive tolerance for all forms of explanation except the one at the core of religious history: the role of the Divine in human affairs (cf. Gregory, 2006). And historical accounts from a religious perspective often remain oblivious, if not downright hostile, to explanations that reject their first principles.

Using the dual lenses of the Exodus and the first Thanksgiving, we explored how sophisticated thinkers, all adults, all with years of higher education, all with advanced reading skills, evaluated historical claims. What criteria guided their judgment? How did these criteria vary within and across topics? How did readers’ notions of historical truth relate to their academic training and religious backgrounds?

We used a purposive sampling scheme (cf. Marshall, 1996; Patton, 2001), intentionally selecting readers who varied by religious commitment and academic training. Because we wanted to study textual analysis in real time, we used a think-aloud methodology that yielded verbatim records of participants’ readings. We transcribed each interview and converted protocols into coding units. This commitment to systematicity, which ensured that all data were reviewed and coded rather than opportunistically cherry-picked, requires a trade-off: As sample size increases, the feasibility of line-by-line coding (and the subsequent conversion of codes into numbers; cf. Chi, 1997) becomes ever more remote.

Although our sample of 16 was considerably larger than samples in comparable studies (e.g., Leinhardt & Young, 1996; Peskin, 1998; Wineburg, 1998), we harbor no illusions about a strategy that slots people into preordained categories like “religious historian,” “clergy,” or “scientist.” We are aware that the four individuals in our “high religious commitment/high historical expertise” cell no more speak for religious historians than the four clergy speak for men and women of the cloth or the four scientists speak for science *writ large*. It is folly to think otherwise. We further recognize how easy it is to disturb the logic of our design, say, by substituting the Mahabharata for the Exodus or by having PhD historians who are believing Sikhs or Jains read about the events at Sinai. In each case these “religious historians” would doubtless produce different results, and we would effectively end up with a different study. We could go on at length spinning strings of similar qualifications.

At the same time, given the sampling criteria we *did* use and how we operationalized religious commitment, our topics worked. The tensions our religious participants felt as they encountered these texts, whether manifested as the unbridled anger of Rabbi K or the controlled seething of Professor B, boiled over at key points. That the Exodus spurred more instances of membership talk than Thanksgiving, that it produced deeper affective engagement for religious participants than non, that religious historians dwelled longer and more intensely on the topic than did their non-religious colleagues: These findings all point to a general correspondence between our selection criteria and our participants’ responses. Thus, our design allowed us to explore relations that we considered to be theoretically rich in advance of the study.

To recapitulate: We found that historians, religious or not, tended to do what historians do: They placed documents into broader contexts and drew on conceptual categories like anachronism to characterize how the present plays fast and loose with the past. Although none of them specialized in either topic, the historians as a group discerned linguistic codes and nuances missed by very smart members of the clergy and very astute scientists. Our study thus extends previous work on historical expertise that either lacked strong controls for historians’ readings (Leinhardt & Young, 1996; Wineburg, 1998) or compared skilled readers to younger novices (Rouet et al., 1997; Wineburg, 1991). Historians, we can say with reasonable assurance, approach documentary evidence in ways that differentiate them from other intelligent, degreed adults.

Yet when it came to the Exodus task, our block of eight historians split into two camps—those with and without religious commitments. When the non-religious encountered claims that appealed to a religious sensibility (deriving from either Scripture or the ancillary documents), they hoisted a disciplinary red card, crying foul at a rogue logic or dismissing these claims as simply “not history.” Religious historians, in contrast, openly acknowledged alternative logics and tried to navigate between the dictates of their professional training and their reverence for

sacred history. They did this by engaging in *epistemic switching*, varying their criteria for truth, reliability, and warrant according to the associations and allegiances that a given text triggered. Some engaged both logics simultaneously, reading texts with a kind of epistemological bifocality, as did Professor B; others, like Professor C, treated the logics as separate and equal, always using one or the other but never both at the same time; still others recognized both logics but elevated one over the other, as was the pattern with Professor D.

At first glance, these findings hardly seem earth-shattering. The claim that individuals present different selves at different times and places is axiomatic of the postmodern condition (cf. Giddens, 1991), a widely accepted finding in the literature on personality (cf. Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997), a pillar of sociocultural approaches to learning (cf. Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003), and old news to social role theorists such as Peter Berger (1963) and Erving Goffman (1959). More recently, micro-sociologists like Christena Nippert-Eng (1996) have explored in exquisite detail how people demarcate the realms of their lives as they move between spheres such as home and work. They use physical objects (separate keys and calendars), clothing (business suits and flat pumps vs. jeans and T-shirts), and practices (drinking coffee or a Diet Coke vs. popping open a beer) to indicate movement from one sphere to the other. Similarly, Lave and Wenger's (1991) work has shown how movement from one community of practice to another (e.g., a novice learning what it means to be a member of Alcoholics Anonymous) entails learning a new way of talking and being, a new way of constructing a life narrative as one is transformed from newcomer to old-timer.

Yet these movements—from home to work, or from outside to inside Alcoholics Anonymous—are not at all what we examined. Although studies that track people's movements across communities of practice (e.g., a study that follows Professor C from his Monday university lecture to his Saturday morning sermon at synagogue) are fascinating, we did something far more modest. We studied how people read.

We sat people down in a single space and gave them texts from different worlds. Their only movement per se was to shift in their chairs or reach for their reading glasses. Confronting texts that made different demands on their affiliations and commitments, they neither became different people nor renounced membership in one community to take up residence in another. Rather, they engaged in *mental switches*, nimbly shifting between distinct sets of epistemological assumptions that reflected multiple and distinct ways of engaging the past. The importance of our work lies in documenting the fluidity of these switches, a seamlessness that expands and complicates notions of human functioning. People express their multiplicity even without changing clothes or putting on different hats. Indeed, the very spheres that philosophers claim must move in separate conceptual orbits and whose merging incurs the wrath of Harvard professors judging a course proposal not only come together with finesse as real people sit down and read texts about the

sacred past but may act in mutually corrective ways that stretch our understanding of the human capacity for complexity and nuance.

To represent the textured readings we observed, we found it helpful to posit two axes for thinking about the past. One is a *vertical* axis that corresponds to familiar notions of critical historiography and epistemic development. Along this axis, thinkers ascend from naive beliefs about how the past is made to a critical consciousness that recognizes perspective, qualification, and the fragility of evidence. Progress along this vertical axis has been charted in broad contour by various developmental models of historical reasoning (e.g., Ashby & Lee, 1987; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Rüsen, 1993; Shemilt, 1983).

At the same time, we posit a *horizontal* axis of historical thinking in which people engage history not as neutral bystanders but as participants in a faith tradition. Rather than treating a tradition's sacred narratives as external data to be probed, investigated, and categorized, in this role they treat them as stories of which they are part and that form part of them. They relate to these stories less as repositories of facts than as sources of meaning, identification, attachment, and commitment. In this regard, participants in a faith tradition abide by an epistemology that differs from the academy's—an epistemology in which truth can be figurative as well as literal and in which the ultimate goal is not the pursuit of knowledge but the pursuit of meaning. At the risk of being misunderstood as suggesting that these modes of thinking are mutually exclusive, we present a schematic in Table 3 that lays out the chief differences between academic and sacred history.

TABLE 3
Academic and Sacred History Compared

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Academic History</i>	<i>Sacred History</i>
Course of history	Non-teleological (things happen)	Teleological (things happen for a reason)
Causal explanation	Everything but God	God and everything else
Oral tradition	Viewed with suspicion	Viewed with respect
Limits of knowing	What is documentable	Documentable and beyond the documentable
Stance of knower	Objective	Engaged
Validation	Documentary record	Sacred texts/history of communal practices and interpretations
Textual analysis	Literalism (linear argument)	Figurativism (allegory, metaphor, homiletics)
Falsifiability	Everything	Some things
Time	Ontological singularity	Ontological multiplicity
Reason	Unlimited	Constrained
Goal of explanation	Accuracy	Meaning

We stress that Table 3 is not meant to imply a dichotomy. On the contrary, our rationale for introducing a second axis into discussions of historical epistemology is to explore the relations between these often overlapping ways of relating to the past. Positions along the horizontal axis represent the intensity with which a person expresses identification with a faith tradition. Some texts trigger strong identification, others weak identification, and still others no identification at all—something broadly evident in different responses to the Exodus and Thanksgiving tasks. Furthermore, positions along the horizontal axis can vary from moment to moment, as readers' identification with a tradition's narratives waxes and wanes in successive acts of interpretation.

To understand how people interpret texts about a sacred past, we can describe their position not only on each axis but also in the plane formed when the axes join. We use Figure 4 to illustrate how our axes might be used to represent four distinct moments in Professor D's engagement with our tasks.

Starting in the upper left-hand corner of the figure, we find Professor D responding self-consciously as a historian to George Washington's *Thanksgiving Proclamation* (Document 12, line P556; here and elsewhere line numbers preceded by P refer to the line in the interview protocol at which the excerpt begins). At this point, Professor D's religious commitments and affiliations do not figure prominently in his interpretation. Moving across and down toward the center of the graph, we find Professor D responding simultaneously as both believer and historian to Dennis Prager's claim that Jews who don't believe in the Exodus

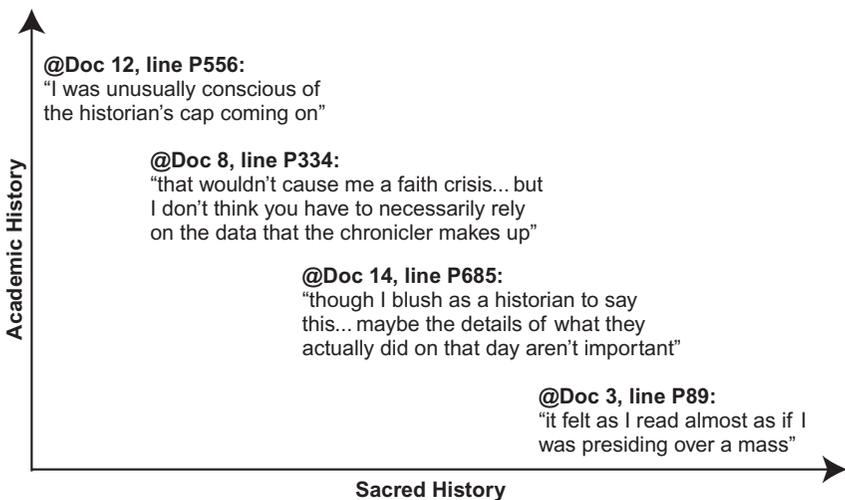


FIGURE 4 Professor D's epistemic switches, represented in two dimensions.

should stop observing Passover (Document 8, line P334). Professor D differentiates between his identification with the larger religious truth represented by the Exodus, on the one hand, and his doubts as a historian about the biblical account, on the other. Moving down, we find Professor D taking a similar approach to Chuck Larson's characterization of the Thanksgiving story (Document 14, line P685). Here, however, Professor D explicitly notes the tension between his commitment to academic history and his identification with the text's broader message. Though the voice of his inner historian is not completely mute, it is trumped by the louder voice of his inner man of faith. Finally, moving to the bottom right-hand corner, we find Professor D self-consciously responding as a priest to the excerpt from the Book of Exodus (Document 3, line P89). Scripture triggers in him a reading almost devotional in character, in which critical historical consciousness seems to recede far into the background.

Epistemic switching of the kind represented in Figure 4 does not sit well with existing models of development. Whether broadly psychological (e.g., Hofer & Pintrich, 1997) or more narrowly historical (e.g., Shemilt, 1983; Wilschut, 2001), such models are blind to a horizontal axis. Even when researchers describe epistemic *development* as multidimensional and domain dependent, they tend to define epistemological *maturity* as the possession of beliefs about knowledge that apply universally—to all knowledge, in all domains. (For a recent example, see the discussion section in Greene, Torney-Purta, & Azevedo, 2010, wherein domain differences in epistemological belief are explained in classic Piagetian terms of “horizontal decalage.”) That a reasoner might deploy multiple epistemologies simultaneously or serially would betoken not cognitive adaptability from this perspective but a failure to synthesize varied positions to arrive at integration. Indeed, theorists and philosophers of historical cognition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992; Lasch, 1984; Oakeshott, 1983; Yerushalmi, 1982) have tended to label, rather than to engage on their own terms, alternatives to academic history (cf. Barton, 2009). Dubbed “nostalgia,” “heritage,” “tradition,” “collective memory,” or “ancestor worship,” such ways of relating to the past often serve as foils to critical historical consciousness rather than achievements in their own right.¹⁰

Our horizontal axis provides an alternative to such one-dimensional characterizations. When Professor D reads like a priest, he does not forfeit the capacity to engage in critical historical consciousness. Rather, his academic faculties move to the side to make room for other forms of engagement. Similarly, when he thinks

¹⁰Even models that depict historical consciousness in a non-hierarchical matrix tend to fall back on schemes with vertical progressions characterized by increasing sophistication and rational explanation. For example, Jörn Rüsen's (1993) highly influential model (cf. Megill, 1994), drawn in circular form and depicting a set of influences interacting nonlinearly, has a vertical accompaniment that moves progressively toward its apex in increasing levels of intellectual sophistication. Peter Seixas (2005) has presciently asked whether Rüsen's “progressive” stage model actually describes “different types, not necessarily more or less ‘advanced’ types” of historical thinking (p. 157).

like a historian, he does not cease to be a man of faith. Rather, his critical acumen comes to the fore while his commitment to the narratives of his tradition fades temporarily from view.

The discrepancies between Rabbi K's historian-like readings of the Thanksgiving documents and his ahistorical readings of the Exodus documents suggest that historical consciousness is not simply a vertical intellectual capacity that different individuals exhibit to a greater or lesser degree. It seems, rather, to be a form of thinking exercised in different ways and to different extents in different contexts. Rabbi K's case suggests that people who are demonstrably capable of sophisticated historical thinking sometimes reason about the past in ways that, viewed exclusively from a vertical perspective, appear epistemologically obtuse. Yet when viewed horizontally, these same instances appear neither worse nor inferior to other instances of historical thinking, but different. They are not lapses into naïveté but cases of epistemic switching wherein the reader moves deliberately and fluently from one mode of historical thinking to another, just as Rabbi K did when he turned from a defender of divine revelation in Document 5 to a legitimate historical inquirer in Document 6 puzzling about the absence of human remains. Conceptual schemes that presuppose a single vertical axis of sophistication must, by necessity, view such switches as either progress or regress. By positing a horizontal axis of historical reading we are not denying vertical schemes but suggesting that such schemes present only a partial image of what sophisticated readers do when reading history that makes demands on one's identification with and attachment to a faith tradition.

We recognize that the idea of dual axes carries with it a host of misleading associations—perhaps the most misleading being the very *notion* of an axis, which implies a calibrated, ordinal variable. Obviously people who identify with a sacred past cannot be assigned an absolute score that permits easy comparison, as identification itself means different things to different people and cannot be so neatly ordered. Rabbi K and Professor C are both committed Orthodox Jews, but as our analysis showed, each man's commitments to the Torah mean very different things. At best, our horizontal axis describes a nominal variable, the values of which are relative to a particular person and to a particular faith tradition.

In light of these limitations, we propose a second way of thinking about the multiple ways of engaging the past. Picture a graphic equalizer on a stereo, which regulates the relative volume produced by its dual channels. We conceive of the relations between vertical and horizontal axes much like those between the left and right channels. At one point in a reading, a person might load high on both channels; at another, high on only one; and at yet another, low on both. Still other people might be tone deaf to one channel and hear always and only in mono. Our point is twofold: first, that—at least for some of our readers—more than one channel was operative; and second, that the volume of each channel varied not

just between people or across contexts but from moment to moment as individuals interacted with materials that triggered different affiliations and commitments.

The metaphor of the graphic equalizer is useful for another reason: It helps locate the present study in relation to previous accounts of epistemic development and helps us think about future studies. In terms of this metaphor, our study can be viewed as an argument for upgrading the conceptual hardware used to discuss epistemic development and historical consciousness by adding a balance fader that works alongside an existing volume control. Perhaps more important, this metaphor reminds us that the present study also oversimplifies the nature of epistemic cognition. The ways in which epistemological standards interact with affiliations and commitments are bound to be more complicated than any two-channel model can describe. No one—not even the most sheltered and incurious among us—is a member of only one community. All of us participate in different ways and to varying degrees in multiple communities, each with its own sets of associated epistemological commitments and practices. The metaphor of the graphic equalizer hints at the prospect of future studies that might describe in detail the interaction between more than two channels. Though in theory one could imagine activities in which the number of activated channels would look more like the mixing desk in a professional recording studio, in practice one would expect there to be some upper limit (akin to Miller's, 1956, "magic number 7") to the number of channels a person is able to activate at once or that one is able to store in one's epistemological repertoire for use in different contexts.

CONCLUSION

The perspective outlined here offers the learning sciences three challenges. First, it challenges us to reexamine the aims of history education. Are any of the strategies our readers used to coordinate epistemologies ones that we would like to see emulated by students of history in our high schools and colleges? If not, what alternative strategies for addressing the unavoidable multidimensionality of historical consciousness do we want to promote in their place? If epistemic switching and navigation between multiple commitments are indeed features of real-life engagement with a history that matters, what are the responsibilities of history educators in preparing students to think critically on the one hand without frustrating possibilities for belonging and participation on the other? Although our study focused on history that matters religiously, there are good reasons to expect analogous patterns of epistemic switching for history that matters in other ways: nationally, ethnically, politically, and so on. If a goal of history education is to produce a citizenry that is neither hopelessly gullible nor irredeemably cynical, history educators cannot afford to focus only on the honing of critical thinking.

They must also take seriously other aspects of historical consciousness with which these critical aspects interact.

Second, this perspective challenges us to refine conceptions of context and its role in epistemic cognition. Initial studies in the 1970s and 1980s viewed epistemic development as a context-independent process whereby a person's conception of knowledge underwent a series of global shifts that affected thinking in relation to all knowledge, regardless of domain or content. Subsequent studies in the 1990s and the first half of the past decade began to explore the different ways in which context influences epistemology. Some studies focused on identifying distinct dimensions of epistemological belief and charting how each develops; others explored how trajectories of epistemic development vary within participants across domains and situations and between participants across disciplines. More recently, researchers have begun to examine the role of cultural context in epistemic cognition. (For a recent discussion of how contextual variation in epistemology should be conceptualized and studied, see Elby, 2009, and Sandoval, 2009).

Apart from their mutual interest in context, what many of these studies have in common are designs that focus on only one type of context at a time. Thus, studies of the role of cultural context in epistemic cognition have often used a classic cross-cultural paradigm. Within this paradigm, culture is operationalized as an independent variable that slots participants into one cultural group or another prior to subjecting them to tests of whatever aspect of epistemology that researchers want to study. Few, if any, studies have used higher resolution designs that allow cultural context to be explored as a complex, multifaceted phenomenon or indeed as anything other than a categorical variable.

The present study suggests an alternative way of conceptualizing the role of context in epistemic cognition. Rather than treating context as something that can be defined in terms of *either* content *or* setting *or* professional community *or* religious affiliation, and so on, researchers should endeavor to design studies that take more seriously the notion (often found in the introduction and discussion sections of studies in the learning sciences but rarely reflected in the method or results sections) that context is all of these—and more—at one and the same time (cf. A. B. Cohen, 2009).

Third, our findings challenge us to review our theoretical assumptions about the relations between epistemology and identity more generally. Though a small number of intriguing studies have examined aspects of these relations in some detail (Boyes & Chandler, 1992; Bråten, Stromso, & Samuelstuen, 2008; Krettenauer, 2005), their designs have been based on theoretical models of both identity development and epistemic development that considered the vertical axis of each construct but not the horizontal. The idea that epistemology and identity can affect each other not only vertically (by providing the cognitive conditions for holding particular beliefs about knowledge or the self) but also horizontally (by triggering

different kinds of identification and belonging as the context shifts) has potentially radical implications for theories of both identity and epistemology. In particular, it suggests that the relations between these two seemingly distinct constructs may be much closer than has been previously assumed.

Each of these challenges is of crucial importance to anyone whose interest in theories of learning extends beyond the “merely” academic to touch on practical concerns about how to educate real people about things that matter. For as Professor C noted at the end of his interview, “People don’t live and die as historians. They live and die as people.”

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APPENDIX A

Document Set—Exodus Materials

Document 1



Source: Faris, L. A., Scott, A. O., & White, W. F. (1934). *Bible stories for young people*. New York, NY: Platt & Munk, p. 13.

Document 2

Moses and Aaron sent messengers who ran from house to house of the Hebrews, crying, “Pack up everything that belongs to you. We will leave the land of Egypt forever.” The people packed their clothing and household goods in huge bundles and tied them to the cattle. They gathered up all the food they could find. The time was so short they did not have time to bake any bread, so they took plain dough. Within a few hours, all the children of Israel were marching toward the wilderness.*†

Moses and Aaron led the army of Hebrews. Men, women, and children followed behind them. There were even some Egyptians among them, who hoped for freedom in the promised land. That night when they made camp, Moses spoke to the people, “Take the dough and spread it out so that the sun will bake it. Always remember this day, the day when you came out of Egypt, out of slavery. We shall celebrate this day every year for seven days. We will eat unleavened bread and make a feast to God.”*

So all the children of Israel celebrated the first Passover. That was three thousand years ago. When spring comes, we still celebrate the Passover. Today we eat matzot just as the children of Israel ate the unleavened bread which was baked in the sun.*

Source: Cohen, L. (1934). *Bible tales for very young children*. Cincinnati, OH: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, pp. 129–130.

Document 3

[17] And you shall observe the feast of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt: therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as an ordinance for ever* . . .

[31] And [Pharaoh] summoned Moses and Aaron by night, and said, “Rise up, go forth from among my people . . .

[51] And on that very day the LORD brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts.*

Source: Exodus 12, *Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version*.

Document 4

[7] Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

[8] So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it.”*²

Source: Luke 22, *Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version*.

Document 5

If a great mass of fleeing Israelites had passed through the border fortifications of the pharaonic regime, a record should exist. Yet in the abundant Egyptian sources describing the time of the New Kingdom in general and the thirteenth century in particular, there is no reference to the Israelites, not even a single clue.* We know of nomadic groups from Edom who entered Egypt from the desert. The Merneptah stele refers to Israel as a group of people already living in Canaan. But we have no clue, not even a single word, about early Israelites *in* Egypt: neither in monumental inscriptions on walls of temples, nor in tomb inscriptions, nor in

papyri. Israel is absent—as a possible foe to Egypt, as a friend, or as an enslaved nation.* . . .

Even if the number of fleeing Israelites . . . is wildly exaggerated . . . the text describes the survival of a great number of people living under the most challenging conditions. Some archeological traces of their generation-long wandering in the Sinai should be apparent. However, except for the Egyptian forts along the northern coast, not a single campsite or sign of occupation from [that] time has ever been identified in Sinai.* And it has not been for lack of trying. Repeated archeological surveys in all regions of the peninsula, including the mountainous area around the traditional site of Mount Sinai, near Saint Catherine’s Monastery . . . have yielded only negative evidence: not even a single sherd, no structure, not a single house, no trace of an ancient encampment.*

Source: Finkelstein, I., & Silberman, N. A. (2001). *The Bible unearthed*. New York, NY: Free Press, pp. 59–63.

Document 6

If you are testing the Biblical story, you have to test *it in its own terms*. You have to accept all of it. It will do no good to take one element of the Biblical story, and then graft onto it other non-Biblical hypotheses and then test the conglomerate, because that is a conglomerate that no one believes in.*

Now in the case of the Exodus the Torah says explicitly that *during the forty-year period their clothing didn’t wear out* (Deut. 8:4). Now, if you are going to look through the desert for scattered clothing, then you are not testing the Bible. *The Bible would say that you won’t find anything!* The Bible says that they are not there.* If you are looking for clothes, you are testing the assumption that there was an Exodus as the Bible says *together with your naturalistic account of the evidence which the Bible denies. Nobody believes that!* To test the Biblical story you have to take it in all its own details.*

Source: Gottlieb, D. (1997). *Living up to the truth* (2nd rev. ed.). Jerusalem, Israel: Ohr Sameach International, pp. 28–29.

Document 7

We all have our own Egypts—we are prisoners of something, either alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, overeating. We have to use (the story) as a way to free ourselves from difficulty and make ourselves a better person.*

Source: Daniel Navid Rastein, quoted in Watanabe, T. (2001, April 13). Doubting the story of Exodus. *Los Angeles Times*, p. 4.

Document 8

Any Jews who believe the Exodus did not occur should have the intellectual honesty to stop observing Passover.

Source: Prager, D. (2001, April 20). If the Exodus did not occur, there is no Judaism. *Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles*. Retrieved from http://www.jewishjournal.com/religion/article/faith_in_exodus_20010420

†An asterisk in the text denotes a place at which the reader was specifically prompted to think aloud.

APPENDIX B

Document Set—Thanksgiving Materials

Document 9



Source: Dalglish, A., & Maloy, L. (1938). *America begins: The story of the finding of the new world*. New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons.

Document 10

All through the summer the pilgrims worked hard. By fall there was a new storehouse in the village filled with corn, barley, and peas. Large piles of clapboards and beaver skins were ready to be shipped to England. Houses had been made snug and tight against the coming winter.*

“Everyone is well and strong, and we have much to be thankful for,” said gentle William Bradford, who governed the little colony. “Let us have a harvest feast like

those we had in England, and rejoice together over all the good things God has given us.”*

So the men killed wild turkeys, ducks, and geese. Massasoit and his Indians, who were invited to the feast, brought more turkeys and five fat deer. Then, for three days, the Pilgrims and the Indians played games and feasted together. This was the first feast of Thanksgiving in America.*

Source: Meadowcroft, E. L. M. (1961). *Land of the free*. New York, NY: Thomas Y. Crowell, pp. 17–19.

Document 11

Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after have a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors; they four in one day killed as much fowl, as with a little help beside, served the company almost a week,* at which time amongst other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest King Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted . . . We have found the Indians very faithful in their covenant of peace with us; very loving and ready to pleasure us; we often go to them, and they come to us.

Source: Winslow, E. (1969). A letter written to a friend in England. In H. Martyn (Ed.), *Mourt’s relation: A journal by William Bradford and Edward Winslow*. New York, NY: Garrett Press, pp. 279–281.

Document 12

Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor; and Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me “to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness”:*

Now, therefore, I do recommend and assign Thursday, the 26th day of November next, to be devoted by the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be;* that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and

humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation; for the signal and manifold mercies and the favorable interpositions of His providence in the course and conclusion of the late war;* for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have since enjoyed; for the peaceable and rational manner in which we have been able to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national one now lately instituted for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed, and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us.*

Source: Washington, G., *Thanksgiving Proclamation*, signed October 3, 1789, New York City (Library of Congress).

Document 13

The “thanksgiving feasts” in England generally occurred on September 29, not in November, and the Pilgrims would not have observed them because they were Catholic holidays. The Pilgrims did not observe religious holidays in England, and that is one of the reasons they fled to Holland in the first place*—the English were trying to force holidays and ceremonies on the Pilgrims who opposed them. The Pilgrims did not even celebrate Christmas or Easter . . . The Pilgrims’ “First Thanksgiving” occurred sometime in October, and was not a religious holiday or observance, but rather more like a fair or public festival.*

Source: Johnson, C. (1998). *A factual rebuttal to a popular Thanksgiving lesson plan*. Retrieved from <http://www.mayflower.com/Introduction/lessonplandebunk.php>

Document 14

What you and I learned in our own childhood about the “Pilgrims” and “Squanto” and the “First Thanksgiving” is a mixture of both history and myth. But the THEME of Thanksgiving has truth and integrity far above and beyond what we and our forbearers have made of it. Thanksgiving is a bigger concept than just the story of the founding of the Plymouth Plantation.*

Source: Larson, C. (1986). *Are you teaching the real story of the “first Thanksgiving”?* Olympia, WA: The Fourth World Documentation Project of the Center for World Indigenous Studies. Retrieved from http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr040.shtml

Document 15

Thanksgiving is unique among United States' holiday celebrations because it is the only indigenous national holiday whose origin is uniquely Christian. Revisionism will never be able to change these facts—it may only obscure them in hope that we will forget.*

Source: Slomka, M. (2000). *BizBREAK: Weekly reminders for the workplace*. San Diego, CA: Horizon Books.

†An asterisk in the text denotes a place at which the reader was specifically prompted to think aloud.