and constraints, to the production, direction, and structuring of those outputs. Both configurations are critical to a more precise understanding of those outputs. Because our reconstruction of the ancient world unavoidably requires theoretical leaps over the gaps between lived experiences and material remains (and particularly texts), a more careful and robust methodological bridging of that gap is critical to advancing the field.[22]

Before describing my approach in more detail, a couple of caveats must be noted. The cognitive sciences are based on research with living informants, and this book begins from the assumption that the findings of experimentation today are more or less transferable to ancient minds. No available empirical data verify or falsify this assumption as of yet, but several considerations lend strong support to it. For instance, the main cognitive features that will be identified as central to the development of my thesis are understood to be products of evolutionary adaptations from very early in, and even prior to, the rise of modern humans. The conditions that give rise to many of those features have not changed since then: humans still give live birth to infants whose growth requires extensive support over several years from human persons who physically and personally interact with them within a broader social group. Additionally, many of the widespread mental outputs identified by scholars today as culturally mediated products of the relevant shared cognitive features are abundant in the material remains of first millennium BCE Southwest Asia, at least provisionally suggesting the presence and influence of those shared cognitive features. As Luther H. Martin has observed, "Given the scale of evolutionary time and change, it is reasonable to conclude that our cognitive capacities, like our behavioral biases, have remained significantly unaltered since the emergence of modern humans by the late Pleistocene Era, some 60,000 to 50,000 years ago" (Martin 2013, 16; cf. Wynn and Coolidge 2009).

A related complication is the disproportionate use of experiment participants from societies that are "WEIRD," or "Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic" (Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010). College students in and from Eurocentric societies have long provided the vast majority of the data used to construct psychological theories and models, based on the untested assumption that their perspectives are universal. The experiences of people in these societies can differ wildly from those of societies from the other ends of those continua, which includes the societies of ancient Southwest Asia. While our underlying cognitive architecture is often consistent, mental outputs differ when cognition gets shone through the various cognitive filters those experiences afford us. While this has problematized much older data, subsequent cognitive research has more consistently incorporated informants from societies that do not fall exclusively under

[22] For a cognitive perspective on text as a technology that facilitated the formation of Jewish culture, see Levy 2012.