

all stones, either through a deity or the divinized dead, contrasts with earlier categorizations of *massebot* that restricted divinity to solely those stones explicitly identified with a god.

To summarize and conclude this section: the societies of first millennium BCE Southwest Asia absolutely evinced body-agency partibility, which was not exceptional, but widespread and intuitive. While there was a great deal of variability in the situationally emergent conceptualization of the person within and between these different societies, the intuitive reasoning described above is revealed by a number of shared frameworks. The person was a partible assemblage of different socially and materially determined loci of agency, animacy, emotion, cognition, and selfhood (Pongratz-Leisten 2011). These loci were generally confined to the body in life, but in death—now as an unseen agent—they enjoyed differing degrees of independence from the body and could even inhabit and be presenced by cultic objects and other material media. This is true even in societies around the world today, including those in which strong reflective frameworks widely and actively suppress those intuitions. The overlap with the conceptualization of deity has already been noted, but the following section will further unpack the nature and origins of concepts of deity.

DEITY

This section addresses the question of how we get from concepts of unseen agency to concepts of enormously powerful deities who reign over national pantheons. Above I addressed the centrality of human language and material media to the initial propagation of concepts of unseen agency. Here I focus more attention on the role of social institutions in the “cultural evolution” of deity concepts. The concept of cultural evolution has some important differences from biological evolution.⁸⁸ In the latter, genetic mutation is random, while cultural change may be accidental, incidental, or intentional (cf. Scanlon et al. 2019). Cultural adaptations, additionally, may have nothing to do with adaptive fitness (an entity’s ability to survive within a given ecology). Cultural innovation is not always the product of extensive testing and trial and error. Instead, the survival of a particular tool, process, or practice may be the result of authority, tradition, economic value, identity politics, or other influences that may insulate it from competition and incentivize its adoption, proliferation, and/or perpetuation. The dynamics are thus very different, and a coevolutionary approach is certainly more complex, but it is necessary to account for the development of concepts of unseen agency beyond the purview of individual cognition.

⁸⁸ This section draws in part from Shennan 2004, 21–25. See also Mesoudi 2011.