

ORAL TRADITION AND WRITTEN LITERATURE  
AMONG THE HEBREWS IN THE LIGHT  
OF ARABIC EVIDENCE,  
WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO PROSE  
NARRATIVES

BY

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ولا يتحدث الآ من كتابه  
فإن الحفظ خوان

To Alfred Guillaume

In this monograph the illustrative material on the Old Testament side will be taken chiefly from the Pentateuch, and above all Genesis, but the Books of Joshua, of Judges, of Samuel and of Kings will also be cited, and observations and conclusions of a more general character will have some bearing also on these books. On the whole we are more concerned here with principles of tradition than with single works of literature as the outcome of the process of tradition.

The Arabic evidence is provided in the main by the stories of the battledays of the ancient Arabs, the so-called *Ayyām al-‘Arab*, where we already possess an excellent literary analysis by Caskel. Supplementary observations have been taken from the biography of the Prophet, the *Sīrah*, and from the collections of tradition, the *ḥadīṭ*-literature. In order not to be accused of subjective and tendentious analysis of the extant materials I have relied as much as possible upon already existing literary analyses as those given by Caskel for the *ayyām*-literature, by Fück and by Horovitz for the *sīrah*, or by Goldziher and Guillaume for the *ḥadīṭ*, as well as by Gunkel, Noth, Cassuto and others for the early Hebrew narratives, only adding here and there a few observations of my own or some fresh examinations of special narrations.

Against this background it is sincerely hoped that my compar-

isons and conclusions—which are on the other hand entirely my own as far as I know—will be ascribed a higher percentage of objective relevance. Anyhow it has been my intention to reduce the nevertheless existing subjective factor as much as possible.

The gist of this monograph goes back upon a paper read before the Society of Old Testament Studies at the summer meeting in Cambridge 1953, 23rd July. I should like to thank the Society for its kind invitation and for the hospitality given to me at Cambridge. My thanks go especially to the then president, Prof. Winton Thomas and the Secretary Prof. Henton Davies, and above all to my friend Prof. Alfred Guillaume with whom I both at Cambridge and at Upsala had several profitable discussions on the topic treated by me.

### I. *The problem and its history.*

The problem of oral tradition has recently been styled “a modern problem in Old Testament Introduction.” This is quite correct because as stated by me in an earlier monograph the whole question as it has come to the fore in some quarters among O. T. scholars was not raised until 1935 when Nyberg published his well-known “Studien zum Hoseabuche”<sup>1</sup> where he tackled the problem of oral tradition in the case of the transmission of the O. T. texts<sup>2</sup>.

Nyberg’s chief contention was that transmission in the East is seldom exclusively written, it is chiefly of an oral character. Living speech played a far more dominating role than written documents. The writing down of nearly every work was preceded by a longer or shorter period of oral transmission. Also after being committed to paper oral transmission remains the normal way of perpetuating and using a work. This applies also to the Qur’ān, which, strictly speaking, is more than any other revealed document a real book<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *UUA* 1935:6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Widengren, *Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets*, *UUA* 1948:10. This book is sold out but I hope to be able to publish a new, revised and enlarged edition.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nyberg, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

We should like to emphasize already here that Nyberg when stressing the role played in certain culture areas by oral tradition introduced the rather vague term "the East" ("Orient"), strongly reminiscent of the Romantic Revival when it was spoken of "the East" in general. If we then consider the reasons adduced by Nyberg as supporting this contention of his that "transmission in the East is seldom exclusively written, it is chiefly of an oral character"<sup>1</sup> we find that he bases his thesis on two facts: the manner in which the Qur'ān is used and the recitation of the Yasna by the Parsi priests (who only with the utmost difficulty are able to *read* the holy text), these two facts belonging, one to the Islamic Near East, the other to the pre-Islamic Middle East (as far as the tradition of the culture area in question is concerned). We observe that no examples from the pre-Islamic Near East are produced, Mesopotamian, Western-Semitic, pre-Islamic Arabian and Egyptian conditions being left unconsidered<sup>2</sup>. In the sequel of his investigation, however, Nyberg often draws comparisons with Arabian corresponding conditions. As to Iranian conditions we will see what a confusing role the introducing of Iranian facts has played in the discussion<sup>3</sup>.

These new ideas, expressed more as a kind of a declaration as to principles, were alleged by Nyberg as far as the transmission of the O. T. text is concerned. His contention was that historical

<sup>1</sup> His *ipsissima verba* deserve quoting: "Die Überlieferung ist im Orient selten eine rein schriftliche, sie ist überwiegend *eine mündliche*. Die lebendige Rede spielte von jeher und spielt immer noch im Orient eine grössere Rolle als die schriftliche Darstellung. Fast jeder Niederschrift eines Werkes ging im Orient bis in die jüngste Vergangenheit hinein eine längere oder kürzere mündliche Überlieferung voraus, und auch nach der Niederschrift bleibt die mündliche Überlieferung die normale Form für die Fortdauer und Benutzung eines Werkes", Nyberg, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> There is to be found a casual remark about older Arabian conditions: "Wie erklären wir uns die Überlieferungsgeschichte des Koran, wie diejenige der älteren arabischen Literatur?" *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> As I observed in my *Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets*, p. 7 n. 1: "We cannot say that any convincing proofs were given to make good these allegations. It is especially remarkable that Iranian conditions, but not those of the surrounding Near Eastern culture are summoned to enhance the probability of the said, rather far-reaching contentions." For the essential range of this last observation cf. below pp. 226 ff.

traditions, epic narratives, cultic legends, and, with some reserve, also laws were mainly transmitted orally. Prophets and poets seldom were real writers<sup>1</sup>.

The prehistory of the content of the O. T. accordingly in the main was oral. We have to reckon with circles or centres of traditionists who preserved and transmitted the content of traditions. This process of transmission means a certain change of the content, but it is a change due to living people and not dependent on graphic deterioration<sup>2</sup>.

I should like to lay stress upon the fact that it was an idea pregnant with far-reaching consequences when Nyberg introduced in the discussion of O. T. problems the contention that we have to reckon in ancient Israel with circles or centres of traditionists. This idea of his has not been given due consideration but has been left rather neglected.

Concluding this section of his introduction to the problems of O. T. text-criticism—and we must not lose hold of the fact that Nyberg presented his observations more at random of his principal task—he stressed the fact that according to his opinion the original contents of the tradition (“die primitiven Stoffe”) were much better preserved by means of oral transmission than if they had been written down at an early date. “Auf primitiveren Kulturstufen ist die Schrift noch kein geeignetes Mittel, der Nachwelt

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nyberg, *op. cit.*, p. 8: “Natürlich hat man im vorexilischen Palästina geschrieben, ob aber in irgendeinem Umfange zu rein literarischen Zwecken ist doch sehr die Frage. Die Schreibkunst wurde vorwiegend praktisch verwendet, zu Kontrakten, Verträgen, Denksteinen . . . wohl auch zu offiziellen Verzeichnissen und Listen, und vor allem natürlich zu Briefen. Nach assyrischem Vorbilde wurden offizielle Annalen geschrieben; möglich, dass auch gesetzliche Texte von grösserer Bedeutung schriftlich fixiert wurden. Aber die konkrete Geschichtsüberlieferung, die epischen Erzählungen, die Kultlegenden, zweifelsohne auch im allgemeinen die Gesetze müssen wesentlich mündlich tradiert worden sein. Mit Schriftstellern unter den Propheten und Dichtern hat man sicher nur unter der allergrössten Reserve zu rechnen,” *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> “Die Vorgeschichte des at. Stoffes war somit überwiegend eine mündliche. Man hat mit Traditionskreisen bzw. -zentren zu rechnen, die den Stoff bewahrten und weitergaben. Es versteht sich von selbst, dass es bei dieser Überlieferungsweise nicht ohne Veränderungen des Stoffes abging, aber wir haben es dann mit lebendiger Umformung und nicht mit graphischen Verderbnissen zu tun,” *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Erzählungen und Gedichte zu vermitteln, das primitive Gedächtnis ist viel zuverlässiger."<sup>1</sup>

In this case we meet with a characteristic confusion, associated with the indiscriminate use of the dangerous term "primitive", dangerous because of its vagueness. Let us then first of all state that the term "primitive" to-day (but even 20 years ago) is abandoned by all anthropologists trained in rigorous methods, and substituted by the term "illiterate". We speak accordingly of "illiterate peoples", because the use of writing is the criterion of the so-called "high cultures"<sup>2</sup>. To say, then, that on more "primitive" stages of culture the writing is not any suitable manner of preserving stories and poems is thus devoid of any sense because 1. o it is characteristic of an "illiterate" (= "primitive") people that it doesn't know the art of writing 2.o Israel *qua* possessing the method of writing was no illiterate ("primitive") people. From the moment that a people had acquired a system of writing it was no longer "primitive", it belonged to a culture area possessing a "high culture". This date can be fairly well fixed in the history of Israel for it is to be assumed at least from the period of the settlement in Canaan<sup>3</sup>.

Nyberg also took up for discussion the problem when and why those O. T. texts that hitherto had been transmitted orally were ultimately put down in writing. He ascribed this process to the fact that in due time faith in the spoken word was shaken, the committing to paper is connected with a general "crisis of credit"<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nyberg, *op. cit.*, p. 8 f.

<sup>2</sup> For the characteristics of a "high culture" cf. *e. g.* Graebner, *Das Weltbild der Primitiven*, München 1924, p. 107 f.

<sup>3</sup> It is quite possible that the Hebrew tribes already during their migrations thanks to their contact with the settlements in the oases and the cultivated land possessed some knowledge of the art of writing (we may also compare the Sinai inscriptions), but it goes without saying that only their occupation of Canaan transformed them into a people belonging to the stage of a high culture. Cf. Wiedengren, *op. cit.*, p. 62 where, however, I now think that I was too optimistic about the historicity of Exod. 34:28 and Exod. 17:14, even though I still hold that these two items "can no longer be dismissed as altogether legendary" as far as the knowledge of the art of writing among the early Hebrews is concerned.

<sup>4</sup> As far as my knowledge goes Nyberg never published the paper on "*Muntlig tradition, skriftlig fixering och författarskap*" read before the "Nathan Soederblom Society" of Upsala in 1942, where he developed more in detail his views on oral

Nyberg's ideas were taken up and developed by Birkeland with special regard to prophetic literature. Birkeland, obviously observing that Nyberg's views, brilliant as they were, lacked the support of convincing demonstration, tried to found his application of the new theories on some references not only to the Qur'ān but also to Muslim tradition literature. He also gave a few hints at pre-Islamic poetry and its alleged exclusively oral transmission before the writing down of these poems in the Umayyad period.

All this, however, was done in a rather sketchy and superficial way so that no adequate picture of existing conditions in ancient Arabia was presented to the reader. This was the more regrettable as Birkeland based his general conclusions on this very inadequate and careless survey, rather astonishing in the case of a scholar, pretending to be a specialist in Arabic language and literature.

Bearing this in mind we are not astonished when confronted with the conclusions arrived at by Birkeland. These are to the effect that literary fixation in the whole East is a fixation of oral discourse. Here again we meet with that extremely vague conception of "the East" in general, without any necessary qualifications. It goes without saying that no references are given to Mesopotamian, Western Semitic or Egyptian conditions. In the sequel of his little monograph Birkeland tries to utilize these alleged principles of transmission for the problem of the composition of Hebrew prophetic writings<sup>1</sup>.

Generally speaking we cannot say that Birkeland introduced any new facts in the discussion of principles though his references

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tradition. He has also given in 1948 a series of lectures at the University of Copenhagen at the invitation of its theological faculty, but these lectures were never published. I do not know the actual views in this case held by Nyberg, but it would certainly be to the benefit of the discussion of these problems, a discussion inspired by his pioneer work, if he were able to state his present position, especially as far as Arabian conditions are concerned, cf. my remarks *Literary and Psychological Aspects*, p. 10.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Birkeland, *Zum hebräischen Traditionswesen*, ANVA 1938:1. Birkeland who had studied Arabic with Nyberg in his booklet, dedicated to Nyberg, expressly declared himself the pupil of Nyberg to whom he acknowledged his debt as to the guiding principles of his investigation.

to Muslim *ḥadīṭ*-literature would have been meritorious had he given more attention to the texts and not contented himself with picking out a few passages in Goldziher's classical work on the *ḥadīṭ*.

Birkeland's compatriot Mowinckel in consequence of this work of his former pupil published an article on the genesis of the prophetic literature. As Mowinckel neither in this article nor in his later, more comprehensive publication "Prophecy and Tradition" produced any new viewpoints as far as the relation between oral tradition and written literature is concerned we may pass by this contribution which we have referred to in our previous investigation into the problem at hand<sup>1</sup>.

The new ideas put forth by Nyberg were further developed and propagated by another of his pupils, Engnell, an enthusiastic advocate of the thesis of oral transmission of the O. T. texts. Engnell definitely vindicates, as his own position, that oral tradition has played such a role that narratives are handed down from mouth to mouth during centuries. There exist complete oral "literatures", and tradition carries on its life chiefly by way of oral transmission also after the tradition has been committed to paper. Such was the case with Israelitic literature as contained in the O. T. This is the only condition by which it was able to survive the crisis of the exile. Oral tradition does not imply uncertainty, transformation, and breaking up, but the antithesis of all this. Our O. T. texts are to be looked upon as the writing down of already current, orally fixed traditions, collected in firm complexes. Engnell then also takes up the idea of Nyberg that the committing to paper is connected with a general "crisis of credit"<sup>2</sup>.

Collections of psalms and laws have been put down in writing even in early pre-exilic times; but irrespective of such a process,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mowinckel, *Prophecy and Tradition*, ANVA 1946:3. As to the goal of historical research in prophetic literature I have already given my adhesion to the principle emphasized by Mowinckel in this work, *viz.* that the definite aim of course must be to attain to the prophet's *ipsissima verba*, even if this goal in many passages is hard to reach, cf. Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> In this case I cannot find any reference to this idea as coming from Nyberg (or Gunkel), though to the attentive reader it is quite evident that as far as the problem of oral tradition in O. T. literature is concerned all guiding principles

it can without any doubt be laid down as a truth that the greater part of our O. T. literature has been written down only in exilic and postexilic times<sup>1</sup>.

Engnell speaks of "the East" ("orienten") in the same vague manner as previous scholars. He does not himself introduce any new material into the discussion but merely refers to already existing investigations the tendency of which he squeezes out to the last drop. We should be very obliged indeed if we could get to know where in the culture area of Israel we do find those "complete oral literatures" that Engnell mentions. In view of the lack of proofs for the far-reaching allegations confidently put forth by Engnell I think I can without any hesitation uphold my judgement from 10 years ago: "Engnell may be said to have carried Nyberg's intentions to their extremes, thus revealing their inherent, easily discernible weakness."<sup>2</sup>

Without knowledge of the views advanced by Engnell the opinions of Nyberg, Birkeland and Mowinckel were subjected to a critical analysis by Van der Ploeg<sup>3</sup>. As to the general principles I find myself on a line with this scholar, so references to his investigation will be given in the sequel together with references to the viewpoints put forward by me in my "Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets", a work published shortly after Van der Ploeg's article<sup>4</sup>. In that book of mine I tried to test the Arabic evidence. The reasons for this procedure were presented in the following words, "The conditions prevailing in

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are those put forth by Nyberg to whom Engnell duly acknowledges his indebtedness, cf. Engnell, *Gamla Testamentet*, I, Stockholm 1945, p. 40. The second part of Engnell's Introduction, promised already 1945 in the author's Preface, has not yet been published nor is it—to my knowledge—in course of publication, though it would now—after 13 years—be highly interesting to see how the detailed exposition of this promised second part would be able to furnish the proofs of the sometimes somewhat extravagant allegations advanced in the first part.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Engnell, *op. cit.*, p. 43, cf. my abstract in *Literary and Psychological Aspects*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 8, cf. further below p. 215 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. "Le rôle de la tradition orale", *RB* LIV/1947, pp. 5—41.

<sup>4</sup> In a review, published by Van der Ploeg, *BiOr* 7/1950, pp. 115—17 he stated this general agreement. There was, however, a certain hint that he might have been more frequently quoted by me in the course of my investigation. This is quite true and I apologize for eventual omissions of his name among authors.



Arabia have constantly been adduced as a comparison with corresponding Hebrew methods of transmission; but, so far, only the most meagre data have been given to justify very far-reaching allegations, said to have been founded on the Arabic material which has been very defectively and erroneously represented" (p. 9 f.).

An examination of the relevant data presented the following results: it was shown that writing was fairly well known and used among pre-Islamic Arabs as far as people settled in towns are concerned, and that it was not even unknown among Bedouins, especially those belonging to the Christian religion<sup>1</sup>. As far as literature in the real sense of the word is concerned we have to

quoted. In several cases I do not claim any priority of all, the evidence being rather well-known. The article of Van der Ploeg actually did not come in my hands until the printing of my book had to start, so I introduced in the last moment a short mentioning of his article and stated certain coincidences in our views, cf. Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 9. After all Van der Ploeg was one of the most quoted authors, as shown by the Index of Authorities. At any rate I think that my examination of the Arabian material will guard some value of its own, especially when supplemented by the additions and observations in the present article.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Literary and Psychological Aspects*, pp. 11—20. I should like to add in this place a reference to Nabla Abbot, *The Rise of the North Arabic Script and its Qur'ānic Development, with a full Description of the Qur'ān Manuscripts in the Oriental Institute, OIP L, Chicago 1939*. It is a matter for regret that the exposition there pp. 5—14 on the "Spread of the North Arabic Script before Islam" was overlooked by me. Most of our material is of course the same. In some cases I have given references not found in Abbott's book, on other cases she includes in her treatment notices that I consider legendary, though perhaps not altogether untrustworthy, e. g. the fact that according to some traditions both 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (cf. Fihrist, p. 5:18 ff.; the enigmatic expression *ḥaff al-nisā'* was quoted by me *op. cit.*, p. 69 n. 1) and his alleged grandfather Quṣayy (cf. Ibn Sa'd I, p. 38:5; Ibn Hišām, p. 75:17) developed some writing activities. The author further refers, *op. cit.*, p. 6 f., to the clearly legendary story about the "invention" of the Arabic alphabet on the basis of the Syriac script by three men, Murāmīr ibn Murrah Aṣlam ibn Sidrah, and 'Āmir ibn Ġadrah (cf. Balādūrī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, pp. 476—480 in the Cairo ed. of 1901). In their case as Miss Abbot admits the names Murrah, Sidrah and Ġadrah look most of all like "artificial inventions", *op. cit.*, p. 6 n. 36. Cf. below p. 240. The relation of the instruction trip undertaken by Bīṣr ibn 'Abd al-Malik to various places in Arabia cannot be given much credit either, *op. cit.*, p. 7, although Miss Abbot here would seem to have no misgivings. A short survey of the history of writing in pre-Islamic Arabia is given also by Pedersen, *Den arabiske Bog*, Copenhagen 1946, pp. 1—9.

distinguish between prose and poetry as well as between secular and religious literature. Nothing, however, would seem to have been saved of the latter category from pre-Islamic times in North-Arabia. Sayings of wisdom on the other hand were fixed in writing and even poetry was committed to paper at an early date, *i. e.*, already in the pre-Islamic period.

That the writing down of poetry was rather a common thing also in South-Arabia, at least in the eyes of later generations, is clear from the story told by Ibn Ishāq (Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 12 f. = ed. Wüstenfeld, p. 18:14; 19:5—7) according to whom Du Ru'ain wrote down a couple of verses on a scrap, *ruq'ah*, and then sealed it in order to produce the verses at a later moment. We may mention this notice as a kind of supplementary evidence for the spread of writing in ancient Arabia.

The history of the North Arabic script shows indeed that it dates from such remote times that it would have been an extraordinary thing if it had not been in common use in the daily life of Arabian towns<sup>1</sup>. All the stories told about the use of the script in so far are of a great value as they clearly demonstrate that the script was used not only for administrative, economic and military reasons at an early date, but that pieces of literature too were committed to writing<sup>2</sup>.

Leaving aside the question of the writing down of the Qur'ān we may in accordance with our main theme mention that oral and written transmission of Islamic tradition and biographical literature was investigated in my book and it was shown that to the mass of oral traditions also written documents were added, records of various content. It was further stated that a written literature describing the life of Muḥammad must have existed about 50 years after the prophet's death. Speaking of the literary fixation of 'Urwah's writings we should like to point to the occasion mentioned by Ibn Ishāq: 'Urwah wrote a letter furnishing some historical data in order to answer a question concerning the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the useful survey in Abbot, *op. cit.*, pp. 1—5, 14—16.

<sup>2</sup> It is most typical that military orders from the early caliphs to their commanders are given in a written form, passages in Ṭabarī and other historians being too numerous to be quoted. We also think of all the letters sent by Muḥammad on various occasions and to various places.

interpretation of a *sūrah*<sup>1</sup>. This fact in itself speaks for his writing down the prophet's life in a fixed literary form. But moreover we know from several passages in Ṭabarī that he possessed written notes on probably all important events in Muḥammad's life, for he communicated to the caliph 'Abd al-Malik written descriptions of several occurrences which have been incorporated in Ṭabarī's comprehensive work<sup>2</sup>. That he actually possessed written notes is a well-established fact, known from other evidence, as pointed out rather long ago<sup>3</sup>.

Accordingly we are confronted with the fact that oral traditions were written down very early, presumably in the first generation of the collectors of traditions as was the case with 'Urwah. Written documents, as we observed, were added to these collections of oral traditions. As long as the process of collecting and sifting of tradition is going on new oral traditions are added to the bulk of tradition, by now already written down<sup>4</sup>.

The same may be said to hold true also of the *ḥadīṭ*-literature, though the material is treated and arranged in quite a different manner. We have to emphasize the fact that "written traditions certainly existed as early as the first Muslim generation"<sup>5</sup>. This conclusion is corroborated by the existence of very early Arabic manuscripts containing even this category of literature, a fact that should not be overlooked in this connection<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fück, *Muḥammad ibn Ishāq*, p. 8 n. 22. with reference to Ibn Hišām ed. Wüstenfeld, p. 754 = Guillaume, *op. cit.*, p. 509.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the passages in Ṭabarī quoted by us below part III.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 37 with a reference to Fück, *op. cit.*, p. 8 n. 23 where some passages are noted. As I observed *op. cit.*, p. 37 n. 2 we should note that 'Urwah also possessed some *ṭiqh*-books which he lost in a fire. For more details cf. below part III.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 38 f. The tradent, *mumli*, should transmit from his book because memory is unreliable, cf. *Die Methodik des Diktatkollegs*, ed. Weisweiler, Leiden 1952, p. 46:14 ff.; summary, p. 22 f.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 40 f.

<sup>6</sup> I should like to add here a reference to Guillaume, *op. cit.*, p. XV where he mentions the discovery of a fragment of the lost work of Wāḥb ibn Munabbih (34—110 A. H.), written on papyrus and dated in 228 A. H. He concludes: "Unfortunately this fragment tells us little that is new; nevertheless, its importance is great because it proves that at the end of the first century, or some years before A. H. 100, the main facts about the prophet's life were written down much as

As a result of these investigations into oral and written transmission of Arabic literature I think I can still stick to what I wrote 10 years ago: "it is wrong to contrast oral and written tradition too much in an ancient Semitic culture . . . Writing down is codified oral tradition, and as such primarily intended to be read aloud, to be recited." I further distinguished between various forms of literature, stressing the fact that one form, the *ayyām*-literature, for a long time circulated only in oral transmission whereas other forms—*sīrah*- and *ḥadīṭ*-literature, the learned literature—were written down from the outset. The case of written or oral transmission is thus dependent also upon the special category of literature. The same principle was accentuated also as far as Hebrew literature is concerned<sup>1</sup>.

Ringgren in an interesting article "Oral and Written Transmission in the O. T." presented some observations on one single point, *viz.* how variant readings are to be explained: to be ascribed to errors made in copying a written text, or as due to slips of memory or mistakes of hearing in the course of oral transmission. Introducing his observations he has two judicious remarks which I should like to quote: "two things may be said to remain established: firstly, that oral and written transmission should not be played off (one) against another: they do not exclude each other, but may be regarded as complementary; and secondly, that the question of the mode of transmission of the O. T. texts must be judged from case to case"<sup>2</sup>.

It would not seem to be necessary to point out that such an opinion agrees perfectly with the views already put forth in the investigations carried out in "Literary and Psychological Aspects".

Ringgren has subjected some O. T. texts, chosen from psalm literature and prophetic poems, to a very careful analysis, based upon existing variant readings in order to find out whether

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we have them in the later works." Cf. also Nabia Abbot, *JNES* VIII/1949, p. 130 where she mentions the fact that the early "bookmanuscripts contain literary texts of *ḥadīṭh* or Islamic tradition and related subjects." The fragment mentioned by Guillaume was published and discussed by Miss Mélamède, *MO* XXVIII/1934, pp. 17—58.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Widengren, *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 63 f. 121 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *SiTh* III/1949, pp. 34—59. The words quoted are found on p. 34.

these variants have something to tell us about the manner of transmission. He comes to the conclusion "that there are many variant readings that are unmistakably graphic. But a still greater number of variants give us the impression that they must be due to mistakes within an oral transmission of the texts."<sup>1</sup> If we muster the lastmentioned group of variants we will find that these variant readings in some cases are due to slips caused when the scribe was writing from dictation<sup>2</sup>. The rest of non-graphic variants may be explained as slips of memory. For corresponding Egyptian conditions Volten reckons with three possibilities:<sup>3</sup> 1. the teacher dictates from memory what he knows by heart, 2. the scribe writes down what he knows by heart, 3. the pupil writing from dictation forgets the correct wording read by his teacher. Such are the conditions within a typical "scribal culture". "In the two first mentioned cases we may speak of a sort of oral transmission", says Ringgren<sup>4</sup>. I should like to emphasize that we can only speak of "a sort of oral transmission", and this for two reasons: 1. the teacher dictates from memory what he knows by heart, and 2. the scribe writes down what he knows by heart. Neither of these two methods tells us anything about the crucial problem, *viz.* if the text committed to paper is written down for the first time *or* if it already existed in a written form. What is valuable is the fact that the evidence brought to the fore by Ringgren shows that certain texts were known by heart. With this qualification I think that Ringgren's conclusions are to be accepted as evident. As to the date of the first writing down of the texts investigated nothing can be said with certainty, as Ringgren himself has already stated<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ringgren, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> This conclusion might perhaps have been more accentuated. However, Ringgren has quite correctly noted many such cases, cf. especially the apparent confusion between † and ‡, *op. cit.*, pp. 49, 57.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Volten, *Studien zum Weisheitsbuch des Anit*, Copenhagen 1937—38, pp. 9 ff., 13 ff., 23, 32 ff.; Ringgren, *op. cit.*, p. 35. Volten's valuable work was quoted by me in my "Literary and Psychological Aspects".

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, p. 58: "Now it must be remembered that even if it seems clear that some or many of the texts of the O. T. were transmitted orally for a certain time, we have no evidence that the same holds true for them all. And further,

Within its given limits this article of Ringgren is a very useful contribution to a solution of the problem of oral and written transmission of O. T. texts by pointing to the possibility of an oral tradition existing for a long time along with the written text<sup>1</sup>.

The two categories of texts analysed by Ringgren are psalms and prophetic texts. As to psalms even Engnell admitted that collections of psalms were put down in writing in early pre-exilic times. We should like to stress that all probability speaks for a very early date of their literary fixation. We have to assume the existence of cultic psalms used at the temples of Canaan before the settlement of the Hebrew tribes, because modern research has demonstrated a clear Canaanite influence on Hebrew psalms<sup>2</sup>. That these Canaanite cult-lyrics were already fixed in a literary form cannot be doubted in the face of the Ugaritic evidence. The existence in Ugarit of cultic texts, written down as early as in the 14th century B. C., makes it more than probable that their tribesmen in Palestine used the same methods of preserving their holy texts, used in the temple service<sup>3</sup>.

That such cultic texts, however, had to be known by heart is quite obvious, for in the temple ritual the practice must have been that they in general were recited by heart.<sup>4</sup> In the case of the variants of the psalm texts I accordingly think that they are to be ascribed to this practice of recitation. That the written form must have been the predominant type of the normalized text would seem to be evident.

The other category is the prophetic text. Here the case is

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we here meet with a new problem: when were these orally transmitted texts put to writing? It is very difficult to give a definite answer, and the texts we have examined seem to give no guidance."

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *inter alia* also *op. cit.*, p. 59 what he says about the oral tradition concerning the correct way of reading the consonantal text.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above all Albright as quoted below p. 222 n. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. for the date of Ugaritic poems below p. 222 with n. 2.

<sup>4</sup> This would seem to be quite evident from a comparison with corresponding Mesopotamian conditions, cf. the *šu-ila*-prayers where three verbs are used in the ritual directions, *viz. epēšu*, perform, deliver, *qabū*, speak, and *manū*, recite. Of these verbs, however, *epēšu* is used only in connection with directions for the sacrificial ritual with which *šu-ila*-prayers are associated. Characteristic expressions are: *minūtām (annitām) tamanū*, *a-šū tamanū*, *a-šū lušammūšu*, *a-šū iqabī*, *a-šū taqabī*, *taqtabū*. Cf. in general Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, II, Heidelberg 1925, p. 208 (81).

quite different. These texts have often, perhaps usually, been recited as an oral composition and written down later, sometimes perhaps after some lapse of time<sup>1</sup>. It goes without saying that existing copies were rather few and that the prophetic sayings circulated also in an oral form. In this case, then, we have good prospects of meeting with a double tradition, one written and one oral. The variant readings accordingly may render very good service here.

Engnell in an "Additional Note" of his booklet "The Call of Isaiah" answered to criticisms and defended his positions<sup>2</sup>. He "disputes the right to apply analogies from Mohammed's Quran to the Old Testament prophetic books". As reasons for this contention he alleges "the great interval of time", further "Mohammed's wish to create a holy book."

In the present monograph I am not concerned with Hebrew prophetic literature and therefore I can content myself with pointing out that 1. "great interval of time" has not deterred Engnell from adducing the Arabian *dīwān* as a model of comparison for one category of Hebrew literature (in this case too making use of an idea of Nyberg's). The oldest *dawāwīn* however, date from the same time as Muḥammad. 2. Engnell has not observed that the notion of a holy book, given from heaven, played a considerable role in the imaginative world of the Israelite prophets, as was shown by me in a special investigation<sup>3</sup>. The phenomenological agreement between the prophets and Muḥammad accordingly is far greater than appears at first sight even in this regard<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Literary and Psychological Aspects*. pp. 116 ff. where I tried to analyse the psychic experiences of the prophets and their importance to the literary fixation of their revelation.

<sup>2</sup> *UUÅ* 1949:4, pp. 54 ff. I have quoted his views from the short summary given by Nielsen in his book (cf. below n. 4) because Engnell's position is extremely difficult to grasp. By retranslating his "English" word for word into Swedish I think I have succeeded in understanding the general trend of his exposition but in order not to be accused of misrepresenting his views I have relied upon an interpreter who seems to be authorized.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book*, *UUÅ* 1950:7.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Widengren, *Muḥammad, the Apostle of God, and his Ascension*, *UUÅ* 1955:1, pp. 115 ff.

In his book "Oral Tradition. A Modern Problem in Old Testament Introduction" E. Nielsen says of Engnell: "He refutes Widengren's somewhat surprising misunderstandings of Engnell's position", and adds in a note: "In view of the outline of Engnell's position given above, it is strange that Widengren should maintain that Engnell has pushed Nyberg's ideas to the extreme and thus laid bare the weakness of the position . . ., and should say that it does not seem possible to proceed further in that line than Engnell has gone"<sup>1</sup>. If we turn to this outline of Engnell's position as given by Nielsen we read there: "His general views are too well-known to need any outline here. The outstanding feature of his book, however, is its vigorous repudiation of the still current method of literary criticism. At the same time he emphasizes the role of oral tradition, and stresses the anachronistic way in which modern Western-European science applied to texts from antiquity points of view that belong to the sixteenth to twentieth centuries. Even though he advances his point of view very forcefully Engnell is far from a rabid or blind insistence on a favourite hypothesis. On the contrary, like Nyberg, he emphasizes several times that the question of the existence and significance of oral tradition demands different answers for different kinds of literature."<sup>2</sup>

Nielsen thus says on the one hand: "In view of the outline of Engnell's position given above" and on the other hand: "His general views are too well-known to need any outline here." The reader is thus referred to an outline that is non-existent because stated to be unnecessary! This seems indeed a rather curious way of furnishing the reader with the promised evidence. If we, however, then muster the few sentences in which Nielsen characterizes Engnell's position we find the following items: 1. his vigorous repudiation of the current method of literary criticism. 2. his emphasis on the role of oral tradition 3. his stressing of the anachronistic way in which European science has applied points of view that belong to the sixteenth to twentieth centuries 4. his insistence on the fact that the question of the existence and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, London 1954, p. 17 where he gives a summary of Engnell's opinions.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 14 f.



significance of oral tradition demands different answers for different kinds of literature.

Here precisely the extreme views advanced by Engnell are passed in silence. 1. Where are those "complete oral literatures" that Engnell mentions? 2. Where is the allegation that tradition carries on its life chiefly by way of oral transmission? 3. Where the contention that oral tradition doesn't imply uncertainty, transformation, and breaking up, but the antithesis of all that? 4. Where, finally, do we find mentioned the firm declaration that the greater part of our O. T. literature has been committed to writing only in exilic and postexilic periods?

If the "outline" of Engnell's views furnished by Nielsen were of an adequate character his assertion that Engnell's position had been misunderstood by me might contain a grain of truth. As it now stands it seems to me that Nielsen is quite right when he says that he doesn't think it necessary to present such an outline and that we are entitled to regard the few sentences offered as a very inadequate description, a picture where all the very bright colours have been softened down in such a way as to be hardly discernible. It may not be out of place to add in this place that my own outline of Engnell's position contrariwise was based upon a translation of the most important passages in his O. T. introduction<sup>1</sup>.

Turning now to Nielsen's own contribution to the problem of oral tradition and written literature in the O. T. we may start with his second chapter "Oral Tradition in the Near East". This title, however, seems somewhat delusive for instead of the promised treatment we are offered a veritable salmagundi, including everything from Plato to Icelandic sagas, phenomena hardly to be located in the Near East. We miss to our astonishment a fresh examination of the Arabian evidence and further we note the absence of any thoroughgoing treatment of Mesopotamian, Western Semitic and Egyptian material. In an interesting and

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<sup>1</sup> Actually my account could be supported here by quotations from Engnell's introduction, *Gamla Testamentet*, I, as compared with my own shortened renderings but I think it would be waste of space to print such long passages here. Everyone capable of reading a Scandinavian language is referred for comparison to Engnell's book, pp. 39—43.

valuable article Læssøe has subjected some of the Mesopotamian evidence to a searching scrutiny and thanks to his expert knowledge he arrived at other results than Nielsen<sup>1</sup>.

To be sure, Nielsen cannot dispute the obvious fact that in Mesopotamia literary texts were transmitted in a written form. That would hardly be possible. But he tries to minimize the importance of written transmission by pointing to the fact that in one single colophon of a hymn to Ea, Šamaš, Marduk and Sin we read: "written according to dictation (literally: mouth) of the scholar (*ummānu*). I did not see the old copy (*gabrū*)." From this single passage Nielsen draws the conclusion that "a minor correction" would be possible to introduce in my allegation that in Mesopotamia literary texts always were written, and accordingly writing the manner of their transmission<sup>2</sup>.

Læssøe, however, who had pointed out this very passage to Nielsen<sup>3</sup> arrives at another conclusion for he says that from the colophon quoted "it would seem to appear that oral tradition was only reluctantly relied upon, and in this particular case only because for some reason or other an original written document was not available. The reservation with which an instance of oral tradition is reproduced here should make us cautious against underestimating the significance of written tradition in Mesopotamia"<sup>4</sup>. To this judicious remark I have only to add that it seems to me rather dubious whether we are entitled at all to speak of an oral tradition in a case where the knowledge of a hymn is based upon a text, existing in a *written* form (*gabrū labīru*) and carrying on its existence in a *written* form (*šafir*)<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, this seems to be a most curious form of *oral* tradition.

In this connection I should like to add a few words about variant readings in Mesopotamia. There exists to the best of my knowledge no special investigation into textual variants in Meso-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Læssøe, Literacy and oral Tradition in ancient Mesopotamia, *Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen . . . dicata*, Copenhagen 1953, pp. 205—218.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Widengren, *op. cit.*, p. 91 with n. 1 as contrasted with Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 28 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 62 n. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Læssøe, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the usual colophon: *kīma labīrišu šafirma*. I should like to add here a reference to an interesting colophon from a ritual tablet belonging to the temple service in Anu's temple in Uruk. The writer had seen in Elam the tablets, robbed

potamian religious texts but after a rapid survey of some categories of religious texts, especially the *šu-ila* prayers I think I can say with some confidence that we find in these texts the same causes of existing variants as those found in Israel and Egypt. As instances of dictation mention should be made of two rather characteristic examples. In *KAR* 55:19 the words *kīma abiija* are written (GIM =) *kīma-bi-ia*, showing that in the pronunciation of the meeting of the two *a*-vowels one could dictate *kimābiija* instead of *kīmaabiija*. Another example of the same kind is found *OECT* VI, p. 35:2 where we read *kīma litti* instead of *kīma alitti*, showing exactly the same meeting of *a*-vowels.

That synonymous words in many cases could be inserted in duplicates can be demonstrated on the *šu-ila* texts in so many cases that it is unnecessary to give a survey of instances<sup>1</sup>. It should also be observed that some duplicates exhibit a text that in certain passages is more "filled up"<sup>2</sup>.

In *CT* XV are edited some very interesting, though unfortunately fragmentary and difficult texts of an epic-mythic character<sup>3</sup>. In the first of these poems we read the following exordium:

zamār ilati  
bēlet ilī  
azammar

The song of the goddess,  
the lady of the gods,  
I shall sing!

from Uruk by Nabopolassar, had copied them, and then brought the copies back to Uruk, cf. Thureau-Dangin, *Rituels accadiens*, Paris 1921, p. 80 (text), 86 (transl.). Very often we find such colophons as *kīma labaršu šafirma barām u ubū*, "written, revised and collated in accordance with the old duplicate", or: *ašūr asniq abrēma*, "I wrote, collated and revised", cf. Thureau-Dangin, *op. cit.*, p. 53 n. 57. For the rest I quote from the collections of wisdom sayings: *ina ihzikama amur ina duppi*, "in thy learning look at the tablet", *BA* V/1906, p. 558:19 = K 7897 Obv. 19. This saying shows clearly that there is no contrariety between learning and writing, this as a supplement to the exposition given by Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 26 f. (corrected by Læssøe, *op. cit.*, p. 213 f.). It should be added here that Driver, *Semitic Writing*, 2nd ed. Oxford 1954, pp. 62—77 has given a fairly exhaustive treatment of the colophons.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. however Ebeling, *Die akkadische Gebetsserie "Handerhebung"*, Berlin 1953, where a rich material for comparison is found.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Ebeling, *op. cit.*, where we find a lot of such conflated duplicates quoted.

<sup>3</sup> They have been translated by Dhorme, *RA* VII/1910, pp. 11—20, and Böhl, *JEOL*, I—V, pp. 194—204. Their language has been analysed by von Soden, *ZA* 40/1932, pp. 163—227; 41/1933, pp. 90-183.

ibru uššira	Friend, pay attention,
qurādu šimēa	hero, listen!

CT XV 1:1—2

Here we meet with the typical exhortation from the side of the minstrel to the addressed audience (in this case a great hero to whom the singer turns) to listen to the song he is going to recite<sup>1</sup>.

Such songs—we think also of poems like the birth legend of Sargon and the triumphant song of Tukulti-Ninurta—as well as all epic compositions—from the outset obviously circulated thanks to minstrels, probably wandering from court to court in the city-states of Mesopotamia. That the king or prince also would seem to have possessed his own court poet and singer we may conclude from the fact that Gilgameš was followed to the grave by his own singer<sup>2</sup>. The name of such a minstrel probably was *zammiru* in Accadian, cf. the expression: *azammar*, “I shall sing”<sup>3</sup>.

It is important to note that the Epic of Gilgameš was composed of and built upon a collection of separate songs, all possessing Gilgameš as their central hero, but not connected between themselves.

Such songs take us back to Sumerian times because these Gilgameš-poems are preserved in the Sumerian language only<sup>4</sup>.

An oral tradition accordingly—as far as we can judge—has been the manner of transmission of poems of a mythic-epic character but of rather modest size. In this case we are reminded of corresponding conditions among Indo-European peoples. It is evident that we are confronted here with a kind of literature that from the beginning carried on its life by means of oral tradition exclusively.

However, when these various Gilgameš poems were united, or

<sup>1</sup> The terms “friend” and “hero” will be discussed by me in connection with studies on feudalism and military organization in the ancient Near East, carrying on the researches presented in my monograph “Recherches sur le féodalisme iranien”, *Or Suec* V/1956, pp. 79—182.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *BASOR* 94/1944, p. 5:5.

<sup>3</sup> The word *zammiru* is also used of the temple singer. Zimmern, *Akkadische Fremdwörter*, 2nd. ed. Leipzig 1917, p. 29 tentatively puts this root as the basis of the west-Semitic corresponding words.

<sup>4</sup> They have been the subject of several studies published by Kramer, cf. the discussion in Böhl, *Opera Minora*, Groningen 1953, pp. 239 ff.

rather when a choice was made out of them, and an unknown Accadian poet created the great epic all traces of oral transmission would seem to have disappeared. The Epic of Gilgameš was written down very soon after it had been planned and composed. We possess some Old Babylonian texts written down already in the time of the First Babylonian Dynasty. If we assume that the unknown poet lived during the reign of Hammurabi<sup>1</sup>—he can hardly be put earlier because the reign of Hammurabi marks the epoch of the victory of the Accadian language in Mesopotamia also as a literary language—it is indeed significant to find that a colophon of an Old Babylonian tablet indicates that that very tablet of the Flood story was written  $\pm 1600$  B. C.<sup>2</sup> That would leave us about 100 years between the composition under Hammurabi and the writing down in the time of king Ammizaduqa. But actually the Old Babylonian version has been written down the first time at an earlier date. As Speiser rightly observed: "That this version was itself a copy of an earlier text is suggested by the internal evidence of the material"<sup>3</sup>.

We may ask whether the poet not was one of those wandering minstrels, living at the court of a ruler of the First Babylonian Dynasty. Böhl actually thought of the court of Hammurabi<sup>4</sup>. The theories about the composition of the Homeric epics inevitably come to our mind.

Now it is a fact that we find such epics in the Semitic literatures only in Mesopotamia and in Ugarit. We cannot enter here upon a discussion of eventual cultural influences from the kingdom of Mitanni where we know of a strong Indo-European admixture and a still stronger influence concerning society and art of war. We may also point to the fact that minstrels carrying a Parthian name, *gōsān*, in later times were found in Mesopotamia, so that in this case history would seem to have repeated itself<sup>4</sup>. We should also have to investigate the cultural interrelations in nor-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Böhl, *op. cit.*, p. 248 who is of this opinion.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Scheil, *RT* XX/1898, p. 55; Speiser in his introduction to the translation in *ANET*, p. 73 a. This tablet belongs to the Flood story but not to that of the Epic of Gilgameš.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Speiser, *ib.* Speiser seems inclined to date the composition of the epic considerably earlier than Böhl but doesn't give any reasons for his opinion.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Boyce, *JRAS* 1957, pp. 10—45.

thern Mesopotamia in the Mitanni period between Semitic, Hurrian and Hittite peoples. In this place we only want to point to the problem the literary aspect of which is of some real importance to our main theme<sup>1</sup>. For in Ugarit as just mentioned we come across at an early date a rich literature of epic-mythic character.

These epic-mythic texts were written down in the 14th century, probably in the first half of it, let us say then  $\pm$  1400 B. C. As the cuneiform alphabetical system used in Ugarit presupposes the invention of a west-Semitic alphabet the order of which it uses, and this invention hardly took place very long before 1400 B. C.<sup>2</sup> we may assume that these epics, though centuries older, were reduced to writing nearly as soon as the new system of writing was established. That means that they, as included in the temple service, were preserved on carefully written tablets like the "canonical" series of temple tablets in Mesopotamia<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Albright in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy, Presented to Th. H. Robinson*, Edinburgh 1950, p. 4 has drawn attention to the formal agreement between the Ugaritic epics and the hymnal-epic texts from the First Babylonian Dynasty, though not entering upon the question of the origins of Semitic epic literature.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Albright, *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, ed. Rowley, Oxford 1952, p. 31 on the date of the Ugaritic tablets: the copies belong in the main to the reign of Niqmadda; *The Archaeology of Palestine*, 3rd ed. Penguin Books 1956, p. 187 f.; the inventor of the Ugaritic alphabet was "more or less familiar with Egyptian or some Semitic consonantal alphabet based on Egyptian principles" (it is generally assumed that this Semitic consonantal alphabet was the Phoenician alphabet); p. 189 he dates the Sinai inscriptions from  $\pm$  1500 B. C. and p. 190 corresponding Palestinian inscriptions to between 1800 and 1500 B. C. He dates the Lachish and Beth-Shemesh inscriptions in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries, *ib.*

<sup>3</sup> For the scribal schools in Mesopotamia cf. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien*, II, Heidelberg 1925, pp. 324 ff.; Driver, *op. cit.*, pp. 62 ff.; Falkenstein, *WO* 1948, pp. 172—186, for Sumerian times; also Kramer, *JAOS* 69/1949, pp. 199—215. Falkenstein emphasizes the fact that this Sumerian scribal school was put under the supervision so to speak of the king. The entire text of the series *é-dub-ba* describing the life in a scribal school was published and translated in the article of Kramer. The name "tablet house", *é-dub-ba*, stands for both scribal school and archive, cf. Wettemeyer, *Libri* 6/1955—56, p. 220. For the "canonical" series of the tablets cf. Müller, *MVAEG* 41:3, p. 1; Meier, *AfO* 12/1937—39, p. 245; Pallas, *The Antiquity of Iraq*, Copenhagen 1956, p. 726.

That also means that the old oral tradition disappears with their carriers, the wandering minstrels, the representatives of the old epic tradition as spread in Mesopotamia in the first half of the millennium B. C. The scribal culture of the ancient Near East even in this case had shown its superiority to the oral tradition of the Indo-European type.

As to the Ugaritic texts themselves I have no hesitation in repeating my words of 10 years ago. "From the view of the contents there is one point to be stressed: these texts testify to the writing down among the ancient Western Semites of their religious, i. e. chiefly mythic, and ritual texts"<sup>1</sup>. When it has been contended by Engnell that this fact cannot be of any special relevance to Hebrew texts because Ugarit is said to have held a special position in Phoenicia we would indeed be grateful if any reasons for this astonishing allegation were offered. "One should therefore not jump to conclusions based on the Ras Shamra material concerning written transmission in Israel", Engnell further contends<sup>2</sup>. From where, then, are we supposed to "jump"? Perhaps from the Icelanders or from Iran? Obviously not from the Arabs! "Is it by mere chance that no analogous written texts whatever have been found in the archaeologically so well explored Israelite Palestine?" Engnell finally asks. Yes, such is the case if we are to believe Albright who says: "Accident may at any time reveal a whole Palestinian archive from this period. Nor is it improbable that Canaanite religious texts written in the cuneiform alphabet, like the documents from the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries at Ugarit, may also be found in Palestine"<sup>3</sup>.

I know of no scholar who has more than Engnell emphasized the influence exercised among the Israelites by Ugaritic literature. These texts, as we have stated, at the time of the settlement of the Israelite tribes in Palestine existed in a written transmission. It is not clear to me how Engnell thinks that the Hebrews got a knowledge of these texts—which we suppose were to be found in the temple archives of the Canaanite cult-centres—if they were not able to read copies of them. How else to explain such an

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Widengren, *Literary and Psychological Aspects*, p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Engnell, *UUA* 1949:4, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 103.

instance as Psalm 29, a well-known instance of an Israelite adaptation of a Canaanite psalm, not to speak of all other such cases?<sup>1</sup>

No, such desperate explanations, operating with arguments *e silentio*, really demonstrate the weakness of Engnell's position.

The other trend in Nielsen's exposition of existing conditions in the scribal cultures of the ancient Near East is to prove that writing was the business of a few experts, not the task of the man in the street. This too was an idea originally introduced into the discussion by Nyberg and taken over by his *epígonoi*<sup>2</sup>. Accordingly Nielsen tries to prove this fact, though it should be reasonably clear 1. that no one ever disputed the obvious fact that in a high culture where such complicate systems of writing as those found in Mesopotamia and Egypt are in use society needed a class of highly trained professional scribes; 2. that conditions in a culture possessing a simple alphabet by the very nature of things must be very different from those in Egypt and Mesopotamia, as they also were. Even bedouins are capable of using a simple and practical alphabetical system of writing;<sup>3</sup> 3. that the extent to which writing is used among ordinary people is altogether irre-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, Baltimore 1946, p. 129 (German ed. *Die Religion Israels*, München-Basel 1956, p. 146). Credit should be given to Ginsberg for having been the first to demonstrate this Canaanite colour of Ps. 29, cf. *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti*, 1938, pp. 472 ff. Cf. also Gaster, *JQR* XXXVII/1946, pp. 55 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Nyberg, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Nielsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 39—56 by all means tries to minimize the extent to which in pre-exilic Israel use was made of the art of writing. We should compare the exposition given by me *op. cit.*, pp. 57 ff. where I arrived at altogether different conclusions. In order not to load the presentation in this monograph with polemics I refrain from a critical examination of the arguments adduced by Nielsen, reserving this for the future. In this place I only want to point to the fact that even bedouins were fond of writing down some words in places they visited, much in the same way as is done in more modern times by visitors. We may compare the memorial inscriptions of pilgrims in the Sinai mountains, cf. Moritz, *Der Sinai kull in heidnischer Zeit*, Berlin 1916, esp. pp. 8 ff. where it is shown that the travellers came from Northwestern Arabia, and Caskel, *Lihyan und Lihyanisch*. *AGF* H. 4, Düsseldorf 1954, esp. pp. 102, Inscr. 56—57; 105, Inscr. 64; 99, Inscr. 48—53; 126, Inscr. 98—101 etc. Many graffiti have been written by caravan people, cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 102 to Inscr. 57. Inscriptions of a sexual character are rather common. In the case of the Lihyanite inscriptions we also move within the sphere of Northwestern Arabia.



levant for the question of oral or written transmission of literary texts. We need only refer to conditions in the classical cultures, in medieval Europe, or in some modern countries where alphabets is still widely predominant, to ascertain the important fact that in cultures where written transmission is the natural method of preserving literary texts there always will be found a class of professional experts, engaged in the task of transmitting the texts by way of writing.

Keeping these problems in mind we may turn to the main point in our criticism of the exaggerated and therefore wrong views of the relation between oral tradition and written transmission in the ancient Near East. Is it not queer to observe that in order to prove the predominating role of oral tradition among such a Semitic people in antiquity as the Hebrews all real evidence from their closely related neighbours the Arabs has been left out of consideration, when it was shown that the hitherto treatment of this evidence was altogether superficial and unsatisfactory, whereas evidence from all kinds of Indo-European peoples was adduced, so that even the old Icelanders were called upon to render their service in which case neither the "great interval of time" nor that of space seems to have exercised any discouraging effect?!

Here we meet in reality with the weak point in the position of the defenders of a predominantly oral tradition for actually we are confronted with two diametrically opposite manners of cultural behaviour, two different patterns of culture: the Indo-European and the Near Eastern and Mediterranean. The credit for having established this all-important difference goes to Wikander who has shown that religion among Indo-European peoples from the outset was characterized by 1. absence of written religious texts, 2. absence of cult-images or idols, 3. absence of temples or other cult-buildings. The role of a mighty priesthood trained in oral transmission is predominant<sup>1</sup>.

This fundamental phenomenological fact explains the embar-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Widengren, *Religionens värld*, 2nd ed. Stockholm 1953, p. 493 n. 1. Unfortunately Wikander has not yet published his important monograph on this subject. For the time being we may also compare Dumézil, *RHR* 122/1940, pp. 125 ff., and *L'héritage indo-européen à Rome*, Paris 1949, p. 19 f.

rassment in which e. g. Engnell and Nielsen find themselves. Arabian evidence—which is after all the only safe guide as far as oral tradition in an ancient Semitic culture is concerned—has obviously lost all its charm and attractiveness to them after the publication of my “Literary and Psychological Aspects”. Instead, examples are desperately looked for in the most distant quarters of the world to enhance their prospects of getting some support of their thesis. That this lack of all method is especially fatal when evidence is sought from Indo-European cultures, representatives of a type of civilization altogether opposite to Near Eastern and Mediterranean scribal cultures should be emphasized here once for all.

Having thus reduced the equation we are obviously once more faced with Arabian civilization as the only culture area in the ancient Near East where there is a hope of coming across some supplementary evidence for the analysis of the problem of oral and written tradition in the transmission of O. T. literature. For there, all things considered, we nevertheless meet with a Semitic culture where oral tradition really played a most important role and where conditions in many cases are so transparent that we may use the evidence of the Arabic texts as a means of checking Israelite conditions because the material in the Hebrew texts is so scanty that for the most part our analysis of them will have to be dependent on internal evaluation and literary criticism without the support of external evidence. Such an external evidence on the other hand in many cases is available in the Arabic texts.

In view of the clearing up of the problem of oral tradition and literary fixation among Indo-European peoples in contradistinction to the peoples of the Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures which we tried to give above, starting from the fundamental distinction introduced into the discussion by Wikander, I shall only briefly touch upon Engnell's latest (?) views as expressed in 1952<sup>1</sup>. This is more for the sake of information, for on principles they do not bring anything new nor does he bring any new evidence but merely repeats in a rather apodictic way what he has said before, at the same time in a most characteristic manner

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *SBU*, II, the article “Traditionshistorisk metod”, esp. coll. 1433—34.

shifting his emphasis as far as an evaluation of evidence is concerned from the analogies, called upon by him in his Introduction, to an intrinsic examination of the O. T. itself. We are thus carried back to an internal evidence, a retreat behind a screen, for the comparative evidence may be used as subsidiary evidence, if only used with sufficient discrimination. What this discrimination means is explained in the following manner: we should by no means try to see on what stage of cultural development the author in question is to be found; the transmission of the traditions is carried out with great fidelity in an inherited way, "remarkably enough" with "comparatively great independence of surrounding cultural factors". When we look for some proofs of these allegations we of course find nothing, only the contention that comparative material from India and Iran is more "profitable" ("givande") than that from less distant quarters, e. g. the Arabic evidence. Actually no one will doubt that when arguing for the predominance of oral tradition one will find comparative material from Indo-European cultural areas more "profitable" than material from the Arabs (a material said to be "dangerous"!). Still more "profitable" material could be found where oral tradition is all-powerful, *i. e.* among illiterate peoples! However, the Near East also gets its tribute for we are taught that the Sumerian-Accadian literature constitutes the most valuable comparative material. How insignificant the role played by oral tradition in reality was among the Sumerians and Semites of Mesopotamia has already been stated, and we should like to emphasize that Engnell was not even capable—for all his talk of oral tradition—to adduce our evidence of an oral transmission of hymnic-epic literature. So we think we can safely dismiss Sumerian-Accadian literature in this connection—with the exception indicated above.

Engnell as a preamble of his allegations contends that oral tradition is absolutely reliable and that all endeavours to cast doubt on this reliability (with a reference to Widengren) fail because not duly paying attention to the wholly unique situation of the O. T., its quality of an altogether sacral religious literature, deeply rooted in a very special cultic "setting in life"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *op. cit.*, col. 1433.

Here it seems to me that two things are confused: 1. the manner of transmission of O. T. texts in the pre-literary stage of those texts: oral tradition, and 2. the situation occupied by the Old Testament, the outcome of a canonized collection of all O. T. texts when they had passed long ago from the pre-literary to the literary stage and possessed another manner of transmission: written tradition. How could oral tradition be dependent on the situation of the Old Testament itself, the Old Testament being the ultimate result of that tradition?

When Engnell finally refers to Rabbinic literature as a support of his allegations he has obviously missed the mark, and it is unnecessary to enter upon a discussion of this material as this has already been done by Guillaume<sup>1</sup>.

When Engnell in his usual manner accuses all scholars who are of an opinion differing from his own—in this case the dependence of transmission upon the stage of culture is in the centre of his interest—of being guilty of “a misleading evolutionistic view”, we may as a rejoinder state the fact that Engnell in this case confuses “evolutionism” and “evolution”, *i. e.* historical development. What is meant by “evolutionism” I have tried to make clear in a rather comprehensive article to which Engnell is referred for information on this special topic<sup>2</sup>.

However, the point at issue possesses a factual importance for the discussion, for if the cultural stage in this case were altogether insignificant why does Nielsen by all means try to minimize the

<sup>1</sup> Guillaume in a lecture delivered at the University of Upsala in 1955 discussed this evidence in a thorough way. He will presumably in a near future publish this lecture as well as two others given by him in Upsala, all concerning the problem of oral and written transmission of Arabic and Hebrew literature.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Widengren, “Evolutionism and the Problem of the Origin of Religion”, *Ethnos* 10/1945, pp. 57—96, esp. pp. 57—72. We should quote in this place what North, “Pentateuchal Criticism”, *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, Oxford 1951, p. 77 has to say on this question: “By all means let us abandon an *a priori* ‘evolutionism’; even so, history is not static; it has movement, and there is not the slightest doubt that some ideas and institutions were early and others late.”

Engnell is very quick to label those of another opinion than his own as belonging to several ugly categories with names ending in “-ism”. Actually he would seem to constitute himself a new kind of “-ism”, *i. e.* “sloganism”. It is highly to be doubted, however, whether slogans can really serve as a substitute of scientific arguments.

extent of the use of writing in ancient Israel? After all, even such an ardent adherent of the hypothesis of the predominant oral transmission in Israel is accordingly compelled to try to master the embarrassing fact that writing was widely spread already in pre-Israelite Canaan<sup>1</sup>.

It seems to me highly significant that Engnell is incapable of giving any references to any O. T. passages where all this surmised oral transmission is mentioned. Where do we find in the O. T. a passage mentioning a circle of traditionists faithfully preserving by means of oral tradition some prose narratives of the character found in the Pentateuch?

On the other hand, where in the ancient Near East do we find such circles of traditionists, transmitting orally prose narratives, if not among the Arabs?

Where do we ascertain with some confidence that this oral transmission was effected with care and fidelity to tradition if not among the Arabs?

Who used such Arabic terms as *dīwān* and *rāwī* to signify Israelite corresponding conditions if not Engnell? Just for fun?

Where in Mesopotamia do we find such circles of traditionists as among the Arabs (except in the case of minstrels as indicated above, but they after all belong to another category)?

Now all this discussion, as we have seen, not always carried on in the most polite manner, focussed on oral tradition and the role played by oral transmission in the ancient Near East and above all in Israel, certainly is not a purpose in itself—though

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 40 ff. and above p. 224. In the teeth of clear evidence even Engnell can't bring anything more than an allegation—as usual without any attempt at documentation—most of all bearing a close resemblance to a declaration of faith: "Oral tradition has certainly had its place also in pre-Israelite Canaan," *UUÅ* 1949:4, p. 58. For a criticism of Engnell in this special point cf. Eissfeldt, *Einführung in das Alte Testament*, 2nd ed. Tübingen 1956, p. 7: "Aber seine Annahme, auch die aus älterer vorexilischer Zeit stammenden Stücke des AT seien zumeist erst in exilischer und nachexilischer Zeit niedergeschrieben worden, besteht schwerlich zu Recht, und es ist eigentlich merkwürdig, dass diese Annahme in einer Zeit aufkommen konnte, die sich durch eindeutige archäologische Zeugnisse davon hat überzeugen lassen müssen, dass in Kanaan und damit auch in Israel der Gebrauch der Schrift sicher um mehrere Jahrhunderte älter ist . . ., als Wellhausen und seine Generation angenommen hatten."

sometimes one may get that impression—but aims at the greater problem of the hypothetic existence of written sources in the Pentateuch and other historical parts of the O. T. literature, *i. e.* the question of those parallel sources labelled *JEDP* in modern research, to use only the most well-known *sigla*.

In recent years North has undertaken to discuss the implications of the new theories concerning oral transmission of Hebrew literature and to put these hypotheses to the test<sup>1</sup>.

North starts from the hypothesis that "oral literature" may possess the same fixity as written literature and asks the question if it then really matters whether the ancient Hebrew literature as we find it in the Pentateuch is "oral" or "written"—or a mixture of both.

He further inquires if there is anything in principle wrong in the application of literary-critical methods to such a kind of literature, a question that is answered in the negative. He insists on the fact that the Pentateuch is literature and produced by means of some literary processes.

"How could such a heterogenous mass of materials have assumed the form in which we have them in the Pentateuch without 'redactors'? What were Engnell's circles of traditionists doing all the centuries they were at work? Have they left no traces of their activities? And if they were as faithful custodians of tradition as Engnell says they were, and as, indeed to judge from the abrupt transitions from one style or story to another, we may readily believe they were, we should expect to be able to sort things out with comparative ease"<sup>2</sup>.

North then proceeds to the central problem, *viz.* the existence of parallel sources. There is a general consensus of opinion that there were sources but were there parallel sources of considerable length? This is denied by Engnell. "But if there were different circles of traditionists, and if the circles of traditionists handled not only units but '*collections of tradition*', it is not inconceivable that the Pentateuch will be found to contain something like parallel 'documents', whether 'oral' or 'written' . . . if *collections*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. his essay "Pentateuchal Criticism", *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, ed. Rowley, Oxford 1951, pp. 63—82.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. North, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

of oral tradition already existed in pre-exilic times, we are perfectly at liberty to apply sourcecritical methods to them. There can be no possible objection in principle to parallel sources even at the pre-literary stage . . . If we can speak of 'oral literature', it is all one whether the literature was oral or written"<sup>1</sup>.

We are not concerned here with the solution of the problem tentatively offered by North. We do not consider it possible to arrive at a satisfactory solution without very extensive and detailed investigations of the whole mass of materials contained in the early Hebrew prose narratives. Perhaps this task will demand the labour of a whole generation.

What we shall try to do in our own rather restricted researches is to offer some points of comparison between early Arabic and Hebrew prose narratives from some special points of view, special attention being paid to the following problems:

1. The problem of the date of the literary fixation of the early prose narratives.
2. The style of early prose narratives; the question of epic recitations.
3. The separate tradition, orally transmitted and committed to paper.
4. The clustering of such oral traditions around an outstanding epic figure; the creation of a cycle of narratives.
5. The arrangement of two or more such cycles to form a complex cycle.
6. The passing over of tradition-cycles from oral tradition into a written form.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. North, *op. cit.*, p. 79. Cf. also Bentzen, *Archiv Orientalnt* XIX/1951, p. 231 f. where he emphasizes the existence of a kind of stratification to be analysed. Already in 1948 much the same thing was said by me in my *Literary and Psychological Aspects*, p. 122. Eissfeldt, *op. cit.*, p. 7 seems to dismiss the whole problem rather light-heartedly. He repeats in a shorter form North's conclusions, saying: "Zudem müsste, wenn die spät geschehene Niederschrift der Traditions-komplexe diesen die Form belassen hat, die sie während ihrer mündlichen Überlieferung durch Jahrhunderte hindurch gehabt haben, auf diese festen Traditions-komplexe im Grunde dieselbe Methode angewendet werden, mit der man unter der Voraussetzung, dass sie schon in älterer Zeit schriftlich fixiert worden sind, diese Stücke zu analysieren bestrebt ist".

7. The composition of such a complex cycle when once committed to paper.
8. The artificial chronological scheme.
9. Use of variant traditions as supplementary details.
10. Poetic tradition in relation to prosaic version.
11. Prose narratives based on poetic traditions.
12. Circles of traditionists at work.
13. Parallel sources and harmonization.
14. The creation of a book: from story-teller to author.

## *II. The Early Prose-Narratives in Arabic.*

1. In the early Arabic prose narratives we find two literary patterns. One is distinguished by a short, concentrated style, contains one or two dramatic episodes, and is told in a swift tempo, everything serving the presentation. All speeches that do not carry the action forward are evaded. The sense is in all details not always easy to interpret, because a modern reader cannot follow all hints and allusions and because the conciseness of the diction often makes the narration obscure. The conscious effort at the utmost concentration is sometimes checked by artistic considerations. Sentimental expressions are, however, as rare as real sceneries. When something is said of the heat of the day or of the brightness of a moonlight night it is to motivate the course of events. The style is concrete and realistic, intent upon dramatic life. Everything is dialogue and action. The diction may sometimes be so realistic as to use rather highly coloured descriptions. Because of the wish to be true to life an action may be split up and described in all its details. In very exciting passages the flow of narration may be interrupted by a genre-painting. The language is adapted to the exposition. It is short, concrete, metaphorical, avoids rhetorical or empty words. Comparisons are comparatively few, but when used short and to the point. Here and there some sentences are exactly repeated, but these repetitions as well as some abridgements appear to be the work of the redactor of the collections of the narratives. Some rather abstract expressions on the other hand may be due to the original story-tellers. These stories achieve their effect by means of plastic concreteness and



appropriate pregnancy, in general completely refraining from rhythm or assonance or rhyme. The use of *sağ'*, the rhyme-prose, is very restricted. Sometimes a dirge may be framed in *sağ'*. The most striking feature of this style is its pure objectivity, no human feelings of a subjective character being allowed to find an expression. Subjective sentiments are confined to the poetic quotations which are found interspersed in the prose narration. On the other hand, in these poems passionate feelings find unbridled manifestations. In the prose narratives further, the psychical reactions of the acting persons are revealed only in their deeds or words.<sup>1</sup>

We should like to add here a reference to the important role played by direct speech. Very often the action advances by means of quotations from a dialogue as in the relation of the end of the war of Basūs.<sup>2</sup>

2. Alongside of this style there is another of a certain rhetorical colour. In such cases the presentation is characterized by a certain epic love for details and slow tempo. Such is e.g. the introduction to the day of Ši'b Ğabalāh, where the council of war and the departure of the Banu 'Āmir are described. Here the narrative advances slowly and quietly. Speech and counterspeech alternate in the same cautious manner. First the commands are given *in extenso* and then their execution is related, abstract decisions being realized in concrete actions, told in detail. In this style we also meet with short descriptions of leading figures, descriptions sometimes developing into literary portraits e.g. in *yaum Ši'b Ğabalāh*, where we get to know that the old al-Aḥwaṣ ibn Ğa'far who was the *šaiḥ* of the Banu 'Āmir, was so old that his eyebrows already had fallen down over his eyes.<sup>3</sup> Also in other cases we meet with such descriptions, sometimes a real *eikonismós*, of course possessing no historical value. Such descriptions are often found in the biography of Muḥammad, the so-called *sīrah*.<sup>4</sup> In some cases

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 34—59. For the psychic reaction as revealed in these narratives cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 42, 93: 'Āmirah relates his fear. Use of *sağ'*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 38: "Alles ist Dialog und Szene."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 34, 36. As Caskel observes p. 36 n. 6 this trait is quite conventional, being found in other descriptions of old men. The best known example is perhaps that of Wahriz, the Persian conqueror of Yaman, cf. Ṭabarī, I, p. 949:9 = Ibn Hišām, *Sīrah*, p. 43:5 f. from the bottom of the page.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, Oxford 1955, pp. 158, 184, Wellhausen, *Wāqidi, Kitāb al-Majāzi*, p. 366, pointed out by Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 38 n. 1.

rhetorical adornment is met with, e.g. in the description of a certain wonderful she-camel al-Lifā', or we meet with single sentences in a rhetorically coloured language. In such cases an abstract event or state is expressed in concrete symbols and the *parallelismus membrorum* may be used too. Sometimes in an otherwise very dry and objectively worded description a revengeful spirit or a state of deep sorrow give free vent to their feelings.<sup>1</sup>

3. The persons appearing in these narratives are few. When more persons are introduced e.g. a circle of influential men in a council of war or some dozen people in a *ǧazu*, only two or three appear in every single scene. If quite a lot of people is brought into action e.g. a tribe, they are treated as a single person, acting and speaking as an individual.

The action is enacted in a series of clearcut, plastic scenes. In these scenes the individual actions, as already stated may sometimes be described in all details, very often, however, only summarized. Pictures from daily life are seldom allowed to dilute the concentration of action, but sometimes such a genre-painting is found in a short scene, as when a man called Zuhair was taken unawares by his enemies, having his head in the bosom of a girl he had taken captive and stretched out upon a piece of red velvet, while she was delousing him. This is of course a special technique of introducing more thrill in some exciting passages.<sup>2</sup>

4. We now pass to the question of variant readings and parallel traditions. The Arabic narratives as found in the *ayyām*-, *sīrah*- or *ḥadīth*-literature do not represent any homogenous stage of tradition. In the *ayyām*-literature one stage, the oldest one, is represented by the narrations of a single *yaum*, told in the short, concentrated style. The other, later stage consists of a group of narratives characterized by the epic, more discursive style, pos-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 57 f. Description of the she-camel, p. 45; rhetorically coloured language with parallel expressions, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 35 ff. Death of Zuhair, p. 41 as compared with p. 39. Only a few persons acting at the same time, cf. Aǧānī XIV<sup>2</sup>, p. 129:9—130:2, translated by Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 98 f. The scenes described are sharply divided from each other. The same holds true of Naqā'id, p. 905:10—906:3, translated by Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 97 f. The people of a tribe, Banū 'Āmir, treated as one of the acting persons, cf. Naqā'id, p. 657:10—658:12, translated by Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 95—97.

sessing as its chief actors not as in the former case a little group of a tribe, but whole tribes, such as Bakr, Taġlib etc., which is completely unhistorical, because in Arabia the tribe is an ideal and genealogical entity but no political one as Wellhausen has shown.<sup>1</sup>

Actually the form of such cycles of narratives, as e. g. the famous Basūs war, corresponds to its unhistorical character, and such elaborate cycles have their action played at an early stage, much farther back in time than the single episodes of one *yaum*. The transmission of tradition in such cases had time to remould entirely the historical kernel of the story and to join one *yaum* to another, so that these great cycles were ultimately formed.<sup>2</sup>

The growth of the *sīrah*-literature has followed the same pattern: the single tradition is more trustworthy than the context where it is found.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly the cycles of tales relating e. g. such a war as the Basūs war have behind them a long history of oral and written transmission. The single *ayyām* grew together and were brought into a special framework. There was certainly no Basūs war at all, says Caskel.<sup>4</sup>

The process of the building up of a framework was not yet finished when the oral traditions were taken into the pen. We are able to state this fact with absolute certainty, for the episode rounding off the Basūs war to a literary unit by alluding to its initial stage and its first cause, in order that the beginning and end would harmoniously suit each other, was not able to get the upper hand in the dominant version. According to this episode which is really indispensable from the point of view of literary composition Ġassās, the instigator of the war, falls by the hand of the posthumous son of his victim Kulaib, but the predominant version has it that the same Ġassās dies quite peacefully. Other examples may be cited to illustrate the same process,<sup>5</sup> which

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, IV. p. 30, quoted by Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 76 n. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 76 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. below part III.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 77: "es hat gewiss einen Dāḥis-Krieg, einen Basūs-Krieg, so wenig gegeben, wie einen 'Krieg' zwischen Bakr und Tamīm."

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 77. The murder of Ša' and that of his father Zuhair ibn Ġadimah are independent "days" in the work of Abū 'Uбайдah, but other authorities had joined them into a "War of the 'Amir and the Ġaḡafān."

is characteristic of a later epoch, when they loved to join single traditions into greater collections, moulded into real, coherent compositions. This tendency, as Caskel observes, gets its logical end in the 'Antarah cycle, where *all* Arabian "days" were joined into one single, vast battle-piece.<sup>1</sup>

We are able to get some insight into the history and growth of the preliterate *ayyām*-traditions by means of the extant parallel traditions. Such parallel traditions exist in a double way, partly as a second version of one "day", partly as interwoven traditions of single episodes. Within the framework of the narrative such episodes may be pushed in another direction by the work of the redactor, the persons may change, isolated new traits may make their appearance but the essential point, often a *logion*, upon which the whole story is based, remains unchanged. Such *logia* are indeed often the common property of parallel traditions even if these may be rather different. In such a way we are in a position to see how the tradition has been built up around one single point.<sup>2</sup> But also single, striking terms may return in parallel traditions, *e.g.* some uncommon poetical expression. In all such cases either one version is dependent upon the other or both of them go back upon one common source.<sup>3</sup> In Arabic literature this conclusion can be proved in certain cases thanks to the chain of traditionists who have transmitted the tradition and we are *not* dependent exclusively on internal criteria. In other cases we can clearly see how one version constitutes an explanatory parallel version of the other. The older tradition is more simple and unsophisticated. In younger versions the listeners or readers sometimes need a few explanations of customs, situations or expressions.<sup>4</sup>

Often the narratives are enriched by episodes that have their origin in other stories and parallel traditions. We are in the happy situation to be able to check this statement by comparing the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 77. The murder of Ša' and that of his father Zuhair ibn Ǧādimah are independent "days" in the work of Abū 'Ubaidah, but other authorities had joined them into a "War of the 'Āmir and the Ǧaṭafān."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 78 f. Also some special striking terms may serve as such clustering points, cf. p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 80 where he points to the episode from *yaum Šau'ar* in which he observes that the younger relation gives the story in a clearer wording.

extant parallel versions some of which may be very simple and altogether lacking the enrichment to be found in the corresponding version.<sup>1</sup> For in such cases is often the more simple version preserved in which the intrusive episode is missing.<sup>2</sup>

To those scholars who argue that duplicates and repetitions are the characteristics of true Semitic prosaic style one would reply by referring to such Arabic prose traditions as the 'A'īshah scandal or the relation of the Hudaibiyah treaty. Both narratives are acknowledged as belonging to the very masterpieces of Arabic prose literature and are both found in the *ḥadīṭ*-collection of Buḥārī and in the *sīrah* of Ibn Ishāq (Ibn Hišām). An investigation in their case yields some interesting and highly instructive results.<sup>3</sup> All parallel traditions in the *ayyām*-literature, however, are not to be understood as reflexions of one and the same basic narrative or as developments of a more simple tradition. We are also entitled to say that from the outset two or more relations of the same event were circulating, for sometimes two such traditions are entirely irreconcilable.<sup>4</sup>

5. The transmitters of the traditions about the *ayyām* have been the story-tellers at the night-assemblies of the tribe, the *maǧālis*, when family history or battle stories were told. These story-tellers often were men who by profession were both poets and warriors, they belonged to the leading men of the tribe. These stories of the *ayyām* are not the outcome of any anonymous spirit in the people, any so-called "Volksgeist".<sup>5</sup>

Later on, in the epoch of the Umayyads these traditions were preserved and cherished also in the towns, at the courts of governors and at the *maǧālis* in mosques.<sup>6</sup> The form of the *ayyām* was taken up in the *sīrah* and the *ḥadīṭ* and exercised a deep-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 80 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 81 where some examples are given.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. below part III.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 81 where he refers to the variations on the motif 'the infidelity of Sinān ibn Ḥarīṭah' (found Naqā'id, pp. 674:3—676:1). The two traditions about the capture of Ma'bad ibn Zurārah at Raḥraḥān are impossible to reconcile as Caskel points out (one is found Naqā'id, p. 227 top of the page, the other *ib.* p. 227:6).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 84 f.

going influence upon the historical narratives of the civil and foreign wars, so that the literary composition of the *ayyām* is the formal basis of Arabic historical writings.<sup>1</sup>

The special narratives about the prophet Muḥammad and his companions as well as all kinds of legendary stuff was spread in popular tales by the story-tellers and free preachers, *quṣṣās*, very often attached to the mosques. Their activity has been described by Pedersen.<sup>2</sup>

The term *qāṣṣ*, plural *quṣṣās*, was used for certain preachers who were appointed to work for Islam. "The 'narrator' is closely connected with the official religion and fills a reputable and influential position. His activity, making up a link in the service of the mosque, consists on the one side in the recital of the Qur'ān, a circumstance that is stressed . . . on the other side in leading the prayer, and lastly in the succeeding speech."<sup>3</sup> However, only the subject of his narrations makes him differ from other story-tellers who gathered their audience not in the mosque, but at the corners of the streets.<sup>4</sup> This affinity carried with it certain problems. "It is obvious that the free position of the common preacher gave him an opportunity of less controlled activity. As his aim was to impress his audience he was tempted to use the means fittest for that purpose, and as everybody might speak in an assembly which he could gather in the mosque or elsewhere, there was no guarantee for his learning and his sense of responsibility, the more so as his preaching was often followed by a collection of money."<sup>5</sup>

6. The literary process in the shaping of the *ayyām*-narratives as they are found in our days may be said to be typical. The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caskeel, *op. cit.*, p. 85 with reference to Levi Della Vida in *EI* IV, s.v. *Sīra*, p. 472 b, and Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz*, Berlin 1902, p. 257 (and p. IV of the preface). We may add references also to Fück, *Muḥammad ibn Ishāq*, Frankfurt am Main 1925, pp. 5—12, and Guillaume, *op. cit.*, pp. XIV—XVII.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Pedersen, *The Islamic Preacher, Ignace Goldziher Memorial Volume*, I, Budapest 1948, pp. 225—251; *The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher, The World of Islam*, N.S. II/1953, pp. 215—231.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pedersen, *Goldziher Memorial Volume*, p. 235.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, II, Halle 1890, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pedersen, *The World of Islam*, N. S. II/1953, p. 216.

greater part of them goes back upon a collector and redactor from Baṣrah, Abū 'Ubaidah, born 728, dead 825. Before him already his teacher Abū 'Amr ibn al-'Alā', born 689, dead 770, had occupied himself with the *ayyām*-literature. From him Abū 'Ubaidah took over not only certain narratives but also some special concrete details. Both of them are representatives of the Baṣrian line of tradition. Beside this tradition there was a Kufian line. This line of tradition leading up to the great *ayyām*-book, collected and written by Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb, ultimately was taken over by the Baṣrian line. This Kūfian line which is very little conspicuous in our present texts does not seem to have shown any principal differences from the Baṣrian line.<sup>1</sup> The literary process by which the old collectors and redactors brought together the texts is approximately possible to reconstruct. *They took over both oral traditions and written texts*, for some doubts expressed by Abū 'Ubaidah concerning the reading of certain names are explicable only from graphic, not from acustic reasons.<sup>2</sup>

When these collectors did not come across two complete parallel narratives they constructed one main strand of the story, giving word to the deviations in single episodes. The same principle is easily discovered everywhere in the *sīrah* too, where the main tradition is supplemented in details by special traditions being added to the main strand of the narration.<sup>3</sup> When two complete parallel traditions were found it was nearly always the principle to give both of them, enumerating when possible the names of the transmitters of the traditions. It goes without saying, however, that this process sometimes involved a certain harmonizing tendency. But in general one was careful not to add anything but explaining remarks which were clearly distinguished as such.<sup>4</sup>

Another great name in the history of the *ayyām*-literature as well as the *sīrah* is Abū Muḥḍir Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī, generally called Ibn al-Kalbī, dead 819 or 821, a most talented

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 85 f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 86 n. 6 where he refers to Aḡānī, XIII<sup>2</sup>, p. 135:3 and Naqā'id, p. 140:1.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ibn Hišām, ed. Wüstenfeld, p. 34:12, and below part III.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

collector and author, but of disputed reliability. He has written a *Kitāb al-ayyām* between 150 and 200 years after the events of the *ayyām* took place. Ibn al-Kalbī was quite capable of handing down the texts as he had received them, but very often he could not resist the temptation to supplement them, to "improve" on them. Accordingly we very soon detect that Ibn al-Kalbī is the man who knows everything, *e.g.* the names of the three men who invented the Arabic alphabet.<sup>1</sup> His historical and etymological constructions are highly suspicious, his material, however, always remains interesting. The predominance of the phantastic element in his traditions is indeed no criterion against their authenticity, for the tales of the modern bedouins about their forefathers and their migrations and wanderings show the same character.<sup>2</sup>

Caskel emphasizes the fact that such a personality as Ibn al-Kalbī has treated the *ayyām*-literature in quite another way than earlier collectors and redactors. Kalbī interrupts his texts by long genealogical and historical discussions.<sup>3</sup>

The further development of the collections of traditions of the *ayyām* can be followed from the so-called Naqā'iḍ of Ğarīr and Farazdaq and then to the famous *Kitāb al-'Aġānī* by Abū 'l-Farag al-Iṣbahānī, born 897, dead 967. In the Naqā'iḍ the traditions are on the whole faithfully transmitted, though irregularities may be found. The same holds true on the whole even of al-Iṣbahānī, in the case of whom, however, we are able to see, as Caskel states, that in attempting at constructing out of several sources one single strand of narrative sometimes *e.g.* as far as the Basūs war is concerned he was not very successful.<sup>4</sup>

When we come to Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, born 860, dead 940, we come to a turning point in the transmission of the *ayyām*-traditions. About 300 years have then elapsed from the time when the acting persons of the *ayyām* were living. In his work *'Iqd al-farīd* he devoted a chapter to the *ayyām*, where, however, he treated the texts very cavalierly, shortening drastically here, and adding something there. Where he uses several sources the narra-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above p. 209 n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 87 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 89.



tive becomes rather broken and incoherent. It is important to note that Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi didn't want to furnish the reader with historical knowledge, but to point to monuments of an heroic age, glorious examples of very ancient ethical ideals, the *muruwwah*, "manliness."<sup>1</sup> Hence, he is in the first place dominated by a tendency, and this tendency, in contradistinction to previous collectors and editors, doesn't make him the servant of his material, but its master, a development recognizable also in Ibn al-Kalbī, but as just stated caused with him by other reasons.<sup>2</sup>

With Ibn al-Aṭīr, dead 1224, author of the famous universal history, we reach a further epoch in the literary history of the *ayyām*-traditions. Not only has he undertaken to arrange the narratives chronologically, but he was also intent on providing every single narrative with a chronological sequel of the isolated episodes. Of course he prefers such forms of the traditions where several "days" already are put into a greater coherent unity. He has not much sense for the true traditions but harmonizes recklessly.<sup>3</sup>

The traditions belonging to the *sīrah* generally have followed the same pattern. In this connection I should like to call attention to the fact that traditions from the outset entirely independent of each other, nay even in apparent contradiction, and thus to be classified as parallel versions of one episode, are combined into one narrative by being arranged in a chronological order. The traditions about the call of Muḥammad as analysed by Andrae furnish us with a very fine illustration of such an artificial chronological arrangement. Such a process obviously belongs to the literary stage of the transmission of the traditions.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting to observe that topographical, chronological, genealogical and philological notes are added by later collectors of traditions as well as by such "redactors" whom we may style "authors" in the Arabic sense of the word. These short notices

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Already Mittwoch, *Proella Arabum paganorum*, Berlin 1899, p. 41 has drawn attention to the drastic shortenings in the traditions carried out by Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi as Caskel states.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 89 f.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Andrae, *Mo* VI/1912, pp. 5—18, cf. below part III.

interrupting the exposition of events, are of no interest for such listeners for whom oral tradition was intended, for they were themselves experts in such things, and are accordingly a token of a stage of the transmission when the traditions were committed to paper.<sup>1</sup>

Concluding this section we should observe that out of the folk-traditions and the sagas "history" is created by arranging the material of traditions in a chronological order and by providing these collections with chronological notices.<sup>2</sup>

7. Arabic prose narratives as is well known are interspersed with quotations of poetry, alluding to the same events as those told in the prosaic narrations.

Caskel has also devoted his attention to the relation between these interspersed poems and the prose narratives.<sup>3</sup> This problem had been discussed already by Brockelmann who was of the opinion that the poems in general were anterior to the prosaic version.<sup>4</sup> Caskel on the other hand after an examination of the evidence came to the conclusion that behind both poetic and prosaic ver-

<sup>1</sup> Some examples are found in the texts treated by Caskel, *op. cit.*, *e. g.* p. 86 a quotation from Aġānī, X<sup>2</sup>, p. 8:20 where it is said that Ša's went away from a visit paid to a king, and it is added: "I think he was Al-Nu'mān, said Abū 'Ubaidah". A topographical note is found *op. cit.*, p. 92 in the relation of *yaum Dū Ṭulūh*, quoted from Naqā'īd, pp. 47:2—50:12, where it is added to the notice that Bakr ibn Wā'il pitched their camp in al-Kilwāqah in the Sawād-country: "the land between Baṣrah and Kūfah". As an example of a philological notice we may quote from the same narrative *op. cit.*, p. 93, where we read à propos the word *al-šuddār*: "*al-šuddār* means the returning people, he means that they are pilgrims."

Already Fresnel, *JA* III 3/1837, p. 324 draws a parallel between the explanations interspersed in the Arabic narratives and the explanatory glosses found in early Hebrew narrations, referring to Exod. XVI 36: "Now an *omer* is the tenth part of an *epha*." We shall return to these explanatory glosses in the second part of our investigation.

<sup>2</sup> Such has been the case with the ancient traditions centering around the sanctuary of Meccah as they have been collected and arranged in a chronological order by Ibn Ishāq. That no chronological statements can be taken from Arabic sources of an early date as far as pre-Islamic history is concerned was stressed by Nöldeke, *Die Ghassānischen Fürsten aus dem Hause Ġaṣna's*, Berlin 1887.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 59—75.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Islamica* 2/1926—27, pp. 96 ff.

sions there may be a common tradition and that if one tradition is dependent upon the other it must of a necessity be the prose tradition.<sup>1</sup> Caskel has further pointed to the various positions occupied by the poems. We have already said that there are prose narratives interspersed with verses, and this is in general the case. But there are other specimens of *ayyām*-literature — and other prose traditions too<sup>2</sup> — where the poems are quoted at the end of the prose narrative.<sup>3</sup>

Caskel considers the association of poetry and prose as rather loose.<sup>4</sup> With the exception of war songs the poems don't form any artistic unity together with the prose traditions, and they do not continue the trend of narration. There are accordingly very few instances where poetry and prose really constitute one single composition full of feeling. There are also only some few cases where the narrative really is continued by the quotation of some verses.<sup>5</sup>

We need not enter upon a discussion here of the problem of *prius* and *posterius* in this kind of composition.<sup>6</sup> In our case we are mainly concerned with the various types of connection between poetry and prose, and their mutual artistic functions. We should like to emphasize that according to such an expert as Horovitz we do not possess any real epic poetry.<sup>7</sup>

It is moreover interesting to note that while the *sīrah* even in the present case carries on the traditions it inherited from the *ayyām* the *ḥadīṭ*-collections are characterized by their lack of poetic quotations which gives to the prose narratives found there a rather different literary type.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e. g. the poetry quoted at the end of the Sassanian conquest of Yaman, Ibn Hišām, ed. p. 44 f., Guillaume, transl. p. 32 f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 62—64.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Haldar, *Mo* XXIV/1946, "On the Problem of Tradition in Ancient Semitic Religious Literature", where, however, in spite of the title hardly anything but *ayyām*-literature is treated.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Horovitz, *Islamica* 2/1926—27, p. 308.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. below for the Ḥudalbiyah treaty, part III.