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Published several times a year by THE SOCIETY FOR EARLY HISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, for the dissemination among its members of information on new discoveries in archaeology throwing light on the origins of civilization in the Old and New Worlds, on the earliest periods of recorded history in the two hemispheres, and on the important historical claims of the Hebrew-Christian and Latter-day Saint scriptures; also news of the Society and its members and of the B.Y.U. department of archaeology and anthropology, of which the Society is an affiliated organization. Included are papers read at the Society's and Department's annual symposia on the archaeology of the Scriptures. All views expressed in this newsletter are those of the author of the contribution in which they appear and not necessarily those of Brigham Young University or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Subscription is by membership in the Society, which also includes subscription to other publications.

120.0 SYMPOSIUM PLANNED. At a meeting held on March 27 the Society's Executive Committee appointed Virgil V. Peterson as chairman of its Twentieth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures.

(Mr. Peterson has served as vice-president and president of the SEHA and has twice presided as co-chairman of the Annual Symposium. Earlier, he served as the director of the Society's Salt Lake Chapter. See Newsletter, 62.3, 82.0, 96.0.)

Mr. Peterson this month announced the following preliminary plans for the Symposium:

120.00 Date Set. The yearly conference has been scheduled for Saturday, October 10, 1970. It will probably be held, as last year, in the Madsen Recital Hall of the Franklin S. Harris Fine Arts Center on the BYU campus.

120.01 Committee Appointed. The following will assist Mr. Peterson as members of the Symposium Committee: Paul R. Cheesman, Ross T. Christensen, M. Wells Jakeman, Clark S. Knowlton, and Sidney B. Sperry.

120.02 Participation Invited. Mr. Peterson is inviting all members of the SEHA to prepare papers for possible reading at the Symposium. A form letter giving further details will soon be mailed. Those planning to accept this invitation should submit a one-page abstract to the Symposium Committee, 140 Maeser Building, BYU, Provo, Utah 84601, by August 28. Thereafter, the Committee will select those papers which are to be read and make final arrangements for the October 10 event.

120.1 MAGAZINE DISCONTINUED, NEWSLETTER ENHANCED. Because of increased costs the SEHA Executive Committee on March 27 reluctantly decided to cancel the Society's bulk subscription to *The Biblical Archaeologist*, a quarterly journal published by the American Schools of Oriental Research of Cambridge, Massachusetts.

For at least 20 years the Society has annually purchased, at a reduced rate, a bulk subscription to this magazine for redistribution to its members. The last issue that will be sent out under this arrangement is that of February, 1970 (Vol. 33, No. 1), which will soon be placed in the mail.

At the same time it decided to discontinue *The Biblical Archaeologist*, the Executive Committee also voted to apply part of the money saved thereby toward enhancing the program of the *Newsletter and Proceedings*. Further Newsletter plans will be announced in a future issue.

120.2 PAST ISSUES OFFERED FOR SALE. The SEHA Executive Committee on March 27 also decided to offer the Society's stock of past issues of *The Biblical Archaeologist* for sale at 50¢ per copy.

With the next printing of the Society's "blue list" ("Publications for Sale"), soon to go to press, these issues will be listed in full; at the same time they will be removed from the "green list" ("Free Past Publications"). (Copies of the "blue list" and the "green list" are mailed to members annually as their membership fees are processed.)

(The price of 50¢ per copy of *The Biblical Archaeologist* is for SEHA members only. Other persons should write directly to the ASOR office—see below, 120.3—where past issues are available at \$1 per copy.)

120.3 MAY SUBSCRIBE DIRECTLY. SEHA members are urged to subscribe to *The Biblical Archaeologist* individually. The cost is \$3 per year. Payment should be sent directly to: American Schools of Oriental Research, 126 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Four issues per year are published, and subscriptions run for the calendar year.

120.4 THE USE OF MNEMONIC DEVICES IN ORAL TRADITIONS, AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM AND THE HOR SENSEN PAPYRUS. By John A. Tvedtnes. A paper read at the Nineteenth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures, held at Brigham Young University on October 18, 1969.

Previous articles in the *Newsletter and Proceedings* by Richley Crapo and myself (Newsletter, 109.0, 114.1) on the Hor Sensen Papyrus have demonstrated the possible use of the Sensen Text as a mnemonic device for an Abrahamic oral tradition, which was subsequently committed to writing in the English language by the prophet Joseph Smith. In the interest of scholarship, it is incumbent upon us to provide further evidence for the use of such a system, demonstrating not only its feasibility but also its actual existence in the time of the patriarch Abraham.

FEASIBILITY OF MEMORY AIDS

Memory aid devices are many and varied, ranging from the proverbial string-around-the-finger to a true mnemonic aid, similar to that demonstrated in our previous articles. One of the more common modern memory devices is the Catholic rosary, each bead of which, according to its size and position, recalls a certain prayer. The Muslims have similar "prayer beads."

I. J. Gelb (*A Study of Writing*) gives numerous examples of objects used as memory aids:

"Objects are used as memory aids for recording proverbs and songs among the Ewe Negroes in a form quite similar to that which they achieved by means of written symbols (see pp. 48ff.). Carl Meinhof relates that a missionary found in a native hut a cord on which were strung many objects, such as a feather, a stone, etc. In answer to his query as to the meaning of the string with the objects the missionary was told that each piece was supposed to stand for a certain proverb. Another custom is related by Mary H. Kingsley from West Africa about native singers who carry around in a net all kinds of objects, such as pipes, feathers, skins, birdheads, bones, etc., each of which serves the purpose of recalling a certain song. The songs are recited with pantomimes. Persons in the audience choose a certain object and before the recital they bargain about the price to be paid to the singer. In a way, the net of the singer can be considered the repertoire of his songs."¹

Gelb gives further examples of objects being used to actually convey messages in Dahomey, in East Turkestan, and amongst the ancient Scythians.² David Diringer (*Writing*) gives the example of the message "prepare to fight at once," contained in a piece of chicken liver, three pieces of chicken fat, and a chili, all wrapped in red paper. This type of message is used by the Lu-tze, who live on the Tibeto-Chinese border. Diringer further

mentions the use of objects by Bangala messengers in the Upper Congo region to emphasize the importance of the verbal message.³

Both Diringer and Gelb speak of North American Indian *wampum* belts as memory aids. The former gives the example of one such *wampum*, used to commemorate a specific historical event, i.e., the treaty of peace between William Penn and the Iroquois.⁴ Both likewise speak of the use of knotted strings — as in modern South America and the Riukiu Islands near Japan, both being cases of statistical use — and of notched sticks.¹ Diringer's examples are of particular interest:

"The knot-device forms the basis for the Peruvian *quipus* (or *quipos*) which were found in such general use by the Spanish *Conquistadores*. They consisted of a number of threads or cords of different lengths, thicknesses and colours, generally of twisted wool, suspended from a top-band or cross-bar. Though ordinarily employed for keeping numerical records of various kinds, they could also be used to CONVEY NEWS OF RECENT EVENTS OR OFFICIAL EDICTS. (The Peruvian Incas, as far as we know, used no writing.) Similar to these devices are the *aroko* epistles of the modern Jebu and other Nigerian tribes, which consist of cowrie shells strung together in different combinations and directions: while related mnemonic methods, including knotted cords, were used until modern times by the Li of Hainan and the Sonthals of Bengal, by some indigenous inhabitants of Polynesia, southern Peru, central and western Africa, and California, and by inhabitants of the Riukiu, Solomon, Caroline, Pelew and Marquesan Islands. Another method which has been widely used at various times as an aid in conveying messages is the notched stick. Like the *quipus* and almost all other devices of this kind, these sticks are today unintelligible except where still in use by contemporary 'primitive' tribes. All such methods of communication are in effect CODES, the keys to the decipherment of which are carried IN THE HEADS OF THOSE WHO USE THEM. The 'key' to the ancient Peruvian *quipus* was clearly very elaborate and systematic, since these were used not only as simple numerical records but for the transmission of MORE COMPLEX FORMS OF INFORMATION. Notched sticks, on the other hand, are often incised in the presence of a messenger TO WHOM THE SIGNIFICANCE OF EACH NOTCH IS VERBALLY EMPHASIZED; so that sticks of this kind may be of the very simplest kind of mnemonic device, and in no way real records. Notched sticks of various sorts have been employed not

only by some 'primitive' peoples of Australia, North America, Western Africa, China, Mongolia, and South-east Asia, but also in ancient Scandinavia, England (the so-called 'tally-sticks'), Italy and Russia. The Khas of Indo-China still keep their accounts and transmit messages by means of small pieces of bamboo, marked with notches at closer or longer intervals."⁵ (Capital letters mine.)

Victor W. Von Hagen (*Realm of the Incas*) gives details regarding the Inca memory device. Some of his comments are as follows:

"The *quipu* . . . is simply a mnemonic device to aid the memory and its knotted strings are based on a decimal count. Too, all *quipus* had to be *accompanied by a verbal comment*, without which the meaning would have been unintelligible . . . an official knot-string-interpretor [was] known as a *quipu-camayoc*, whose duty it was to tie in the records. He then had to remember which *quipu* recorded what . . . Like all preliterate peoples, they had good memories. While the *quipu* itself could not be read without verbal comment to make all the entanglements and knots understandable, it did (this much is certain), go beyond mere compilation of statistics; it was used as a supplement for the memory of historical events."⁶

HISTORICITY OF MEMORY AIDS

The widespread use of mnemonic devices in oral recitation throughout the world is sufficient evidence for the *feasibility* of such a device in connection with the Book of Abraham. The historicity of mnemonic devices in the Middle East (and particularly in Egypt and Palestine) remains to be hereafter demonstrated.

The scribes of ancient Egypt were quite fond of word-games; this was a natural development for the land which Jean Capart chose to dub the "pays du symbolisme."⁷ J. J. Clère has shown that the Egyptians composed not only crosswords, but acrostics as well.⁸ Etienne Drioton, the renowned Belgian Egyptologist and Catholic priest, in his "La Cryptographie Egyptienne," gives several examples of Egyptian cryptograms (symbols — ornamental and otherwise — which convey dual meanings). These may consist of one or more symbols composing but a single word, or of entire sentences which have dual meanings. The latter most often display their dual meanings through homophones,⁹ to which we have had recourse in our Hor Sensen Papyrus investigations.

Eduard Nielsen (*Oral Tradition*) writes:

"The fact that religious and epic texts of major importance in the high cultures of the Ancient Near East were ordinarily put into written form has already been stressed in the case of Egyptian literature. The evidence points in a similar direction in the case of Mesopotamian

literature. But from a few Mesopotamian texts we gain the impression that *written* transmission was not so absolutely exclusive as to leave no room for oral tradition. The importance of learning the sacred texts by heart was stressed, and that may have had practical consequences."¹⁰

"As to the value of oral tradition we are in a favoured position in that texts have been preserved from antiquity, both from the Semitic and the non-Semitic worlds, which, directly or indirectly, bear witness to the importance attributed to oral tradition. These testimonies are in marked contrast to modern, rather sceptical, conceptions of oral tradition, especially with regard to its reliability . . . But this scepticism, legitimate *per se*, must not be applied as a matter of course to fields with a *milieu* of genuine, living, oral tradition, whether these fields are to be found in the ancient world or in our own time, whether the culture is Semitic or Aryan.

"The modern contempt for learning by heart — learning things by heart is a necessary basis for oral tradition — is not exactly characteristic of the ancient Semites. The ancient Mesopotamian culture seems to have been enthusiastic about writing; but we have some texts that stress the importance attached to learning by heart."¹¹

Speaking of George Widengren's *Literary and Psychological Aspects of the Hebrew Prophets*, Nielsen says, "This is characterized by a distinct reserve on the question of oral tradition, and is notable for an interesting and thorough examination of the pre-Islamic and early-Islamic material. The author tries to establish the probability that oral and written tradition have gone hand-in-hand with one another, and that the written tradition was the prevailing one in its special *milieu*, that is, in the cities. For instance, Birkeland refers to the history of the origin of the Quran in support of his own views concerning the role oral tradition played for the Old Testament prophetic books. To this Widengren replies that in all probability Mohammed not only contributed directly or indirectly, to putting the Quran into writing, but even made some interpolations in the text on different occasions himself."¹²

SEMITIC ORAL TRADITION

There are two points that should be emphasized in the preceding: (1) that writing was typical of ancient Mesopotamian *urban* life, while oral tradition would have been more typical of the nomadic life which Abraham led, and (2) that the Quran is an excellent example of Semitic oral tradition. We shall, of course, consider the former in greater detail later; for the moment, let us consider the latter.

Régis Blachère (*Introduction au Coran*) examines the two theories regarding the recension of the Quran—that (1) the various revelations of Muhammad were passed on orally until after his death, when they were committed to writing, and (2) that some of the revelations (and perhaps all, though only certain ones are mentioned in the traditions) were written down during the lifetime of the prophet, possibly under his direction. He concludes that, most likely, some of the revelations were written during Muhammad's lifetime, and that others were not written down until later, but that, in any case, there were certain of the Companions who transmitted them orally even when they were written.¹³

Edouard Montet (*Le Coran*) is equally emphatic on the point of oral tradition for the Quran. Not only did Muhammad derive many parts of the Quran from Jewish and Christian oral tradition,¹⁴ but, "à sa mort, il existait donc un ensemble de textes écrits, formant une masse désordonnée, et un trésor de paroles mémorisées, qui n'offraient pas d'ordre meilleure."¹⁵ The definitive version of the Quran, moreover, was not collated until AD 650-655.¹⁶

That memorization and oral recitation were an integral part of Middle Eastern literary life is certain. That they played an important role amongst the Hebrews in particular is the thesis of Brevard S. Childs (*Memory and Tradition in Israel*), who attempts to analyze what he terms "the Hebrew psychology of memory."¹⁷ His analysis of the root *zkr* shows "two different meanings . . . a. to remember, in the qal, b. to utter, in the hiphil . . . It is important that these distinctions be observed in any attempt to understand the meaning of memory in the Old Testament."¹⁸ He continues his exposition of the verb by showing that the "utterance" of memory can be either symbols (by certain acts) or oral, especially in liturgy.

So great seems to be the stress on memorization of texts for oral repetition, that writing was actually subordinated in the ancient Middle East. "Partly inspired by Nyberg, H. Birkeland discusses the 'oral tradition' behind the Old Testament prophetic books. Birkeland like Nyberg stresses that Old Testament literature is a product of ancient oriental culture. Here writing is always secondary, used for the one purpose of preserving the oral message from destruction, whereas oral tradition is primary, creative, sustaining and shaping, a fact well-known especially from Arabian and Persian culture . . . In 1943 Mowinckel published a study, 'Oppkomsten av Profetlitteraturen', in which he strongly stresses the fact that the prophets were men of the spoken word and that their books were compositions based on oral tradition. We owe it to oral tradition, for instance, that the prophecies of Amos and Hosea were preserved until the exilic age, which was also the age when

the prophecies were committed to writing."¹⁹ Nielsen quotes Nyberg in limiting the use of writing to "contracts, covenants, monuments . . . official registers and lists, and, above all, for letters."²⁰

USED SIMULTANEOUSLY

Nielsen indicates "two types of interplay between written and oral tradition: a writing down of the tradition while it is still flourishing, so that the two methods of transmission run side by side, possibly so that the written one represents an aid or support of the oral one; or—a possibility which must remain theoretical for the present—one long chain of tradition stretching through many generations with one or more links that have been broken off for shorter or longer periods."²¹ He further speaks of "the formation of a written canon and a 'supplementary' oral tradition in one and the same period."²² He emphasizes the fact that the oral tradition of which he and others (such as Gunkel, Wellhausen, Budde, and Lods) speak is *not* from a pre-literary stage.²³

The list of scholars who have accepted the "oral tradition" thesis for the Old Testament is impressive indeed. In addition to those already mentioned, it includes Ivan Engnell²⁴ and H. S. Nyberg,²⁵ as well as Alt, Noth, and Louis Ginzberg. Ginzberg writes as follows:

"We know for certain that as late as the end of the Geonic period, about the beginning of the eleventh century, the *oral* law, comprising primarily Mishnah and Talmud, was still taught *orally*."²⁶

Some rather important theories regarding the Old Testament have come out of the oral tradition thesis. Nielsen outlines one of them as follows:

"Between Joshua and Samuel we have the 'minor' Judges, men who were neither priests nor heroes, but who are remembered because they 'judged Israel'. We must regard these men as being full of understanding and well versed in the true tradition, and it was their privilege to convene and to lead general assemblies of the people. Almost thirty years later this hypothesis has been endorsed by Alt, and it is shared by Noth, who in this connection denies that the monarchy had any influence on the framing of Israelite law, as we find it in the Old Testament—a view which a closer analysis, however, will prove to be illusory."²⁷

Yves M.-J. Congar (*Tradition and Traditions*) begins his Chapter I, "The Existence of Tradition in the Old and New Testaments" by outlining the 3 forms and usages of oral traditions as (1) an original oral tradition, complete in and of itself, (2) an oral tradition used to add "precision" to the written text, and (3) an oral tradition for the "interpretation" of the written text.²⁸

From George Horowitz' *The Spirit of Jewish Law*, we extract the following:

"The Jews have an ancient, authoritative tradition to the effect that Moses was given a two-fold Torah at Sinai, 'the Torah in Writing' (*Torah she-be-ketav*) contained in the Pentateuch, and a 'Torah orally transmitted' (*Torah she-be'al peh*). The latter was also called in ancient days Cabala, 'Tradition.'

"The main substance of the Tradition was later reduced to writing in various works, such as *Mishnah*, *Midrash*, *Tosefta*, *Talmud* which will be described in due course . . .

"Both the Book and the Tradition were carefully preserved and transmitted from generation to generation, from Moses to Joshua, the Seventy Elders of Israel and the Prophets, down to Ezra, the Scribe . . .

" . . . The title 'scribe' is a translation of *sofer*, 'bookman,' from the same root as *sefer*, 'book,' and meant not merely a 'scrivener' but one conversant with 'the Book,' i.e. the *Torah* of Moses."²⁹

On the latter point, we can agree but partially with Horowitz. Both *šēpher* and *šōphēr* are derived from *šippēr*, "to count, to tell, to recount." The verb probably dates from preliterate times, and has to do with the recitation of oral, rather than written, accounts. The word *šēpher* no doubt originally referred to an oral recitation or account, rather than to a "book," though it has come to have the latter meaning. The verb "to write" is *kātab*, and one would ordinarily expect the word "book" to come from it. On this point, Nielson writes:

"Statistics of the occurrence of words such as 'kāthabh', 'sēpher', etc., demonstrate as clearly as could be wished the use of writing for really literary purposes belongs essentially to the exilic and post-exilic times. But at the same time such statistics show that writing was used to a considerable extent for more practical purposes, and if the Old Testament had not been a collection of texts chosen from a religious standpoint, but more especially composed of political, judicial, profane, poetical, mercantile, and grammatical elements, the statistics would certainly show a still more widespread use of writing in pre-exilic Israel than is now the case."³⁰

Geza Vermes (*Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*), treating "the evolution of the midrash . . . within the 'biblical milieu,'" refers to "the choice of *Kere* (text to be read) to replace *Ketib* (written text)."³¹ Here we encounter another alternation with the root *ktb* (to write), in the form of *qr'*, which, while meaning "to read", also means "to shout, call, *proclaim*." In its hiph'il form, it means "to recite," and, in preliterate days, this was no doubt the true meaning of the root form itself. The Arabic equivalent *qr'* has the following meanings: "to recite, read," though "to read" was, in preliterate times, certainly not one of its meanings. From this root, we de-

rive the word for Qur'ān, that which is recited, the holy book of Islam. (Hence, we have additional evidence for the memorization and oral recitation of the Quran in ancient days.)

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

In addition to the etymology of the verbs used for writing, recitation, etc., there is much textual evidence for oral tradition in the Old Testament. Nielsen outlines some of these evidences in his Chapter III ("The Role of Oral Tradition in the Old Testament"). He maintains, for example, that the Deuteronomic texts of the Old Testament (which include more than just Deuteronomy) are based on oral tradition, stating that "Deut. 1:5 itself indicates the entire following work as Moses' own oral, expository recitation of the law."³² Regarding other, parallel traditions of the Old Testament, he says, "It must be admitted that Genesis and Exodus-Numbers contain texts that are parallel and that have fallen into the hands of the editors of the Tetrateuch through individual paths of transmission. And it is just as indisputable that this same Tetrateuch contains texts where an older basis is sometimes apparent behind the present form. The merit of having established this belongs to literary criticism, but it is no more than one might expect at the outset of such a work as the Tetrateuch, that at one and the same time is a compilation and a revision of entirely different traditions. So far then it is possible to follow literary criticism: the material in the first four books of the Bible is heterogeneous, and the work as a whole presupposes a revision of the material in accordance with certain points of view."³³

"It is characteristic of all these traditions that the law is promulgated publicly and orally, and that it is afterwards written down, and that this document is deposited in a sanctuary of YHWH [Jehovah]. So the tradition of a law-book found in a temple of YHWH, II Kings 22 f, does not come upon the reader of the Deuteronomistic history without the necessary preparation.

"More interesting to us in this connection is the fact that the law-tradition is of a double nature. When once the law has been ratified in an assembly of the people on the basis of an oral promulgation, it is written down and deposited in the holy place. But this does not mean that the oral recitation of the law ceases. In Duet. 31:9-11 the responsible leaders of the people are commanded to see to it that the law is promulgated in the assembly of all Israel when the people are gathered together every seventh year at the feast of tabernacles before the face of YHWH in the place where He lets His name dwell."³⁴

In further support of oral tradition, Nielsen cites the biblical expression "to write upon the tablets of

one's heart." "This phrase must be compared with the Arabic expression about the Quran, that it 'lives in the hearts of the believers', i.e. they know it by heart . . . Finally we may briefly mention that the book of Proverbs ends with a poem, the stanzas of which are arranged alphabetically, i.e. according to the initial letters of the stanza. This is interesting evidence of the fact that the circles that were familiar with the art of writing did not reject the oral method of transmission. For it is difficult to imagine any other reason for an alphabetical composition and arrangement of the stanzas in this manner than the wish to procure a mnemonic aid."³⁵

Another of Nielsen's arguments is as follows:

"We read in II Sam. 1:17 f: 'And David made the following lamentation over the bodies of Saul and his son Jonathan, and he commanded them to teach the children of Judah a bow (?). 'Kesheth' (bow) seems very peculiar here; it is omitted in LXX and this has given rise to doubts as to the integrity of the text. The Massoretic text, which is *lectio difficilior* and is further supported by the Peshitta, must be retained; it might be possible to understand 'Kesheth' as the name of the poem in which the picture of Jonathan's bow occupies such a prominent place. The words 'lelammēdh benē-Yehūdāh' do not in any case belong to the usual late headings with which the Old Testament Psalms are so well supplied. It is only to be found in one case, Ps. 60; more recent study of the Psalms has attempted to move this Psalm back some 800 years, from the time of the Maccabees to the time of David. 'Lammēdh' means 'to impress upon others by oral teaching'; the word is especially characteristic of the framework of Deuteronomy."³⁶

Moreover, "The Chronicler cites portions of Psalms 105 and 106 as belonging to the temple liturgy (I Chron. 16:15)," thus showing that the oral temple liturgy was at times committed to writing, in part, at least.³⁷

Perhaps the best example of oral tradition in the Old Testament is found in the book of Jeremiah:³⁸

"And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, *from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah, even unto this day . . .* Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote *from the mouth of Jeremiah* all the words of the Lord, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book." (Jeremiah 36:1, 2, 4; italics mine.)

Thus was Jeremiah commanded to commit to writing a total of eight years' worth of prophesying.³⁹ He did so by dictating his *oral prophecies* to the scribe

Baruch, perhaps because he could not himself write. The book was subsequently presented to the king, who had it burned, whereupon "Jeremiah (took) another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe the son of Neriah: who wrote therein *from the mouth of Jeremiah* ALL THE WORDS of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burnt in the fire: *and there were added besides unto them many like words*" (Jeremiah 36:32)

From this, it is clear that the text was fixed, though oral, and that, while giving a no-doubt perfect or near-perfect rendition of the original, Jeremiah thought to add something else of importance.

MNEMONIC DEVICES

With this background of oral tradition in ancient Israel, we shall now consider the use of mnemonic devices in connection therewith. Jan Vansina (*Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*) speaks of mnemonic devices in oral tradition⁴⁰, though not in connection with the Hebrews. Nielsen, however, does connect them with the Hebrews and lists among his items for the "techniques of oral composition and tradition" such things as "the forming of collections, the catchword principle, [and] mnemotechnics."⁴¹

In the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1907 ed.), we read the following:

"MNEMONICS (Hebrew, 'simanim' = 'signs'): Certain sentences, words, or letters used to assist the memory. Such aids are employed in the Mishnah, in both Talmuds, and in the Masorah, as well as by the Geonim and by the teachers of the Law during the Middle Ages. In this article only the Talmudic mnemonics will be discussed, together with those employed by the later teachers of the Law . . . The mnemonics employed in the Talmud may be divided into the following two groups: (1) Mnemonics which are formed from a Scriptural passage, a mishnah, a halakic sentence, or a proverb or maxim taken from life or from nature . . . it is usually stated who invented and used them. Many originated with the Babylonian amora R. Naham b. Isaac, who employed them with special frequency . . . (2) A wholly different kind of sign, found in the mnemonic sentences which are composed of single words each of which is a catchword for a halakic sentence, a teaching, or an opinion; or of the names of the authors and together with words made up of single letters either of the authors' names or of the catchwords characteristic of the sentences, or again of both . . . These mnemonics, which are nearly all anonymous, designate the order of succession of the sentences which are to follow, or even how many times and in what passages the name of the same transmitter occurs in the treatise under discussion. A few examples may be given. In Hul. 4a the sayings of R. Manasseh which occur

in the treatise are comprised in A SINGLE SENTENCE WHICH ITSELF CONTAINS A REGULATION CONCERNING CIRCUMSICION . . . These mnemonics were used by students AS EARLY AS THE PERIOD IN WHICH THE HALAKAH (tradition - JT) WAS STILL HANDED DOWN ORALLY. The prohibition against committing halakot to writing DID NOT APPLY TO THESE SIMANIM; and they thus furnished aids to the memory.”⁴²

Much of the material quoted in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* is repeated in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (under “Mnemonics”), from which we extract the following:

“The Jews of Bible times, in common with many of the peoples of antiquity, transmitted much of their law and literature not only through writing but also through the memory of generation after generation. It was frequently after the lapse of many years, and only when there was danger of their being forgotten, that tales centuries old were written down. At first it was not the whole story or speech that was written down, but enough to refresh the memory . . . In the latest books of the Bible, however, the stories and narratives are recorded in great detail, indicating that literary composition had replaced oral transmission . . . The chief need for aids to the memory . . . arose in the Amoraic period, when the mass of oral tradition became a veritable ‘sea of the Talmud.’ For this purpose various indicators were employed known as *simmanim*, or ‘signs’ (singular, *simman*). The Babylonian teachers laid especial emphasis on such aids to the memory and held that the knowledge of the Torah had been better preserved in Judea than in Galilee because the students of the former country paid attention to such signs and those of the latter did not. Such aids to memory occur often in the Babylonian Talmud. They usually consist of short sentences or abbreviations. The sentences may be verses from the Bible, proverbs, or, less frequently, well-known names; the abbreviations are made by combining the initial letters of various words that go to make up the essence of the passage to be remembered.”⁴³

One of the better examples given is the following:

“Sometimes a number of words, each of which formed the beginning of a series of passages, were combined into a mnemonic sentence. Thus the following are the opening words of the passages read from the Torah in the morning service for the eight days of Passover: *mishchu* (Ex. 12:21-51); *shor* (Lev. 22:26 to 23:44); *kaddesh* (Ex. 13:1-16); *’im kesef* (Ex. 22:24 to 23:19); *pesal* (Ex. 34:1-26); *bemidbar* (Num. 9:1-14); *beshallah* (Ex. 13:17 to 15:26); *kol habechor* (Deut. 15:19 to 16:17). These leading words were made into a sentence, ‘Lead the ox, betroth with money, carve in the wilderness, send away the firstborn’ (*Meg.* 31a). Or words

might be made from initials as an aid to memory.”⁴⁴

Another evidence is that found in connection with a theory regarding the use of icons in the transmission of Hebraic traditions, put forth by Robert Graves in 1958 in his *Adam’s Rib*. Graves believes that icons were in common use in the area of Palestine during the period preceding the Babylonian Captivity. These icons were arranged to be interpreted in boustrophedon (zig-zag) fashion, but, upon the return of the Jews from Babylon to reconstruct the walls of Jerusalem, they were interpreted in an orderly right-to-left fashion, according to the direction of Hebrew writing (which, as we have seen, became important only *after* the captivity). This, Graves believes, would explain some of the inconsistencies of the Biblical text (which, in its present form, dates from post-Captivity times, when the Scribes were operating) when compared with Mesopotamian stories of the creation and subsequent events up to the time of the Deluge. To illustrate this, Graves prevailed upon the engraver James Metcalf to prepare reconstructed icons, which were then juxtaposed, first in the order that the Jews returning from Babylonia would have used them with the Genesis account, and then, in what Graves considers to be the original order, with one of the Mesopotamian versions of the creation.⁴⁵ We could, of course, reverse Graves’ view by showing that it was possible for the *Mesopotamians* to have misinterpreted the icons, reading in boustrophedon fashion when they should have been read from right to left. In any event, Graves’ hypothesis would indicate that icons, in the pre-exilic period, could have been used as a mnemonic device, accompanying oral traditions, and that some of these traditions have come down to us in the Bible.

VALID FOR BOOK OF ABRAHAM?

Is the oral tradition hypothesis then valid for the Book of Abraham? The evidence from our previous Newsletter articles would indicate that it is. There remain, however, a few points to be clarified, some of which have been brought up by critics of the thesis.

It should, first of all, be made clear that Abraham (or whoever actually composed the text of the Book of Abraham—presumably in the Hebrew language) made use of an *already extant Egyptian text*, in all probability. The Sensen text seems to bear this out, for, as some critics have pointed out, many of the elements on the papyri definitely *predate* Abraham. But, in using the Sensen text, the originator of the Abraham story would NOT have developed a mnemonic *system* which would render any Egyptian text (or even this one, for that matter) intelligible to a person acquainted with the system. Instead, the person using the Egyptian text as a mnemonic device would have been required to know the

Hebrew(?) text of the Book of Abraham by heart (or, at least well enough so that the key-words would bring it to mind and fill any gaps in the memory). As for the use of homophones, interested parties should consult Vansina,⁴⁶ who gives examples thereof.

One objection to the hypothesis concerns the strength of the individual parallels between the meaning of the Egyptian word and the meaning as reflected in Joseph Smith's juxtaposed text. The word "the", for example, is not a strong correspondence, for it would be expected in almost any given text of approximately 25 words (the ratio of English to Egyptian words in the case of the Book of Abraham). But, if a Hebrew were using a text that included the Egyptian word for "the," he would, in composing his oral tradition, be OBLIGED to use that word in his story. As for the meaning of the words in the Sensen text themselves (i.e., in content) and the sometimes variant meanings in the English text, one need merely reply that, in composing an oral tradition around an ALREADY EXTANT TEXT, it is perfectly valid to assign to ANY GIVEN WORD ANY OF ITS VALID MEANINGS!

Moreover, the key-word in the Egyptian text NEED NOT REPRESENT THE KEY THOUGHT IN THE ORAL TEXT—and, indeed, probably WILL NOT so represent it, if the written text used as a mnemonic device PREDATES the oral text. Such an example (indeed, many such examples) can be given from the Quran, which was, as pointed out earlier, transmitted orally in the beginning. The "Companions" of Muhammad memorized whole Surahs (chapters) and later committed them to writing; some continued (and still do) to memorize them, even after they were written. In order to preserve the oral rendition of the Surahs, and to keep them separate, each was given a name. Surah 2, for example, is called "The Cow," though it has VERY LITTLE TO DO with a cow. Yet, the very mention of the words "The Cow" brought (and still do, to those who still memorize the Quran) to the minds of those acquainted with the text a full 286 memorized verses! The "cow" in question is mentioned only in verses 67 through 71, and is definitely NOT the key thought of the Surah.

WHY AND HOW ORALLY TRANSMITTED

There remain two questions of major importance to be answered: (1) WHY was the text orally-transmitted? (2) HOW did Joseph Smith come by the text if, indeed, it was not written on any document that he possessed.

(1) The answer to the first question is, simply, that portions of Abraham's record dealt with the Temple ceremony (see Joseph Smith's explanations of Figs. 7 through 20 of Facsimile 2), and could therefore not be

committed to writing. Additionally, we cannot be certain that the composer of the text knew how to write. The records of the "fathers" to which Abraham refers may also have been orally-transmitted.

In further response to this question, we refer to Nielsen:

"Although the Hindus have made use of writing since the fifth or fourth century BC, they have retained oral tradition. Why? Cult and religion are always rather immune to technical improvements, are always wedded to tradition. The Vedas were a divine message, handed down orally from one generation to the other, without the aid of writing; therefore the oral tradition is continued into the age of writing.

"We now propound the question, In what fields was oral tradition active in antiquity? And to what extent, in what *milieu*, for what purpose was *writing* used?"⁴⁷

In answer to the latter question, Nielsen indicates that written records were concerned principally with official and legal documentation, while "the actual tradition of history, the epic tales, the cult-legends, doubtless generally the laws too, must in the main have been handed down orally."⁴⁷

For further elaboration, we turn to Jan Vansina:

"The transmission of oral traditions may follow certain definite rules, but it may also be a completely spontaneous affair, left entirely to chance. Where special methods and techniques exist, their purpose is to preserve the tradition as faithfully as possible and transmit it from one generation to the next. This may be done either by training people to whom the tradition is then entrusted, or by exercising some form of control over each recital of the tradition. Whatever the method may be, accurate transmission is more likely if a tradition is not public property, but forms the esoteric knowledge of a special group. The employment of mnemonic devices may also contribute towards ensuring accurate repetition of traditions."⁴⁸

"Some traditions may be a matter of esoteric knowledge, just as others may be known and recited by all ranks of the population. In the first case, they are only transmitted by certain persons attached to a particular institution, or are the property of a special group. No one else is allowed to transmit them, even if he should happen to be well informed about the tradition."⁴⁹

I propose that the Book of Abraham was just such an esoteric oral tradition, passed down by word of mouth by the righteous descendants of Abraham until it was eventually lost.

(2) This being the case, we now come to the question of how Joseph Smith came into possession of the Abrahamic story. Here, I propose that he received it

by direct revelation or inspiration, possibly even from a heavenly messenger, who, during his lifetime, was one of the transmitters of the tradition.

Most of Joseph Smith's revelations came as answers to questions that he asked of the Lord. The Book of Abraham was, no doubt, the answer to his questions regarding the papyri that came into his possession. The relationship of the Abrahamic oral tradition to the Sensen text would have been revealed to him as well. But the Prophet apparently went much farther in his quest for knowledge, and began speculating (based on what the Lord had already revealed to him, but without further divine guidance) regarding the Egyptian language. The result is the volume known to us as the *Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar*, the significance of which will, hopefully, be the topic of a future discussion. (It should here be pointed out that Joseph Smith's handwritten Book of Abraham text, which he juxtaposed to the hieratic words from the Sensen Text, is NOT in the volume in question, though a local Salt Lake publisher included it in his reproduction thereof, taken from a microfilm which included several separate documents relating to the Book of Abraham.)

(Important references to the *Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar* appear in the *Newsletter and Proceedings*, 71.0, 105.0, 109.0, and 114.1. See also *Progress in Archaeology*, pp. 25-33. Ed.)

It should be noted that oral tradition has been associated with scriptures *other than* those of Old Testament times. There is some evidence for oral tradition as the source for parts of the New Testament.⁵⁰ Moreover, Section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants seems to have been orally-transmitted, for Joseph Smith began living the law of celestial marriage as early as 1831, though the revelation was not committed to writing until 1843 (and was not revealed to the Church until 1852!).

In conclusion, there remains one further study in order to fully demonstrate the validity of the oral tradition thesis for the Book of Abraham: to textually compare the various Abrahamic traditions in order to determine if there is a common source. The comparative method is commonly used by scholars in the fields of history, anthropology, and linguistics, and a preliminary survey of the various Abrahamic texts shows promising results. This, then, is our next project.

NOTES

1. I. J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing*, p. 4. (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963.)
2. See *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.
3. David Diringer, *Writing*, p. 34. (Vol. 25 in the series "Ancient Peoples and Places," Gen. Ed. Dr. Glyn Daniel. London: Thames & Hudson, 1962.)

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-34. (See also Gelb, *op. cit.*, p. 4.)
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 31-33. See his "Memory Aid Devices," pp. 30-34.
6. Victor W. Von Hagen, *Realm of the Incas*, p. 185. (N.Y.C.: New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1961. Copyright 1961 by Victor W. Von Hagen.) See his Chap. 32, "The Knot-String Record—Inca Literature." (See also the account by Garcilaso de la Vega in Alain Gheerbrant (ed.), *The Incas*, pp. 80-81, 145, 198-199. N.Y.C.: Avon Books.)
7. Jean Capart, "Au pays du symbolisme," in *Chronique d'Egypte*, No. 63 (janvier 1957), pp. 219-241. (Brussels: Fondation Egyptologique Reine Elisabeth.)
8. J. J. Clère, "Acrostiches et Mots Croisés des Anciens Egyptiens," in *Chronique d'Egypte*, No. 25 (janvier 1938), pp. 35-58.
9. Etienne Drioton, "La Cryptographie Egyptienne," in *Chronique d'Egypte*, No. 17 (janvier 1934), pp. 192-206.
10. Eduard Nielsen, *Oral Tradition*, p. 28 (his Chap. II, "Oral Tradition in the Near East."). No. 11 in the series "Studies in Biblical Theology." (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1954.)
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19. On pp. 19-20, he cites texts praising the scribes who commit their works to memory.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
13. Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran*, pp. 12-28. (Paris: Editions Besson & Chantemerle, 1959.)
14. Edouard Montet, *Le Coran*, Vol. I, pp. 9-10. (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1958.)
15. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 13-15.
17. Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, p. 17. (Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 37. London: W. & J. MacKay & Co. Ltd., 1962.)
18. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
19. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14; see also p. 39.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
25. Yves M.-J. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 1. (N.Y.C.: The MacMillan Co., 1966.)
26. Louis Ginzberg, *On Jewish Law and Lore*, p. 11. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955.)
27. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
28. Congar, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-4.
29. George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law*, pp. 9-10 (see through p. 17). (N.Y.C.: Central Book Co., 1963.)

30. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 40.
31. Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, p. 8. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961.)
32. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
37. Childs, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
38. See Nielsen's discussion in *op. cit.*, pp. 64-67.
39. See John A. Tvedtnes, *The Church of the Old Testament*, p. 143. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1967.)
40. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, pp. 36-41. (Trans. by H. M. Wright, and copyright 1965 by Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London.)
41. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
42. Isidore Singer, (Projector & Managing Ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. VII, pp. 631-632. (N.Y.C.: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1907.)
43. Isaac Landman, (ed.), *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, Vol. 7, pp. 601-602. (N.Y.C.: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia Co. Inc., n.d.)
44. *Ibid.*, p. 602.
45. Robert Graves, *Adam's Rib and Other Anomalous Elements in the Hebrew Creation Myth*. (Great Britain: Thomas Yoseloff, Inc. 1st Amer. ed. 1958. Copyright 1955 by Robert Graves & James Metcalf.)
46. Vansina, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
47. Nielsen, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
48. Vansina, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
50. Congar, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 7.

120.5 MAPS AVAILABLE. By Susan P. Stiles. Major Joseph E. Vincent, ret., of Garden Grove, California, and an SEHA general officer, has received numerous requests for a Book of Mormon-lands map of which he is the author, but has asked us to give notification that he has no copies of the map left.

Major Vincent points out, however, that the map was printed on p. 69 of *Papers of the Fourteenth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures* (BYU Extension Publications: Provo, 1963). It is there included with his article, "Some Views on Book of Mormon Geography," pp. 61-69. This 94-page publication is still available from BYU Publication Sales. Price \$1, plus \$.25 for postage and handling.

120.6 PUBLICATIONS ON SCRIPTURAL CONFERENCES. By Susan P. Stiles. Information has been received concerning the publication of papers read at two recent scriptural conferences held in Salt Lake City and Provo.

Papers delivered at the "Book of Abraham Symposium," held April 3 at the LDS Institute of Religion, University of Utah, Salt Lake City (Newsletter, 119.4), should be available by the end of this year, according to John A. Tvedtnes, symposium chairman. The *Newsletter and Proceedings* will mention the details when they become available.

Papers delivered at the "Book of Mormon Symposium," held on April 25 at BYU (Newsletter, 119.5), will be available by the end of this summer, according to Dr. H. Donl Peterson, chairman. The *Newsletter and Proceedings* will mention the details when available.

Please note that neither of these conferences was sponsored by the SEHA, nor is it anticipated that their published papers will be available through the Society office.