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# THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST AND THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL\*

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## I

**B**EFORE we can advantageously compare the religion of Israel with the religions of the ancient Near East, we must appraise the state of our knowledge in both fields. Moreover, we must ask ourselves whether our interpretation of the data is affected by extrinsic considerations, such as preconceived theories of the evolution of religion. Each field has its own pitfalls. In dealing with the ancient Near East we must carefully estimate the degree of assurance with which we can translate our documents and interpret our archaeological materials. In approaching the OT we must reckon not only with textual corruption but also with the elusive problem of dating. All our efforts to reconstruct the chronological order of events and documents, and to deduce a satisfactory scheme of historical evolution from them, are inevitably influenced more or less strongly by our philosophical conceptions, as will be pointed out briefly below.

## II

There are four main groups of religious literature from the ancient Near East which are of particular importance for the light they throw on the origin and background of Hebrew religion: Egyptian, Mesopotamian (Sumero-Accadian), Horito-Hittite, and West Semitic (Canaanite, Aramaean, South Arabian). In

\*The Presidential address delivered at the meeting of the Society on December 27th, 1939, at Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

every case it is much more important to know whether a translation is philologically reliable than whether the translator is a specialist in the history of religions. Comparative treatment is relatively futile until the texts on which it is based have been correctly explained as linguistic documents. It is quite true that a trained student of religions may divine the true meaning of a text before philological confirmation is available. In such instances comparative religion has a definite heuristic value. An excellent illustration is furnished by Julian Morgenstern's happy interpretation of a passage in the Gilgamesh Epic as somehow connected with widely diffused stories of the theft of the divine gift of immortality from man by a serpent.<sup>1</sup> However, this remained only a plausible hypothesis until the present writer corrected the reading *qulultum*, supposed to mean "curse" to *quluptum* (*quliptum*), "slough of a serpent."<sup>2</sup> The writer would not have stumbled upon this correction, now accepted by all Assyriologists, without having read Morgenstern's paper.

For convenience we may distinguish three main periods in the history of the interpretation of ancient Near-Eastern documentary sources: 1. decipherment and rough translation; 2. the development of grammatical and lexicographical study, accompanied and followed by much greater accuracy in interpretation; 3. detailed dialectic and syntactic research, accompanied by monographic studies of selected classes of documents.<sup>3</sup> In Egyptology the first phase may be said to have begun with Champollion's famous *Lettre à M. Dacier* (1822) and to have come to an end with the appearance of Erman's *Neuägyptische Grammatik* (1880). The second phase includes the principal grammatical and lexicographical work of Erman and Sethe and was brought to a close by the publication of the grammatical studies of Gunn and Gardiner (1923-27) and of the main part of the great Egyptian dictionary of the Berlin Academy (1925-31). The third phase began in the middle twenties and is still in progress; notable illustrations of its achievements are the

<sup>1</sup> *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, XXIX, 284-301.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue d'Assyriologie*, XVI, 189 f.; *Am. Jour. Sem. Lang.*, XXXVI, 278 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the general discussion of the progress and present state of Near-Eastern studies in *Jour. Am. Or. Soc.*, LVI, 121-144.

publication of detailed documentation for the words listed in Erman's *Wörterbuch* (since 1935), the publication of Sethe's translation and commentary to his edition of the Pyramid Texts (since 1935), the Egyptological publications of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (since 1930), Gardiner's publication of the Chester Beatty papyri (since 1931), the appearance of the *Bibliotheca Aegyptiaca* of Brussels (since 1932), etc.

Assyriology has passed through a similar cycle. The first phase may be said to have begun about 1845 and to have closed with the establishment of the Delitzsch school of trained philological exegesis about 1880. The second phase saw the solid foundation of Assyrian philology through the work of Delitzsch, Haupt, Zimmern, Jensen, Meissner, and Ungnad and of Sumerian through the work of Delitzsch and Thureau-Dangin. With the emergence of the Assyriological school of Landsberger in the early twenties and the appearance of Poebel's *Sumerische Grammatik* (1923) the third and current phase began. This phase is characterized by intense activity in detailed grammar and lexicography, especially among the members of the now scattered Landsberger school and at the Oriental Institute, where it centers about the great Assyrian dictionary which is being prepared by Poebel and his associates. Goetze and Speiser are developing important schools of Accadian linguistics. It is also marked by monographic activity in all important fields of Assyriology, continuing and supplementing the work of the second phase, which was synthesized by Meissner in the two volumes of his *Babylonien und Assyrien* (1920–25).

The story of the recovery of the Horito-Hittite languages is not yet finished. The decipherment of the Hittite hieroglyphs was begun in 1877 by Sayce and was successfully launched by Meriggi, Gelb, Forrer, and Hrozny between 1928 and 1933; it is still under way and no translations of these enigmatic texts can yet be relied on. The decipherment of Horite (Hurrian, Mitannian) was successfully begun by Jensen and Brünnow in 1890; it has been facilitated since the War of 1914–18 by the discovery of new documentary sources at Boğaz-köy, Nuzu, Ugarit, and Mari, and is now making very rapid progress, thanks especially to the work of Friedrich, Speiser, and Goetze; Speiser has a

grammar of the language nearly ready for publication. However, great care must be exercised in dealing with questions in the field of Horite philology; translations of unilingual texts are still very precarious. Cuneiform Hittite was deciphered by Hrozny in 1915; progress in its philological interpretation has been rapid and continuous, and good grammars and glossaries are now available. Recent advance has been due largely to the efforts of Friedrich, Ehelolf, and Sommer in Germany, and of Goetze and Sturtevant in America. The first stage of progress in this field may be said to have been surmounted as early as 1925, but we are still far from aspiring to the third stage. Translations by the best authorities in the field may, however, be followed with considerable confidence.

In this connection we may briefly refer to the tremendous advance in our knowledge of Anatolian and Aegean religion which may be confidently expected from the impending decipherment of Mycenaean and Minoan script. The 1600 tablets from Cnossus in the cursive script known as Linear B, excavated by Sir Arthur Evans forty years ago, would probably have been deciphered already if any appreciable part of them had been published. Blegen's sensational discovery of 600 more tablets in this same script in Messenian Pylus (spring of 1939)<sup>4</sup> renders decipherment merely a question of time and effort, since these documents are almost certainly in archaic Greek and many phonetic values are probably deducible from the Cypriote script. Once the phonetic values of the syllabic characters of Linear B have been obtained in this way, it will only be a matter of time and availability of material until the Cnossian tablets are also deciphered. To judge from the evidence of place-names, their language may be only dialectically different from cuneiform Hittite, Luvian, and proto-Lycian. In short, many vexed problems connected with the relation between Mycenaean and later Greek religion may soon find their solution, at least in part. Since the Cnossian tablets date from about 1400 B.C. and the Pylian ones apparently from the thirteenth century, their

<sup>4</sup> See *Am. Jour. Archaeol.*, 1939, 564 ff. I have extremely interesting information from oral sources with regard to the progress of research on these documents, information which justifies optimism.

decipherment will cast direct light on the sources of Homer, thus perhaps enabling us to decide the question of the extent to which the Iliad and Odyssey reflect the Late Bronze Age.

The fourth of the main groups of documentary material to which we referred above is the West Semitic. This term we use here in a wide sense, to include both Canaanite and Aramaic inscriptions in Northwest Semitic and South Arabic, as well as the rapidly increasing number of documents in early North Arabic. After many more-or-less abortive attempts, Phoenician was finally deciphered by Gesenius in 1837 and South Arabic yielded almost simultaneously to Gesenius and Rödiger about 1840. Since their time the number of known inscriptions has increased vastly, especially in South Arabic. In 1868 the discovery of the Mesha Stone pushed the date of the oldest "Phoenician" document back to about 850; in 1923 discoveries at Byblus carried this date back to before 1100; since then miscellaneous finds have taken it back still farther to the sixteenth century or even earlier.<sup>5</sup> Because of their close linguistic resemblance to Biblical Hebrew, practically all "Phoenician" inscriptions from the twelfth century or later can be read with general certainty; the obscurity of older ones, including the proto-Sinaitic inscriptions from the late Middle Bronze Age (partially deciphered by Gardiner in 1916),<sup>6</sup> is due solely, we may suppose, to the paucity of texts on which to work.

The sensational discovery of tablets in a previously unknown cuneiform alphabet at Ugarit (Râs esh-Shamrah) on the North-Syrian coast in 1929, followed by their decipherment through the joint efforts of Bauer and Dhorme in 1930, has opened up a new phase of Canaanite literature. Successive finds of documents by the excavator, C. F. A. Schaeffer (1929-39), have now

<sup>5</sup> For recent accounts of this material see the divergent treatments by the writer (*Bull. Am. Sch. Or. Res.*, No. 63, pp. 8 ff.) and by Obermann (*Jour. Am. Or. Soc.*, LVIII, *Supplement*; *Jour. Bib. Lit.*, LVII, 239 ff.). Flight has given a very judicious survey in the *Haverford Symposium on Archaeology and the Bible* (1938).

<sup>6</sup> The writer's proposed decipherment (*Jour. Pal. Or. Soc.*, 1935, 334 ff.) remains the only one which fits the linguistic situation in Syria and Palestine as we now know it from Ugarit and Amarna. This does not, of course, prove that it is correct, since our material is inadequate.

brought so much material, still only partly published, that we may confidently expect the major difficulties of interpretation to be solved within a few years, if Virolleaud's yeoman work in editing is not stopped by the present war. The first detailed grammar of Ugaritic is about to be published by C. H. Gordon in *Analecta Orientalia*. The use of current translations of the Ugaritic religious texts requires great caution, since the pioneer work of Virolleaud cannot be regarded as definitive and much of the interpretative work of others is either fanciful or is already antiquated by the progress of investigation. The best recent work has been done by H. L. Ginsberg, with whom the writer finds himself generally in agreement.

In their present form the Ugaritic documents carry us back only to about 1400,<sup>7</sup> but the syllabic inscriptions on stone and copper which have been excavated at Byblus and in small part published by Dunand seem to date from the late third millennium B.C. That they are in early Canaanite seems highly probable, and most of them presumably have religious significance.<sup>8</sup> Their decipherment may some day enable us to penetrate into an early stage of Canaanite religion, comparable in antiquity to the Pyramid Texts and the contemporary Sumero-Accadian documents from Babylonia.

After being successfully launched by Gesenius and Rödiger about a century ago, the interpretation of South Arabic made little progress until the number of accessible documents had been greatly increased by subsequent explorations, especially those of Glaser. The first stage of their interpretation was brought to a close by the publication of Hommel's *Süd-arabische Chrestomathie* in 1893. Owing to the uniformity of the material and to the fewness of investigators, the progress of the past half century has been disappointing. By far the best man in this field is Rhodokanakis, to whom we are indebted for nearly all real advance in the field. To him and to his pupils, especially Miss Höfner, we also owe substantial improvement in our gram-

<sup>7</sup> For this date see *Bull. Am. Sch. Or. Res.*, No. 77, pp. 24 f. and the references there given. Several colophons show that the tablets containing the mythological texts of Ugarit date from the reign of Niqmêd.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Bull. Am. Sch. Or. Res.*, No. 60, pp. 3-5; No. 73, p. 12.

matical knowledge. Aside from the commonest formulae and from clear narrative passages, there is still wide divergence in the translations offered by leading scholars in the South-Arabic field. Consequently the reconstructions of South-Arabian religion offered by Nielsen and Hommel are not to be taken too seriously.

Thanks to the recent work of F. V. Winnett, the early North-Arabian inscriptions written in South-Arabic script are becoming intelligible and are beginning to yield reliable material for the historian of religion.<sup>9</sup> The work of Grimme, though stimulating and sometimes brilliant, is erratic and undependable. It is now clear that the earliest Dedanite inscriptions go back as far as the Minaean, perhaps even farther than the latter. If we date the earliest documents in the South-Arabic script, whether North Arabic or South Arabic, to about the seventh century B.C. we can hardly be far off. A date in the eighth century is possible only for the earliest Sabaean texts. All treatment of proto-Arabic inscriptions must be affected by the fact that they generally belong to an age when native South-Arabic culture had been long influenced, not only by Assyro-Babylonian, Persian, and Aramaic culture, but also by Hellenistic and Nabataean.

### III

Progress in the field of OT criticism, whether textual, literary or historical, has been incomparably less marked during the past century. Moreover, practically all important forward steps in the historical criticism of the OT since 1840 fall in the generation from 1850 to 1880, that is, at a time when the interpretation of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and South-Arabian documents was still in its first stage, and before there was either sufficient material or philological foundations strong enough to bear a reliable synthesis of any kind. The greatest Semitic philologist of modern times, Theodor Nöldeke, stubbornly disregarded the

<sup>9</sup> See Winnett, *A Study of the Lihyanite and Thamudic Inscriptions* (Toronto, 1937) and the writer's discussion of it, *Bull. Am. Sch. Or. Res.*, No. 66, pp. 30 f.; "The Daughters of Allah," *Moslem World*, April, 1940, 1-18. A letter from him dated April 3rd, 1940, reports that he has made important further progress in his decipherment and interpretation of the Lihyanite inscriptions.

young field of Assyriology, though after he had passed his sixtieth year he expressed regret that he had not mastered it. For all his profound control of Arabic, Ethiopic, Hebrew, and the Aramaic dialects, he was helpless, as he candidly confessed, in the terrain of Assyrian, Egyptian, and Sabaean.<sup>10</sup> What was true of Nöldeke was true *a fortiori* of the great founders of modern OT science: Wellhausen, Kuenen, Robertson Smith, Budde, Driver, etc. No less a man than Wellhausen, great Semitist though he was, neglected the new material from the ancient Orient with a disdain as arrogant as it was complete. In his invaluable work, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (second edition 1897) he does not even apologize for his total disregard of the newly revealed South-Arabic sources. Nöldeke at least had the grace to apologize. Of course, one cannot help sympathizing with the suspicion which the greatest Semitists showed toward the new disciplines of the ancient Orient when one thinks of their parlous state at that time. Nor can one fail to recognize that the adventurous expeditions of a Winckler or of a Hommel into the *terra incognita* of historical synthesis were not calculated to win the approval of masters of exact method in the older disciplines. At the same time, there can no longer be the slightest doubt that neglect of the ancient Orient, whether justified at that time or not, could result only in failure to understand the background of Israel's literature and in consequent inability to place the religion of Israel in its proper evolutionary setting.

No great historian or philologist is likely to construct his system in a vacuum; there must be some body of external data or some exterior plane of reference by the aid of which he can redeem his system from pure subjectivity. Since no body of external data was recognized as being applicable, men like Wellhausen and Robertson Smith were forced to resort to the second alternative: the arrangement of Israelite data with reference to the evolutionary historical philosophies of Hegel (so Wellhausen) or of the English positivists (so Robertson Smith). Graf, Kuenen, and Wellhausen, the joint creators of the so-called Wellhausenist

<sup>10</sup> See Nöldeke, *Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, I (1904), p. v, II (1912), p. v.

system, were all Hegelians, and Wellhausen, who was the greatest thinker of the three, avowed his allegiance in unmistakable terms when in the introduction to his famous *Prolegomena* (1878) he wrote (p. 14): "Meine Untersuchung . . . nähert sich der Art Vatke's, von welchem letzteren ich auch das Meiste und das Beste gelernt zu haben bekenne." Now Vatke was, we must remember, an ardent disciple of Hegel, who was one of the first and certainly the most successful exponent of Hegelianism among German Protestant theologians; his most important work appeared in 1835. This Hegelianism, more implicit than explicit with Wellhausen, became even clearer with his followers, especially in the books of Marti, whose influence was much greater than his scholarly merit would seem to warrant. OT literature was now divided into three phases: early poetry and saga, prophetic writings, and legal codes. The religion of Israel exhibited three stages: polydemonism, henotheism, monotheism. To Wellhausen the fully developed religion of Israel was latent in its earlier stages, spirit and law replacing nature and primitive freedom from fixed norms, all this development following strictly Hegelian dialectic: thesis (the pre-prophetic stage), antithesis (the prophetic reaction), synthesis (the nomistic stage).

Robertson Smith was no less a positivist because he nowhere described his theory of the evolution of Israel in formal positivistic terms than Wellhausen was a Hegelian because he failed to reduce his system to explicitly Hegelian language. The historical chain of students of comparative religion formed by Tylor, Robertson Smith and Frazer was largely dependent on the philosophical temper of the age in England, a temper which was powerfully influenced by the work of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, through whom the positivism of Comte passed into the history of religion and related fields. It is quite impossible to understand the development of Robertson Smith's thought without understanding the nature of English positivistic philosophy. English OT scholarship subsequently fell even more completely under the domination of the positivist tradition, as is particularly evident in the writings of S. R. Driver and S. A. Cook, to name only its most prominent representatives in the two generations that have elapsed since Smith's death. In

France the positivist tradition has also been dominant, except in Catholic circles, as is clear from the recent work of such Protestant scholars as Lods and Causse.<sup>11</sup> With the latter we move into a new stage, which has been deeply influenced by the sociological schools of Durkheim and Lévy-Bruhl. It is historically important to stress the fact that, in spite of the far-reaching resemblances between the conclusions of the German and of the Anglo-French schools, they go back to essentially different philosophical horizons. Accidentally, however, it happens that there is a striking superficial resemblance between the evolutionary religious schemes of Hegel and of Comte, since the latter also thought in triads as illustrated by his progressive sequence: fetishism, polytheism, monotheism. On the other hand, Comte's triple hierarchy of modes of thought (theological, metaphysical, and positivistic or scientific), which was in some respects diametrically opposed to Hegelian doctrines, has led Anglo-French and more recently American Biblical scholarship into more and more drastic evolutionary materialism. Under the influence of current instrumentalist philosophy, American Biblical scholarship tends to construct unilateral schemes of evolution, oriented either toward some form of socialism or toward ethical humanism. In these systems mechanical progressivism competes with a remorseless meliorism to produce increasingly artificial results. Whenever doubts arise they are quickly suppressed by appeal to the authority of Biblical criticism, which by establishing the chronological sequence, early poems and sagas, prophetic writings, legal codes, appears *superficially* to confirm the evolutionary schemes in question.

<sup>11</sup> I take this opportunity to correct the erroneous emphasis I placed on the Hegelian atmosphere of Causse's work in my review (*Jour. Bib. Lit.*, LVII, 220), where I wrote: "The sociological determinism of the author is thus essentially Hegelian." In a recent letter to me Professor Causse protests against this statement, insisting that he is actually opposed to Hegelianism. The "rigid Wellhausenism" for which I tax him later does, in fact, give his picture of Israelite evolution a Hegelian appearance. However, direct philosophical influence on his work is mostly of neo-positivistic character (Frazer, Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl), and Max Weber, whom he often quotes, was as much of a positivist as he was a Hegelian.

The reaction against these suspiciously aprioristic constructions came first in Germany, where they originated. The first competent scholar to give formal utterance to the new attitude was none other than Rudolf Kittel, in his historic address, "Die Zukunft der Alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft," delivered at the first German Orientalistentag in Leipzig, September 29th, 1921: "Es fehlte dem Gebäude (d.h., der Schule Wellhausens) das Fundament, und es fehlten den Baumeistern die Massstäbe."<sup>12</sup> In this address he stressed, as we have, the fact that the founders of modern OT science had no idea of the great world of the ancient Orient, which was just then opening up, and that their successors also failed to reckon with it, in spite of the vast increase in our knowledge. There were two weaknesses in Kittel's presentation. In the first place, he was premature. The past twenty years have enormously extended and deepened our knowledge of the ancient Near East; in fact they have brought the first real syntheses, which were still absolutely impossible when Kittel spoke. Even nine years ago, when I wrote my first partial synthesis of the results of Palestinian archaeology for Biblical scholarship,<sup>13</sup> the time was not ripe for a successful effort to reinterpret the history of Israel's religion in the light of archaeological discoveries. Such a reinterpretation I hope to offer in two volumes which should appear in the coming two years; the present article contains a greatly condensed abstract of certain chapters of them. Kittel's second weakness was that he lacked the perspective from which to judge the philosophical tendencies inherent in the development of Biblical research, especially in

<sup>12</sup> *Zeits. Alttest. Wiss.*, 1921, 86.

<sup>13</sup> *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible* (New York, 1932-5). For an accurate foreshadowing of my present attitude see "Archaeology Confronts Biblical Criticism," *The American Scholar*, 1938, 176-188, with W. C. Graham's reply, "Higher Criticism Survives Archaeology," *Ibid.*, 409-427. In the latter article Principal Graham makes so many concessions that in some respects the difference between our stated views becomes a matter of terminology. However, he continues to maintain a theory of the development of Israelite religion which I cannot accept, while I adhere to the standard critical position with regard to the order and chronology of J, E, D, P, though he is ready to abandon it.

Germany. It is all very well to declare that the historico-religious edifice of Wellhausen lacked a solid foundation and to point out his ignorance of the historical and cultural background of Israel, but conviction can come only after an exposition of the intrinsic reasons for the artificiality of this edifice and a synchronous demonstration of a better structure, founded on solid historical material.

Since 1921 there have been sporadic attempts, mainly in Germany, to shake off the yoke of a rigid Wellhausenism, but it cannot be said that any has succeeded, though there have been numerous partial successes and many correct observations. However, voices are more and more often heard decrying the artificiality of most modern theories of the religious evolution of Israel. The important and influential school of Albrecht Alt has performed exceedingly valuable services for Israelite history as a whole, but it is clear that it is weak in the sphere of religious history. Meanwhile the crisis of religious faith in Central Europe which heralded the victory of National Socialism in Germany, has brought with it a violent reaction against historicism (*Historismus*) in all its manifestations, a reaction almost as pronounced among foes of the movement as among its friends. The great work of the Swiss scholar, Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1933–39), expresses the author's conviction in emphatic words: "In der Tat ist es hohe Zeit, dass auf dem Gebiet des Alten Testaments einmal mit der Alleinherrschaft des Historismus gebrochen und der Weg zurückgefunden wird zu der alten und in jeder wissenschaftlichen Epoche neu zu lösenden Aufgabe, die alttestamentliche Glaubenswelt in ihrer strukturellen Einheit zu begreifen."<sup>14</sup>

#### IV

This is hardly the place in which to present my philosophical credo, but a few observations are in order, since one's philosophical position is inseparably bound up with one's efforts at synthesis — perhaps more in the field of this paper than in most

<sup>14</sup> I, 5.

essays at historical interpretation. In the first place, I am a resolute positivist — but *only in so far as positivism is the expression of the modern rational-scientific approach to physical and historical reality*. I would not call myself a positivist at all if it were not for the insistence with which National-Socialist theorists have rejected the rational-scientific approach to reality, calling it “positivism.” I am even in a sense an instrumentalist, but only to the extent that I acknowledge the truth of an instrumentalism *sub specie aeternitatis*, in complete opposition to the metaphysical system of the Dewey school. Men can judge the value of a movement or of a method only by inadequate criteria, and to set up such criteria as absolute guides is the most dangerous possible procedure, both in science and in life. I am an evolutionist, but only in an organismic, not in a mechanical or a melioristic sense. All such aprioristic evolutionary systems as those of Hegel and Comte are so artificial and so divorced from physical or historical reality that they cannot be safely used as frames of reference, though they have undoubtedly possessed real heuristic value — a partially erroneous classification is generally better than no classification at all. Subsequent evolutionary philosophies are so unilaterally determined that they can at best reflect only one facet of a polyhedron. Favorite forms of determinism in our day are socio-economic, ranging all the way from the brilliant and often correct work of Max Weber<sup>15</sup> to the plausible but factitious reconstructions of orthodox Marxists.

The most reasonable philosophy of history, in my judgment, is evolutionary and organismic. Evolution is not unilateral progress, it is more than a series of abrupt mutations; yet, like organic development, it falls into more or less definite forms, patterns, and configurations, each with its own complex body of characteristics. In recent years we have been made familiar with “Gestalt” in psychology, with “patterns” in the history of religions and sociology, with “cultures” in archaeology and ethnography. A comparison of successive organismic phenomena dis-

<sup>15</sup> I do not wish to give the impression that all Weber's work was characterized by socio-economic determinism. Far from it. I wish here only to emphasize the relative soundness of this phase of his work.

closes definite organic relationships, which cannot possibly be accidental and which require some causal or purposive explanation, whether it be some latent or potential entelechy or whether it be interpreted teleologically. But the task of the historian, as distinguished from the philosopher or the theologian, is to study the phenomena as objectively as possible, employing inductive methods wherever possible. My task is restricted as far as possible to historical description and interpretation, leaving the higher but less rigorous forms of interpretation to others. Though I am, as will be clear from the above sketch, essentially an historicist, my point of view remains very different from that of the older representatives of *Historismus*, whose interpretation was distorted by erroneous postulates and false frames of reference, and who sinned grievously in subordinating structural and organismic considerations to sequential relationships.

Broad classifications of historical phenomena are inevitably inadequate, yet if they are planned with sufficient care they can be illuminating. I have found the following classification of mental operations very useful in the study of the history of religions. The late R. Lévy-Bruhl<sup>16</sup> introduced a happy new term into current terminology: "prelogical" thought. In other words, primitive men and modern savages share a type of thinking which never rises to the logical level, but always remains more or less fluid and impersonal, not distinguishing between causal relationships and coincidences or purely superficial similarities, unable to make precise definitions and utterly unconscious of their necessity. Most ancient mythology goes back to the prelogical stage of thinking. Next above this stage is what I would term "empirico-logical" thought, in which sound, though unconscious, observation and simple deduction from experience, subconscious as a rule, play an important part. This stage, in which most of the fundamental discoveries and inventions of primitive man were made, was to a large extent contemporary with the prelogical stage, but it assumed the dominant role during the third millennium B.C. and continued until the dawn of logical reasoning in sixth-century Greece. Empirical logic

<sup>16</sup> See especially Lévy-Bruhl, *La mentalité primitive* (1922).

became self-conscious in the systematic "science" of the Babylonians and Egyptians, at least as early as 2100 B.C.; it is best illustrated by the elaborate systems of magic and divination developed in Babylonia during the following centuries, where we find a "proto-inductive" method of gathering data and methodical deduction from these "inductions" as well as from empirically developed or mythologically conditioned postulates. Empirical logic survived long after the discovery of logical reasoning by the Greeks, even in some dominant intellectual circles. It goes without saying that prelogical thinking has never become extinct among savages and children, and that a disconcerting proportion of contemporary adult thinking is essentially prelogical, especially among uneducated people, in the most civilized lands. Empirico-logical thinking is still commoner. However, since we must classify modes of thought according to their best examples and since chronological progress in dominant types of thinking is certain, our classification is just as instructive, *mutatis mutandis*, as the archaeologically useful (but culturally somewhat misleading) series, stone — bronze — iron.

## V

After these preliminary remarks, whose apparently disproportionate length is required by the nature of our theme, we may turn to consider the subject of our paper. The space at our disposal is, however, too short to allow a full treatment of so extensive a topic, and we shall restrict ourselves to a brief comparison of the conceptions regarding the nature of deity among the peoples of the ancient Near East between cir. 2000 and 1000 B.C. with those prevailing in Israel between cir. 1200 and 800 B.C. Since the national and cultural evolution of Israel shows an inevitable lag (which must not be exaggerated!) when compared to that of the surrounding peoples this apparent chronological disparity is quite justified. When we remember that Israel was situated in the middle of the ancient Near East and that all streams of influence from the richer and older centers of culture percolated into Palestine, when we recall that Israelite tradition itself derived both its ancestors and its civilization

from Babylonia, Egypt, and Canaan (Phoenicia), then our chronological postulate is not only justified but becomes inevitable. Incidentally, it has the practical advantage of scrupulous fairness, since we are not retrojecting ideas which are expressed in documents of — say — the seventh century B.C. into the middle of the second millennium, following the example of many members of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, who did not hesitate to relate the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles to the Mandaean liturgies and the Corpus Hermeticum, though the latter cannot antedate the third century A.D., and the former can hardly be earlier than the sixth century A.D. Slight chronological uncertainties must remain: it is by no means always certain that a given religious text from the ancient Orient (including the Bible) actually reflects the period when it was ostensibly compiled; it may belong to a considerably earlier period, being handed down orally or in writing and then adapted to a special purpose, with no change in its religious atmosphere. Moreover, in dealing with Biblical literature unusual care must be exercised in dating and interpreting our material, both because of its complicated transmission and because of frequent textual and lexical uncertainty.

Among the most serious methodological fallacies of most current OT scholarship is the tendency to telescope an evolution that actually took many thousands of years into the space of a few centuries.<sup>17</sup> This is a direct result of adherence to a unilateral evolutionary scheme which requires a definite succession from simpler and cruder to more complex and more refined forms, and which tries to eliminate the latter from early stages and the former from later stages of a given development. Actually, of course, the order of evolution is, in the main, correct, but we must go back several thousand years to find prelogical thinking dominant in the most advanced circles. The religious literature

<sup>17</sup> This tendency is by no means the exclusive property of OT scholars. An example of it, though much less drastic, is Breasted's brilliant book, *The Dawn of Conscience* (1933), in which he seems to date the effective emergence of social conscience in Egypt in the Old Empire. However, since he defines "conscience" in social terms, his conclusion is not without some historical justification.

of the ancient Orient is mainly empirico-logical and there is little evidence of true prelogical thought except in such bodies of material as the Pyramid Texts, unilingual Sumerian religious compositions of the third millennium, and other documents transmitted to later times but redolent of their primitive origins. Even in magic and divination after the beginning of the second millennium, there was increasing tendency to restrict the prelogical element to inherited elements (very numerous, of course) and to employ empirico-logical methods to innovate and develop. The mythological substratum of fertility cults and ritual retains its prelogical character longest, but after 2000 B.C. there is an increasing tendency to explain away inconsistencies and to turn the originally impersonal, dynamistic figures of the "drama" into definite forms with tangible personalities, fitted into a special niche in an organized pantheon. On the other hand, of course, empirico-logical thinking generalizes by intuitive "induction," and reasons by intuitive analogy, so we cannot be surprised to find the highest religious thought of the late third and the second millennia B.C. engaged in modifying the fluid dynamism of early religious expression in two directions: pantheism and monotheism. Both in Egypt and in Babylonia pantheistic tendencies appear clearly but remained in general abortive. After the middle of the second millennium B.C. monotheistic tendencies also appear in our sources, but were also repressed by the standard pluralistic polytheism of the age — except in Israel, where monotheism flowered. In India, on the other hand, primitive dynamistic ideas persisted and were transformed into pantheistic conceptions by the empirico-logical thought of the Upanishads and of the earliest Buddhism.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> There is no reason whatever to date the first appearance of strictly logical reasoning in India before the Greek period (third century B.C.). It must also be remembered that some comprehension of Greek ways of thinking must have percolated into Babylonia and even farther east through the intermediation of Greek traders and professional men during the fifth century B.C. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the remarkable development of systematic astronomical research in Babylonia during the late fifth and the fourth centuries was due to an intellectual impulse originating in Greece and transmitted through Asia Minor and Phoenicia. I expect to discuss this subject at more length elsewhere.

## VI

In this paper we are not so much interested in sporadic evidences of pantheism or of monotheism in the ancient Near East as we are in the nature of the organized polytheism of the Assyro-Babylonians, Canaanites, Hurrians, Hittites, Achaeans, Egyptians, in the second millennium B.C. All of these peoples possessed a definite pantheon, which naturally varied from district to district and from period to period, but which was surprisingly stable. In the time of the First Dynasty of Babylon, before 1600 B.C.<sup>19</sup> the Babylonian pantheon was organized on the basis which it occupied for a millennium and a half, with little further change. Head of the pantheon was Marduk of Babylon, henceforth identified with the chief god of the Sumerian pantheon, Enlil or Ellil, "lord of the storm." As head of the pantheon Marduk was commonly called *bêlu*, "lord," and the appellation *Bêl* soon replaced his personal name for ordinary purposes. In Assyria Marduk's place was naturally held by Asshur, chief deity of the city Asshur, who was also identified with the old Sumerian god Ellil. Under the head of the pantheon were many hundreds of other deities, ranging from the great gods to minor divinities, often of only local significance. The boundary line between gods and demons was none too clear and fluctuated constantly. For our present purposes it is important to stress the fact that most of the gods were cosmic in character and that the multiplication of names was due largely to the differentiation of originally identical divinities, whose appellations became attached to different local cults,<sup>20</sup> as well as to the introduction of many foreign deities. Only a small part of these figures may be said to have developed clear-cut personalities, as was undoubtedly true of Ea, Nabû, Shamash, Ishtar, etc. Almost any important deity was at the same time connected with numerous different localities and temples; he was charged with some cosmic function which required his presence in many different places

<sup>19</sup> For this chronology see *Bull. Am. Sch. Or. Res.*, No. 77, pp. 25 ff. Very important confirmation of my new low dates is at hand from other sources.

<sup>20</sup> See, e. g., Bertholet's instructive study, *Götterspaltung und Götterversinnigung*.

and under many different conditions; he was considered to have his own residence in heaven or the underworld, or both. Nowhere except in astrological speculation of relatively late date is a great god assigned exclusive dominion over a given district or country. Marduk is called "king of (foreign) lands" (*lugal kurkurra*) by Kurigalzu III (fourteenth century). In the canonic list of gods, which was composed before 1600 B.C., we find numerous identifications of Sumero-Accadian deities with Hurrian and Northwest-Semitic ones; e.g., Ishtar is identified with Shaushka and Ash-tartu, Adad is identified with Ba'al or Dad(d)a and with Teshub. Nothing can be clearer than the universal cosmic significance of the great gods, especially of Marduk in the Creation Epic, which dates in its present form from the early second millennium. In the somewhat earlier Gilgamesh Epic we are told that Gilgamesh journeyed a prodigious distance westward in search of his ancestor, the Flood-hero Ut-napishtim. In order to reach the Source of the Rivers<sup>21</sup> he traversed the western desert; he reached the mythical mountains of Mashu; he traveled in darkness for twenty-four hours, with gigantic strides; he emerged into the beautiful garden of Siduri, the goddess of life;<sup>22</sup> he crossed the redoubtable waters of death, shunning no toil in order to attain his goal. But no matter how far Gilgamesh traveled he could not escape Shamash, who traveled around the earth in a single day. Even at the Source of the Rivers the gods are all-powerful, for they placed Ut-napishtim there after the Flood, following the command of Ellil.

Nothing can be clearer from Assyro-Babylonian literature of the second millennium than the total absence of any suggestion of henotheism, "the belief in one god without asserting that he is the only god,"<sup>23</sup> or, as commonly meant by Biblical scholars, the belief that the chief god or the patron deity of a given land was lord only of that land and people. Whenever the Mesopotamians came into sufficiently close and persistent contact with a foreign cult to become acutely conscious of the existence of its deity, they adopted him into their own pantheon, either

<sup>21</sup> See *Am. Jour. Sem. Lang.*, XXXV, 161-195.

<sup>22</sup> See *Am. Jour. Sem. Lang.*, XXXVI, 258 ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, s. v.

identifying him directly with one of the native deities, or assigning him some special place or function in their pantheon. Theological disputes must constantly have arisen over details. One school, for example, regarded Ishtar as daughter of the old god of heaven, Anu (Sumerian *An*, "Heaven"), while another considered her as daughter of the moon-god, Sîn. Similarly, one group regarded Ninurta as the greatest and most powerful of the gods, while another group insisted that this honor belonged exclusively to Marduk.

The recognition that many deities were simply manifestations of a single divinity and that the domain of a god with cosmic functions was universal, inevitably led to some form of practical monotheism or pantheism. To the second half of the second millennium belong, on clear intrinsic evidence, two illustrations, one monotheistic and the other pantheistic in tendency. The first is the well-known tablet in which Marduk is successively identified with a whole list of deities, each of whom is called by his name; e. g., Sîn is Marduk as illuminer of the night. The second is a document which lists all important deities, male and female, as parts of the cosmic body of Ninurta; e. g., Ellil and Ninlil are his two eyes, Marduk is his neck.

Among the Hurrians and Hittites the process of syncretism was carried so far that it becomes almost impossible to guess the origin of a god's name by the place of his residence, or rather, by the places where he is specially worshipped. The extraordinary fusion of Sumero-Accadian and Hurrian pantheons is illustrated by documents from Nuzu in northeastern Mesopotamia, from Mitanni proper, from Mari, and from Ugarit, but nowhere so clearly as in the rich material from the Hittite capital (Boğazköy). One Hurrian myth describes the primordial theomachy, in which the father of the gods, Kumarbi, is defeated by the storm-god, Teshub, with whom are allied an impressive list of Hurrian and Accadian deities.<sup>24</sup> Three Sumero-Accadian goddesses ranged particularly far to the west: Nikkal, whose cult is attested from different parts of Syria and Cappadocia in the second millennium; Kubaba, who apparently started as the

<sup>24</sup> See provisionally Forrer, *Journal Asiatique*, CCXVII, 238 f.

Sumero-Accadian *ki-Baba* (the holy Baba)<sup>25</sup> and became increasingly popular, especially in Asia Minor, where she was finally borrowed by the Greeks as Cybebe, identified with Cybele; Ishtar of Nineveh, a long list of whose cult-centers in different countries is found in a Hittite document from about the thirteenth century.<sup>26</sup> To the Hittites all storm-gods were Teshub, all mother-goddesses Hēbat; in Hittite literature there is no such thing as henotheism. The religious catholicity of the Hittites is shown not only by their wholesale adoption of Accadian and Hurrian deities, but also by their use of ritual formulae and incantations in several different tongues, including Babylonian.

It is increasingly evident that in many respects there was close similarity between the Anatolian (Horito-Hittite) religion of the late second millennium B.C. and the Aegean, both as we see it in Minoan and Mycenaean monuments and as we find it vividly portrayed in the Iliad and the Odyssey. While it is, of course, true that the Homeric epics in substantially their present form belong to the beginning of the first millennium, it is now recognized by virtually all scholars that they reflect the culture and the conceptual world of sub-Mycenaean times, i. e., of the last two centuries of the second millennium — in certain respects even of the Late Mycenaean (fourteenth-thirteenth centuries). In the Iliad and Odyssey there is no suggestion that any of the great gods were restricted by nationality in their sphere of action, though they often play favorites. Zeus, Hera, and Apollo are worshipped by both Achaeans and Anatolians; Odysseus encounters Poseidon and is aided by Athene wherever he wanders. From Zeus, who still bears the Indo-European appellation "father of men and gods,"<sup>27</sup> to Helios, whose favorite abode is

<sup>25</sup> I hope to discuss this figure elsewhere; see provisionally my note in *Mélanges Syriens offerts à M. R. Dussaud*, I, 118, n. 2.

<sup>26</sup> See Friedrich, *Der Alte Orient*, XXV, 2, pp. 20–22. The Ninevite goddess is summoned to come to the Hittite capital from Ugarit, Alalkha, and other places as far south as Sidon in Syria, from parts of northern Mesopotamia as far south as Asshur, from Cyprus, and from southern Asia Minor as far west as Masha and Karkaya (probably the Achaemenian Karkâ and therefore Caria).

<sup>27</sup> See Nilsson, *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, XXXV, 156 ff.

in the land of the Ethiopians in the far south, the great gods are cosmic in function and unlimited in their power of movement.

Turning to Canaanite religion, we find ourselves in an entirely different situation from our predecessors, thanks especially to the religious literature of the fifteenth century B.C. from Ugarit, but also to archaeological discoveries at Ugarit, Byblus, Bethshan, Megiddo, and Lachish. It is now certain that the religion of Canaan was of the same general type as that of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and the Aegean in the second millennium. Organized cult in temples played the chief role, and sacred rocks, trees, and springs were much less significant than has been supposed. Moreover, the religion of Canaan was true polytheism, not polydemonism, and no henotheism can be proved to exist in it. Thanks to the documents from Ugarit we now know that the account of Phoenician mythology preserved by Sanchuniathon of Berytus (about the seventh century B.C.)<sup>28</sup> and condensed by Philo Byblius (first century A.D.) into the form in which we have it, reflects, with substantial accuracy, the mythology of the Canaanites in the middle of the second millennium. A mass of fragmentary data from Canaanite, Egyptian, and Greek sources helps to round out and complete the picture. The titular head of the pantheon was the high god, El, who no longer took too active a part in the affairs of men, and who lived far away, at the source of the rivers, "in the midst of the fountain of the two tehoms."<sup>29</sup> In order to reach the home of El it was necessary even for deities endowed with superhuman strength to journey through "a thousand plains, ten thousand fields."<sup>30</sup> El and his consort Asherah (who was much more than a sacred tree!) were

<sup>28</sup> Cf. provisionally *Bull. Am. Sch. Or. Res.*, No. 70, p. 24. An earlier date is defended by Eissfeldt, *Ras Shamra und Sanchuniaton*, 1939, 67 ff., against all onomastic and historical probability.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *Jour. Pal. Or. Soc.*, XIV, 121 and notes 93-94. The text reads as follows (repeated so often that form and meaning are quite clear):

*'ima 'Éli mabbîki naharîma*  
"to El who causes the rivers to flow

*qîrba 'ap(i)qê tîhâm(a)têma*  
in the midst of the fountains  
of the two deeps."

<sup>30</sup> For this rendering, which imposes itself as soon as pointed out, see de Vaux, *Revue Biblique*, 1939, 597.

the progenitors of gods and of men. Next to him was the head of the pantheon *de facto*, the storm-god Hadad, the lord (*Ba'lu*, *Ba'al*) *par excellence*. That *Ba'al* early became his personal name as well as his appellation, just as was later true of *Adonî* (Adonis), of Aramaean *Bêl* and *Bêlî*, etc., is certain from the fact that it was borrowed by the Egyptians in this sense as early as the fifteenth century and that it was listed as such in the still earlier Babylonian canonical list of gods. Baal was the lord of heaven, the giver of all life, the ruler of gods and of men, to whom it is said: *tîqqahu mûlka 'ôlâmika, dârkata dâta dardârika*, "thou shalt take thy eternal kingdom, thy dominion for ever and ever."<sup>31</sup> The throne of Baal is on a lofty mythical mountain in the far north, certainly to be compared with the Mesopotamian mountain of the gods, Arallu, also in the far north and also the mountain of gold.<sup>32</sup>

The extent to which Canaanite gods were fused with Egyptian has become very clear as a result of Montet's excavation in the ruins of Tanis, which was the capital of the Ramessides in the thirteenth century B.C. The native god of Tanis, *Sûtaḥ* (later *Sêth*), who became the patron deity of the dynasty, was identified with Baal, and his consort Nephthys became Anath. Canaanite *Ḥaurôn* was identified with Horus, Astarte with Isis. The Ugaritic texts show that the artificer of the gods, *Kôshar* (later *Kûshôr*), was identified with Egyptian *Ptaḥ*, as had long ago been correctly guessed by G. Hoffman,<sup>33</sup> and a hieroglyphic inscription from Megiddo now proves that there was a temple of *Ptaḥ* at Ascalon. Much older, of course, is the identification of the West-Semitic *Ba'latu*, "the Lady," with Egyptian *Ḥathôr*, both at Byblus and in Sinai and Egypt itself. To the Canaanites

<sup>31</sup> Ras Shamra III AB, A, line 10 (Virolleaud, *Syria*, XVI, 30).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, V AB, D, lines 44 f. (Virolleaud, *La déesse 'Anat*, 51 ff.). For the imagery and the cosmological ideas involved see especially Delitzsch, *Wo lag das Paradies?*, 117 ff.; Jensen, *Die Kosmologie der Babylonier*, 203 ff. (to be rectified in the direction of Delitzsch's position); Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des alten Orients*<sup>2</sup>, 568; Albright, *Jour. Bib. Lit.*, XXXIX, 137 ff.

<sup>33</sup> *Zeits. f. Assyriologie*, XI, 254, independently discovered by H. L. Ginsberg through his study of the Ugaritic material (*Orientalia*, IX, 39-44). Very important additional evidence for Ginsberg's position has since come to light and will be treated soon by the present writer.

there was no limit to the power of their deities; of Kôshar-Ptah it is said, "for his is Crete, the throne on which he sits, Egypt, the land of his inheritance."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Canaanite, Amorite, and Accadian deities were exchanged and identified to a disconcerting degree. Gods like Hadad and Dagan, Ashirat (Asherah) and Astarte (Ishtar) were worshipped in the second millennium from the Delta of Egypt to the mountains of Iran. In the cuneiform tablets found in Syria from the period 1500–1300 B.C., we find Sumero-Accadian names and ideograms used so widely for native deities that we are often quite unable to say what their native names may have been. Such cases as Bêlit-ekalli of Qatna, Damu of Byblus, Ninurta of a town in the territory of Jerusalem are the rule, not the exception. Some of these deities became permanently domiciled in the West.

In Egypt also we find a similar situation, though its advanced civilization and its natural conservatism combined to produce a remarkable polarity, in which the most pantheistic and rarified monotheistic conceptions are found side by side with extremely primitive myths and beliefs. The god Amûn-Rê, who was not only the sun-god but was also creator and lord of the universe, is praised in the following terms in the great hymn to Amûn (from the fifteenth century B.C., but unquestionably older in conception):

Thou far traveller, thou prince of Upper Egypt, lord of the land of the Matoi (Eastern Desert of Nubia) and ruler of Punt (East Africa),

Thou greatest of heaven, thou oldest of the earth, lord of what exists . . .

Whose sweet odor the gods love, as he comes from Punt, rich in fragrance as he comes from the land of the Matoi, with fair countenance as he comes from 'God's Land' (Asia) . . .

'Hail to thee!' says every foreign land, as high as heaven is and as wide as earth is and as deep as the sea is . . .<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Ginsberg, *loc. cit.* My translation differs slightly from Ginsberg's, since I translate the word *klh* (left untranslated by the latter) as *kl-lahu*, "for to him (is)." The second passage, which threw Ginsberg off the track, is characteristically abbreviated and should be read: *b'l kkt 'el . klh (Kptr ks'u . tbt . Hkpt 'arš . nhlh)*, "lord of Egypt-of-God, for to him (i. e., to Kôshar) belongs (Crete, the throne on which he sits, etc.)."

<sup>35</sup> For good recent translations see Scharff, *Aegyptische Sonnenlieder*, 1921, 47 ff., and Erman, *Die Literatur der Aegypter*, 1923, 350 ff.

The archaism of the language and of the geographical terminology should not prevent us from recognizing the fact that this text forms a perfect conceptual bridge between the ideas of the third millennium, as illustrated by the hymns to Rê' in the Pyramid Texts, and the great Hymn to the Aten, which dates from the fourteenth century. Even after the reaction had set in strongly against monotheism in the late fourteenth century we find that Wen-Amûn can say to the prince of Byblus in the early eleventh century: "There is no ship on the waters that does not belong to Amûn, for his is the sea and his is Lebanon, of which thou sayest, 'It is mine'." It is interesting to note that the Canaanite prince is represented as admitting freely that Amûn is supreme and as adding that Amûn taught and equipped Egypt first, so that Egypt was able to instruct the Canaanites in the art of civilization. It may be observed that this idea agrees with the conceptions of the Ugaritic texts of the fifteenth century regarding Ptaḥ-Kôshar, as well as with the Biblical view that Canaan was son of Ham and brother of Mizraim; so there is no reason whatever for suspecting its essential authenticity.

The general character of the Aten religion is so well known that there is no occasion for us to dwell on it here at length. In spite of occasional denials by scholars, there can be no doubt that it was a true monotheism, though specifically solar in type and consequently far below the lofty spiritual monotheism of a Second Isaiah. This is proved not only by many statements in the Hymn to the Aten which sound monotheistic but also by the wave of erasing names of other gods from public monuments which then swept over the country. It is also confirmed by other points, such as the absence of shrines of other gods or of their representations in contemporary remains at Tell el-'Amârnah. The solar disk is addressed as "the only god, beside whom there is no other," as creator and sustainer of Syria and Nubia as well as of Egypt, as creator and lord of all, including the most distant lands.

After the Aten cult had been, at least officially, stamped out, the priests of Amûn had a brief period of glory. Not, however, for long. The north reacted a second time against the religious tyranny of the south, and Sûtaḥ of Tanis was made patron of

the Ramesside kings of the Nineteenth Dynasty. Above we have sketched the remarkable fusion of Egyptian and Canaanite pantheons which took place at Tanis. So complete was the fusion that it is difficult to determine the origin of any given image of Sûtaḥ-Baal from iconography alone without clear stylistic indices; from Nubia to Ugarit we find substantially the same iconographic type. The extent of this amalgamation of cults may be illustrated in many ways. The phenomena are absolutely certain and it is, therefore, quite clear that nothing remotely like the "henotheism" of Biblical scholars is reflected by our Egyptian sources during the period from 1500 to 1000 B.C.

In spite of the inadequacy of our treatment, which could easily be extended and amplified in many directions, the picture of ancient Near-Eastern polytheism in the second half of the second millennium is entirely clear. It was this world into which Israel was born and in which it took up its inheritance. It is hardly necessary to observe that this is not the world pictured by Wellhausen and his followers.

## VII

It is quite impossible to develop my conception of early Israelite religious history here in detail. Though accepting the assured results of modern Biblical criticism, I fail absolutely to see that they carry the implications for the religious evolution of Israel with which they are generally credited. The very fact that J, E, D, and P reflect different streams of tradition gives us reasonable confidence that the outstanding facts and circumstances on which they agree are historical. It is true that J and E may have separated into two streams of tradition in the eleventh century, but this would carry us back so close to the age of Moses and Joshua that only hypercriticism could doubt the substantial historicity of the common source. Moreover, thanks to recent archaeological discoveries and to the research of such scholars as Nyberg, we are coming to have a much higher respect for the historical value of oral tradition than we had a few decades ago. If we eliminate the Book of Genesis because it reflects many pre-Israelite traditions, whose originally polytheistic character is sometimes transparent, and if we eliminate

all the rhapsodist prophets of the eighth century and later, together with the Hagiographa as a whole, D and P, the latter part of the Book of Kings, and clear Deuteronomic and Priestly elements in the earlier books, we still have a very considerable body of material to illuminate the period from 1200 to 800 B.C. Only the most extreme criticism can see any appreciable difference between the God of Moses in JE and the God of Jeremiah, or between the God of Elijah and the God of Deutero-Isaiah. The rebellion against historicism of which I spoke above is justified, yet it should not be a revolt against sound historical method but rather against the unilateral theory of historical evolution, which makes such an unjustified cleft between the official religion of earlier and of later Israel. A balanced organic position may consistently hold that the religion of Moses and of Elijah, of David and of the Psalmists was the same in all essentials, just as the religion of Jesus was substantially identical with that of St. Francis and the faith of Paul was also the faith of Augustine. In other words it is not really historicism that is at fault, but rather the philosophy of history which is too often associated with it.

I am, of course, fully aware of all the conventional arguments brought by scholars against early Israelite monotheism, but I consider virtually all of them as invalid and some of them as quite absurd. This is, however, not the place to refute them in detail. I wish only to point out that the literature of early Israel all comes from the empirico-logical age, in which there were no such concepts as philosophical interpretation or logical definition. Wisdom was gnomic or graphic; long inherited expressions were used without thought of their being treated as material for logico-analytical hermeneutics or for philosophical deductions. The sixth century B.C., with Thales and Pythagoras, with Deutero-Isaiah and Job, had not yet come. No one could have predicted that the First Commandment would have been explained in the Nineteenth Century as henotheistic; no one could have imagined that the words of Jephthah or of Elijah, written down in their present form about the seventh century, but presumably following old tradition, would have been interpreted otherwise than as simple statements of what everybody

knew to be the Ammonite or Tyrian point of view. As a matter of fact there is nothing in the earlier sources which sounds any more polytheistic than the words attributed to Solomon by the Chronicler in the fourth century B.C. — “for great is our God above all gods” (I Chron 2 5). Nor is any allusion to the “sons of God,” to the angels, or to the possible existence of other deities in some form or other (invariably very vague) any more henotheistic than the views of Philo, of Justin Martyr, or of the Talmud with regard to pagan deities. As should be clear without explanation, much of the onslaught on early Israelite monotheism comes from scholars who represent certain theological points of view with reference to monotheism, i. e., who deny that orthodox trinitarian Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic, is monotheistic and that orthodox Judaism and orthodox Islam are monotheistic. I do not need to stress the fact that neither of the last two religions can be called “monotheistic” by a theologian who insists that this term applies only to unitarian Christianity or liberal Judaism. No standard “dictionary” definition of monotheism was ever intended to exclude orthodox Christianity.

If monotheism connotes the existence of one God only, the creator of everything, the source of justice and mercy, who can travel at will to any part of his universe, who is without sexual relations and consequently without mythology, who is human in form but cannot be seen by human eye nor represented in any form — then the official religion of early Israel was certainly monotheistic. The henotheistic form constructed by scholars sinks below the level attained in the surrounding ancient Orient, where the only alternatives were polytheism or practical monotheism, henotheism being apparently unknown. There is nothing to show that the early Israelites were either ethically or religiously below their contemporaries. The highest manifestations of spiritual life among surrounding peoples cannot be raised to the level of corresponding forms among the precursors of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah. Moses and Elijah still stand high above the religious leaders of neighboring peoples and the God of Israel remains alone on Sinai.

Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the gods?