

**Introduction to the Semitic Languages: Text Specimens and Grammatical Sketches**



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The Institute of Religious Iconography of the State University of Groningen appropriately chose, for the first issue of its Annual, to honour Professor Th. P. van Baaren, the successor of G. van der Leeuw in the chair of History of Religions at Groningen. The guiding idea of the Annual is outlined in the introduction, which emphasizes the importance of not neglecting visual images and other symbolic forms of expression in the study of religions. Appropriately, the volume is richly supplied with 132 illustrations occupying 53 pages. Though the contributions mostly reflect the influence of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, the plea made in the introduction also echoes that made by Marcel Jousse in his (posthumous) *L'Anthropologie du geste* (Paris, 1974-8), though without mentioning him. The theme chosen for Vol. I, 'Commemorative figures', can offer rich material for either conception of anthropological study of religions; but commemoration has so many forms and aspects that it may be difficult to give coherent unity to a collection of occasional essays, particularly when, as in a *Festschrift*, some freedom must be allowed to contributors to write on what they choose.

In the present instance, some contributions seem rather remotely related to commemoration, whereas others suggest a very broad understanding of the term. If thematic unity was desired, it would have been useful to have an introductory article analysing the senses, forms and functions (religious and social) of commemoration. As it is, if this collection is approached through its title, the reader cannot but be frequently puzzled. The term seems to be stretched till it is almost indistinguishable from symbolization, and it is only in the penultimate essay, on Ancient Egypt, that we come near to general explanations.

To review the contents in order: V. Arnoldus-Schröder, in 'A memorable Baiga', describes the foundation myths of the Baiga in Madhya Pradesh (Central India); here we have 'commemoration' in the non-historical sense. L. P. van den Bosch, in 'Yama, the god on the black buffalo', traces the developing roles of this Hindu god of death and judgement from the Vedic literature on, with a full discussion of iconography, richly illustrated. Commemoration as such is barely mentioned; implicitly it is understood as the relationship of icon to what is symbolized.

H. J. W. Drijvers, in 'Sanctuaries and social safety: the iconography of divine peace in Hellenistic Syria', discusses the reconstructed giant lion, peacefully protecting a gazelle, in the sanctuary of the Arabian goddess Allât in Palmyra, tracing the theme of divine peace (also reflected, of course, in Hosea 2, Isaiah 11, etc.) in iconography, ritual and the social function of asylum. Here again we are more concerned with symbolization than with any usual sense of commemoration.

H. G. Kippenberg, in 'Zu einem normativen Symbol Vorderasiens: das gesattelte Pferd', discusses the significance of the saddled but riderless horse in the Shī'ite Ashura ritual which commemorates the 'passion' of Ḥusain. He traces the iconography back to the horses of gods and divine kings, and argues that this image is still charged with its ancient power. Here at last we are in the centre of the semantic field of commemoration, and the article is an outstanding example of iconological interpretation.

J. G. Oosten, in 'The symbolism of the body in Inuit culture', illuminates the mythic bases of rituals in this Eskimo tribe, but without mentioning commemoration. J. G. Platvoet, in 'Commemoration by communication: Akan funerary terracottas', accepts the word but then, understanding it in a clear and restricted sense, denies its applicability to the funerary rituals of the Akan in Ghana, which are interestingly described and illustrated.

H. te Velde, in 'Commemoration in Ancient Egypt', gives a clear and useful summary of his vast subject, which of course dominates ancient Egyptian culture as known from its monuments. Here alone we have some exposition of the various aspects of commemoration, ending with literary texts expressing the claim of scribes to attain immortality by making themselves remembered. Finally H. Witte, in 'Fishes of the earth: mud-fish symbolism in Yoruba iconography', again leads us farther away from the normal senses of commemoration in his discussion of the mythical bases and social functions of his subject.

Altogether, this is a fascinating and most instructive group of papers, the value of which is not impaired by the foregoing criticism on grounds of unclear coherence. Subsequent volumes of this Annual are to be awaited with high expectations.

ROBERT MURRAY

## SHORT NOTICES

GOTTHELF BERGSTRÄSSER: *Introduction to the Semitic languages: text specimens and grammatical sketches. Translated with notes and bibliography and an appendix on the scripts by Peter T. Daniels*. xxiii, 276 pp. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1983. \$29.50 (paper \$19.50).

Though Bergsträsser's magisterial *Einführung* might, 55 years after its initial appear-

ance, be thought ripe for a thorough recasting, it is instead offered us in an English version. The format is that of the original, augmented by a list of tables, an analytic table of contents, a translator's preface, language name abbreviations, an appendix of paradigms, of Semitic scripts, as well as a bibliography and an index of authors. The whole is provided with extensive marginal annotation, but shorn of the appendix (Brockelmann) on Ugaritic added to the 1963 reprint. As in the original edition, *Sprachproben* from Akkadian, Hebrew, Ara-

maic, Ethiopic (*et seqq.*) are here included, but nothing of the North-West Semitic languages that have become so prominent in the years since 1928. These are offered in the brief but useful bibliography and to some extent incorporated in the marginalia. But it might well be asked whether, in 1983, an introduction to Semitic languages could dispense with Ugaritic, Phoenician, and the fascinating forms of early inscriptional Aramaic and Hebrew, quite apart from significant data on the diachronic development of Arabic and its many manifestations. From the point of view of language teaching, the innovation here is the introduction of original scripts for the *Sprachproben*, as well as an appendix (pp. 236–60) retailing some (!) of the eccentricities of Semitic orthography (Ugaritic is, for example, rather badly depicted, and Phoenician is dismayingly simplistic). Of all these, Akkadian is the most persuasively articulated. The bibliography is as valuable as could be expected in eleven pages (pp. 264–74), following as it does the categories of the original publication. All in all, the exercise is useful, though one might be permitted to regret that a reading knowledge of German is no longer the ineluctable key to Semitic philology.

J. WANSBROUGH

JACOB MILGROM: *Studies in cultic theology and terminology*. (Studies in Judaism and Late Antiquity, Vol. 36.) xiii, 172 pp. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983. Guilders 68.

This volume contains 15 of Professor Milgrom's papers on cultic terminology published over the past 20 years, in most cases emended and bibliographically updated, but without cross-reference between its constituent parts that could have enhanced the presentation. That apart, the reprint is most welcome, since the whole provides an invaluable lexicon (an index would also have been helpful) of some of the most problematic locations in Hebrew scripture. In his Preface (new) the author argues (persuasively) the antiquity of the Priestly Code and reminds us of Wellhausen's erroneous interpretation of the same data. This refinement was of course possible not merely through fresh and careful scrutiny, but also by a wealth of source materials for the ancient Near East not accessible to the latter. Milgrom's method is well known and exemplary: statistical documentation of the gradual replacement of terms, e.g. 'ēdā by qāhāl or ašm by šwb, and detection of the semantic shift in a constant feature, e.g. 'abōdā, are convincingly set out. The relation of ašm to ht' is rather more complex, here (pp. 122–32) aided by analysis of the term šgh (!). Reference (p. 124, n. 11) to the author's later (1976) *Cult and conscience* favours a general Semitic etymology for ašm in the sense of 'punishment' or 'penalty', secondarily of 'guilt'. Now, that evokes of course the spectre of Arabic, even of Ugaritic, where however the data is exiguous and disputed (cf. most recently *RSP*, III, iv, 6 and 27), in any case rejected by Milgrom (*Cult*, p. 3, n. 6). And yet, with or without Ugaritic, I have in my own

analysis (forthcoming) of Arabic *īm/alām* found the concepts inherent in Hebrew *ašām* particularly valuable: the notions of 'guilt' and especially of 'expiation' are certainly evident in the Arabic material, though not without the ambivalence that obtains between 'crime' and 'punishment'.

J. WANSBROUGH

R. W. J. AUSTIN (tr.): *Ibn al-'Arabī: The bezels of wisdom*. (Classics of Western Spirituality.) xviii, 302 pp. New York, etc.: Paulist Press, [1980]. \$7.95.

This careful, fluent and readable translation of the *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* by Ibn al-'Arabī (1165–1240) will be welcomed by Arabists and by students of Islamic thought in the Middle Ages. This is the first time that this major work of Sūfism, one of the high-water marks of Islamic thought, has been translated into English. Titus Burckhardt, who has published a partial translation of it has contributed the preface. Dr. Austin commences with an introduction on the life and religious background of Ibn al-'Arabī, although he makes it very clear that he would prefer the great mystic to speak directly to the reader. 'I consider that his system of thought is original enough to merit presentation without the further complication of detailed religious, philosophical, and mystical comparisons' (p. 41).

One has sympathy with this viewpoint, all the same, it is probably a mistake to publish this translation without any glossary whatsoever. The student buyer, let alone the general reader, would be glad of a little help. For example, on p. 268 we read, 'The wisdom of Khālid b. Sinān resides in the fact that, in his mission, he manifested the Prophethood of the Isthmus. He claimed that he would reveal what was there [at the Isthmus] only after his death. It was therefore ordered that he be disinterred. When he was asked about the matter, he revealed that its regimen was in the form of this world, by which it may be known that what the apostles said in their worldly lives was true'.

It is to be doubted whether a student, who knows little about Sūfism, or even the by-ways of Islam, will make any sense of a passage such as this. True, Khālid b. Sinān is entered in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, yet here he is thrice mentioned in the index and is nowhere described as a person. There is no note, however brief. The Isthmus (*barzakh*) receives only the barest of attention.

There is much of real value here. It is a worthy translation, although the absence of helpful notes is to be regretted.

H. T. N.

HENRY CORBIN: *Cyclical time and Ismailī gnosis*. (Islamic Texts and Contexts.) x, 212 pp. London: Kegan Paul International [and] Islamic Publications, 1983. £11.95 (paper £6.95).

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