

## Arabian Sources of the Mosaic Narrative

Dr. NEILSEN's monograph\* of 221 pages is one of the most suggestive pieces of investigation into the bearings of the religious ideas and practices of the ancient Arabs on the Old Testament that have appeared in many a year. With the tendency at present to rather force the importance of Assyriology for the Old Testament, it is particularly desirable to bring into bolder relief the elements in the traditions and religion of the Hebrews which connect themselves directly with ancient Arabia. In the stories of the patriarchs these two elements—the Babylono-Assyrian and the Arabic—are represented by the Abraham and Isaac "cycles," respectively, tho the commingling of the two is shown by the attribution to Abraham of traditions that are regarded as having belonged originally to the "Isaac" group.

Dr. Neilsen's book is divided into two parts. In the first he gives an admirable summary of the material furnished chiefly by the inscriptions of Southern Arabia for determining the views held by the ancient Arabs of the deity and of the seasons, and days and places which they considered as sacred. Neilsen's main thesis, that this religion was essentially a moon-cult, maybe regarded as definitely established, tho he is inclined to press some of the evidence too hard. Around the moon-cult there was formed a pantheon, in which the sun and the planets Venus and Mercury represent the chief factors and the relation between the four is pictured as a family consisting of father, mother, daughter and son. The predominance of the moon-cult leads to making the month, with its natural subdivisions according to the phases of the moon, the point of departure for the recognition of certain days as sacred, and since the Hebrew

Sabbath—originally celebrated at intervals of seven days, corresponding to the phases of the moon—stands in direct connection with the moon-cult, it holds that we are justified in seeking for Arabic influences in the earliest form of the institution among the Hebrews.

Neilsen would go even further and interpret the Hebrew word "Sabbath" as the "station" or resting-place of the moon in each of its four phases. This explanation, however, will hardly meet with favor, and is a good illustration of the main defect of the suggestive work in pressing the arguments and the evidence too hard. The same remark applies to the attempt (p. 139) to find for Aaron an Arabic origin, and likewise in Neilsen's treatment of Moses the "moon" *motif* is forced beyond all reasonable bounds. One of the most valuable sections in the book is the one devoted to the rock sanctuary at Petra, discovered by G. L. Robinson in 1900, and the comparison which Neilsen institutes with the one that appears to have existed on the top of Mt. Sinai. Whether such a sanctuary actually existed or not, there is no doubt that the narrative in Exodus had one like this in mind, and the important bearing of Neilsen's most suggestive piece of reasoning remains the same, no matter what view we may take of the Biblical traditions.

The book fairly teems with brilliant suggestions and throws new and an entirely unexpected light on many problems of the Old Testament religion. Some of Neilsen's views will evoke helpful criticism, but all scholars will cheerfully acknowledge their indebtedness to him for having opened up new avenues of investigation.

\* NIELSEN, DITLEF, DIE ALTARABISCHE MOND-RELIGION UND DIE MOSAISCHE UEBERLIEFERUNG. Strassburg: Trübner.