Study of Israelite and Jewish Oral and Folk Literature: Problems and Issues

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INTRODUCTION

The first survey of oral and folk literature in relation to the whole of Jewish literature and problems stemming from it was made sixty years ago by the orientalist Bernard HELLER (1930).[1] Since then new material has been accumulated. More important, new questions and new viewpoints have been formulated.

The present essay shall survey some of these viewpoints and questions; an important element of these is the concept of tradition (see below). Some of these problems are restricted to the realm of Jewish studies proper, while others bear on folk literature in general and on its relations to other complexes of tradition which are part of a culture. The issues of the distinction between folk and learned (high) literature, of interrelations between various cultural traditions, and of the significance of language use in multilingual societies are universal problems and will apply equally to literate and non-literate societies. The impact of literacy and the problems of the interrelations between oral and written traditions should be considered for every literate society. These would include ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures with a written record of three to five millennia, South and East Asian cultures as well as Arabic and Europe-north-of-the-Alps cultures with a literacy of one to three millennia duration, and other cases with a record as short as two to three centuries. Questions of history of the material and of evaluation of sources in Israelite-Jewish culture will parallel questions arising in other cultures with a long written record, such as those of India and of the Far East. Thus, the Jewish tradition can also serve as a " laboratory " in which to examine more general problems.

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Our discussion follows the development of Jewish tradition in time.[2] The system of ethnopoetic genres used here follows the usage adopted in the author's previous work (see JASON 1968b, 1975a, 1975b, 1978). A detailed description of sources of Jewish literary tradition has been made elsewhere (JASON 1978–1980).[3] A survey of Israeli institutions of learning and research in folklore and ethnography and the relevant periodica has also been published (GOLDBERG and JASON 1983–1984).

Tradition: Definitions

Since " tradition " is a central concept in the present discussion, I will briefly outline what is meant by the term in this context.

The term " tradition " has several meanings and uses. The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists six groups, the main differentiations being between " tradition " as a noun designating menti- and artifacts of a certain culture, " tradition " as a verbal noun designating the process of transmission of the menti- and artifacts in time and space, and the adjective " traditional " as an attribute of menti- and artifacts.

In the present essay the term " tradition " is used in a somewhat wider sense than any single one of the meanings and uses enumerated above. We will speak of " *a* tradition " and not of " tradition " in general, based on use no. 6 in the *Oxford English Dictionary* and on the reasonings of E. SHILS (1981). By " a " tradition is meant a complex of values, beliefs, permanent ways of behavior (habits, conventions, customs practiced by members of a society); products of this behavior (menti- and artifacts); the habitual ways of maintaining all these; and their transmission in time and space. The " tradition complex " is understood by its bearers as coming from the past.

As a culture contains many tradition complexes, their relative positions in regard to the center of the culture differ. Thus, a learned tradition (as defined below, see p. 73) will always be more central and a folk tradition more peripheral to the culture. The relative positions of oral and written traditions (see p. 71) will vary from culture to culture and from period to period. For instance, in medieval Muslim culture oral tradition was valued higher than the written tradition. Thus, in Islamic law, a written document needs legal validation by oral testimony (see SCHACHT 1964, 192–196), and a whole branch of historic scholarship busies itself with the evaluation of the trustworthiness of isnads (the chain of transmission of hadiths—the historical oral traditions; see *Djarh-wa-'l Ta'dil*, *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. II: 462).

The " tradition of oral literature of a culture " would consist of the underlying values and beliefs held by the members of a society (these values and beliefs take part in more than one tradition complex

in a culture); of the literary forms and devices used, i.e., ethnopoetics; of the repertoire of works used by the society, i.e., the system of genres and the pool of content units; of the habitual ways of performance and use of these works; of the habitual ways of transmitting these works from generation to generation; of the ways of contact with other tradition complexes in society (such as the learned and the written traditions of the society, or non-literary complexes, such as the musical traditions of the culture, the beaux arts, etc.), and contact with the corresponding tradition complexes of other cultures. The written tradition of a culture would include also such aspects as the rules of literary composition, i.e. poetics; the choices in the use of certain languages and dialects among those available to the society for certain writing purposes (for instance, the dialect of a certain region is chosen as the basis for the development of the literary language, while other dialects remain side branches); the ways of contact with the oral literary tradition of the respective society; forms of contact with the tradition complexes of other cultures (ways of translation, rules determining what should be translated, borrowing and supplying literary models, etc.); technical, cultural and social aspects of the use of certain scripts; cultural meanings of the graphic aspects of the written work; and production and consumer behavior (authorship rights, publishing, reading habits, etc.).

Let us now review the problems pertinent to Jewish oral and folk literature.

Oral Tradition and Written Tradition

The problems of interrelations between oral and written tradition in Jewish culture are complex. Jews were literate, often in more than one language and script; they had a large body of letters, some of them belles lettres which contained, among others, also rewritings and imitations of folk stories (see p. 76); at the same time they practiced oral narration like the members of any other traditional society. Since ample documentation covering a long period of time exists, a detailed study of Jewish literature can be done, comparing it with other literatures with which it came into contact and with modern oral folk literature. Detailed indices of tale-types and motifs as well as structural analyses are needed, coupled with field investigation. Such studies would yield information about interrelations between oral and written tradition which would offer more than an educated guess. It might prove possible to advance solutions to such problems as, for instance, the influence of the written tradition on the oral folk tradition and the very nature of the latter, as expressed in the controversy between Wesselski (1931) and Anderson (1935). So far little work has been done in this field and

very few preliminary studies are available. Presently, a rough sketch of the problems can be given but no solutions are offered.

The first preliminary work needed would be the compilation of separate tale-type and motif indices for every period of Israelite and Jewish literature. So far a motif-index for the Talmudic-Midrashic literature and a partial tale-type indexing for the freshly collected oral folk narratives from immigrant groups in Israel have been completed. A full periodized index of the literature would show what kind of literary material, both in form and in content, was developed; which forms and contents are documented for a given period of time; in what frameworks (=works of literature) oral folk literature appears; what has been transmitted from one body of literature or period to another and what has been dropped here and picked up there. First of all, the whole belletristic material should be indexed, without regard to whether it is learned or folk tradition. A detailed investigation of the poetic features is needed to establish what is " learned " and what " folk " in the old written tradition, as the ancient oral tradition, naturally, cannot be directly observed any more.[4] The " whys " can be asked only after the facts have been established.

Influences between written and oral works in Jewish tradition should be assumed to run in both directions. The writers were themselves well versed in oral folk tradition and drew amply from it, be they compilers of medieval and modern tale collections, preachers (their practice is known since the Second Commonwealth), or composers of ethical instruction books, inspired by the medieval mystical movements (best known is Bahyee ibn Paquda's *Hovot ha-levavot*, see HYAMSON 1925–1947). All three kinds of literary activity continue today. Preachers still enjoy extended audiences in small and large synagogues, and tale collections and ethical instruction books are being republished and new ones compiled along traditional lines. Such works are still read in great quantities.[5] As this is the same audience which until very recently carried (and in its older generation still carries) the oral folk tradition of narrating, they close the circle by becoming now the readers of written books which draw on oral folk literature. On the other hand, the material circulating orally today is much richer than the contents of these books. Thus, the interrelations are not simple, and can be explained neither by postulating a closed circle, whereby the primacy of neither the written nor the oral tradition can be ascertained (the " chicken-and-egg " question), nor by adopting a priori the primacy of one of the two traditions.

FOLK TRADITION AND LEARNED TRADITION

Every society known to date possesses two traditions: learned and folk tradition. Even the most simply organized preliterate societies have their specialists, such as the shaman or another kind of medicine man, the war chief, the chief's court poets, instructors of the youth during the initiation period, masters of ceremonies, etc. The knowledge necessary for these specialists to perform their task in society was often couched in oral texts containing poetic features. Such texts can be described as " learned oral verbal traditions " of the society. Side by side with such texts, every society has a folk oral verbal tradition. Familiar to everyone, this tradition consists of artistic literary texts and of texts organized in a simpler way. Whether a genre has the status of " learned " or of " folk " varies from society to society and from period to period. The following is an approximate classification of works of oral literature:

a) Learned tradition of various specialists (regardless of how they are remunerated for their services):
   aa) Knowledge-and-information works, such as laws, norms, rules for sacrifices, sanctified historical traditions (including genealogies), high order technical knowledge, etc., which also may contain some poetic features.
   ab) Fully developed literary texts, such as magic formulas, medicinal texts, myths and hymns as parts of rituals, complex epic cycles, laments, etc.
b) Folk tradition, familiar to every member of the society, at least passively:
   ba) Knowledge-and-information works such as low order technical knowledge, transmitted verbally and sometimes couched in a semi-literary form (weather portents, agricultural rules).
   bb) Works of literature, sometimes " owned " and/or produced by individuals who thereby are not professionals in a technical sense: folk tales and lyric songs of various genres, simple epics, proverbs, riddles, etc. All of these have stable distinguishing ethnopoetic features.

The folk-literary works may be performed on informal occasions or in the framework of customs (secular) and rites (religious); formal roles in customs and rites are usually performed by specialists.[6]

Israelite Literature

In Jewish literature these divisions apply as well. In Israelite literature

the long lists of laws and prescriptions in, for instance, the Books of Exodus or Leviticus, and the myths and genealogies in the Books of Genesis, Exodus, and Chronicles can be regarded as Israelite learned tradition, which existed orally before being put into writing. The works of belles lettres (legends, novellae, parables, proverbs and riddles, and the many short poems of various genres) found in the Bible, are to be classified as oral folk tradition.

West Semitic literary tradition, as it has reached us in the extant texts, is of the learned sort. Very little is known of what could be possibly considered Canaanite folk tradition. Canaanite works of literature of the same genres as found in Biblical literature and exactly contemporaneous to it, i.e., from Canaan proper and stemming from the 16th–12th centuries B.C., did not reach us. As is well known, however, we have two groups of texts from societies to the north of the Israelite kingdoms: the 15th–12th century B.C. Ugaritic literature, and magical texts and royal inscriptions from the 12th century B.C. to the 4th century C.E. from Phoenicia and its offshoot, Carthage (see DONNER and RÖLLIG 1962–1964). Ugaritic texts contain psalmic poetry and epics of the "mythic epic" sub-genre, the poetics of which corresponds to widespread Ancient Near Eastern models.[7] This West Semitic learned tradition influenced Biblical literature in passages which are themselves pure learned tradition, such as the Psalms and the speeches in the Book of Job (see CASSUTO 1975). Genuine Israelite epics—not derived from the extant West Semitic tradition—are found in the Books of Joshua, the Judges, and Samuel. The respective Biblical chapters seem to be summaries of oral works. These works parallel in many respects some still living oral epic folk traditions. As these Biblical stories also do not show influences of the West Semitic learned tradition, the possibility could be considered of their having been at some stage part of the folk tradition. Other explanations are also possible. One such explanation could be: the Israelite epic expressed the specific ethnic identity of its bearers, therefore it had little or no connection to Ugaritic literary tradition (see text analyses in JASON 1979a, and 1981–1982).

Written creativity

With advancing literacy during the First Commonwealth (10th–6th century B.C.), the Israelite oral learned tradition and its literary creativity became increasingly committed to writing. The prophets committed their speeches to writing (see Jer. 36: 4–6, 26–29; 45: 1). During the Persian and the Hellenistic periods older works were rewritten and finalized and works taken over from the oral folk tradition were elaborately remodeled. In place of mere summaries, they were transformed

into independent works, as exemplified by the Books of Esther, Judith, Tobias, Susanna, and the so-called Second and Third Books of the Maccabeans (see analyses in JASON 1969). The exclusion of most of these works from the Biblical canon shows that they were considered at the time to be " folk " literature, even in their written versions.

Oral Tora

From the end of the Hellenistic period and into the Roman (1st century B.C.–3rd century C.E.) and Byzantine (4th–7th century C.E.) periods in the west and Parthian (2nd century B.C.–2nd century C.E.) and Sassanian (3rd–7th century C.E.) periods in the east, Jewish learned tradition once more became oral. This oral period produced rabbinical medieval Judaism, with its huge literature of the Mishna, Talmud, and Midrash. The need to differentiate qualitatively between the earlier, Biblical tradition, and the new, rabbinical tradition, dictated using a formal device of differentiation. Any formal device would work equally well, for instance, the consistent use of a different language or script. As it happened, oral communication was chosen to contrast with the written tradition of the Scriptures, while the language (Hebrew) and its script were retained. The social and cultural causes for this choice have not yet been investigated. In the course of time, as the quantity of the material increased, this " Oral Tora " was finally committed to writing, but the label " Oral Tora " is still used today to distinguish the Talmudic-Midrashic literature from the " Written Tora," i.e., Biblical literature.

It is not proper to say that intellectuals " fell back " into orality in the Hellenistic period, because the Israelite learned tradition was written since at least the 9th century B.C. Even the prophets, who obviously preached orally to the public, went to the trouble to have their speeches put in writing (or a follower did it for them—see p. 74). Neither did the rest of the Near East or the contemporaneous Hellenistic culture leave evidence of an oral learned tradition. Greek academic tradition, which started as an oral learned tradition (Socrates being the last oral teacher) was written since Plato, and textology was invented in the Alexandrian library. The Aramaic Christian tradition, which seems to have been wholly learned and written (see BAUMSTARK 1922), started at about the time the Tannaites began to fix the " Oral Tora " in writing (2nd century C.E.).

The arbitrariness of the choice of orality as a marker of difference is demonstrated by other choices made. MATHEWS (1983) gives an interesting example of technical uses of script for purposes of differentiation, showing how ancient Hebrew script and the newer "Assyrian "

script have been variously combined between the 2nd century B.C. and the 2nd century C.E., in order to distinguish a number of purposes. Another example is the so called " RaSHI " script: when Hebrew printing began, RaSHI's[8] commentaries on the Talmudic text were set off by a special script, invented precisely for this purpose. In this century, a strictly orthodox Jewish group in Israel uses language as a differentiating device between " sacred " and " profane." Hebrew is used for ritual and other religious purposes, while Yiddish is used for everyday conversation, although members of the group speak modern Hebrew and use it when addressing outsiders.

The Haggadah

What does the oral tradition of the Oral Tora consist of? From our list above, laws, norms, and rules for the performance of rituals are found in abundance. Their belonging to the learned tradition is beyond doubt and amply attested to in the texts themselves. In addition to these, a wealth of literary and semi-literary texts—the Haggadah—fills many pages of Talmudic-Midrashic literature.

Are these haggadic texts adapted from the oral folk tradition, possibly carrying the last remnants of those traditions which were not fixed in writing during the First Commonwealth? Does the Biblical text possibly bring only the most important features, a skeleton so to speak, since the details were known anyway to everybody in the society? Or, alternatively, are these embellishments to the Biblical stories which the Haggadah brings, literary creations of the learned community of sages in the Hellenistic and Roman periods? How can we decide between these two possible explanations? To the expanded Biblical story should be added stories about the sages themselves which are mostly of a novellistic character and do not constitute sacred legends (Biblical stories about Elisha can serve as an example of sacred legends; see 2 Kings 2 ff.). A third group of stories could be termed " historical " as they often contain some real historical information. Do these last two groups of Haggadah represent learned or folk tradition?

In our opinion, the haggadic texts are mainly the product of learned tradition, but of an *oral* learned tradition. The expanded Biblical stories were invented by the creative phantasy of the sages; the stories glorifying the sages and relating incidents of their intimate lives represent the oral folk tradition of the *bet ha-midrash* (the academy), i.e., of the older and younger students, and not of the lay masses of the people. The historical traditions, which often carry topical political references elevated onto (or disguised into) a theological level, are learned tradition developed in the *bet ha-midrash*, often by preachers for pur-

poses of political agitation (see *s.v.* Hellenism, *Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971, and bibliography there). A number of folk texts are, indeed, scattered here and there in the Talmudic-Midrashic literature, but these are only a small percentage of the whole Haggadah. The learned tradition uses oral-literary poetic devices (textual formulas, direct speech, tripling of various elements, individual motifs from folk tradition, etc.), a fact that may prove to be misleading at first examination. Three reasons prompt us to conclude that Haggadah is not a part of the folk tradition. First, ethnopoetic analysis reveals that these stories do not fit the models of Jewish oral folk literature, neither of the Biblical period nor of those from the Middle Ages or those observed today in living tradition, and cannot be classified by its system of genres. Second, oral folk tradition haggadic stories, or stories of a similar kind, are not told in modern Jewish life (see p. 93). And, lastly, many haggadic texts are prefixed by a short chain of transmission " thus heard X from Y . . . " which is typical of learned oral tradition as it seeks to authenticate its material in order to be authoritative. In contrast, folk proverbs are introduced by the phrase *'imre 'inshi* ([as] people say).

Kabbalistic and Hasidic oral traditions

Since the time the Oral Tora was committed to writing, the practice of an oral learned tradition had ceased. A certain revival could be observed among the 16th century kabbalists in the Eastern Mediterranean, where the mystical secrets were revealed orally by teachers to their followers, only to be immediately afterwards committed to writing by the eager pupil and then copied by everybody who could manage to get at the pupil's manuscripts (see *s.v.* Vital, *Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971, vol. 16: 172). Thus, no real oral learned tradition could develop.

The next approximation to an oral learned tradition could be observed in the Hasidic mystical movement, which started in the second half of the 18th century in Eastern Europe and continued some of the traditions of former mystical movements. The leader of the local group would teach his community at ritual gatherings and, again, a pupil would soon after the occasion commit the teacher's words to writing.

A sizable body of sacred legends grew up around the more prominent figures of kabbalists and Hasidic rabbis. This is regular oral folk tradition which runs parallel in time to the learned tradition of these two movements. In the course of time it was collected from the people and committed to writing by the pious admirers of the rabbis. These legends still live in modern oral folk literature.[9]

The basic contemporaneous folk tradition was less pious: folk tales and songs of all genres, proverbs, and riddles can be supposed to have

lived all the time. From time to time these folk tales entered collections of tales which were being compiled since the 10th century. The earliest of these are the *Alpha betha de Ben Sira* and the *Midrash 'aseret hadibbrot*, which utilize the form of the late Midrashim, and the tale collection *Hibbur yafe mehayshu'a* (see BRINNER 1977), which uses Arabic literary models. This is the only way we have come to know about the existence of folk traditions during the Middle Ages.

THE PROBLEM OF LANGUAGE

Since literature is composed in language, sociolinguistic aspects play an important role in the life of literary traditions. Among issues to be considered are consequences that follow from speaking a certain language; consequences of proficiency in several vernaculars; impact on tradition of the proximity in space of different language communities; impact of the simultaneous existence of written and learned traditions in several languages, some of which are actively spoken and others passively known; etc. There are many questions to be asked: how does folk and oral literature react to the factors just mentioned? How does it react to changes in these factors? What influence does the interplay of the different actively and passively known languages have in the society? What consequences follow from the existence of a written learned tradition in a literary language for the vernacular oral and folk literature? How does vernacular written folk literature interact on the one hand with vernacular oral literature and on the other hand with written learned literature in a different, passively known language? Which members of a given society use—actively or passively—which of the languages at the disposal of the society? How does society cope with language change and the consequent antiquation of the language in which the older literature is written? Which processes are involved when a society adopts a new language, as happened several times in the Near East? How does such an adoption affect the society's literary activities? How does the respective society itself view these problems? And so on.

The following brief review of otherwise well-known facts should highlight these questions in relation to Israelite and Jewish folk and oral literature. The Near Eastern peoples changed the language they spoke several times while keeping the same, or a close, cultural tradition. Sumerian was replaced by a series of Semitic languages which followed one another: Akkadian (2nd millennium B.C.), Aramaic (1st millennium B.C.–1st millennium C.E.) and lastly, Arabic (2nd millennium C.E.). The folk literature of the area was not affected: works of ancient Semitic folk literature can be found even today in the oral tradition of

contemporary Near Eastern populations.[10]

Canaanite

It is assumed that the Israelite tribes, upon settling in Canaan, adopted the local West Semitic dialect—at least, that is the language in which their preserved literature (i.e., the Bible) is written. The adoption of the local dialect gave them direct access to Canaanite literature, oral and written. As our knowledge of Canaanite literature grows, it becomes increasingly evident how much Biblical literature was part of this literary tradition (naturally, anything that has reached us is in a written state).

Aramaic

The next language change for the Israelites occurred during the 6th century B.C., in the course of the Babylonian Exile and under Achaemenid rule. They adopted Aramaic which in the meantime had become the language of all Semitic groups in the Fertile Crescent. This switch to Aramaic opened for the Israelites the gates to general Near Eastern literature of the period, first to the oral part of it. Remnants of written Jewish literary activity in early Aramaic are found in the Bible (Book of Daniel) and in the Story of Ahiqar (5th century B.C.).[11] Later on (2nd to 7th centuries C.E.) much of the Talmudic-Midrashic literature is written in various Aramaic dialects. Here, remnants of an oral literature in Aramaic can be found (see p. 76). It is not clear how far Indo-European languages: Greek and Hittite from the west, and Indo-Iranian languages from the east, were known to Semitic peoples at this early time. In this connection we may consider the Philistines, who are thought to be of Greek origin and who settled in Canaan, the many Greek myths which are located in the Near East, or the Hittites (Neo-Hittites) mentioned in the Bible (see, e.g., Num. 13: 29; Joshua 12: 8; 2 Samuel 11: 3 ff.; see also next section below).

Greek and Persian

The fourth century B.C. brought with it a further change: Greek rule, language, and culture entered massively into the Near East. Soon Greek became the language of the western Jewish Diaspora (primarily in Ptolemaic Egypt) to the point of necessitating a translation of the main sacred text—the Bible—into that language (the Septuagint). The core of the nation, residing in Judea, also adopted Greek, but only as a second language, Aramaic being the first. Greek served both the simple and the educated classes (see the recent summary by MUSSIES 1976). Thus Greek literature became accessible to Jews and served as a supplier of

both literary themes and models (see pp. 88, 95).

In the eastern Diaspora—Syria and Mesopotamia—Aramaic continued to be the only spoken language until the switch to Arabic occurred during the 7th–10th centuries C.E. Neither Old (6th–4th centuries B.C.) nor Middle Persian (2nd century B.C. to 7th century C.E.) language and literature seem to have played a great role. To be sure, there are Persian loanwords in Talmudic-Midrashic literature (see TELEGDI 1935), but there is no evidence that Jews in Mesopotamia used Persian in daily conversation or that Talmudic sages read Pahlavi literature, at least not in the original language. Persian domination did not impose its culture on the population as did Greek and Roman domination. In spite of centuries of Persian rule all parts of the Mesopotamian population—pagan, Jewish, Christian, etc.—continued to speak and write Aramaic (see MONTGOMERY 1913, BAUMSTARK 1922). It can be assumed that only when moving eastward, to the Iranian Plateau proper, did Jews switch to speaking Persian. According to available documentation, written Jewish literature (Persian written in Hebrew script) developed here only in the late Middle Ages (NETZER 1985).

Arabic

In the wake of the Arabic conquest of the Fertile Crescent (7th century C.E.) the Aramaic and Coptic speaking population—including Jews—switched to Arabic. Consequently, the whole oral folk literature has been (by the performers) translated and recreated in Arabic. The process of language replacement took a long time, mainly from the 7th to the 10th century; still, Christians wrote in Aramaic until the 13th century (consider Bar Hebraeus, who wrote his works first in Aramaic, but then translated them into Arabic—a sign that his audience by then hardly knew Aramaic). From the 9th century on Jews stopped using Aramaic and started writing in Arabic, adopting at the same time new forms of literature, following Arabic models (see DRORY 1988). An example is the tale collection *Hibbur yafe mehayshu'a* (BRINNER 1977). Jews adopted Arabic for literary purposes earlier than Eastern Christians. This could be explained by Aramaic being the vehicle of ethno-religious identification for Eastern Christians as opposed to Greek the language of the Byzantine rulers, while for Jews, Hebrew played this identifying role. Thus, Jews could easily replace Aramaic by another language.

Central European vernaculars

When moving westward to Rome (already during Roman rule) and from there northward to Central and Western Europe, Jews adopted

whatever local language the host population spoke: first Latin/Italian, then Romanic and Germanic languages and dialects. Knowledge of language gave Jews direct access to the respective literatures—again, as in the case of Aramaic, first to the oral literature. The simplest way written literature could enter Jewish society was to transliterate works into Hebrew script (E.g., *Dukus Horant*, a 14th century German romance. See GANZ et al. 1964). Original works were written following themes and models of contemporary European literature and using well-known folk tale materials. Examples include *Megillat Ahima'atz* (11th century South Italy), which builds upon Byzantine and Italian legend literature, and Berechiah's *Mishle shu'alim* (13th century, England or France. See SCHWARZBAUM 1979) of a similar kind as Marie de France's collection of animal fables, *Ysopet*. Arthurian romance and the story of Alexander the Great found their translators and rewriters.[12]

With the move from Central Europe eastward to the Slavic countries from the 14th–15th century on, language switching ceased. Jews retained the Middle German dialects which they spoke and had become accustomed to write in Hebrew script. Yiddish developed on this basis. The socio-cultural causes for this significant change in language behavior are not clear, but as a result folk literature in Yiddish, both oral and written, developed following German models and themes.

Hispanic

In the westernmost part of Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, where Jews settled since Roman times, the process took on a different form, due to a different historical development. Here, Jews did not move around from place to place. Instead the host population, or its ruling class, changed. Each new conqueror brought his language, which the population adopted, at least partially. Romans brought a very thorough switch to local Latin dialects; the rule of the Visigoths which followed is very sparsely documented. The Arab conquest in 711, on the other hand, was followed by centuries of a blossoming Arabic culture, based on the Arabic language, with the Jews being very much part of this culture. With the Reconquista, Jews switched once more, now to the Romanic dialects of Spain. During the 12th–15th centuries Jews were persecuted in Spain and emigrated to other Mediterranean and Near Eastern countries, carrying with them the Spanish dialects they spoke. As in Europe at about the same time, Jews now stopped switching languages and retained their Spanish dialects. Thus, Spanish Jews knew three or even four languages: Hebrew, which was used for ritual and literary purposes; Aramaic, known passively by the educated; Judeo-Spanish, spoken as the mother tongue at home and inside the com-

munity; and a local language used in the market place (Arabic, Turkish, South Slavic, Greek, Italian, etc.). This knowledge of the local vernacular rarely included reading ability and thus no direct access to the respective high written literature was available. A rich oral folk literature developed in Judeo-Spanish, based partly on the specific Hispanic heritage and partly on the general Mediterranean culture.

Multilingual capabilities

Given this complex language situation, the question arises as to which language provided in each period and in each particular Jewish group the vehicle of oral literature? If a person speaks several languages, does he narrate and sing oral literature in all of them? What is the relationship between the mother tongue and the language oral literature is habitually performed in? Was the same language common to both folk and learned tradition? Many more such questions might be asked. Once the facts are established, " whys " can be asked and the consequences of the facts investigated.

In Talmudic-Midrashic literature there are some clues concerning the use of language, namely quotes from oral folk literature. These are given in Aramaic, which occupied at that time the role of mother tongue. As the surrounding non-Jewish population also spoke Aramaic as its mother tongue, we can assume that little difference could arise between the transmission of oral folk literature inside the community and in contacts with other ethno-religious communities. The learned tradition used two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic, and thus bilingualism was the problem of the learned tradition and not of the folk tradition.

For the later Middle Ages, direct data is less available. One can assume that in Moslem countries Jews switched to Arabic as their mother tongue together with the rest of the population and thus again a monolingual situation prevailed. Written learned tradition switched from Hebrew plus Aramaic to Hebrew plus Arabic. However, passive knowledge of Aramaic could not be abandoned as much of the Talmudic-Midrashic literature was written in Aramaic and has never been translated into Hebrew. Thus, the learned tradition became trilingual, using Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic.[13]

On the Iberian Peninsula the situation was apparently more complex. At the start of Moslem Spain, two groups of Jews could be differentiated in respect to their language: the old settlers, descendants of the settlers of the Roman period who spoke the local Romanic dialects, and the new immigrants from the Fertile Crescent and North Africa, who already had switched to Arabic as their mother tongue. To this should be added servants in well-to-do houses who were presumably

drawn from the native romanized population. Thus a rather complex linguistic situation evolved. The question which language played the role of mother tongue, when and where and among which classes of the Jewish population, is not easy to answer. In which language did, e.g., the mother or a servant sing a lullaby to the child?

For the learned tradition, both religious and secular, we possess a wealth of documentation which shows clearly that it was trilingual. This was the " golden period " of Jewish medieval literature. Hebrew and Arabic were both used actively while Aramaic was used passively. The artificial Aramaic of the *Zohar* (13th century) demonstrates the latter point clearly. In the wake of the Reconquista, Jews living in Christian Spain dropped Arabic and adopted Spanish as their mother tongue. As a consequence, oral folk literature was composed in this Judeo-Spanish dialect (e.g., Judeo-Spanish romancero-folk poetry; see MENENDEZ-PIDAL 1957–1985 and SOLA-SOLE, SILVERMAN and ARMISTEAD 1980–1984). Judeo-Spanish maintained its position with the Spanish exiles until the recent disbanding of the Sephardic communities (with the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948). With the abandonment of Arabic, the learned tradition became restricted to Hebrew, with Aramaic carried on as passive knowledge; thus, Sephardic Jews lost contact with Arabic literature. The exiles who settled in Arabic countries relearned colloquial Arabic for low-level oral contacts with co-territorial ethno-religious communities. Those who settled in Turkish-speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire do not seem to have cared for Turkish literacy, at least not until the end of the 19th century, and thus Turkish written literature had no influence on their literary activity. Slavic speaking provinces of the Ottoman Empire had at the time no secular written learned tradition. Since the opening of Alliance Israélite Universelle schools throughout the Ottoman Empire in the second half of the 19th century, knowledge of French opened gates to French literature; this, however, had no impact on oral literature.

Since the late Middle Ages contacts with Arab literary traditions lessened also for those Jews in Arabic-speaking countries who never had passed through Christian Spain. Classical literary Arabic differed so much from the colloquial language that comprehension of the literary language necessitated special training. Jewish education did not provide routinely for instruction in Arabic script and literature and thus only educated people mastered them.[14] Hebrew printing started already in the 15th century, while Arabic printing started only in the middle of the 19th century, making Arabic reading materials scarce and expensive. Only during the second half of the 19th century did a local

chapbook literature develop in Arabic countries in both Arabic and Hebrew script (see YA'ARI 1937–1940, 1959, 1967, for texts in Judeo-Arabic dialects and Hebrew script for Jews who rarely knew Arabic script).

In Europe (north of the Alps) the situation was much simpler. In Western and Central Europe, Jews spoke the local vernaculars (consider RaSHI's glosses in Old French in the 11th century. See note 8). In Germany, during the late Middle Ages, Jews adopted the High German dialect as their mother tongue which then developed into Yiddish. This they used as the vehicle of their folk literature, oral and written, and kept it during their stay in Slavic and Baltic countries (ca 14th–20th centuries). Towards the end of the 16th century printing in Yiddish starts, most of it texts of folk literature for the uneducated and women. Learned tradition uses Hebrew throughout, with Aramaic as passive knowledge.

Sociolinguistic aspects

From the 16th century on until the beginning of modernization in the 19th and 20th centuries, the language situation in traditional Jewish society was as follows: in most Jewish groups, men had at least a reading ability of the Hebrew script and language, needed for ritual purposes (in this century, Jews in Kurdistan, the Caucasus, and India were found lacking this basic knowledge, except for the religious functionaries). Women rarely had religious education and usually did not know Hebrew. In Europe they were taught to read the Hebrew script in which Yiddish literature was written; in the Near East, in this century, women were usually completely illiterate, except for the places with schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle. In the Mediterranean, Near Eastern countries, Central Asia, and India, Jews spoke the local vernaculars, sometimes in their own version, such as the various Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Persian dialects, which they wrote with Hebrew characters. In addition, several groups had their own vernacular for use inside the community: Eastern European Jews, Yiddish; descendants of Spanish exiles an old version of Spanish; Jews in Kurdistan a Neo-Aramaic dialect; while in Turkey a small group kept to a medieval Greek dialect. Since the second half of the 19th century schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle introduced French language and literature into the Eastern communities; both boys and girls were instructed.[15]

This pattern of language proficiency opened three possibilities. First, knowledge of Hebrew enabled every group of Jews to communicate with every other Jewish group, be it inside the Moslem world or across the barrier, in the Christian world. A common literary activity

of writing and publishing was maintained across state boundaries. The literature produced was for the most part of a religious and legal nature; a small number of chapbooks of a belletristic content was published too (see p. 88). These chapbooks drew heavily upon oral folk literature, translated into Hebrew, and thus helped disseminate the same works into all parts of the Jewish Diaspora.

Second, their own local dialect, playing the role of mother tongue and of vehicle for oral and folk literature, served Jews for self-identification purposes. It set the community off from its immediate surroundings, especially during one's childhood, before the child learned the other languages current in the neighborhood. Within the confines of the Jewish groups, in turn, Judeo-Spanish and Yiddish created further sub-groups of communities.

Speaking proficiency in local vernaculars used by the co-territorial population around the Mediterranean and in the Near East finally opened a third doorway, namely to the local oral folk literature.

In Eastern Europe, before the advent of rapid modernization since the end of the 19th century, both men and women knew how to read the Hebrew script. Men also knew the language, mostly passively. The mother tongue was Yiddish and Jews did not, for the most part, speak local Slavic and Baltic languages of the co-territorial population. This created, for the development of Jewish oral and folk literature, a situation entirely different from that in the Near Eastern countries. Lack of proficiency in the local languages coupled with the fact of the Jewish population being mainly urban, in contrast to the immediately surrounding Slavic and Baltic population which was essentially rural, curtailed literary contacts between the two groups. As language barriers are not necessarily barriers to the dissemination of oral literature, this is a rather unusual phenomenon which calls for further investigation.

Script and Literacy

Israelite-Jewish literary tradition has an uninterrupted written record, even in the very same language, for more than three millennia. In addition, Jews, throughout history, have been literate in various degrees, in the languages and scripts of other cultural traditions: West Semitic, Akkadian, Aramaic, Greek, Arabic, Romanic, and Germanic languages, to list only the more important ones.

How did literacy, especially multiple literacy, influence folk and oral tradition? The influence should be considered on two levels: (a) direct contacts between domestic written and domestic oral tradition; between foreign written literature, folk and learned, and domestic

written literature; and (b) indirect contacts: foreign literary tradition impinging on domestic oral tradition by way of domestic written literature. Foreign literature can impinge on domestic literature in two ways: by direct translations and by providing models for domestic literary creativity. Literacy in neighboring languages enables participation in regional cultural trends; literacy in leading world languages opens the door to world literature. Thus Jews are found participating in Aramaic, Greek, medieval Arabic, and Latin traditions. That is where, for instance, the philosophical works of Sa'adya Gaon (10th century Iraq) and Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), and the translating activities of Jews from Arabic to Hebrew and Latin, belong (LEVIANT 1969, 52–55; see, for instance, Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis*: SCHWARZBAUM 1961–1963). Yet, literacy in another script was not crucial for this participation. So long as another language was known, an individual could transliterate works into Hebrew script. Such was done in printed chapbook literature in Europe (from German, 16th–19th centuries: LIPTZIN 1972, ch. I) and in the Near East (from Arabic, second half of the 19th century to the 20th century; see YA'ARI 1937–1940, 1959, 1967).

Questions to be asked here include: what kind and what degree of literacy are we talking about, mainly an ability to read, or more than that? How much is needed to transmit cultural values? How extensive was literacy at a given time, at least the ability to read fluently and the possibility to get hold of manuscripts? Was literacy at certain periods confined to certain social groups (professional scribes, upper class), who then served as transmittors, or was literacy a matter of general knowledge?

Since the Second Commonwealth basic reading ability of Hebrew script was obligatory for every boy for ritual purposes (see, e.g., SAFRAI 1976). Women do not seem to have been excluded from Hebrew literacy during antiquity and the Middle Ages (take, for instance, the learned Bruria, Bab. Talmud, Pes. 62b and the woman teacher in the 34th responsum of Maimonides, BLAU 1986). Based on this reading skill, literature in vernacular was written in Hebrew script and thus made accessible to the half-educated. Since early modern times, women in Europe are known to have been able to read and write in Yiddish, in Hebrew script, and to have formed a formidable audience for works specially written for them. A whole chapbook literature (i.e., written folk literature) developed for the use of women and the less-well-educated men.[16]

Less well known, and for most periods impossible to establish, are data about the availability of reading materials, initially of manuscripts

and later on of printed books. What could the semi-literate man or woman get hold of to read in, say, the kingdom of Judah? If we assume that the inscriptions of Kuntilet Ajrud and the Arad and Lachish ostraka were written by average members of the community and not by hired scribes, then there were also average members of the society who could read and write.[17] How many manuscripts of a work were circulating in antiquity? How were they produced? What was the price of a manuscript scroll in the 9th century B.C.? How long could a manuscript be used before it fell to pieces? How many works could an average adult, semi-literate person be supposed to have read during his lifetime, or, say, yearly? How proficient was he at reading? What was the difference in reading ability between various social groups? Later on we may ask how widespread was reading ability in, say, Greek or Arabic? The Jewish medieval and early modern system of instruction, which is well known, did not provide anything more than Hebrew literacy.[18] In spite of that it is known that at least some educated Jews knew how to read and write Arabic in the Middle Ages, and wrote in this language for a Jewish readership, but in Hebrew characters.[19]

Due to the scarcity of sources it is very difficult to answer these and related questions. The answers, however, would throw light on the very basic questions of the influence of written literature on oral literature, a matter which has a very important bearing on the problem of the nature of folk and oral literature.

Sources

As stated above, Jewish oral and folk literature is relatively well documented for a rather extended period. What is the nature of this documentation? How do the written sources at our disposal contain works of oral literature? Why do certain sources contain oral-literary works? What purpose do these works serve in the overall framework of the document? Which ethnopoetic genres do these written sources contain in each particular period? What changes did the oral text undergo when it was included in the written document, which is in itself a work of literature, of a certain literary genre, has a particular style and purpose, and was intended for a specific audience?

For Jewish tradition, evaluation of sources has been done mainly for Biblical literature; later periods have received less detailed scholarly attention. Let us briefly review the main groups of sources at the scholar's disposal and the way they incorporate oral literature, and try to sketch the direction in which answers to our questions may be looked for.

Biblical literature

Biblical literature contains several groups of texts. Dozens of sacred legends are scattered in the various books (see list in JASON and KEMPINSKI 1981). The Books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel are almost wholly composed of summaries of epic narratives (JASON 1979a, 1981–1982). Smaller groups of works consist of novellae, aetiological legends, early-population legends, a few parables, proverbs, and riddles.[20] King David's lament may resemble genuine folk laments (2 Samuel 1: 19–27), but so far it has not been compared to folk laments from the region. The Book of Lamentation does not seem to be folk poetry but learned tradition, possibly modeled after Sumerian and Akkadian laments over destroyed towns. These laments are part of classical Mesopotamian written learned tradition (HILLERS 1972). Short lyric songs of a kind found even today in the oral folk poetry of the Near East, are scattered throughout Biblical literature; prophets, among others, use them (AVISHUR 1971). It is attested that texts from the Song of Songs have been sung by the common folk in taverns; that would add folk love songs to the repertoire.[21] Missing are fairy tales, numskull tales and tall tales.[22]

The Biblical writer uses the narrative genres (myth, legend, novella, epic) to tell a story which is considered to be history; mythic tales in the Books of Genesis and Exodus (which we consider learned tradition) tell sacred history.[23]

Apocryphal and pseudepigraphic literature

This literature from the Persian and Hellenistic periods used works stemming from folk tradition in the same manner as Biblical literature did: to tell history. In contrast to Biblical practice, however, this literature has the character of entertainment literature and thus pseudo-historical narrative results. Such are the Book of Judith, a last remnant of epic narrative; the Second Book of the Maccabeans, where history is piously rewritten into a chain of sacred legends and martyr-tales; and the Book of Esther, the Third Book of Maccabeans and the first chapters in the Book of Daniel, all of which tell pseudo-history in the form of sacred legends and wisdom novellae. The content of a heroic fairy tale is rewritten into a pious legend in the Book of Tobias (AaTh 505); a wisdom novella is rewritten in the Book of Susanna (AaTh 926 *E-F-JASON 1965) and appended to the biography of the historically elusive prophet Daniel (whose name is suspiciously familiar from Ugaritic literature, preceding for a whole millennium the Hellenistic period. See DRIVER 1956). This pseudo-historical writing is part of a genre blossoming at the time in the wider Hellenistic literature.

Talmud and Midrash

With the advent of Talmudic-Midrashic literature, the place of folk literature in the framework of the learned tradition changed. Now, folk tales did not purport to tell history—that was the task of the learned tradition—nor did the writer want to entertain his audience. Folk tales are here used as exempla in sermons and in discussions on legal or theological matters. While there are relatively many folk-literary works in Biblical and Hellenistic literature, Talmudic-Midrashic literature is relatively poor in folk-literary texts: learned tradition prevails. Most of the tales in this literature used as exempla are learned compositions (see p. 76). The same will be the case from now on in the whole of Jewish written literary creativity. Medieval and modern tale collections, folk tales contained in chronicles, preachers' sermons, and ethical instruction literature form only a small part of the total literary output.

In the absence of genre-, tale-type- and motif-indices which would distinguish between folk and learned tradition, it is difficult to describe in detail the repertoire of subsequent periods. The following descriptions are, therefore, based solely on the author's impressions.

The body of Talmudic-Midrashic literature seems to include some folk materials stemming from the oral tradition such as sacred legends and legends of fate, some demonic and early-population legends, novellae, some tall tales and proverbs. The latter are the only genre which the Talmudic writer designates as being oral literature, by introducing them with the phrase "*'imre 'inshi*" ([as] people say). Among genres which loom large in Biblical literature, the absence of epics and the rarity of lyric folk song in Talmudic-Midrashic literature has to be noted. These two do not reappear in Jewish written premodern literature any more.[24]

Medieval tale collections

The first tale collections made their appearance at about the tenth century. For the first time the folk tale was introduced as a work in itself, not as part of a historical narrative or as an exemplum in a sermon, but for its own sake, as literary entertainment, sometimes with a moralistic frame. This treatment resembles the way Hellenistic works were composed, with the difference that the Hellenistic writer rewrote the folk tale heavily into an elaborate literary work, while the medieval collector and editor had less artistic aspirations and introduced the tale in short form, often as a mere summary of the oral tale. Here, Jewish writing paralleled developments in popular Arabic literature which introduced the oral folk tale as entertainment (possibly following Persian models, based in turn on Indian literature, such as the collection *Kalila-*

wa-Dimna). Part of the materials for Jewish collections was adapted from contemporaneous oral folk literature and had no prior written sources; thus we learn indirectly about the existence of this oral tradition (see p. 93). Prominent among such collections are *Hibbur yafe mehayshu'a* (BRINNER 1977) and R. Berechiah's *Mishle shu'alim* (see the thematic historical study by SCHWARZBAUM 1979). To these should be added translations into Hebrew of belletristics from world literature and later retranslations into Latin, which earned the Jews the reputation of literary mediators in the medieval world (see Petrus Alfonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis*. SCHWARZBAUM 1961–1963).

Somewhat later, collections were made which culled their materials solely from the Talmudic-Midrashic learned tradition and arranged them according to principles and models used in Jewish traditional literature. Of these, *Yalqut Shim'oni* (13th century Germany) and *Ein Ya'aqov* (Salonika 1516) are prominent and popular to this day. The interest in these collections arose concurrently with the development of the mystical movements which produced, among others, the ethical didactic literature (see the next section). Together, both these collections and the ethical didactic literature represent a " return to the sources " after the somewhat cosmopolitan culture of the Spanish " golden age."

Ethical didactic literature

This literature, which appeared first in Spain on the basis of the mystical movements in the 12th–13th centuries, carried texts from three sources: learned Talmudic-Midrashic tradition, oral folk tradition and a considerable quantity of new inventions of its own, i.e., of the learned tradition of the medieval mystical movements. The tales serve again as exempla, thus following the Talmudic-Midrashic model. The best known of this sort is the already mentioned *Hovot ha-levavot* (HYAMSON 1925–1947); such works are still being republished and new ones are composed.

Modern collections

The invention of print in early modern times brought more and more collections, both in Hebrew, for the educated in all parts of the Jewish Diaspora, and in the vernaculars for the simple folk, including women, of specific communities. Written in a simple style, such collections in Yiddish flooded the European Jewish market from the 16th century on, and since the middle of the 19th century, printed collections in Judeo-Arabic were put on the market in North Africa and the Near East (see the bibliography in YA'ARI 1937–1940, 1959, 1967). Now the fairy tale and the numskull tale joined the sacred legends and novel-

lae of the earlier collections and thus almost the full repertoire of the oral folk tale was represented. Often the authors drew on their own experience of oral folk tales as heard at home; for many of the pieces no earlier written source can be found. Collections of sacred legends and wisdom novellae glorifying holy rabbis form a special group. First to appear was the collection of legends about Isaac Lurie (ha-'ARI, publ. 1629–1631); the most prominent, however, is the Hasidic collection in Eastern Europe about the founder of Hasidism *Shivhe ha-BeSHT* published in 1815 (BEN AMOS and MINTZ 1970).

The 19th century brought a new factor to the scene: conscious collecting of folk tradition—the "folk wisdom"—in the vernacular, with little or no pretensions to literary authorship of the collector. Manuscripts of that sort were found in Iraq, written in Hebrew characters and the local Judeo-Arabic vernacular. The manuscripts, still unpublished, several of which stem from the first half of the 19th century, contain dozens of tales and hundreds of poems and proverbs (AVISHUR 1979, 1980, 1988). Independently, modern collecting started in Eastern Europe by the end of the 19th century and produced several published volumes of folk tales and songs (see bibliographies by WEINREICH 1959 and NOY and NOY 1971, 85–96). All of these recordings were done manually, with all the inaccuracies such recording carries. Verse texts are always recorded more accurately, while prose texts tend to be more or less rewritten according to the collector's memory and talent. Incidentally, that holds for all collections (Jewish and others) published since early modern times, before tape-recording started.

HISTORY OF ORAL AND FOLK LITERATURE

The exceedingly long written documentation of Jewish literary tradition allows us to examine the history of the oral and folk creativity that produced it.

The historical destiny of oral literature is a controversial subject. Two directions compete: one is the devolutionary assumption that contemporary oral literature is a deteriorated remnant of once perfect antique literary works. Such are the historical-philological and textological approaches of, e.g., the Grimm Brothers and the Finnish school (AARNE 1913; JASON 1970). The second assumption is evolutionary: oral literature developed from more primitive to more complex forms. Such are, e.g., the ethnographical and sociological approaches of the early British anthropologists and of contemporary East European Marxist scholarship. As, however, oral literature by its very nature vanishes with its performance, neither of the two approaches can be substantiated for lack of evidence. The available sources are all written documents

which carry rewritings of oral works (see p. 87).

Questions asked so far about the history of oral literature are first of all related to content (themes and motifs—*Stoffgeschichte*). A second kind of question concerns the problem of relations of this content to ritual, to the concrete social situation (the " context ") and to the overall social system. Recent East European semiotic scholarship further added attention to ethnopoetic qualities (JASON 1977b and MARANDA 1974). We will try to still broaden the scope of questions and thus enable a better utilization of the evidence available.

A history of oral and folk literature should include such topics as: changes in poetic forms and models (prosody, narrative syntax, models for whole genres and for their interrelations) and contents (the pool of themes and motifs, narrative semantics); changes in the ways of life of this literature in tradition (contexts of use, ways of performance, transfer in space and time, etc.); changes in the socio-psychological functions of single works and of whole genres from one historical period to the next; changes in the interplay between oral and written literature; changes in the interrelations between learned and folk traditions in literature and in other realms of culture. Other questions would be: what kind of literary activities were practiced at a certain time? What forms of authorship and of audience were customary? What do we learn from the available documentation about the position of oral and folk tradition on the axis of center vs. periphery of the culture (JASON 1988b)?

All these questions should be considered in the light of the problem of direction: what should be seen as a progressive and what as a regressive change? In which of the above-mentioned aspects can evolution or devolution of the oral and folk literary traditions be observed? And, lastly, the question should be raised: has change a direction at all (JASON, n.d.)?

What can the available sources of the Israelite-Jewish tradition—all of which are, naturally, written—teach us about the problems mentioned? Most readily observable is information about the pool of themes and motifs current at a given period. Next comes evidence concerning ethnopoetic questions, the literary patterns and models used in a given period. In some exceptional cases genuine proverbs and text-fragments of poems may be found quoted in the sources which provide information about the poetic system of a period. The systems of genres prevailing at certain periods are amply documented; good indices arranged by historical periods are needed to inform us about the system of genres in the past. Answers to other questions raised are less readily found and demand much more ingenious work of unearthing the little evidence there might be and in interpreting it in the

light of information about the whole web of society and culture in which oral and folk literature are embedded.

Just one aspect can be tentatively discussed: the repertoire of ethnopoetic genres of the Israelite-Jewish literature through time. All other questions have to wait for preliminary investigations before any exposition of the developments can be undertaken.

Poetics

In another place we showed that a truly progressive development from primitive to complex forms in oral literature of the Semitic and Indo-European people cannot be traced in the documents available. The earliest Sumerian works available, of the third millennium B.C., were already fully developed literary creations, analysable by ethnopoetic models as these were developed from modern oral folk literature, i.e., no changes occurred in the poetic qualities during the five millennia since the Sumerian works were put into writing. Indeed, the relevant Biblical texts show the same quality: they are easily analysable and classifiable into clear-cut ethnopoetic genres. Thus, no changes either in form or in content, be they progressive or regressive, can be detected in the documentation at our disposal (JASON 1969, 1979a, 1979b, 1981, 1981–1982; JASON and KEMPINSKI 1981).

Repertoire of genres

In one point alone can a change be observed, namely in the composition of the repertoire. Some genres disappeared from the repertoire while others were added in the course of time. The repertoire in Biblical literature contained myths, but these seem to have been part of the learned tradition. The Bible also contains epic narratives, in two sub-genres as national and historic epic (JASON 1979a, 1981–1982). No later period of Jewish oral literature, taken as a unit, contains myths and epics (see note 24).

During the Hellenistic period, a sub-group of the sacred legend appeared in the sources which deals with ethnic problems of Jews as an oppressed ethno-religious minority (JASON 1968b, 118–164; 1975a, 125–171). First examples of these legends appear already in the last Biblical books, Daniel and Esther, and in the Apocrypha (such as the Third Book of the Maccabeans. JASON 1969). Martyr tales are another group which appeared during the same period. These tell about individual victims (real or imaginary) of Greek and Roman persecutions. While martyr tales subsequently flourished in early and medieval Christian *legendae*, they are rare in Jewish literature. These stories surface occasionally in oral tradition in times of severe persecutions. They are

always conveyed as history; in many cases they are based on actual history, and often supported by the learned tradition.[25]

Lyric folk songs are well documented in Biblical literature, while Talmudic-Midrashic literature contains only a few (MIRSKI 1965); they are absent from the literature of subsequent periods. This is not meant to suggest that lyric folk song disappeared from oral folk repertoire; it is amply documented in modern oral vernacular tradition of all Jewish groups (see, e.g., NOY and NOY 1971; GAMLIELI 1979; AVISHUR 1987).

Most other genres are continuously present in the sources, with some small deviations. As our historical documentation, naturally, is not a representative sample, small deviations in the presence or absence of sub-sub-genres cannot be taken as evidence for fluctuations from period to period in the repertoire's composition.[26]

A major change in the composition of the repertoire can be observed in modern times in the oral folk literature of Jews in Eastern Europe. This repertoire underwent an impoverishment of the same kind as the oral folk literature of Central, Western, and Northern Europe. It became modern urban in nature, containing legends, jokes, parables, numskull tales, proverbs, and lyric songs. From the dozens of thousands of texts which were collected since the beginning of this century among Jews of Eastern Europe, only a slim volume of fairy tales could be compiled, while this genre accounts for ca. 11% of the material collected from North African and Near Eastern Jews (KAHAN 1931; for comparative tables of folk tales from several Jewish groups see JASON 1965, 136 and 1966, 317–318).

In conclusion, available documentation points to stability in poetics and changes in the repertoire. The major change in modern times in Europe has not yet been properly assessed.

One should not be led astray by the different nature of the works which haggadic texts offer (see p. 76) and suppose that Jews suddenly and radically changed their oral folk literature during the first millennium C.E., nor that in the second millennium C.E. they just as suddenly reverted to such literature as they had used before the Talmudic-Midrashic period. That would mean a curious change in tradition, more curious even because it would have had to occur twice. In no other ethnic group of whatever magnitude have such changes in tradition been observed. Even if we suppose that in principle it could occur, we still have to explain why it occurred; or, why, at the same time, two oral folk traditions prevailed side-by-side: namely, the old tradition documented, however sparsely, in Talmudic-Midrashic literature, and the Talmudic-Midrashic literary tradition proper.

INTERRELATIONS BETWEEN ISRAELITE-JEWISH TRADITIONS AND TRADITIONS OF OTHER CULTURES

Interrelations between cultures concern transmissions of narrative contents in time and space (*Stoffgeschichte*), of artistic models (poetics and performance) and of social models (use and function). Due to the nature of the sources at our disposal (see p. 87) we know most about narrative contents.

Antiquity

Contacts between Israelite-Jewish literary tradition, oral and written, and corresponding traditions of peoples with whom Jews met directly or indirectly, were, naturally, ample and can easily be gathered from the written record. Ancient Near Eastern influences on Biblical literature to the point of being instances of the same literary tradition of themes and models (such as the Canaanite) have been amply discussed in scholarly writings. These influences seem to have been unidirectional, namely toward the Israelite literature, which flourished in what was a remote province.[27]

Interrelations specifically between Jewish and other Aramaic literatures from the middle of the first millennium B.C. to the switch to Arabic by the end of the first millennium C.E.—be these direct or indirect—have so far been little investigated. Thus even for the later periods little can be said (for instance, how far was the 5th century C.E. Aramaic translation of the *Kalila-wa-Dimna* collection (BAUMSTARK 1922, 124–125) known to Aramaic-speaking Jews between the 5th and 8th–10th centuries C.E.?).

The situation changes with the opening to the west, during the Hellenistic period, and still more during the Roman and Byzantine periods. Due to the advent of general religious ferment, and specifically of Christianity and its spread outside of the Jewish society, Jewish religious literature found itself located much more centrally than before. At this time influences are no longer only unidirectional merely from the outside towards Jewish literature.

Massive mutual influences can now be found between the exegetic Talmudic-Midrashic literature, the Apocrypha and the pseudepigrapha and the rest of the contemporaneous Hellenistic, Roman, and later on, the Christian literatures (in various languages) of both the central orthodox and the local Eastern churches. Borrowing models and contents, translations, retranslations and rewritings of works exchanged between the various religious sects and ethnic groups were common practice. With the advent of Islam, Arabic literature also took part in these practices.[28] Consider such examples as the taking over by Tal-

mudic sages of philological-textological methods from the Alexandrian school; the movements across languages, spaces and churches of the Biblical, apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literatures and their themes and models by way of translations and rewritings; or the taking over by Karaite Jews of literary models from contemporaneous Arabic literature (9th–11th centuries. DRORY 1988).

So much for the written learned tradition of antiquity. What can be said about the oral and folk tradition? A list compiled by JASON and KEMPINSKI (1981) demonstrates that Biblical narrative conforms in both form and content to the Ancient Near Eastern ethnopoetic system. As it happens, the Israelite literature contains the bulk of folk-literary works from the Ancient Near East (60%). (For the various reasons see JASON and KEMPINSKI 1981, 3.) Hellenistic and Roman periods saw the advent of a kind of mass popular entertainment literature (a "kind of," since real mass literature requires print), which carries many oral-literary elements (HÄGG 1983). Some Jewish works can be considered to be of this kind (the apocryphal Books of Tobias, Judith, etc.). In the Roman period this literature ceases to develop and religious writing takes over—at least no Jewish entertainment works from this period or authors who could be identified as Jewish are known (see CHARLES 1913).

Medieval traditions

In Muslim countries Jews switched from Aramaic to Arabic together with the rest of the population, and consequently used Arabic as a literary medium (see, e.g., the 10th century *Hibbur yafe mehayshu'a*, written in Arabic for Jews in imitation of similar Arabic collections. BRINNER 1977). We may suppose that oral literature was shared (so far no indices exist for medieval literature which would allow an examination of the repertoires). Arabic epics (*Sirat 'Antar* and *Sirat Banu Hilal*) expressing Arabic ethnic identity were an exception. Jews did not show interest in them.

Jewish medieval and modern belletristic writing in Europe used Yiddish, written in Hebrew characters. This immediately created a barrier against German literary activities, because of a difference in script, and against the co-territorial Slavic culture, because of difference in both script and language. The only avenue of interaction between Jewish and world literature which remained open was unidirectional: from German literature to Yiddish writing. Thus we see Yiddish belletristic literature fashioned after the corresponding German literary activities (German chapbooks are being translated or simply transliterated), and not after models of Slavic literature, although the bulk

of the European Jews resided in Slavic countries at least since the 16th century.

Modern oral traditions

Modern recordings of oral tradition confirm the difference between the two Jewish groups, the Afro-Asian and the European, in relation to their co-territorial societies. Jewish oral folk literature around the Mediterranean, in the Near Eastern and Central Asiatic countries was part of the general folk literature in these areas and had the same traditional repertoire, so much so that the tale-type indices for the respective Jewish materials represent the general Near Eastern tradition.[29]

Those small differences which are found are easily explainable. Jews told sacred legends, swindler novellae, and jokes dealing with their own problems as an oppressed ethno-religious minority. No such tales have been found to date circulating among Muslims, while oral folk literature of other ethno-religious minorities in the Near East has not yet been documented (e.g., of Eastern Christians). These tales are not specifically Jewish inventions, but adaptations. Generally known swindler novellae were changed to fit the needs of the minority. In another case the tale-type of a sacred legend (no AaTh number yet) in which a Jewish community escapes persecution was found in China, where the persecuted community is a professional group. The Chinese legend parallels exactly the Jewish stories in form and content (see text in EBERHARD 1965, no. 40, and analysis in JASON 1968a). Stories of this kind are common to both groups of Jews, the Afro-Asian and the East European, and are amply represented in Hebrew tale collections which are read in both Jewish groups (JASON 1968b, 118–164; 1975a, 125–171).

On the other hand Jews did not share with their co-territorial ethno-religious groups the genre of epic, in verse or prose. As this genre functions in society as a vehicle of ethnic identification, it is understandable that a group with a different ethno-religious identification will not find interest in other peoples' epics. Examples of such rejected epics are the Arabic *Sirat 'Antar* and *Sirat Banu Hilal*, the Caucasian *Nart* cycle, South Slavic epic songs, etc.[30] (For the same phenomenon in the Middle Ages see p. 96)

The oral folk literature of East European Jews, as documented by the late 19th and early 20th century collecting activities in Poland and the Baltic countries until World War II, was of a typical modern urban character and differed sharply from the oral folk literature of the co-territorial Slavic and Baltic peoples, the latter being of a rural and traditional kind. Jewish oral literature from that area consisted primarily

of jokes, legends, and lyric songs. The legends are mostly of the sacred legend sub-genre; the songs are of the same character as German folk songs collected in the 19th century: they can be shown to stem to a large extent from third- and fourth-rate local poets.[31]

This difference in the folk literature of co-territorial groups is not easily explainable in the light of our knowledge that language barriers are not necessarily barriers to the diffusion of oral literature. On the other hand, differences in religion and rivalry and enmity that prevailed between the diverse ethno-religious groups in the Near East did not prevent them from sharing the same oral literature. The problem calls for extensive investigation.

State of the Art

The " golden age " of folklore in Europe was the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, when the great collections were made and the main institutions (archives, museums) were established to house these collections. Jewish culture did not participate in this activity. The great interest in folklore fed upon notions of the romantic movement and on the national movements of small European peoples who built their national culture to a great extent on artistic folklore products. As Jews possessed a substantial ancient and medieval literary tradition, which supplied the needs for ethno-religious identification, there was no need for them to turn to folklore for this purpose. In addition, Jewish folk tradition, as we saw above, was carried since the early Middle Ages by vernaculars varying from one Jewish group to the next and was clearly felt as not forming part of an overall national identity. Indeed, the 19th century brought a blossoming of philological works dealing with Jewish classical literary tradition in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic (such as the works of L. Zunz, M. Steinschneider, H. Graetz, M. Gaster, J. Berdichewski, L. Ginzberg, H. N. Bialik and J. H. Rawnitzki, to mention a few), but little interest developed in folk literature or in any other field of folklore or ethnography.[32]

When by the end of the 19th century interest in folklore arose in the East European Jewish group, it was under the influence of the activity of co-territorial European peoples and was carried by the wave of nationalism based on the Yiddish language which had by that time already developed a high literature. At first, collecting was done on private initiative. After World War I, it was institutionalized by the YIVO-Institute (Yiddisher Visenshaftleher Institut, Vilna-New York), which also initiated investigation of the collected materials. Everything was done on the basis of the Yiddish language and with only the Jewish community in Eastern Europe in mind. Unfortunately, much of

YIVO's materials were lost during the Holocaust (1939–1945).

Recently, work among other Jewish groups began in Israel, again at first sporadically as a private enterprise, and then, since the late fifties, institutionalized: the Israel Folklore Archives (IFA) collects and publishes folk narratives from all Jewish groups (see descriptions in NOY 1961; JASON 1965, Introduction; JASON 1988a, Introduction).

Of research tools, modern literary indexing is still in its beginnings: several tale-type indices for the IFA collections have been published so far (see JASON 1988a, 31–32, 142, 144 for list of publications). For older literature only a single motif-index has been prepared (NOY 1954). The rest awaits the studious investigator. No regular bibliography for the field is being published.[33] Folklore still occupies a marginal position in Jewish studies.

We hope that the framework of problems outlined and questions posed here will help facilitate future work both on specifically Jewish tradition complexes and on similar tradition complexes of other cultures.

NOTES

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1. Heller's survey dealt with medieval sources only; recently also NOY 1952, 1980, and YASSIF 1987–1988.

2. It is customary to use the adjective "Israelite" to designate the culture of the First Commonwealth which is Antiquity proper (until the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century B.C.). "Jewish" applies to the culture which developed during the Second Commonwealth and was developed by the community of the returned exiles in Judea from the 5th century B.C. on. This culture developed from the turn of the era on typical medieval traits, such as intellectual creativity assuming the form of commentaries on hallowed classical works. It lasts in Jewish society, with some exceptions, until the advent of the Enlightenment which reached European Jewish society in the 19th century. "Israeli" applies to modern culture which is developing in Israel (established in 1948).

3. This work contains a brief description of sources from the earliest times on and their interrelations with oral literature. Among the sources listed for the first time are surveys of Afro-Asian Jewish folk literature in manuscript and print. "Introductions" to chapters relate to specific questions of language use and publishing.

4. When certain works below are designated as stemming from a "learned" tradition, it is done based on the author's rough preliminary analyses which are still unpublished.

5. See, e.g., the collection published recently by NA'ANA (1960–1969). A list of such publications until World War I can be found in BIN-GORION 1976. YA'ARI's bibliographies (1937–1940, 1959, 1967) cover the list for publications in the Near East.

6. The problem of learned vs. folk tradition in preliterate societies has been

discussed and illustrated by FINNEGAN (1970, 87–105) for Africa. P. Radin's concept of " high " and " folk " literature in preliterate societies differs from the present conception. Radin talks about a certain group of oral literary works which appeared to him polished to such a degree as to form " high " literature. In our survey, literary excellence is not taken into account. Works of both the learned and the folk tradition may be of high or low aesthetic quality (RADIN 1915 and 1954–1956).

7. The category " mythic epic " is part of the system of ethnopoetic genres of the cultural area encompassing Europe, the Near East, Central Asia, and India (see JASON 1977a, 13), yet none of these cultures features a living oral example of this genre. All our texts come from ancient literary written sources. Such are narratives about struggles of Ugaritic Baal against Mot and Yam, Babylonian Marduk vs. Tiamat, Hittite gods against each other, Indian Indra and Greek Zeus against their adversaries, Germanic Aesir against Giants, etc. All of these are myths which might have been at some time tied to ritual; they are handed down by priests, that is, learned specialists. For one possible plot model of the epic struggle which also holds for some of these mythic epics, see JASON 1981. Note: due to their fragmentary state, not all Ugaritic literary texts are classifiable.

8. RaSHI stands for *R*abbi *Sh*elomo ben *Y*itzhaq (1040–1105) of Troyes, France, a Talmudic scholar.

9. The stories in the collection about the founder of Hasidism—*Shivhe ha-BeSHT*—bear even the names of the narrators-informants, presumably in imitation of Talmudic usage, in order to support the claim to veracity; see the English translation by BEN AMOS and MINTZ 1970.

10. For folktales see JASON 1979b, JASON and KEMPINSKI 1981; for folk songs see WETZSTEIN 1873; for proverbs see AVISHUR 1981.

11. The story's manuscript was found in the debris of the Jewish colony at Elephantine, southern Egypt; see text in PRITCHARD 1969, 427–430. No source for the story has been found so far, and the possibility of it being a Jewish creation of the same group of literati who composed the Biblical books of Esther and Daniel and some of the early Apocrypha (e.g., Judith, Tobias, Susanna) should be considered.

12. For general information and bibliography see *Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971, 2, 579–580; 3, 652–654. Some of the texts are to be found in GASTER 1925–1928, vol. 2, 814–907, 965–984. For an investigation see LEVIANT 1969.

13. The problem of the interrelations of the three languages belongs to the learned tradition and so we do not deal with it here. Rina DRORY (1988) discusses the functions which each of these languages fulfilled in the 9th-10th centuries C.E. in the Eastern Diaspora, i.e., at the very time the transition from Aramaic to Arabic took place.

14. The evidence has not yet been thoroughly assessed. See VAIDA 1978 and AVISHUR 1985.

15. For a concise historical and philological description see PAPER 1978.

16. See SCHENDA (1970) for an exemplary description of the sociology of literature of German 19th century popular publishing and consumption. His findings have a direct bearing on Yiddish publishing of the same period. For Yiddish prose literature of the 16th to 19th centuries see ZFATMAN-BILLER 1983. How well women knew to write Yiddish is shown, among others, in the memoires of Glückel of Hameln (KAUFMANN 1896).

17. During the 9th-8th centuries B.C. Kuntilet Ajrud was a lonely outpost in the desert, frequented by caravans (SINGER 1976). For the ostraka a good summary is given in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971, *s.v.* Arad and Lachish.

18. See DEMSKY 1976 for Antiquity, and ASAF 1943, SZULWAS 1949, and GOITEIN

1967–1983, vol. 2, ch. VI for the Middle Ages.

19. See AVISHUR 1985; Karaite Jews, however, regularly used Arabic script when writing in that language.

20. A few examples: novella—Solomon and the two harlots, 1 Kings 3: 16–28; parable—The thistle of Lebanon, 2 Chron 25: 18; aetiological legend—Lot's wife, Gen 19: 15–26; early population legend—Og, king of Bashan, Deut 3: 11; riddle—Samson's wedding, Judges 14: 14; proverb—1 Kings 20: 11.

21. There is, however, a problem if we use the Talmudic quotation as an evidence for these texts being folk songs (Bab. Talmud, San 101a). They are written in Hebrew while the people who are supposed to have sung them spoke Aramaic. The only possibility to save the evidence is to suppose the texts were sung in Aramaic translation; of that, however, we have no evidence. Translations of folk literature did indeed occur in the Near East, as it has been found that Akkadian works still live in oral folk tradition, translated into Arabic. That means that these works have been translated into every successive language people switched to (AVISHUR 1981).

22. When GUNKEL (1917) speaks of "fairy tales" he does not base his analyses on ethnopoetic definitions but on popular usage.

23. The stories of creation in the Book of Genesis are considered by some scholars to have been taken over from Mesopotamian tradition (e.g., HEIDEL 1942), which was also a learned tradition.

24. The so called "epics" of the Jews of Kurdistan, collected and published by RIVLIN (1949) were really written by local learned men in the *piyyut* tradition and are retelling Biblical stories with Midrashic additions; Rivlin took pains to trace the Midrashic sources of these additions. Several of the texts have been translated into English by SABAR (1982).

25. See sample texts from Morocco (JASON 1985, nos. 20, 25; ELBAZ 1982, no. 44, and pp. 156–162); Yemen (JASON 1985, no. 27); Kurdistan (JASON 1985, nos. 23, 24); and Eastern Europe (JASON 1985, no. 19).

26. See JASON 1988a: in a sample of 1,250 texts collected from immigrants to Israel from Iraq, the sub-sub-genre of "legends of early populations" is missing.

27. See, e.g., the opinions on the origin of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis (e.g., HEIDEL 1942), of the story of Joseph (e.g., VERGOTE 1959), or the opinions about the Canaanite origin of the tradition in which the Biblical psalmic poetry was composed (e.g., ALBRIGHT 1965).

28. See, e.g., SCHWARZBAUM 1975 for the use of Jewish narrative materials in Islamic literature.

29. See JASON 1965, 1975c, 1988a. For indices of comparative material see EBERHARD and BORATAV (1953, Turkish), THOMPSON and ROBERTS (1960, Indian), NOWAK (1969, Arabic), MARZOLPH (1983, Persian) and KUROVANIDZE (1983, Georgian—here only nos. AaTh 300–749 are given). A full list of indices for Jewish materials is given in JASON 1988a, 142, 144. NOY's (1954) motif index includes primarily materials from the learned tradition.

30. There are several manuscripts and chapbooks from Iraq with transliteration into Hebrew script of parts of the *Sirat 'Antar* (AVISHUR 1979, 84–85; 1988). This seems to be the "exception which confirms the rule."

31. The work of MEIER (1906) showed that the 19th century German folk song was derived in the main from such earlier poets; for Yiddish folk song taken from written sources see KAHAN 1952, 202–209. Lists of published East European collections can be found in WEINREICH 1959 and NOY and NOY 1971, 85–96.

32. What little interest there was centered around the journal *Mitteilungen der*

Gesellschaft für jüdische Volkskunde (1898–1922). For a recent account see DAXELMÜLLER (1983). The interest of the *Mitteilungen* was more of a philological-romantic kind: exploration of the past through the sources, and of an ethnographic-exotic kind: investigation of the far-away East European Jews by German Jews, than of a folkloristic-nationalistic kind: the exploration of " our own highly esteemed " traditions.

Note a similar relation to folklore studies in India and China. Both societies possess a learned tradition of long standing and great esteem, and did not care in the past to develop the collecting and study of their folk traditions; these studies still occupy a peripheral position in their humanistic scholarship.

33. For an earlier survey see JASON 1978–1980, ch. 2, where the sources for ancient and medieval literature are listed; see GOLDBERG and JASON 1983–1984 for institutions and periodicals.

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