

WERE ISRAEL'S PROPHETS UNIQUE AND NOT TO BE PARALLELED IN OTHER COUNTRIES?

The ultimate source of the prophetic saying is the state of ecstatic possession which enables the prophet to see pictures which lie beyond present reality and to perceive voices otherwise inaudible to the human ear, visions and words which reveal to him Yahweh's nature and will. The Hebrews of the pre-Canaanite period, like the pre-Islamic Arabs, were familiar with this phenomenon of ecstasy, and designated as seers $\pi\sigma\pi$ $\pi\delta\tau$ Arabic kahin) men who had a particular propensity for it. (Eissfeldt, 77)

We have already indicated (see p.77) that the existence of seers and nabis is not a specifically Israelite phenomenon, and that, if for the moment we disregard the religious and ethical content which in Israel is so clearly of a quite special kind, the visions and sayings of the seers and prophets in Israel's environment look exactly like those in Israel itself. . . It has been thought that such parallels can be demonstrated in Egyptian literature. For here, already by about 2000 B.C., prophetic texts appear - the prophecies of Nefer-rohu (Neferti), the exhortations of Ipu-wer and others - which proclaim concerning the future first all manner of disasters and then good fortune, and in this reveal a certain similarity to many of the smaller collections of sayings which underlie our prophetic books. . . .

But in one point we may with certainty recognize external influence on Israel. Those Egyptian prophecies are, at any rate in part vaticinia ex eventu. This is particularly true of the so-called 'demotic Chronicle' which dates probably from the middle of the third century B.C. It purports to have been compiled under king Tachos (360-359 B.C.) and to proclaim in advance the events down to the beginning of the Greek period, though in reality those events already lie in the past. To this there is then added the real prophecy, the proclamation of the overthrow of foreign rule and the re-establishment of the native kingdom. This structure reveals, as we may see, great similarity to Dan. vii-xii, . . . as well as to the Habakkuk 'Commentary' from Qumran. It is thus very reasonable to assume here the dependence of Judaism on its environment. . . . For the writings of the Sibyllines, which will be discussed later, and the 'Oracles of Hystaspes' which are similar and reveal Iranian elements, show that at the time there was also to be found in other parts of the world this type of vaticinia ex eventu based upon genuine prophecy and built upon it to give it credulity. At all events we do not seem here to be dealing with a specifically Jewish phenomenon. (Eissfeldt, 150-152)

Probably, then Israel borrowed ecstatic prophecy from the Canaanite environment, as she did so much else. . . . To be sure, there are certain external similarities between the Baal prophets. . . and the Israelite prophets of the early monarchy. . . . But these are superficial similarities. The real difference between the Yahweh prophets and the Canaanite prophets was that the former were active primarily in the political sphere. They were not soothsayers or clairvoyants, but spokesmen of Yahweh in the arena of history. (Anderson, 186-7) ②