

lengthening the shadow of 'Abd al-Rahmān I beyond his legitimate long-term influence, even to the unintentional dwarfing of the achievements of 'Abd al-Rahmān III.

The documentation is scanty but the bibliography is well selected and conveniently classified. The author's knowledge of the Spanish sources is put to good use in supplementing the Arabic literature on the period. Conspicuously absent from the bibliography and text is any reference to the numerous works of Lévi-Provençal, who has contributed so much to the history of Moslem Spain.

The text is marred by some inconsistencies in the spelling of proper names and by numerous typographical errors, some of which have resulted in queer words (pp. 14, 64, 83, 88, 90, 94, etc.). A few factual errors have been overlooked, e.g., the mix-up in the dates A.D. 731 for 751 and 750 for 730 (p. 29), and the confusing of 'Abd al-'Aziz with his brother, the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Malik (p. 37).

The author throws out some interesting suggestions supplementing Buckler's theory on the relationships of Charlemagne and the 'Abbasids of Baghdad, relative to Umayyad Spain. He has striven to enter into the spirit of the medieval Moslem world as he has sought to understand and to present the basic factors that influenced the life and statesmanship of 'Abd al-Rahmān I and made possible his historic achievement.

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Oral Tradition. By EDUARD NIELSEN. Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1954. Pp. 108. \$1.25.

The author explains that the content of this little book appeared first as a series of articles in *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* in 1950 and 1952. It was Professor Rowley's interest and active mediation that resulted in their being published in English translation. For this we all stand under a debt of gratitude to Professor Rowley, whose motivation was not that of exponent, but of expositor: the scholarly desire to let a significant case be adequately presented. The four brief chapters that constitute the book are a short introduction to the traditio-

historical approach which has become one of the major features of current Scandinavian study of the Old Testament, and sets itself consciously in opposition to literary criticism that is still, in all its variety, the predominant mode of thought of the scholarship of the West. Nielsen's presentation is lucid and succinct; and in his final chapter he has made his case still more clear by illustrations of the method he describes and advocates. The book is one of high importance.

In his introductory sketch Nielsen traces briefly the course of the movement from its inception in the work of Gunkel, through the insights of Nyberg and Birkeland, to current debate among Scandinavian scholars. The bulk of the book then deals in logical progress with the prevalence and features of oral tradition in early cultures, and notably in the Orient, then with its place in the formation and transmission of the Old Testament, leading on thus to his final chapter of illustration through traditional-historical handling of three passages somewhat typical of three types of Old Testament literature.

In brief, the argument is this. Memorization even of considerable literary works has a much larger place in the ancient world than our modern western methods give us to realize. Passages in Accadian documents, supported by materials as far separated as Plato and Icelandic legends, provide corroborative evidence. Most of all the history of the Koran is relevant. Writing was very ancient, but it was the prerogative of specialists, the scribes. Also it was employed in the main "for contracts, covenants, monuments . . . probably also for official registers and lists, and above all for letters" (p. 24); in addition "religious and epical texts of major importance . . . were ordinarily put into written form" (p. 28). The result is that in the study of the Old Testament we deal with masses of oral tradition that was committed to writing relatively late. Such recourse to writing "is linked with a general crisis of confidence." At some time faith in the spoken word began to waver, and it was thought necessary to write down the traditions" (p. 33). The change "does not take place because cultural summits have been reached, nor because