

(CONTINUATION)

Oral Tradition

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must naturally never be justified in advance with the book we know by the prophet's name. On the other hand it is attempted to explain through what phases the original collection of prophetic oracles passed in order to become our present prophetic book. By means of certain established criteria a portion of the material is separated from the rest as being secondary. An attempt is made to determine the age of this secondary material and by this means it is believed to be possible to reconstruct, with more or less accuracy, the development of the prophetic book in question often through a period of several centuries. The literary and historical investigations go hand in hand; a separation of them is impossible. The task of the work is the effort to recover the prophet's own book, to get back to his original message without the later additions. In order to do this the necessary prerequisite is, as likewise appears in the purest literary criticism, that the reduction to writing of a saying is contemporaneous with the origin of the saying. Not the spoken word, but the written word can be preserved intact throughout the ages.

The traditio-historian proceeds in a different way. He attempts to distinguish between the historical and the literary aspect of the investigation, and he first devotes himself to the literary investigation. In this way the complex of tradition with which he is concerned is first of all separated from its surroundings, and then an understanding of its structure is attempted. The passages having a literary relation are defined, the central point of the complex is sought for, and an attempt is made to explore the possibility of understanding the remaining material as literary deposits around this nucleus. Supported by the knowledge available from other sources as to the conditions for oral composition and oral transmission, the scholar tries to describe how this literary deposit around the nucleus can have taken place, and why a nucleus has attracted precisely that material by which it is at present surrounded. But this does not yet prove anything as to the historical value of the different sayings, their value as a source of information as to the prophet's message. This is an entirely different problem, the solution of which can only be attempted when the literary investigation is brought

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to an end. It is a matter of opinion whether the traditio-historian's historical investigations—if he embarks upon them at all—should commence with the nucleus or with the deposits. Personally we think it most natural to commence with the nucleus. If this nucleus can without contradiction be fitted into the historical pattern, from which tradition asserts that it derives, there is scarcely reason to doubt the correctness of the tradition. But certainty is something we never attain. If the deposits exhibit more than a formal relationship with the nucleus, or exhibit an inherent relationship with it in spite of formal differences, and even in spite of apparent or perhaps demonstrable differences, then we can plead the authenticity of these sayings, in the first case in full measure, in the second in a substantial measure. If the lack of inner relationship is felt too strongly, it is naturally necessary to emphasize the role of tradition for these deposits, which thus testify to a later revision, perhaps a modification, of the thoughts of the prophet. But even in this case these passages retain considerable value—in principle, however, neither greater nor less value than the supposedly original sayings of the prophet. Of course there are people who apotheosize the prophets. For them the 'secondary' is equivalent to the *infernale*. For the historian who can date these deposits, they become however useful illustrations of the views held in certain times and in certain circles on certain matters.

As the pursuit of the prophet's own words is an essential concern of literary criticism in its radical as well as its conservative form, we have first of all to examine the complex, Mic. 4-5, in its relation to the remainder of the book of Micah, among other reasons because radical criticism in its classical form as it appears in Karl Marti's commentary<sup>1</sup> does not recognize any authentic saying by Micah after Mic. 3.12. Marti's argument is briefly this: Jer. 26.18, which quotes Mic. 3.12, shows that a hundred years after the prophet's activity he was still remembered as a great and bold, but remorseless, prophet of doom. And this is just the picture of him we know from Mic. 1-3 (without their secondary additions); this section is a compact

<sup>1</sup> *Dodekapropheten* (Kurzer Hand-Commentar), 1904, pp. 258-302