

THE WRITTEN RECORD OF THE SPOKEN WORD OF GOD: ORAL VERSE IN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

Nicolas Sykes

ABSTRACT

Through the work of such scholars as William S. Graham we are coming to a greater appreciation of the oral aspects of scripture in religious studies. I will go further and argue for a new view of oral verse in opposition to written prose.

Centrally, I will talk about the Bible; but I will also refer to the Koran, the scriptures of the Ancient Near East, India and China and Aboriginal song.

I will argue against the orthodox view that a significant minority of the Bible is written in poetry and the rest in prose. Instead I will give arguments and evidence that the whole of the Old and New Testaments (except parts of Luke and perhaps Matthew) are oral verse.

I will do this by placing the Bible in the context of an unorthodox view of world language and literature. I will propose that the distinction between poetry and prose is not a universal distinction but one limited to certain parts of Western culture. I will argue that the parallelism of the Bible should be redefined as 'Semantic Verse' and should be seen as the origin of human language in oral verse.

I will finally go on to argue that the central intellectual documents of Western culture are also oral verse and that there is a continuing tradition of Semantic Verse in the current languages and literatures of the world.

Sydney