Nilsson's discussions of the religion of the countryside, rural customs and festivals, the religion of Eleusis as "the highest and finest bloom of Greek popular religion," the place of house and family among the ancient Greeks, the effect of urbanization on Greek folk religion, the important roles of superstitions, seers and oracles -- topics seldom, if ever, broached by the classical scholarship of the period -- opened to view "a religion of simple and unlettered peasants" which has proven to be "the most persistent form of Greek religion."

Within the past decade, Nilsson's little work -- mainly in the reprinted editions of 1961 and, now, of 1972 which bear the title Greek Folk Religion -- has attracted the attention of a new and appreciative audience: the academic folklorists of the United States. Their appreciation has been occasioned by several aspects of Nilsson's work. First of all, his choice of subject matter, as the individual chapter headings noted above indicate, clearly anticipates the orientation of many current forays into the field of folk religion. Books and articles treating religious customs, festivals, superstitions and seers in many different societies dot the publishers lists and the pages of numerous recent journals. Secondly, Nilsson's sympathetic depiction of the social background of the Greek peasantry, the result perhaps of his own descent from "an old line of peasants who occupied the same farm for two hundred years," looks forward to the sensitivity toward context which has recently overtaken the field of folklore. Finally, Nilsson's explicit assertion that one might gain a more balanced and comprehensive view of the whole of Greek religion by beginning from a consideration of the agricultural life of the peasants and of their beliefs -- that is, from the lower levels of Classical Greek life and thought -- presents an intriguing challenge to the modern folklorist and/or student of religion: does contemporary "official" religion become more meaningful or comprehensible when viewed from the perspective of its "folk" counterpart?

These sophistications of focus, methodology, and approach, coupled with Nilsson's easy style and the well-chosen illustrations of the work, have made Greek Folk Religion the best introduction to ancient Greek religion for the past thirty years and one of the best introductions to folk religion for perhaps the last ten. Indeed, what Arthur Darby Nock said of the work some eleven years ago has acquired in the interim even more meaning: Nilsson's Greek Folk Religion, despite its age, "retains all its freshness."

xi - 124 pp.

by Keith Cunningham.

Brunvand's book is, by and large, a worthy successor to the long line of guides published by various state societies to stimulate collecting in their areas; it is well organized, informative, and complimented by a number of aesthetically pleasing photographs from a variety of sources.

The book begins with a brief introductory discussion of "Folklore and Its Study," "Suggestions for Collecting Folklore," and "Folk Groups in Utah"
(pps. 1-27); it concludes with a longer section entitled "Folk Traditions of Utah" which is a survey by genres organized into the general categories "Folksay," "Folk Literature," and "Folklife." The specific suggestions on actually beginning collecting do not seem as supportive, and thus useful, as those in the well-known Leach-Glassie guide, with which this book will inevitably be compared; but this is a minor criticism, and the book definitely should fulfill its basic purpose and involve people in collecting folklore and reporting it to the sponsoring Utah Heritage Foundation and thus result in the amassing of a large archive.

The guide does seem to me, however, to have one weak point. Though the section on "Folk Groups in Utah" does a thorough job of outlining various minor occupational and ethnic groups in the state, the rest of the book concentrates upon the dominant Mormons and Mormon lore. Even the bibliography lists very few books and articles that are not either of a very general nature or about Mormons and their lore. It is this focus, it seems to me, that causes Brunvand to practically write off the traditional ballad in Utah in favor of parodies, nursery rhymes, etc.: "The songbag one fills is not likely to seem as worthwhile as one might have hoped or imagined. Not only region, but time works against us too; some twenty years ago Professor Lester A. Hubbard of the University of Utah scoured the state for folksongs and ballads and discovered a large and varied treasure of them, but where will we find today the counterparts of his then sixty- to ninety-year-old informants?" (p. 65). The Arizona Friends of Folklore collection, which was made not far from Utah, indicates that his statements are largely correct for Mormon song but not correct for other groups. For instance, Brunvand includes an incomplete version of "The Horse Wrangler" (it is interesting to note that a version of this song was included in Thorp's 1908 collection of cowboy songs), which he identifies only as "a fragment of an interesting song commenting on a cowboy's life" (p. 70). His note would seem to indicate that this song has been lost with the passing of Professor Hubbard's informants of twenty years ago. Arizona Friends of Folklore, however, have four complete texts of the song, garnered by rather limited collecting within the past two years in Arizona from informants ranging in age from forty-two to eighty-three. This collection suggests that the "counterparts" of Professor Hubbard's informants and their large and varied treasure of American ballads and folksongs are still to be found.

I hope that I, as a reviewer, am not guilty of simply pushing my own interest in "cowboy" song, and I realize that Mormons are the dominant folk group in Utah; but I fear that, since collectors most often find what they look for, this slight attention to minority occupation and ethnic groups in the state is a weakness in what is otherwise an excellent book and may even affect the archive that it will create.

FROM THE REVIEWS EDITOR: RECORDED HILLBILLY TRADITION

Dave Freeman's County Records

Among the several contemporary producers of recordings of traditional Anglo-American folksong and instrumental material, together with hillbilly tradition, is County Records, 307 East 37th Street, New York, under the guidance and management of David W. Freeman. Freeman founded County Sales