nothing on the widespread Northern Athabascan "Bushmen" beliefs, or any discussion on the role humanoid monsters play in American popular culture, although an excellent paper addressing that topic was given at the conference. Finally, the most glaring, and in my opinion most significant, lacuna in this broad panorama of North American manlike monsters is the original Bigfoot tradition itself, so much a prominent and meaningful aspect of Pacific Northwest folklore. Green's dismemberment of the phenomenon virtually ignores the human element—the eyewitness.

As both editors note, the subject can still be profitably studied, especially if one expands the contexts within which Sasquatch-like beings are considered. For the time being, this rather special inquiry into the nature and function of manlike monsters is a welcome and important work, relevant to the study of folklore.


Reviewed by Guy H. Haskell.

On May 19, 1941, seven years before the founding of the State of Israel, the National Council of the Haganah, the underground defence force of the Jewish community in Palestine under the British Mandate (the Yishuv), ordered the creation of a permanently mobilized striking force. The immediate reason for this order was the need to be prepared in the event of a Nazi takeover of Palestine by Rommel's Africa Corps, which was surging undefeated across the deserts of North Africa. This striking force was called the Palmah (acronym for peługot mahaz, "assault companies") and through its role in the Allied invasion of Syria and Lebanon and Israel's War of Independence, it won a prominent place in the history of Israel's struggle for statehood. The force also entered Israeli consciousness and folklore as the symbolic embodiment of Israeli character and sacrifice during the heady years leading up to independence and the struggle for national survival thereafter. Yet it was not the Palmah's military
success against very large odds which set it apart in the
Israeli mind, but its unique character as a fighting force,
a character which finds no precedent in the annals of mar-
tial history.

This unique character developed out of the social,
military and political realities of the Yishuf during its
pivotal period. The Palmah was an elite corps made up
largely of native-born Jewish Palestinians (Sabras). The
Palmah was outlawed by the British mandatory authorities
and had to maintain itself through a close working relation-
ship with the kibbuzim (collective agricultural settle-
ments). Groups of Palmahniks were assigned to various
kibbuzim, working for the kibbuz half the month for their
keep, and spending the other half in training, exercises
and operations. This unusual way of maintaining itself
and the highly motivated young men and women who formed
its ranks helped give the Palmah its character.

Not only did the Palmah enter the folklore of the
period in legend and song, it created a body of folklore
of its own. One form of this lore, which defies tradition-
al genre classification, is called the chizbat (Arabic:
"lie"). It is this unique and complex oral form which
Elliot Oring examines in this work, and which originally
appeared as a doctoral dissertation at Indiana University
in 1974 ("Ha-Chizbat: The Content and Structure of an
Israeli Oral Tradition").

Oring begins his study of the chizbat with a chapter
on the background and character of the Palmah, tracing
its history back to the first Jewish self-defense group
in Palestine (Ha-Shomer, "The Watchman") and examining
its character in light of the ideological development of
Zionist settlement. The Palmah was a product of the idea-
listically charged ethos of the pre-state period. As the Pal-
mahniks viewed themselves, the Jews in Palestine were the
elite of the world Jewry, and the Palmah was the elite
of Palestinian Jews. The sense of common purpose, mission,
kinship and camaraderie was one of the key factors in the
Palmah's military success, and imbued the chizbat with
its unique character.

Oring continues with a discussion of the nature of
the chizbat itself, which does not fit into any of the
traditional Jewish (or international) genre classifica-
tions. Oring never attempts a concise definition of the chizbat. Rather, he discusses at length several separate "basic constituents": The Performers; The Audience; The Setting; The Message; The Channel; The Code; The Attitude.

The third chapter deals with theories of and approaches to humor ("appropriate incongruity," "drive reduction theory") and their usefulness in analyzing the chizbat. Oring chooses the "social scientific" rather than "humanistic" approach in this analysis. An examination of the psychological and cultural contexts, interspersed with actual chizbat texts and explanations, make up the bulk of the chapter.

The last three chapters deal with the content, structure and message of the chizbat. Throughout the book arguments are illustrated or even initiated by the chizbat texts themselves. This alternation of explanation and example is done artfully, and constant contact with the data makes the discussion lively and the arguments convincing. Oring's sensitivity to and familiarity with the various factors which create the humor and meaning of the chizbat make for insightful analysis. There are several instances when Oring's outsider status may have obscured his understanding of some of the chizbatim. In general, however, this view from the outside and his subtle perception result in his finding connections and having insights perhaps not readily visible to the native Israeli.

One weakness of the work is that Oring makes no attempt to relate individual chizbatim or the chizbat phenomenon as a whole to the international repertoire of humor. He convincingly demonstrates throughout the work that the chizbat developed out of the particular circumstances of the Palmah and the Yishuv, and that the body of chizbatim and their contexts and characters are unique to the Israeli environment. Does this mean, then, that there are no parallels? For example, on page 83, Oring discusses a chizbat in which a newcomer to the Palmah is the object of numerous practical jokes by his comrades. When he has proven himself to them by enduring the outrageous insults without complaint, and is promised he will not be the subject of further abuse, he asks, "Do you promise?" They said, 'Yes!' He said, 'Well, in that case I won't pee in your coffee anymore' (331A)." Two variants
of this joke, one involving an old Jew and two Arab antagonists on an airplane, the other a Chinese coolie in a Canadian lumber camp, come to mind offhand. In the description and analysis of uncharted realms of folklore, the revealing of similarities to known explored regions is as important as the discovery of uniqueness. One of the important contributions of early folkloristics was the emphasis on the fact that even in those realms of expression each group believed to be completely its own, there was a universality which belied chauvinism.

Of the 342 texts presented in the work, 89 were orally collected by Oring, and 253 were copied from printed or manuscript sources. The chizbat can no longer be found as a living form of Israeli folklore. It died with the disbanding of the Palmah in 1948. The lore was no longer viable without the context which created and nurtured it. The name, however, has entered the Israeli lexicon in two forms: "Al tesaper li chizbatim" ("don't tell me stories, lies, nonsense, don't bullshit me") is one rather aggressive idiomatic usage; lechazbet (to tell stories, lies, talk nonsense, bluff) is a verb form derived from the four consonants of the noun chizbat. Although my own Israeli informants tell me these terms are no longer part of the active lexicon of the contemporary slang-producing generation (mostly high school and army age youth), the term chizbat seems to have developed, at least among some younger Israelis, an entirely different connotation. One twenty-six year old woman from Bat Yam told me that chizbatim are "scary stories told around the campfire at night in the scouts." The campfire remains, in any case, and perhaps we should be a bit more careful before finally burying any form of folklore. It is liable to scratch its way out of the grave and appear, like in the scary chizbatim, in another guise.

Oring's work is well-written and insightful. It enables the reader to grasp a sense of the spirit and character of the Palmah through its lore. Indeed, Israeli Humor is a fine example of a scholarly work which illuminates the nature of a time, place and group through its folklore, an illumination unobtainable only through historical and ethnographic description. Oring acts as our guide and interpreter, but lets the Palmahniks speak for themselves. Israeli Humor is among the finest works on Israeli folklore to date.