INTRODUCTION

This work consists of three parts: the corpus, the analysis of the corpus and the glossary. The corpus, which forms the second part of the work, is a transcribed and translated, long oral narrative, or, as the Arabians call it, *sālfih*. This *sālfih* is a sample chosen from hundreds of hours of narratives and poems collected in the field.

The analysis of the *sālfih* takes up the first part of this work. It consists of several chapters, the first of which gives a summary of the *sālfih* and its historical context. The following chapter outlines the steps taken in the collecting of the *sālfih* and preparing it for publication. The remaining chapters analyze the language and style of the *sālfih* and examine the historical and ethnographic value of this oral narrative genre. The final chapter of the first part deals with the translation of the text and the compilation of the glossary which forms the last part of this work.

The analytical part is the outcome of a process, the result of an attempt to think through and appreciate the oral data I have been collecting. The point of departure for the analytic part is mainly aesthetic. How to present to a non-Bedouin reader Bedouin oral narrative and poetry, not merely as a linguistic corpus, but as a vital and vibrant work of art! How to lead the uninitiated into the aesthetic and cultural universe of the desert nomad! It took a great deal of thinking and working on my part to teach myself how to perceive beauty and interpret art as the Bedouin would. This work is, in a sense, a document of this process of discovery, not to claim that I am totally content with the final result. The *sālfih* serves to illuminate its associated poem. With apologies to the *rāwis*, this work is a *sālfih* of the *sālfih*.

Everyone knows of the inherent difficulties involved in transferring a dynamic, oral performance into a static, written text, the breaking-up of a living, improvised delivery into discrete, printed sentences. The audio-visual effects of gestures, facial expressions and dramatic changes of voice quality and intonation leave no traces on the written page. Print does not tolerate, nor can it present, such characteristic features of oral delivery as

pauses, hesitation and repetition. In preparing and editing the story of Hiḏlūl aš-Šwēhri, an attempt was made as much as possible to employ punctuation in such a way as to 1) convey the vividness of a living oral text, and, at the same time 2) contribute to the production of a coherent and articulate English translation. For the sake of smoothness and easy flow of the narrative, comments and interjections by the audience were eliminated except for a few, which have been included and interpolated in their proper places in the narrative, because of their poetic, historical or ethnographic value. It is hoped that all this does not subvert the oral character of the narrative.

One final word on transliteration. A macron over a vowel indicates it is long. A dash under a consonant indicates it is interdental and a dot indicates it is velarized. Here is a list of the phonetic symbols of some sounds that need to be pointed out:

<u>long</u> <u>vowels</u>   <u>semi-vowels</u>

ā   long   *alif*   **ا**
ī   long   *yā°*   **ي**   y   semi-vowel   *ya*   **ي**
ū   long   *wāw*   **و**   w   semi-vowel   *wa*   **و**
ē   the diphthong *ay* is monophthongized into this long vowel.
ō   the diphthong *aw* is monophthongized into this long vowel.

<u>consonants</u>

j ج	ṭ ط	ṯ ث	c ع
ḥ ح	ḏ̣ ظ	ḏ ذ	q ق
x خ	ṣ ص	š ش	
ġ غ	ḍ ض		

g fronted ق pronounced like *al-jīm al-qāhiriyyah.*
ǵ fronted, affricated allophone of *g*, pronounced *dz.*
ć fronted, affricated allophone of *k*, pronounced *ts.*

A full discussion of the transliteration system adopted in this work would necessarily lead us into the domain of phonology. As I explain in chapter 6, I shall not deal with phonology in this work, but on this the reader is advised to consult Sowayan (1982a) and Sowayan (1982b).