CHAPTER SEVEN

MOSAIC TRADITIONS IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In Chapter II analysis of the thematic functions of "prophet" and "king" in John led to the hypothesis that this peculiar combination of the two figures was connected with traditions about Moses. Exploration of Moses' legends and midrash of very diverse provenance has now shown clearly that Moses was frequently described by just such a combination of royal and prophetic images. In some circles of both Judaism and Samaritanism Moses was regarded as the prototypal king and prophet of Israel. The foundation of his prophetic-royal mission, in this view, was his enthronement in heaven (the Sinai theophany), where he received the Torah and, with or within it, all truth. From that moment he became God's emissary or agent (his šalīḥah) and his vice-regent on earth. It is reasonable to assume that such traditions were cultivated by groups that exalted Moses as the center of their religious concerns, as the intermediary, in some sense, between them and God. There is considerable evidence to support this assumption: the secrets revealed to Moses were the source of apocalyptic knowledge and legal regulation; his enthronement was sometimes the model for mystical "ascent" and for the elevation of the righteous at death; his leadership in the Exodus and the wilderness was the model for expectations of final redemption; his intercession was the basis for hope at the last judgment.¹

On the other hand, the prophet-king combination is completely

¹ E. R. Goodenough has for years been arguing for the existence of such a Moses-centered mystical piety in Judaism (By Light, Light, passim, and now with great persuasiveness in his analysis of the synagogue paintings at Dura-Europas, Jewish Symbols, IX-XI, especially IX, 197-226, cf. 110-123, and X, 105-139). Goodenough's theory has been vigorously controverted, the debate turning especially on the question whether such a Jewish religion might have taken the form of an organized "mystery" (above, p. 120, n. 7). The evidence I have presented above, while it sheds little new light on the question of a possible cultic organization in mystical Judaism, certainly harmonizes with Goodenough's general theory, and even adds a measure of corroboration beyond the sources he had used. In particular, it shows that the kind of piety Goodenough postulates was not limited to certain "Hellenized" Diaspora Jews, but was known in Palestine, by Samaritans as well as Jews, even in circles whose traditions have been preserved in the literature of "normative" Judaism.
absent from the Mandaean sources, even though "king" is a frequent title for the divers revealers, who also have in common with the Johannine Christ their missions as "apostles" or envoys of the highest God.

Thus the Moses traditions do offer an adequate background for the prophetic-royal christology of John. The question to be answered now is what the Fourth Gospel says about Moses.

DIRECT MENTION OF MOSES IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

Moses is mentioned by name eleven times in John. Most of the occurrences speak of the "gifts" of God through Moses, pre-eminently "the Law," i.e., the Torah. A few passages suggest a Moses-centered Jewish piety. Beginning from these direct references, one can discover in the gospel a large number of fairly clear allusions to the Moses traditions. Only those allusions closely related to the "prophet-king" themes can be discussed here.¹

Gifts through Moses and through Jesus

The gift of the Torah

"The Law was given through Moses . . .," declares the evangelist (1.17), in a clause formulated exactly as the rabbis would put it.² Moses did not give the Law, but it was given through him. The distinction was not always preserved by Greek-speaking Jews, who customarily referred to Moses as "our legislator."³ John 7.19a thus sounds more like the Hellenistic formulation: "Did not Moses give you the Law?" However, perhaps this clause should be translated as a statement rather than a question, like the precisely parallel clause, "Moses did not give you the bread from heaven . . ." (6.32a). The result in 7.19 would be awkward, requiring the reader to supply

¹ There is a temptation, once one is familiar with the Moses stories, to find hidden parallels to them throughout the gospel. But every such suggested parallel would have to be subjected to a rigorous historical criticism, to discover whether the Johannine motif in question could be better explained in another way. For an example of the extraordinary number of allusions to Moses that an imaginative reader can discover in John, cf. the monograph by T. F. Glasson already referred to several times.

² The Torah was given "by the hand of Moses" (ביד משה): Bloch, "Quelques aspects," pp. 139-141; Odeberg, Fourth Gospel, pp. 149f.; Barrett, p. 141; cf. above, pp. 171, 205f., 224.

³ Above, pp. 107, 112f., 132f. and n. 2.