Chapter 4

The Deuteronom(ist)ic Problem since the Second Half of the 20th Century

In the second chapter we demonstrated how biblical scholarship, still following to a greater or lesser degree in the wake of the Documentary Hypothesis, had ascribed an important role to a Deuteronom(ist)ic author or redactor in the genesis and evolution of the Pentateuch. In the preceding chapter it became clear that scholars became critical of this perspective from the 1960s onwards, pointing to passages in Genesis–Numbers in which a precursor to the formation of the Deuteronom(ist)ic language and ideas could be discerned. In many instances, the analysis focused on individual texts only, but there were also scholars who were inclined to speak of a Pentateuch- or Hexateuch-inclusive proto-Deuteronomic redaction.

In the present chapter we offer a survey of the various approaches to the genesis and composition of the Pentateuch that gained in popularity from the beginning of the 1970s. The studies in question, moreover, have also, and to a very considerable degree, changed and redefined research into those texts and text segments in the books Genesis–Numbers considered to have a Deuteronom(ist)ic flavour. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, interest in Deuteronom(ist)ic elements in Genesis–Numbers was limited to the identification of (a few) Deuteronom(ist)ic interpolations in the said books. From the 1960s onwards, these elements were seen as a precursor to the Deuteronomic language and theology. Since the 1970s, more and more attention has been focused on the possibility of an inclusive (post-) Deuteronom(ist)ic redaction that is said to have been at the origins of the Pentateuch as a whole or to have played an important role in the completion of the so-called final redaction of the said corpus.

In presenting recent developments in research into the Deuteronom(ist)ic problem, any attempt to provide a comprehensive picture would be ultimately doomed to failure. The present chapter is an endeavour to present an overview of the way in which the presence of language and ideas in Genesis–Numbers reminiscent of the Deuteronom(ist)ic literature has been dealt with since circa 1970 on the basis of a number of related studies. Pride of place is granted to authors who have given significant and innovative impetus to this research domain. I make a distinction in this regard between two tendencies that share a common distance, albeit in varying degrees, from the classic
Documentary Hypothesis with its roots in the 19th century. In the first section I deal with authors who ascribe the materialization of the Tetrateuch to a post-Deuteronomistic redactor or author. This means that the redactional activity the scholars in question maintain they are able to discern in Genesis–Numbers is later than and dependent on the Deuteronomistic History. The authors who maintain the terminology of the documentary hypothesis, but ascribe it a fundamentally different meaning—namely the suggestion that a late post-Deuteronomistic Yahwist was responsible for Genesis–Numbers—distinguish themselves thereby from scholars who likewise recognise traces of an inclusive post-Deuteronomistic redaction, but at the same time radically distance themselves from the prevailing Documentary Hypothesis.

In the second section, I offer a description of the work of a number of exegetes relating the materialization of the Tetrateuch to one or more Deuteronomistic redactions or to a Deuteronomistic author. This implies that they locate the origin of the Deuteronom(ist)ic elements in Genesis–Numbers on one and the same line with the author(s)/redactor(s) responsible for (a part of) the Deuteronomistic History.1

A new shift is particularly evident since the final decade of the last century. Various passages traditionally considered ‘Deuteronom(ist)ic’ but at the same time anterior to the Priestly ‘reworking’, now tend to be relocated to an extremely late stage in the process of the Pentateuch’s genesis. They are not only considered dependent on the Deuteronomistic History, they are also considered dependent on the late Priestly layer or redaction of the Pentateuch. Moreover, some associated these post-Priestly, post-Deuteronomistic texts with the ‘final redaction’ of the Pentateuch. A few examples of this approach will be briefly explored in the third section of the chapter.

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1 I am well aware that some scholars do not fit with ease into the outlined division. I maintain this distinction nevertheless, convinced as I am that the framework it provides helps us to chart contemporary tendencies in relation to the Deuteronom(ist)ic problem in Genesis–Numbers in the clearest possible way. It is important to remember thereby that approaches often partially overlap one another and that authors frequently adjust their perspective on a given issue as years pass. It should be noted, in addition, that attention is primarily focused on authors who deal explicitly with the Deuteronom(ist)ic problem in Genesis–Numbers. Cf. also M. Vervenne, ‘The Question of “Deuteronomic” Elements in Genesis to Numbers’, in: F. García Martínez et al. (eds), Studies in Deuteronomy: In Honour of C.J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday (svt, 53), Leiden 1994, 243–268.