DEUTERONOMY AND THE JERUSALEM
CULT TRADITION

BY

R. E. CLEMENTS

Edinburgh

The traditio-historical approach to the Book of Deuteronomy has made it abundantly clear that its cultic and legal material does not fit into the distinctive traditions of Jerusalem, which are more characteristically represented by the Holiness Code, the Reconstruction Programme appended to the Book of Ezekiel (xl-xlvi), and the Priestly Document. Instead the background of Deuteronomy has been rightly sought in religious circles of the Northern Kingdom. This, so far as I am aware, was first suggested by C. F. Burney in 1918, in the introduction to his commentary on the Book of Judges 1), and has since been elaborated by a number of scholars, especially Welch 2), Bentzen 3) and von Rad 4). The authors of Deuteronomy must be sought among the heirs of the religious traditions of the Northern Kingdom, either among disciples of the prophets, as Burney thought, or more probably, as Bentzen and von Rad argue, in Levitical circles. These may well have been associated with the sanctuaries of Shechem and Bethel, and have been dispossessed of their living by the religious changes introduced after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom in 721 B.C. Ultimately their cultic and legal traditions would go back to the conditions and ideology of the amphictyony, so that Deuteronomy may justifiably be presented as a developed expression of the older Mosaic religion. In agreement with this several distinctive features of Deuteronomy have been thought to reflect the traditions of the amphictyony.

3) A. Bentzen, Die Josianische Reform und ihre Voraussetzungen, Copenhagen, 1926.
However, the assertion that the background of Deuteronomy is to be found in the traditions of the Northern Kingdom has been pressed by a number of scholars into an argument that the original Deuteronomy was in fact composed in the Northern Kingdom, and only subsequently brought to Jerusalem 1). Thus Josiah's reform was remarkable in that it entailed an application to Jerusalem of a cult tradition which had originally belonged elsewhere. On this reckoning it was Josiah's court which made a reform programme out of a document which was essentially the crystallization of a local corpus of legal and cultic material. It is this aspect of recent interpretations of Deuteronomy that I wish to question, and to argue that whilst the Deuteronomists did not originate from Jerusalem, they certainly composed the central corpus of their work with Jerusalem in mind. Whilst Deuteronomy is the work of a non-Jerusalem priesthood, and uses material drawn from the Northern Kingdom, it was intentionally composed as an attempt at reforming and reinterpretating the cult tradition of Jerusalem. This is the most satisfactory explanation of a number of significant features of the Deuteronomic theology which can best be understood as derived from a knowledge of the claims of Jerusalem. Thus Josiah was entirely correct in regarding the Deuteronomic law of the sanctuary as applying to Jerusalem 2), and the Deuteronomistic historian of the Books of Kings was equally right in referring that law to this sanctuary 3). This, from the beginning, was the sanctuary which the Deuteronomistic lawgivers had in mind, and their work was very much concerned with reforming its cult tradition.

The first piece of evidence in support of this claim concerns the Deuteronomic interpretation of the ark 4). Whilst Deuteronomy lays


A secondary revision of the work in Jerusalem is postulated by DANELL (op. cit., p. 57). 2) 2 Kings xxiii 4ff.

2) 1 Kings viii 15ff.; xi 36; xiv 21; 2 Kings xxi 4, 7.