WHERE DID MOSES SPEAK
(DEUTERONOMY I 1-5)?

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The opening section of Deuteronomy (i 1-5) is of a markedly complex nature. The obvious problems that present themselves have been extensively studied—as yet, however, without convincing results. There are undoubtedly perplexing elements in this passage. One question is the meaning of the different and repeated opening phrases and whether they represent a composite version. Another problem is how to reconcile the diverse geographical demarcations with one another and with the purported place where Moses spoke. Furthermore, it is not only a question of textual interpretation; the principles of methodology applied themselves require thorough reappraisal.

To facilitate this study, it will be useful to formulate in more detail the problems that present themselves. One problem concerns the repeated opening phrases in vv. 1a, 3 and 5 with the statements that Moses spoke. The place of Moses' speaking, as intimated in vv. 1a and 5, is another question. Finally, there is the particularly vexing problem of the diverse toponyms in vv. 1b-2, their relationship with each other, and their connection with the act and place

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1 This article is based on a paper read at the 10th World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem in August 1989. The text has been revised and footnotes have been added.

2 All commentaries and numerous related studies have attended to the problems of this passage. The most comprehensive summarizing discussions may be found in the commentaries of Mittmann and Perlitt. Cf. S. Mittmann, Deuteronomium 1-63 (BZAW 139; Berlin and New York, 1975), pp. 8-17; L. Perlitt, Deuteronomium (Neukirchen-Vluyn [fasc. 1], 1990), pp. 1-25. To outline the major trends, however, only some of the more indicative studies, which formulate diverse manners of approach that dominate the current literature, will be reviewed. As for the general framework of the wanderings of the Israelites, closely related to this subject, cf. Z. Kallai, 'The Wandering-Traditions from Kadesh-Barnea to Canaan: A Study in Biblical Historiography', JJS 33 (1982), pp. 175-84.
of Moses’ speaking to the people of Israel. A brief survey of some of the pertinent studies that present the methods of analysis applied will bring these questions into focus.

Driver and Bertholet summarize the earlier critical studies, presenting their own detailed assessments on that basis.

S.R. Driver emphasizes the purpose of this section as a historical introduction defining the place and time of the discourses of Moses. He sees great difficulties in v. 1b, because of his endeavours to understand the details and accommodate them to the purported frame of time and place. These toponyms, Driver notes, are in part related to an earlier stage of the wandering. He quotes A. Knobel who assumed these names to be retrospective, referring to various communications in the itinerary that extends from Exodus to Numbers. This, Driver maintains, is possible as far as style is concerned, but improbable in this place; in particular, he sees a complication in those toponyms that have not been named in the preceding narrative. Driver furthermore refers to A. Dillmann’s opinion that this is a fragment of D’s itinerary prefixed to the discourse, but concludes that this is not feasible because v. 1b seeks to define the locality. The detailed analysis illuminates Driver’s self-imposed restrictions. The wilderness could be east of Moab or else the wilderness of the wandering, but that is inexact if used with the term Arabah, which he relates to the Jordan valley and further south. He relates Suph to Suphah of Num. xxi 14, while Paran must be a different locality from the one usually known by that name. To sum up these deliberations, Driver concludes that whatever cannot be explained as being related to the area fitting the discourse of Moses is probably misplaced. Verse 2 is explained by Driver as an indication of the distance from Horeb to the southern edge of Canaan.

A. Bertholet sees this passage as a heading for the text following, encumbered by agglomeration, so that it cannot be regarded as homogeneous. It is obvious from vv. 1a and 5 that Transjordan is referred to, but vv. 1b-2 do not fit this framework. It must therefore be assumed that this is an independent fragment from a list of stations like that found in Deut. x 6-7, and should be excluded from the text. Also v. 3 looks disjointed and in its formulation seems to

4 Deuteronomium (Freiburg i. B., 1899), pp. 1-2.