10

'The peg in the wall': Cultic Centralization Revisited

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1. THE PROBLEM

It was Julius Wellhausen who first used the idea of cultic centralization as a criterion according to which it was possible to separate the history of Israel into two different epochs: the age of ancient Israel and the age of Judaism.[1] Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette paved the way for this distinction. De Wette identified the law book of Josiah (2 Kings 22–3) with Deuteronomy and introduced the distinction between Hebraism and Judaism.[2] Wellhausen combined both aspects realizing that Deuteronomy must be used when one wants to distinguish both historical epochs within the biblical texts. Wellhausen's analysis is still valid today but seems to aim more at the literary level of the Hebrew Bible than at the history of Israel. From a historical perspective it is impossible to maintain that one epoch simply follows the other. The texts from Elephantine and the continuing polemics against ancient Israel within the Hebrew Bible itself make it seem likely that both types of 'Israel', the historical one and the biblical one from which Judaism derived, existed—from a certain point onwards—next to each other.[3]

Both de Wette and Wellhausen arrived at their results with the help of literary-historical criticism, i.e. by using internal criteria.

[1] Wellhausen (1905) and (1914).

[2] The famous dissertation of de Wette—often quoted, but seldom read—is now re-edited and translated into German by Mathys (2008), translated into English by Harvey and Halpern (2008). For Hebraism and Judaism see Perlitt (1994).

[3] Kratz (2007*a*).

Next to such an approach we also find proposals that operate with extra-biblical material, i.e. the so-called external evidence. Behind such a preference often lies the intention to undermine form-critically any literary-critical hypothesis.[4] Or one simply wants to confirm the results of literary-historical investigations and, subsequently, place the results on a new religio-historical basis.[5] Since the groundbreaking studies of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic school by Moshe Weinfeld from 1972 the discussion tends to focus on certain neo-Assyrian parallels.[6] Today these parallels are used to explain not only the literary history of Deuteronomy but also the origin of the Pentateuch as a whole and many other aspects of the biblical tradition.[7] Here phrases such as 'point of Archimedes' and 'peg in the wall' are used.[8] Thus, the external evidence seems to support a current trend in Hebrew Bible scholarship to date many of the texts, previously thought of having originated during Solomonic times, to the time of Josiah, even though we do not know anything more about Josiah than we know about Solomon and the pre-monarchic period.[9]

It is to be hoped that the 'peg in the wall' that has to hold all those hypotheses will be spared the destiny of the peg mentioned in Isa. 22: 25:

ביום ההוא נאם יהוה צבאות תמוש היתד התקועה במקום
נאמן ונגדעה ונפלה ונ כרת המשא אשר עליה כי יהוה דבר׃

In the following I will subject those hypotheses to close scrutiny using the concept of cultic centralization in Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic literature as a test-case. Thus, our contribution serves a double purpose: we will discuss the religio-historical place of

[4] Baltzer (1964), on whom see Perlitt (1969).

[5] Already Oestreicher criticized the 'isolated method' of de Wette and Wellhausen who 'only knows of a inner-Israelite development' and postulated a 'universal perspective' (*weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungsweise*); see Oestreicher (1923), 9–10; id. (1930), 34.

[6] Weinfeld (1972), 59–178; see also ibid., vii where he notes the significance of VTE for de Wette's hypothesis.

[7] Otto (1996), (1997), (1999), (2000), (2002) etc.; for the broader perspective see Otto (1999), 86–7, (2000), 237 n. 21, and (2002), 13 n. 67, followed by Schmid (2008), 73–108.

[8] Otto (1997), (1999), 8, 12, (2000), 10, and (2002), 6.

[9] Finkelstein and Silberman (2001), 14 *et passim*; for Hezekiah as Josiah's predecessor see Finkelstein and Silberman (2006). On the methodological incoherence of this position see Albertz (2005), 27–9.

cultic centralization and, at the same time, address the methodological question of what heuristic value ancient Near Eastern parallels can have for the explanation of biblical texts.

2. SUBVERSIVE RECEPTION

It is scholarly consensus that those laws that centralize the cult and the stipulations that shape the social and judicial laws in the light of the cultic centralization form the basic layer of Deuteronomy.[10] The issue of cultic centralization serves as the motif for the reworking of the older Covenant Code of Exodus 20–3 in Deuteronomy and as the guiding principle for the reception process.[11] This insight provides us with a lucid criterion for any analysis of Deuteronomy. Next to the change of number in the form of address (*Numeruswechsel*) and the literary dependence on the Covenant Code it is the centralization of the cult that decides the extent of the basic layer of Deuteronomy, the so called *Urdeuteronomium*.[12]

In addition to this analysis, Eckart Otto has proposed that the laws regarding centralization are preceded by an even earlier document that can be found in Deuteronomy 13 and 28 and which he calls—in a deviation from traditional terminology—the *Urdeuteronomuium*. According to Otto, who follows a proposal made by Paul-Eugène Dion and Hans Ulrich Steymans, this older *Urdeuteronmium* consists of an almost verbatim translation of a neo-Assyrian formulary. He finds this formulary in those texts that are generally classified as the Vassal Treaties of Essarhaddon (VTE) containing a loyalty oath that

[10] Neglecting any detailed analysis those laws are: Deut. 12: 1–28; 14: 22–29; 15: 1–18; 15: 19–23; 16: 1–18 as well as Deut. 16: 18–20; 17: 8–13; 18: 1–11; 19: 1–13; 19: 15–21; 21: 1–9; 26: 1–16. All other laws do not have a genuine relationship to the theme of cultic centralization. See Reuter (1993); for a wider perspective Hagedorn (2005).

[11] Levinson (1997). In the following I will assume an exclusive exegesis of the formula of centralization. On the problem see Reuter (1993), 65–7; Levinson (1997), 23–4 n. 1. On the identification of the chosen place see Kratz (2007*b*).

[12] Kratz (2000*a*), 120–7 (ET 2005: 114–33); see also Veijola (2004), 2–3. On the question of the criteria see Otto (1999), 10–14. Otto rightly refutes any correlation between Deuteronomy and 2 Kings 22–3 as a basis for literary analysis. Unfortunately he takes only the religio-historical comparison into account as an alternative; see Otto (1996), 3–4, (1999), 13–14, 15–90. Everything else, including the reformulation of the Covenant Code, is therefore subsumed under this aspect.

Esarhaddon imposed on his subjected rulers in favour of his successor Ashurbanipal.[13] In the supposed translation the neo-Assyrian loyalty oath was transformed into a loyalty oath of the Judaean people in favour of their god YHWH. Otto calls this process a 'subversive reception' and dates it—because of the external evidence, the proposed literary dependence, and the supposed anti-Assyrian tendency of Deuteronomy 13 and 28—to Assyrian times.[14] It is within this chronological and literary frame that Otto is also locating the concept and realization of cultic centralization in Judah. The religio-historical background of this concept and its supposed polemic and anti-Assyrian purpose is called the 'rationality of Assyrian cultic centralization'.[15]

Otto's hypothesis offers a closed and coherent system. Nevertheless there are quite a number of objections that cause the 'peg in the wall' to wobble.[16] It has often been observed that the hypothesis cannot be reconciled with the literary evidence of Deuteronomy. The laws concerning cultic centralization are not connected to or fitted into the assumed frame of Deuteronomy 13 and 28. Rather, Deuteronomy 13 interrupts the original connection of the laws regarding centralization in Deut. 12: 13–28 and 14: 22–9.

Additionally, the covenant theology of Deuteronomy 13 and 28 does not mark the beginning of the legal and literary-historical development of Deuteronomy, but rather its end. There cannot be any doubt that the covenant in Deuteronomy is inspired by the ancient Near Eastern contract pattern and here especially by the neo-Assyrian loyalty oaths and their late Hittite predecessors. But, in contrast to the ancient Near Eastern examples neither the Assyrian nor the Judaean king takes part in the covenant. It is a covenant only between the people of Israel and the God of Israel. If we had a subversive reception here such a reception would imply that the

[13] Text in Parpola and Watanabe (1988), 28–58. On the question of whether the documents are a vassal treaty or a succession oath of Essarhaddon see Liverani (1995) and Otto (1999), 15–32.

[14] See Dion (1978) and (1991); Steymans (1995), (2003), and (2006); Otto (1996), (1997), (1999), (2000), (2002), etc..

[15] Otto (1999), 351: 'Wie der assyrische Gott Aššur an nur einem Ort kultisch verehrt wird, so auch der judäische Gott JHWH: Jerusalem steht nicht Aššur nach, und kein Lokalheiligtum in Juda unterminiert die Alternative zwischen dem Gott Aššur und JHWH.'; see also pp. 74–5, 350–1, 364–78, and Otto (2002), 14–17, 161.

[16] See Veijola (2000), and (2002), 289–98; Köckert (2000); Rüterswörden (2002); Aurelius (2003*a*), 41 n. 77; Pakkala (2006); Koch (2008).

Judaean king (Josiah) terminated his own existence (see Deut. 17: 14–20).[17]

Finally, the direct dependence of Deuteronomy 13 and 28 on VTE has been questioned since such a linear and monocausal process does not do justice to the complexity of the ancient Near Eastern literary tradition. Despite the fact that the late Hittite and neo-Assyrian as well as other (Aramaic) parallels provide the general background for the literary development of the Book of Deuteronomy, it is, however, not recommended to accept the hypothesis that a composition of Deuteronomy 13 and 28 is the predecessor and literary frame of the idea of cultic centralization within the original form of Deuteronomy.

Thus, we have to concentrate our investigation on the laws regarding centralization themselves and their relationship to what Otto calls the 'rationality of Assyrian cultic centralization'. Here, Otto depends on information gained from Assyriologists that the god Aššur—according to the sources available to us and with only one exception (during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I)—did not have an official temple outside the city of Aššur.[18] Undoubtedly, this is a fact but what does it tell us? Is this fact the 'peg in the wall' we are looking for?

Otto himself has to concede that, as far as the 'programmatic consequence' is concerned, 'the Deuteronomic, pre-Deuteronomistic conception of the sacrificial centralization moves significantly beyond the Assyrian concept'. The same is true for the 'aniconic trait of JHWH-religion' originating in Judah at the same time and equally 'reacting to the power of neo-Assyrian culture'. According to Otto this 'trait of JHWH-religion', too, was inspired by the god Aššur but was turned against him.[19] If, however, we had indeed a process of 'subversive reception' here it would have gone so far that its starting

[17] The oath from Arslan Taş cannot be used to show that 'the revolt against the Assyrian royal ideology via the covenant theology' is a specific aspect of Deuteronomy 13 and 28; contra Otto (1999), 85–6, and (2002), 165–6. The covenant theology of Deuteronomy is neither directed against the god Aššur nor against the Assyrian king but explicitly against 'other gods' (Deut. 13: 3, 7, etc.). It goes without saying that also a covenant with Aššur, Marduk, or Ahuramazda is excluded here. On Arslan Taş see Koch (2008), 252–3 n. 23.

[18] Otto (1999), 74–5, 350–1 referring to Mayer (1995), 61–7; Otto (1997), 15–17; Maul (1997), 121–4. See also Schmid (2008), 81, 106, who is speaking of an 'Assyrian import'.

[19] Otto (1999), 75.

point can no longer be recognized. This, in turn, makes it very difficult to construct genetic dependencies from similarities.

If one wants to evaluate the proposed analogy, one has to look at the religio-historical context. The god Aššur always had his cultic centre in the city of Aššur. There was no need for his cult to become centralized, since it was always limited to a single place that was seen in competition to other (Babylonian) cultic centres established earlier. The main point of this rivalry was a question of status of the main god and the capital (i.e. the central cultic place), where the axis of the world was located.[20] Since the god Aššur originally did not have many significant features, he was concerned with acquiring attributes of other powerful gods as well as transferring the significance of their cultic place to his cultic centre of Aššur. The most prominent and brutal expression of this competition can be found in Sennacherib's campaign against the Marduk temple Esangila of Babylon and the rich echo of the events in the literary tradition.[21] Such campaigns are, however, the exception. Normally the rivalry is expressed in rivalling attributes, rites, and myths for which Aššur competes with Marduk of Babylon and Enlil of Nippur. These processes cannot be labelled centralization. Rather, they are politically motivated transfers from one centre to another. As far as I am aware we do not know of any prohibition to worship Aššur (or any other god) outside the city of Aššur, although we have to concede that positive pieces of evidence are equally sparse.[22]

The Book of Deuteronomy is quite different. It deals with a deity that was worshipped at different places such as the official temple of the capital and the different local sanctuaries in the cities. The prohibition of any form of offering and the introduction of profane slaughter outside the chosen sanctuary (that is normally identified with Jerusalem, the capital of Judah) do not continue this long-standing tradition. In their original form the laws regarding centralization are not directed against other gods and their cultic

[20] Maul (1997); on the temple of the god Aššur see Menzel (1981), I, 34 ff.

[21] See Vera Chamaza (2002).

[22] Cogan (1974), 49–61, esp. 52–5; Pongratz-Leisten et al. (1992). The fact that there are no extra-biblical attestations for a legal corpus focusing on priestly claims from Mesopotamia is further evidence that not only the Deuteronomic concept of centralization but also the form of it (i.e. a divine law mediated by Moses) is exceptional within the ancient Near East and needs to be explained.

places that compete with YHWH. Rather they are directed against YHWH himself and his own local cultic centres 'in the gates'.

A rivalry between the YHWH of Jerusalem (Judah) and the YHWH of Samaria (Israel) and other manifestations of the same god at other places may have formed the background of the idea of cultic centralization (see Deut. 6: 4). The rivalry with 'other gods' mainly of the land of Canaan, however, presupposes the first commandment and was only added later—as the supplements in Deut. 12: 1–12 or Deuteronomy 13 show. The status of YHWH as the main god of Israel and Judah and the status of Jerusalem as capital of Judah was never questioned if one does not want to think of a rivalry with foreign rule and its capital and gods. Against it, however, the prohibition of sacrifice and the profanation and destruction of local cults would hardly have been a tried and tested measure.

Therefore, any comparison of the Deuteronomic law of centralization with the Mesopotamian concept of a capital lacks a valid point of comparison. The only comparative element is the concept of a capital but this is neither a Deuteronomic nor a neo-Assyrian speciality. The concept of a capital is attested in Aššur but also in Babylon and was most likely also prominent—despite the real political constellations—in Israel and Judah and the other small states in Syro-Palestine. As such, the concept represents the common idea that gods of the land rise to become main gods and certain places become capitals, an idea that necessarily includes some rivalry.[23] In all that we find one prerequisite for the Deuteronomic law of centralization, but the two concepts are not identical nor does one concept simply derive from the other. Above all, the common background does not explain any anti-Assyrian polemics, which Otto assumes to be behind the Deuteronomic programme of centralization.

In fact, it is not the pre-eminence of the city and the god Aššur that leads Otto and those who follow him to the assumption of anti-Assyrian polemics in Deuteronomy but the politics of King Josiah of Judah.[24] In doing so, Otto is trapped in the same circular argument

[23] See Mayer (1997) for Ahuramazda who follows the neo-Assyrian and neo-Babylonian examples.

[24] Otto (1999), 74–5.

that he rightly criticizes in other places.[25] Issues of methodology make it impossible, however, to simply correlate Deuteronomy with the report of Josiah's reform in 2 Kings 22–3. Such a correlation depends largely on the analysis of both Deuteronomy and the chapters in 2 Kings, and both are hotly debated subjects. This is not the place to repeat the discussion but we have to remind ourselves that the picture changes depending on the literary reconstruction.

Even if we take the anti-Assyrian measures employed by Josiah that are generally regarded as belonging to the basic layer of 2 Kings 22–3 and compare them—for argument's sake—with the laws regarding centralization in Deuteronomy we realize that both aspects are difficult to reconcile.[26] Neither the dismissal of the *kĕmarim*-priests and the removal of several Assyrian cultic symbols from the Temple in Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 23: 5, 11–12)[27] nor Josiah's encounter with Necho that got him killed[28] have anything to do with the Deuteronomic concept of cultic centralization.

On the other hand, the laws regarding centralization of Deuteronomy as well as Josiah's move against the indigenous ('Canaanite') local cults distinctly lack the rationality of anti-Assyrian politics.[29] Theodor Oestreicher has tried to solve this problem by separating the anti-Assyrian measures of Josiah from his move against the local cults and subsequently interpreted this move as simply being a momentary measure. According to Oestreicher, neither aspect, nor the original version of Deuteronomy, has anything to do with cultic centralization. In his view the centralization is an invention of the Deuteronomists based on a misunderstanding.[30] It is quite obvious that such a hypothesis is simply a rationalization

[25] Otto (1999), 7, 13–14 (with reference to Gustav Hölscher). One gets the impression that placing the 'covenant' and the covenantal document (*Bundesurkunde*) before the 'Law' in Deuteronomy 13 and 28 (Otto (1999), 74) is modelled on the scene of 2 Kings 22–3.

[26] See Uehlinger (1995, ET 2005) and the apt remarks by Otto (1999), 12: 'Für eine Korrelierung mit einem Urdeuteronomium geben diese Maßnahmen wenig her'; equally Arneth (2001), 206 on the 'anti-Assyrian reform' in 2 Kgs. 23: 4–15: 'Von einer Kultzentralisation ist im ursprünglichen Textbestand (noch) nichts zu vernehmen.'

[27] See Spieckermann (1982), 85–6, 245–56, 271–3, 293–4.

[28] It is difficult to decide whether Josiah approached the pharaoh with hostile or friendly intent. See Spieckermann (1982), 138–53; Würthwein (1994), 464–5; Cogan and Tadmor (1988), 291, 300–1.

[29] Otto (1999), 75–6, followed by Arneth (2001), 208, simply ignores both aspects.

[30] Oestreicher (1923), 56, 116–20, and (1930), 32–42.

of the literary tradition from a universal perspective (*weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungsweise*)—a perspective with numerous problems. Nevertheless such a hypothesis highlights the difficulties one encounters if one tries to subsume the earliest edition of the Book of Deuteronomy and the report of Josiah's reform in 2 Kings 23 under the aspect of Josiah's anti-Assyrian politics.

Here, it is quite common to assume that one can solve these problems by simply historicizing the statements regarding the high places in the narratives of Hezekiah's (2 Kgs. 18: 4, 22) and Josiah's (2 Kgs. 23: 5, 8–9, 13, 15, 19–20) reign. The removal of the high places is then an expression of a Judaean (anti-Assyrian) politics of centralization that simply took the historical realities (i.e. the devastation and curtailing of Judaean territory after the events of 701 BCE and the assumed opposition of local and official religion) into account.[31] Due to economic, political, and religious pressure local cultic places were defamed as being Canaanite (i.e. foreign), and therefore abandoned or deliberately not rebuilt.[32]

Methodologically speaking such an approach is highly problematic, since it is, again, based on a combination of Deuteronomy 12 with 2 Kings 23 and fuses the literary level with the historical one. In addition, it is difficult to grasp that Judah would have transformed its desperate situation and the desolate state of its land caused by the Assyrian invasion into a religio-political or even theological programme.[33] Furthermore, it remains unclear who, by defaming

[31] Jepsen (1956), 75; Gleis (1997), 177–81. Similarly Fried (2002), 461, who explains Deuteronomy 12 with the situation after 701 BCE but attributes the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah in total to an exilic Deuteronomist. On the various pictures of Josiah and historical (re)constructions in the light of the Assyrian sources see Handy (2006).

[32] Na'aman (1991), 57, and (2002), 596–7. Halpern (1991), 27 thinks that the prophets were responsible for such a programme; Barrick (2002), 177–216 refutes any anti-Assyrian tendency and argues for a shift in internal Judaean politics. For Albertz (2005)—although the historical evidence is lacking—the Josianic reform just must have happened in Josianic times since the dating of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History must not be too late. Similarly Pietsch (2013), who—after a very thorough and critical evaluation of the literary as well as the archaeological and epigraphic sources—surprisingly comes to the conclusion that the report of 2 Kings 23 is to be dated not too far from the events recounted in this report and thinks that the biblical account is more or less historical.

[33] See Aurelius (2003*a*), 32 (arguing against Jepsen (1956), 75): 'Aber eine solche gewordene, nicht gewollte, geschweige denn einem Programm zufolge durchgeführte (Tendenz zur) Zentralisation wird noch keinem Geschichtsschreiber Maßstäbe für die Königsbeurteilungen, also für das theologische Urteil über die gesamte Geschichte der beiden Reiche geliefert haben.'

the indigenous local cults as foreign cults, would have created an artificial antagonism to the YHWH cult of the capital only for economic profit or in order to fulfil the expectation of a 'subversive reception' and assimilate YHWH to the god Aššur. If Josiah is interpreted by employing any anti-Assyrian tendency it would have been more likely that we find an expansion of the local cults of YHWH rather than their defamation and abolition.[34]

Lastly, it is questionable whether the statements regarding the high places in 2 Kings 23 were ever part of the basic layer of the reform report or whether they were added at a later stage—taking up ideas from later literary levels of Deuteronomy—to transform the anti-Assyrian religious measures of Josiah into an inner-Judaean cultic reform.[35] If we use the statements concerning the high places we are in danger of using the judgement of the exilic Deuteronomists to describe the mood of the assumed reform movement active under Josiah or even earlier to explain the origin of the Book of Deuteronomy and of the Josianic reform.[36]

In conclusion we cannot but state that the idea of cultic centralization fits neither the rationality of neo-Assyrian politics nor any Judaean anti-Assyrian political movement. In the light of Moshe Weinfeld's groundbreaking study it remains unquestionable that the Book of Deuteronomy is influenced by the language and social world of the neo-Assyrian treaty literature and their Hittite and Aramaic predecessors.[37] However, it is significant that Moshe Weinfeld himself pointed to a very different religio-historical parallel when explaining the law of centralization in Deuteronomy and its realization under Hezekiah.

[34] Kratz (2000*a*), 137 (ET 2005: 131–2); Aurelius (2003*a*), 41–2.

[35] See Würthwein (1994), 457–8; Kratz (2000*a*), 136, 173 (ET 2005: 131, 169). Aurelius (2003*a*), 44, keeps the polemics against the high places although he is unable to detect any political calculation (contra Levin (2003)), nor economic advantage (contra Niehr (1995)), nor any theological (contra Spieckermann (1982)) or anti-Assyrian (contra Otto (1999)) intention of King Josiah; see Aurelius (2003*a*), 40–2. Also, any action against a YHWH-cult swamped with Canaanite influences does not make sense during Josianic times; contra Hardmeier (2000), 141.

[36] Oestreicher (1930), 41.

[37] On the condition of such influences see Nissinen (1996), 179–82; Steymans (2006); Rüterswörden (2002); the relevant essays in Witte et al. 2006 (303 ff., 351 ff., 379 ff.); Koch (2008). Since Hittite traditions were handed down via Syro-Hittite and Aramaic transmission to the first millennium BCE, one could assume the same for the Assyrian traditions that were handed down to Persian times via Median and Urartian transmission. See Schmitt (1977).

3. CULTIC REFORM AND CENTRALIZATION

Moshe Weinfeld himself did not refer to a neo-Assyrian analogy but to one from neo-Babylonian times.[38] Here Weinfeld is thinking of the transfer of the gods from the Southern Mesopotamian cities to Babylon during the reign of Nabonidus shortly before the conquest of the city by Cyrus II. The events are reported in several documents from the circles of the Babylonian priests of Marduk.[39] This act is interpreted by Weinfeld as a politically and religiously motivated measure to bind the Babylonian cities under threat from Persian invasion to Babylon and to increase their military power. Simultaneously—in Weinfeld's view—this transfer fits well into Nabonidus' reform programme aimed at establishing the cult of the moon god Sîn as the main cult of Babylon. The later inner-Babylonian polemics of the priests of Marduk portrayed this as a sacrilege reversed by Cyrus II.

According to Weinfeld one has to understand the reform of Hezekiah along similar lines, i.e. a politically and religiously motivated measure hoping to strengthen the central power in the light of Assyrian pressure and the siege of Jerusalem. Hezekiah was able to refer to the amphictyonic heritage. Weinfeld uses 2 Kgs. 18: 22 as proof that such an act was criticized in Judah, where prophetic circles—especially the pupils of Isaiah—regarded such a measure as a heinous deed. On the other hand the cultic reform of Hezekiah that was supported by the priestly circles of Jerusalem was regarded as a pious act by the authors of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History (2 Kgs. 18: 4–6). In contrast to Nabonidus, Hezekiah's reform, completed by Josiah, was successful.

Weinfeld, too, sees the point of origin of the idea of cultic centralization in a religio-political situation that can be explained against the background of ancient Near Eastern sources. In contrast to the hypothesis of a 'subversive reception' of Assyrian royal ideology, however, Weinfeld does not postulate any direct literary dependence. Rather, the polemic debate about cultic centralization is limited only to the individual culture concerned. Thus, the Nabonidus episode simply serves as a heuristic model to understand the Deuteronomic

[38] Weinfeld (1964).

[39] *Chronicle of Nabonidus* III. 8–12, 20–1 (Grayson (2000), 109–10); *Cyrus-Cylinder*, 9–10, 33–4 (Schaudig (2001), 550–6); *Verse Account* V. 12–14 (Schaudig (2001), 570, 578).

programme and its realization, reported in the books of Kings, against the background of the cultural situation of the ancient Near East. An absolute chronology is, therefore, not deduced from such a religio-historical analogy. Following the scholarly consensus at the time Hezekiah, Josiah, and the Book of Deuteronomy are dated to the neo-Assyrian period and are thus seen as predecessors to the neo-Babylonian analogy.

It is an advantage of this hypothesis that it does not only take the rivalry between the different capitals into account but also the relationship between capital and hinterland. In doing so, the neo-Babylonian parallel is much closer to the Book of Deuteronomy than the neo-Assyrian material surveyed above. For neither the Assyrian nor the Babylonian concept of a capital city is able to explain sufficiently the concept of centralization in Deuteronomy or the polemics against the high places in the Deuteronomistic History. Another advantage of the material presented by Weinfeld is that both the biblical and the neo-Babylonian concepts are part of a specific situation in which unusual measures are employed to cope with difficult circumstances. In both cases, Weinfeld assumes a process of innovation within the framework of an extensive cultic reform that needs to be explained historically.

Despite these obvious advantages, Weinfeld's religio-historical analogy also poses a series of questions that make it unlikely that we have the desired 'peg in the wall' here. The main problem is the exact meaning of Nabonidus' unusual action during the last days of the neo-Babylonian empire. The tendency of the sources is mostly polemical, which makes their interpretation difficult. As is the case in the books of Kings one is faced with the difficult task of discernig the historical motifs behind the polemics.

Weinfeld's explanation is heavily influenced by the views put forth by the Babylonian priesthood that expounds a theology centred on Babylon. Since the priests of Marduk lump Nabonidus' actions together with other deeds to denounce them as an offence against Marduk and his cultic site, one gets the feeling that the action has indeed something to do with his religious policy. A centralization of the cults in the name of the moon-god Sîn, however, does not seem to fit Nabonidus' politics of religion and expansion, which was actually more concerned with decentralization.[40] Neither his stay at

[40] See Beaulieu (1989); Na'aman (2006), 158–62.

Teman nor the building project of Ehulul at Harran, pursued by Nabonidus in the last years of his reign, point to a concern with centralization. The accusation of the so called Verse Account (V: 18–22) that Nabonidus changed the temple of Marduk at Babylon into a temple of Sîn does not imply a concentration of all cults in one single place but simply fits his religio-political plan to supplant Marduk with Sîn as highest god and to declare the temples of other gods to be places of residence for Sîn.[41]

Furthermore, Weinfeld's proposal is not the only possible explanation. Mordechai Cogan has pointed to parallels to the behaviour of Nabonidus showing that the dislocation of gods was a protective measure against enemies and served at the same time as reassurance of divine protection.[42] This explanation was excluded by Weinfeld[43] but has recently been revived by Paul-Alain Beaulieu, who was able to use newly discovered sources.[44] The documents show that—next to the divine images—cultic personnel, too, were ordered to Babylon and we learn of a lively exchange of goods to support the gods now housed there. Beaulieu is further able to detect signs that the dates of the transport of the gods and the personnel were connected with the religious policy of Nabonidus in favour of the god Sîn. Only the polemics of the priests of Marduk distorted the true intention of Nabonidus, namely the protection of the gods, in favour of a portrait of Cyrus as the faithful servant of Marduk. Thus Nabonidus' action was defamed retrospectively as a cultic abomination and an offence happening against the will of the gods brought to Babylon, triggering the wrath of the lord of gods (Marduk).

No matter how we evaluate the process, it is not easy to reconcile it with the Deuteronomic programme of cultic centralization and with the Deuteronomistic portrait of Hezekiah and Josiah. It is possible to understand the election of a cultic place for the main god of the empire against the ancient Near Eastern background, but it is impossible to do so for the flip-side of the coin. In Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History the election of the cultic place is intrinsically linked to the prohibition of cultic deeds and the

[41] Schaudig (2001), 21.

[42] See Cogan (1974), 30–4, esp. 33 n. 67 against Weinfeld; see also Cogan and Tadmor (1988), 219.

[43] Weinfeld (1964), 205; see also Galling (1964), 33.

[44] Beaulieu (1989), 219–24, and (1993).

profanation of slaughter 'in your gates' (Deut. 12: 13–18) and with the violation and removal of the 'high places' (2 Kgs. 18: 4, 22, and 23: 4 ff.). This aspect cannot be equated with the transfer of the gods and their cultic personnel to Babylon under Nabonidus. Beaulieu has shown that such a measure does not imply any violation or removal of cults in Babylonian cities at all. At the same time, a restitution of these and other defunct cults under Cyrus II does not imply that these cults had previously been forbidden by a higher authority in favour of the capital. Centralization on the basis of the Mesopotamian concept of a state capital and the abolition of local cults in favour of a single legitimate cultic place are simply not the same.

There is, however, a certain similarity on a literary level between the biblical picture of Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms and the inscriptional evidence of Nabonidus' cultic reform, his self-presentation in his monumental inscriptions and the later polemics of the priests of Marduk who attribute the violation of cultic places and idolatry to him.[45] These similarities, however, are not too insightful. Nadav Na'aman and others have pointed to similar ancient Near Eastern sources that deal with royal cultic reforms and that contain reports both of forceful interventions and of restitutions of destroyed cultic centres.[46] It is hardly surprising that the topos of a royal cultic reform and—up to a certain point—also the pattern of representation in texts that all originated in the ancient Near Eastern realm are comparable. But as far as the motivation and aim are concerned the analogies contain significant discrepancies.

All examples are in agreement that the reform 'is the attempt to elevate a particular deity to the headship of the pantheon and exalt his status throughout the kingdom'.[47] The same can be said of Deuteronomy and the literary presentation of Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms in the books of Kings for which the antagonism between YHWH and the 'other gods' is crucial. None of the ancient Near Eastern analogies, however, with the exception of Akhnaten, mentions the destruction of other cults as part of the reform and has the king praise himself for it. The case of Sennacherib might be

[45] On the relationship between self- and outside-perception of Nabonidus see Kuhrt (1990) and Kratz (2002*a*).

[46] Arneth (2001), 206–16; Na'aman (2006); see also Handy (1995) and on him Barrick (2002), 132–43, who mentions *memorial inscriptions* such as the Mesha stele as parallels.

[47] Na'aman (2006), 163.

instructive here: the destruction has a specific aim but is universally condemned in later sources as a cultic violation.

Thus, neither Weinfeld's nor any of the other analogies provide a convincing reason for the intention to limit any sacrifice to YHWH to Jerusalem and why the other local sanctuaries ought to be profaned, defamed as foreign cults, and subsequently destroyed. The specific differences of the biblical reports are not simply 'the book' that provides the basis for the reform.[48] The decisive difference is what this book, the Book of Deuteronomy or the Torah of Moses respectively, prescribes and what Hezekiah and Josiah, generally following the example of ancient Near Eastern kings, actually have done on the basis of this book. Here we have to concede, that 'while its theological significance seems clear enough, its exact nature and practical significance as an official governmental action in Josiah's Judah are not'.[49]

Finally, the literary-historical analysis do not support the neo-Babylonian analogy put forth by Weinfeld. As has been the case with Josiah (2 Kings 22–3), Hezekiah's reform (2 Kgs. 18: 4–7a, 22) was also connected to historical events behind the literary account that fits the historical realities of 701 BCE and seems to be supported by archaeological evidence.[50] Both arguments, however, are quite uncertain. Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian policy does not necessarily point to a cultic reform, and the factual crisis of Judah does not make the cultic critique of 2 Kgs. 18: 4, 22 a religio-political programme of a Judaean king. Additionally, archaeological evidence is sparse and difficult to relate unambiguously to a cultic reform. For these and other reasons Hezekiah's reform has long been regarded as literary fiction of the Deuteronomists and seems to be secondary within the Deuteronomistic work.[51]

Further doubts arise in regard to Weinfeld's main argument, namely the speech of Rabshake in 2 Kgs. 18: 22. As far as the context is concerned, the passage is found within the context of three

[48] Na'aman (2006), 166–7. For a differentiated view of the role of this book see Ben-Dov (2008).

[49] Barrick (2002), 183; see also 171 ('except the closing of the bamoth').

[50] Handy (1988); Finkelstein and Silberman (2006), 269–75; see nn. 31 and 32 in this chapter.

[51] Spieckermann (1982), 170–5; Camp (1990), 274–87; Na'aman (1995), and (2002); Gleis (1997), 149–63; Fried (2002); Aurelius (2003*a*), 30–3; and even Arneth (2006). On the secondary character of the verses in question see Würthwein (1984), 410–12, 421.

legendary accounts of the Sennacherib episode and labelled 'Source B_1' (2 Kgs. 18: 17–19: 9a) by scholars.[52] This source is undoubtedly older than the version in 2 Kgs. 19: 9b–35, called 'Source B_2' that is a supplement and not an independent tradition.[53] Both versions are preceded by 'Source A' (2 Kgs. 18: 13–16) that expands on the short note in 2 Kgs. 18: 7b—either within the frame of an older annalistic source or as part of the Deuteronomistic basic stratum in 2 Kings 18–20.[54] Usually the end of the narrative in 2 Kgs. 19: 36–7 is attributed to 'Source B' but these verses do not only provide the closure for B but for the whole passage in 2 Kgs. 18: 13–19: 37 thus including 'Source A'. Since A is older than B, we can assume that originally 2 Kgs. 19: 36–7—framed by 2 Kgs. 18: 1–3, 7b / 20: 20–1—only formed the closure of A before B was inserted and was finally expanded by the Isaiah-legends in 2 Kings 20.[55]

All this means that Weinfeld's main evidence in 2 Kgs. 18: 22 is handed down as part of a relatively young literary context, in which it is also secondary.[56] The passage stands in a certain contrast to the positive (presumably secondary or at least reworked) evaluation of Hezekiah's piety in 2 Kgs. 18: 4 and is most likely later than it. No matter how we evaluate 2 Kgs. 18: 22—as an original element of the text or a secondary addition; as part of an independent narrative or literary supplement to the books of Kings—the verse presupposes the centralization of the cult and thus Deuteronomy 12 and most likely also the Deuteronomistic demand for abolishment of the high places as well as the positive ending of the narrative in 2 Kgs. 19: 36–7.

Within the frame of the narrative, however, 2 Kgs. 18: 22 does not want to contradict 2 Kgs. 18: 4. Rather, the verse wants—at a later stage and in its own words and with slightly different accentuation—

[52] See Cogan and Tadmor (1988), 240–4; Camp (1990), 38–52, 108 ff.; Gallagher (1999), 143–59; and similarly Würthwein (1984), 404–6, 414; Hardmeier (1990), 13–14, 116, 119.

[53] On this question see Gallagher (1999), 156.

[54] See Würthwein (1984), 406–9 and Camp (1990), 62–107, for an attribution to an annalistic source; Jepsen (1956), 36, 54, 62 and Noth (1957), 76 n. 6 for an attribution to a Deuteronomistic basic stratum.

[55] See Kratz (2000*a*), 173 (ET 2005: 169); for the ending of A see Lewy (1928) followed by Cogan and Tadmor (1988), 241.

[56] On the dating of the narrative of 'Source B' to the late monarchical period (after 597 BCE) see Hardmeier (1990), 169–70. Exegetical reasons for such an evaluation are provided by Hoffmann (1980), 149–50; Würthwein (1984), 421; Gleis (1997), 154–5.

to align the context in 2 Kgs. 18: 21, 23 with the theological characteristics of the frame in 2 Kgs. 18: 4–6. The cultic reform of Hezekiah placed in the mouth of the enemy rectifies the stigma of the trust in Egypt and in doing so provides the true reason for the factual refutation of the enemy and the deliverance of Jerusalem.[57] Undoubtedly, the Sennacherib narrative and 2 Kgs. 18: 22 breathes an Assyrian atmosphere.[58] This, however, is simply a fictitious argument within the narrative (*erzählfiktives Argument*) and neither a historically reliable reminiscence of oppositional circles during the neo-Assyrian period nor the view of a party during neo-Babylonian times when the narrative was written.[59] Via the detour of enemy polemics and its refutation—quite common in victors' propaganda—the Deuteronomic-Deuteronomistic ideals are powerfully confirmed. It would be rather short-sighted were we to use the atmosphere of a biblical statement for a precise and historical location of the text itself.

4. GATES AND HIGH PLACES

The result of the religio-historical comparison is quite ambivalent. On the one hand it became obvious that the Mesopotamian concept of a capital as well as other ancient Near Eastern ideas serve as a prerequisite for the origin of the Deuteronomic idea of cultic centralization and its application within the books of Kings. On the other hand it is not possible to demonstrate a direct dependence on the ancient Near Eastern analogies and thus to date the biblical concept accurately. A religio-historical comparison is important and illuminating but cannot provide the desired 'peg in the wall'.[60]

[57] See Hoffmann (1980), 149–51; on the different interpretations of the passage see Machinist (2000).

[58] Gallagher (1999), 160–254, esp. 190–1; Spieckermann (1982), 346–7; Oded (1992), 121–37. Assyrian propaganda continues under Cyrus; see Beaulieu (1993), 243.

[59] Hardmeier (1990), 398–9.

[60] This is also true for the formula *l*^{e}*šakken š*^{e}*mô šām* and its ancient Near Eastern parallels thoroughly investigated by Richter (2002). It is all but scholarly consensus that this expression belongs to the oldest form of the centralization formula; see Reuter (1993), 130–8; Kratz (2000*a*), 126 n. 29 (ET 2005: 122 n. 29). And even if it belonged to it the ancient Near Eastern parallels would not allow us at all to date its usage in Deuteronomy to the seventh century or even earlier.

Here, the main difference is that the concept of cultic centralization in Deuteronomy does not only mean an increase in status of the capital but is intrinsically connected to a radical intrusion upon the local cults 'in the gates' or 'on the high places' of Judah. Every analogy proposed cannot provide a proper explanation for that. Not because the different situation of the sources do not allow it but simply because Deuteronomy itself 'significantly moves beyond' ancient Near Eastern analogies.[61] Thus, we have to note that the Deuteronomic (and Deuteronomistic) concept of cultic centralization 'is so special and singular in the world of the ancient Near East that there must be special reasons for it'.[62] Therefore, together with Moshe Weinfeld we have to pose the question 'what was it that prompted the institution of this peculiar reform?'[63]

Answering this question is not at all easy and we have to evaluate the different possibilities quite carefully. Since reasons of foreign policy such as the destruction of the Judaean hinterland may have played a role but were hardly responsible for the idea of a programmatic destruction of the Judaean local cults and for the repeated polemics against their continuation we have to look for inner Judaean causes.

Here, I see two possibilities that have been debated and it is difficult to reach any certainty.

> Either the idea of centralization and the no less unusual 'Hear, Israel' in Deut. 6: 4–5, which is directed against the local differentiation of Yhwh, is a reaction to the downfall of Samaria and is meant to bind the northern Israelites, who have lost a political and religious home, to Judah and Jerusalem. Or the programme is a reaction to the downfall of the kingdom of Judah, the loss of the political and ideological centre of pre-exilic Judah connected with it, and the deportation, and has the purpose of warning against the decentralization threatened as a result . . . creating a substitute for the one place of worship chosen by Yhwh.[64]

While I still tend to favour the latter possibility I take into account that it is difficult to explain why Judaeans and Israelites had given up their own local sanctuaries. Nevertheless, I would like to stress again

[61] Otto (1999), 75.

[62] Kratz (2000*a*), 137 (ET 2005: 132).

[63] Weinfeld (1964), 203, similarly 204: 'Our question is, then, what was the primary motivation for the action taken to centralize the cult and for the law validating this act?'

[64] Kratz (2000*a*), 137–8 (ET 2005: 132); see also Aurelius (2003*a*), 40–4.

that there are equally good reasons to accept the first possibility outlined above and that Deut. 6: 4 emphasizes the common bond between Israelites and Judaeans, a bond first stated by the prophets.

Depending which path one takes, internal reasons for the Deuteronomic programme of centralization point either to the late pre-exilic or to the early exilic period. This connects then—more or less organically—to the annalistic frame of the books of Kings where the Deuteronomic programme is applied to the political history of Israel and Judah. On the basis of the Deuteronomistic History hypothesis put forth by Martin Noth this application is self-evident.[65] But even if one does not follow Noth's hypothesis any more we cannot deny the fact that several revisions of the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel–Kings are inspired by Deuteronomy and its theology.[66] The same can be said of the first edition of Samuel–Kings that connected the older material in the books of Samuel with the annalistic frame of the books of Kings and in doing so created an extensive history of kingship in 1 Samuel 1–2 Kings 25. If we want to continue to speak of a Deuteronomistic History (DtrH)—something that is recommendable for factual reasons as much as it is scholarly convention—such a work can be grasped in this first composition of Samuel–Kings from the exilic period.[67]

[65] Noth (1957).

[66] For my argument against Noth's hypothesis see Kratz (2000*a*), 155–225 (ET 2005: 153–221), and (2000*b*), (2000*c*), (2002*b*), followed by Otto (2000), 15–16 n. 15 and (2002), 3. On the following scholarly discussion see Veijola (2003), 28–44; Aurelius (2003*a*); Frevel (2004); Schmid (2004) and the contributions in Witte et al. (2006) and Römer and Schmid (2007). Blum (2007), 84 finds the solution to the riddle in the 'auto-referential self-definition' of Deuteronomy in passages like Deut. 31: 9–12, 24–6 and Deut. 1: 5 (Blum (2007), 86). It is undoubtedly correct that in these passages 'the Torah (*Torabuch*) defines itself as a quotable referential entity that could be integrated in a larger literary work' (pp. 88–9). It remains unclear, however, how to recognize on this basis an individual literary work and why this 'larger work' has to be the scholarly construct of the Deuteronomistic History (pp. 89, 93). Blum neglects the obvious alternative, i.e. the canonical context from Genesis to Deuteronomy or 2 Kings, even though the beginning of the narrative ('On the other side of the Jordan, in he land of Moab, Moses undertook . . . ') connects well with it and Blum has to concede that the 'genetical code' of Deuteronomy belongs to the canonical context of the Pentateuch (pp. 93–5, 97). The explanation of the function of Deuteronomy 1–3, missed by Blum p. 93 n. 90), is found in Kratz (2000*a*), 132–3 (ET 2005: 127–8) and (2000*b*), 113–14.

[67] Kratz (2000*a*), 190–3, 218, 222–3, 325 (ET 2005: 183–6, 209–10, 218–19, 318), and also Spieckermann (2001); Aurelius (2003*a*), 207, and (2003*b*), 3–4; Schmid (2004), 205, 209; for a pre-exilic edition of Samuel–Kings see Provan (1988), 157–73.

A closer look at the annalistic framework in Samuel–Kings reveals that we have to distinguish at least two literary levels here: The first one uses the unity of kingdom and of cult place (achieved under David and Solomon and relinquished under Jeroboam) as a criterion for the evaluation of the kings; it judges them according to political and cultic criteria. The second level employs the standard of the first and the second commandment as well as cultic purity and judges the kings exclusively along these theological lines.[68]

Thus, the two literary levels represent two different theological standards. The second standard evidently refers to Deuteronomy and the law of the Pentateuch as a whole. The first one, however, agrees with Deuteronomy's programme of cultic centralization, but uses its own language. Instead of speaking of 'this place' and 'your gates' as is the case in Deuteronomy, the books of Kings simply refer to the 'high places'. The Deuteronomic 'place which Yahweh will choose to let his name dwell there' (in Kings: 'has chosen') appears only in secondary additions to 1–2 Kings. In turn the typical formula of Kings 'he did what was right/evil in the eyes of Yahweh' appears only in late passages of Deuteronomy.[69] The different terminology confirms the hypothesis that both literary corpora (Deuteronomy within the Hexateuch and the first edition of the Deuteronomistic History in Samuel–Kings) originally existed independently from each other and were only later connected (by the insertion of the book of Judges which has its own framework) and aligned with each other literally within the Enneateuch (consisting of the Torah and the Former Prophets: Genesis–2 Kings).[70]

Recently several modifications of this literary-historical reconstruction have been proposed, not least in regard to the relationship between 'gates' and 'high places'. Konrad Schmid has used the terminological difference to argue that the theological evaluation of the kings of Israel and Judah in Kings did not yet know of Deuteronomy. Therefore the idea of centralization in Deuteronomy has to be later than the annalistic frame of Kings and developed from it. This proposal is explicitly connected with

[68] See Kratz (2000*a*), 161–7, 174–9 (ET 2005: 159–63, 170–4); also Aurelius (2003*a*), 211–12, and (2003*b*), 1–4; Müller (2004), 78–82; Schmid (2004), 201–4; Levin (2008). See already Würthwein (1984); Provan (1988), and Pakkala (1999).

[69] Kratz (2000*a*), 165 (ET 2005: 162), and (2000*b*), 119–20.

[70] Kratz (2000*a*), 173–4, 191, 195–8, 215–16 (ET 2005: 169–70, 183–6, 188–92, 206–9); see already Jepsen (1956), 73, 90–1.

the option of a pre-exilic edition of the books of Kings. This means—according to Schmid—that the basic form of the annalistic ('Deuteronomistic') frame of 1–2 Kings has to be pre-Deuteronomic.[71] Both assumptions are highly unlikely. Erik Aurelius has provided compelling reasons that a pre-exilic date of the evaluation of the kings in 1–2 Kings is impossible.[72] Furthermore, a pre-Deuteronomic date of the annalistic frame cannot explain the polemics against the high places. Without the knowledge of Deuteronomy's law of centralization this does not make any sense.

Felippe Blanco Wißmann in his Zurich dissertation tries to prove the opposite. In contrast to his supervisor, he maintains the traditional chronology of Deuteronomy and Kings and also accepts an exilic date for the annalistic frame of 1–2 Kings. Blanco Wißmann, however, assumes that the Deuteronomic law of centralization and the 'Deuteronomistic' frame of the books of Kings—that one is to call 'Deuteronomistic'—originally had nothing to do with each other. The correlation of both is simply based on a 'Deuteronomistic preconception' (*deuteronomistisches Vorverständnis*), i.e. a misunderstanding by scholars, which the Zurich dissertation will remove.[73]

The strict differentiation of 'gates' and 'high places' is supplemented by a religious or cultural-historical hypothesis, making this dissertation relevant to the subject of this contribution. First, we find a detailed description of what is meant when speaking of high places. The result is fairly traditional and long known: high places are cultic places in the towns of Judah where the imperial god (*Reichsgott*) YHWH was worshipped in different local manifestations and together with several other gods and goddesses next to him.[74] The difference to the cult 'in your gates' is—as far as I can see—not explained. Also it is never said what is wrong with the local cults if one does not want to rely on the law of centralization of Deuteronomy.

[71] Schmid (2004), 205 with n. 53, 208–10; see already Clements (1996), 13–14.

[72] Aurelius (2003*a*). Of a different opinion again is Schmid (2006). My reasons for not letting the work end in 2 Kgs. 23: 29–30 has nothing to do with the date of Deuteronomy as speculated by Schmid (2006), 34–5. The explanation for the absence of a note on the high places in the account of Hezekiah and Josiah is given in Kratz (2000*a*), 165 (ET 2005: 161–2); here it does not make any difference whether the harmonized notes on the high places in 2 Kgs. 18: 4aα_1 and 21: 3a are original or not (see Kratz (2000*a*),173; in the table on p. 193 2 Kgs. 21: 3a has to be added in brackets); cf. Müller (2004), 79–80.

[73] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 246–8.

[74] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 62–7; see already Gleis (1997) and Fried (2002).

The connection of the high places with the worship of foreign gods (*Götzendienst*), given as the reason here, is based on the polemics of the Deuteronomistic frame of Judges, some disputed passages from Kings (2 Kgs. 18: 4, 22; 23: 8–9), and certain prophetic passages.[75] The idol worship, however, cannot sufficiently explain the demand to abolish the high places; rather one would expect—as is the case with Jerusalem—a cleansing of the cult. Furthermore, the accusation of idol worship needs to be explained, especially in the light of an assumed religious pluralism and poly-Yahwism during the pre-exilic period.[76] The 'key' to solve the problem is seen in the religious-historical situation itself but Blanco Wißmann simply states its sudden termination, a process during which the damnation of traditional religious practices, now obsolete, was brought to an end; he calls this process an inner-Israelite drawing up of a frontier (*innerisraelitische Grenzziehung*) without explaining the reasons for it.[77] But where exactly did the damnation of the traditional religious practices start? Did it start, after all, for the high places with Deuteronomy, and for the idolatry with the *Sh*^{e}*ma*', or with the Decalogue?[78]

[75] Blanco Wißmann (2007), 75, 77–89, 107–14. In a similar vein he postulates rather than offering any arguments (pp. 116–35) that the 'sin of Jeroboam' in 1 Kgs. 12: 26–30 refers to idol-worship. The coherence of the evaluation of the house of Omri, which Blanco Wißmann (pp. 103–5) misses in my reconstruction is self-evident (with or without Baal in 1 Kgs. 16: 31–2!) under the aspect of the unity of cult and kingdom and is explained in Kratz (2000*a*), 165, 169 (ET 2005: 161–2, 165–6). 1 Kgs. 16: 26 shows that—'according to the political and ideological standard of the redactor' (Blanco Wißmann (2008), 76)—the house of Omri surpasses its predecessors in wickedness even without the Baal; 2 Kgs. 8: 18, 27 show that the motif of marriage into foreign or illegitimate dynasties can be used independently. Also the comparison with father and mother in 1 Kgs. 22: 53, 2 Kgs. 3: 2 fits well in such a concept, despite the fact that the two doublets ('on the way' and 'only') could point to a secondary addition here (Würthwein (1984), 265, 279; see 2 Kgs. 3: 13). Even if the Baal as a speciality of the house of Omri in 1 Kgs. 16: 31–2 and thus also in 1 Kgs. 22: 54a and 2 Kgs. 10: 28 is part of the oldest stratum, Omri together with the calves of Bethel and Dan (if they are original in 1 Kgs. 12: 26–30; cf. Pakkala 2008) was above all condemned because he undermined the unity of cult and kingdom and not because of his idolatry, which is only a secondary aspect; see Müller (2004), 80–1.

[76] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 96–103.

[77] See Blanco Wißmann (2008), 114–16.

[78] Deuteronomy, too, assumes 'an internal connection between the plethora of the cultic places and the plethora of gods' (Blanco Wißmann (2008), 114) but this does not lead automatically to the defamation of the local cults as idolatry. Only the programme of cultic centralization (Deut. 12: 13 ff.) and the idea of a unity of Yahweh (Deut. 6: 4) poses the question about the character of the manifold manifestations of Yahweh and the other gods and what should happen to the local sanctuaries.

The prophetic tradition cannot be used here since the dating of this material is all but certain.[79]

In fact, the differentiation between Deuteronomy and the books of Kings is not based on the religio-historical situation (at 'the gates' and 'the high places') but on ancient Near Eastern parallels. As far as Deuteronomy and its idea of a cultic centralization are concerned, Blanco Wißmann follows Eckart Otto. This means that both Deuteronomy and the idea of cultic centralization are traced back to neo-Assyrian parallels and that Deuteronomy is dated emphatically to the time of Josiah.[80] On the other hand, the annalistic frame of the books of Kings and its verdict on piety are directly derived from neo-Babylonian chronicles and thus dated—with equal emphasis—to the neo-Babylonian, i.e. late-exilic period.[81] Here, Weinfeld's hypothesis is almost turned on its head: the tendency to centralization, that is found in the religious censoring of some editions of the *Babylonian Chronicle* as well as in the propaganda of the Babylonian priests of Marduk against Nabonidus and in favour of Cyrus is correlated directly to the annalistic frame in 1–2 Kings.

Blanco Wißmann states that the closeness of the *Babylonian Chronicles* and the Books of Kings has been long observed by scholars but was never evaluated 'consistently'.[82] And indeed, there are reasons for such negligence, since it is questionable whether the 'consistent' evaluation of the comparative neo-Babylonian material to the books of Kings can arrive at a more compelling result than the 'consistent', if not to say forced, evaluation of the neo-Assyrian material for Deuteronomy. The sharp distinction of the cultic centralization in Deuteronomy from the notes regarding the high places in the books of Kings, which is drawn from the 'consistent' evaluation of ancient Near Eastern material, gives reason for some doubt.

This doubt is further nourished by the 'inconsistent' use of the ancient Near Eastern material. Thus it is difficult to understand why

[79] See already Jepsen (1959), 106–7 and Gleis (1997), 68–80, 235–44. Also Hos. 10: 8; Amos 7: 9, and Jer. 17: 3 cannot provide the desired evidence.

[80] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 16–19 *et passim*.

[81] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 37, 223 *et passim*; see also Adam (2007), 169–211. Most of the primary sources are found in Grayson (2000) and Schaudig (2001).

[82] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 214. Also it is not that new that some of the parallels are close in time to the annalistic frame of Kings. However, a date according to the evaluation of the kings has to be favoured. See Kratz (2000*a*), 17 (ET 2005: 12–13); thus also Blanco Wißmann (2008), 75 (but a different view, pp. 249–54).

the neo-Assyrian and neo-Babylonian ideology of a capital city is used for both the cultic centralization of Deuteronomy *and* polemics against the high places, although it is argued that both concepts have nothing to do with each other. This is especially surprising because the ancient Near Eastern comparative material is not seen as a traditio-historical analogy but as direct and exceptional sources, which allow us to date exactly the biblical reception of them.[83] Blanco Wißmann conveniently forgets to mention that neither the neo-Assyrian nor the neo-Babylonian sources say anything about the fate of the local cults during the process of cultic centralization. He is equally silent about the fact that the notes on the high places in the books of Kings say nothing about centralization.

Thus we realize that the 'consistent' evaluation of the ancient Near Eastern parallels leads to a series of problems that could have been avoided were the parallels seen for what they are, namely, examples for the ancient Near Eastern environment in which the biblical tradition originated and which the biblical authors used to develop their own specific expressions and theological concepts. Approaching the sources in this way, we are able to explain the terminological difference between Deuteronomy and Kings. It is well known that the books of Kings are compiled from two sources: the Israelite-Judaean annals (i.e. the books of days of the kings of Israel and Judah) and the theological (biblical) tradition. Here the idea of a cultic centralization can be derived only from the Deuteronomic law. In the frame of the books of Kings the annals are used as a medium to introduce the idea of centralization into the political history of Israel and Judah. This editorial process leads almost automatically to a formulation that differs from Deuteronomy, even though the same idea is described. Here the idea of cultic centralization is interpreted under the aspect of the unity of kingdom and cult. We can assume that the *Babylonian Chronicle* served as an example for synchronisms and the verdict on piety, since the annals are related to it.[84] The *Babylonian Chronicle*, however, cannot serve as an alternative to

[83] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 67–72, 220–1; on neo-Assyrian influences see p. 215 n. 1078 on the one hand and p. 222 on the other.

[84] Kratz (2000*a*), 164 (ET 2005: 161). For parallels from North West Semitic epigraphy see Parker (2006). That no parallel to the 'books of the days' has been discovered yet does not imply that there were not any; the method of *Literarkritik*, however, does not suffice to reconstruct such a North West Semitic parallel from the text of the books of Kings.

Deuteronomy as the source for polemics against the high places in Kings.

Only in passing I would like to note that other arguments—centring on the inner-biblical analysis and theological derivation—put forth by Blanco Wißmann, too, are hardly compelling and often contradict each other. Once it is argued that—in contrast to the books of Kings—in the oldest part of Deuteronomy there was a difference between unity and purity of cult. At the same time an Ur-Deuteronomy as reconstructed by Eckart Otto is used, that already contains the polemics against 'other gods' (see Deut. 13: 3, 7).[85]

In the books of Kings, in turn, it was not the unity of kingdom and cult but the purity of the cult, i.e. the prohibition of foreign gods, that is seen as the starting point and as the criterion that joined the standard formula ('to do right/evil in the eyes of Yahweh') with the 'sin of Jeroboam' (for the Northern kingdom) and the polemics against the high places (for the Southern kingdom).[86] At the same time the books of Kings are separated from Deuteronomy and the (Deuteronomistic) book of Judges where we find precisely what Blanco Wißmann reads into the standard formula, in the 'sin of Jeroboam' and in the notes on the high places.[87] Thus, the damnation of foreign gods—that cannot be explained with the help of the ancient Near Eastern parallels[88]—appears as unmotivated as the destruction of the high places.

Blanco Wißmann also mentions politics next to cultic concerns as a criterion for 'doing right/evil in the eyes of Yahweh' but the connection of both remains unclear.[89] In one instance the Deuteronomistic standard formula is explained in political terms, in another

[85] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 94 n. 485 realizes the problem but chooses to ignore it.

[86] On the differentiation see Kratz (2000*a*), 164–5 (ET 2005: 161–2); different Blanco Wißmann (2008), 72–5, 89–90, 114–16, 236–7; similarly Frevel (2006). The critics seem to return to the old position of Jepsen (1956), 81 and the Göttingen DtrH; see Smend (1989), 122–4; similarly—in regard to the role of Baal—Müller (2004); Levin (2008).

[87] On the extent of the first edition of the Deuteronomistic history of kings see Kratz (2000*a*), 174–5, 190–1 (ET 2005: 170–1, 183–6); on the differentiation of (Joshua and) Judges Kratz (2000*a*), 195–8, 215–16 (ET 2005: 188–92, 206–9); Aurelius (2003*a*), 93; Rake (2006), 135; followed by Blanco Wißmann (2008), 54, 246.

[88] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 96.

[89] On Würthwein's ((1984), 492–5) proposal to consider political next to cultic aspects see Kratz (2000*a*), 165, 169 (ET 2005: 161, 165–6); Müller (2004), 78–81.

one in cultic terms.[90] Then it is never explained how the standard formula exactly relates to its continuation (the note on the high places or the remark of the sin of Jeroboam respectively), i.e. whether kings or people are judged according these criteria or not—whatever they may imply.[91] If a Southern king is evaluated positively—a verdict regularly qualified in regard to the people and their offering on the high places—it remains unclear whether the behaviour of the people has any bearing on the king as is the case in the Northern kingdom.[92]

As far as a theological classification is concerned, an appeal to the prophets cannot account for the separation of Deuteronomy and Kings.[93] Not only the books of Kings but also Deuteronomy with the law of centralization and the *Sh*^{e}*ma*‘ in Deut. 6: 4 presupposes the prophets and their concept of one ‘Israel—even though neither document explicitly quotes them.[94] In this respect it is hardly convincing to distinguish between Deuteronomy and Kings, between gates and high places. In other words it is clear that the theological evaluation of the kings in the frame of the books of Kings—derived from Deuteronomy and thus rightly called ‘Deuteronomistic’—does not simply repeat the Deuteronomic idea of cultic centralization but adopts and transforms it. The decisive innovation is the connection of the unity of cult and kingdom that combines Deuteronomy 12 with Deut. 6: 4 and applies both to the political history of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Thus a national-religious stance is created that unites and excludes since the internal unity of YHWH and his cultic place implies externally a politics of separation. Such a delimitation from the outside, in turn, paves the way for the polemics against foreign gods as stated in the first commandment and for the defamation of the high places as cultic places of ‘other gods’.[95]

[90] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 75–7 on the one hand and pp. 89–90 on the other.

[91] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 54, 89–90 on the one hand and pp. 73–4 on the other.

[92] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 75 on the one hand and pp. 89–90 on the other. On the differentiation between king and people in the verdict see Kratz (2000*a*), 164–5 (ET 2005: 161), and (2000*c*), 10–11; Müller (2004), 78–9.

[93] Blanco Wißmann (2008), 224–33.

[94] See Wellhausen (1905), 23–8, and (1914), 122–32, esp. p. 129: ‘Das Deuteronomium krönt die Arbeit der Propheten’; Kratz (2000*c*), 16–17.

[95] On the development of the first commandment see Kratz (2000*a*), 128, 131–2 (ET 2005: 124, 126–7); Aurelius (2003*b*); Kratz (2005).

5. CONCLUSION

The result of our comparative analysis can be summarized thus:

The proposed ancient Near Eastern analogies to the idea of cultic centralization (neo-Assyrian loyalty oath, idea of a capital city; Sennacherib literature; Nabonidus literature; neo-Babylonian Chronicle) represent the religious-historical prerequisites of the idea of centralization but cannot be regarded as direct parallels. Therefore they are unsuitable for any traditio-historical derivations or an exact historical dating of biblical documents.

The programme of cultic centralization in Deuteronomy and the reports of putting such a centralization into practice that are found in the books of Kings are related to each other—despite all terminological and subject-related differences. The programme of cultic centralization can stand for itself; the reports of its implementation, however, cannot: it is impossible to change the order of events. Deuteronomy has to come first and the verdict on kings in the annalistic frame of the books of Kings is derived from it.

A dating of both aspects is only possible because of internal criteria and against the background of the religious history of the ancient Near East. The measure of plausibility helps to reach a decision here. Therefore, the idea of cultic centralization as part of the original edition of Deuteronomy, which represents a reworking of the Covenant Code under this aspect, remains the 'peg in the wall'. The idea of cultic centralization is still a valuable and decisive criterion for a relative chronology of the history of the literature and theology of the Hebrew Bible. An absolute dating as well as a classification of the different phases of this history remains an object of historical weighing in the light, but not with the exclusive proviso, of the ancient Near Eastern sources available.

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