

CHAPTER IX

THE CENTRALIZATION OF WORSHIP

THE CASE FOR THE CENTRALIZATION THEORY

WELLHAUSEN described the centralization of worship in Jerusalem, which he conceived to be the aim of Deuteronomy, as the starting-point from which he drew his other deductions.¹ A modern scholar² calls the date of Deuteronomy 'the keystone in the Wellhausen system of chronology', and adds, 'If there is serious uncertainty here, the entire structure of the theory is weakened and may collapse.' It is the object of this chapter to inquire into the grounds which exist for such uncertainty.

Wellhausen dated the composition of Deuteronomy as 621 BC shortly before Josiah's reform of which we read in 2 Ki. xxii, xxiii, and thought that it was expressly designed to abolish all the local sanctuaries and to restrict the worship of Yahweh to Jerusalem. With the probable connivance of Hilkiah, the book was placed in the temple in order to be discovered, and so produce the desired impression upon the king.

In the course of time the argument was modified, and with it the date of Deuteronomy. Anxious to clear the author from the imputation of fraud, S. R. Driver³ placed the date some fifteen years earlier. 'The book, even though intended to produce a reform, might well have been written while Josiah was yet a child', and placed in the temple in hopes that one day 'some practical use could be made of it'.

H. H. Rowley⁴ puts the date back still further, to the beginning of Manasseh's reign, about 680 BC. Like Driver, he thinks that fraud on the part of the authors is 'in the highest degree im-

¹ *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, ET, 1885, p. 368.

² G. W. Anderson, in *OTMS*, p. 283. Also see pp. 17-21.

³ *ICC*, p. lv. 'Towards the end of the seventh century BC', says S. H. Hooke, *In the Beginning*, Oxford, 1947, p. 10.

⁴ *Growth*, p. 31.

probable'; though composed thus early, and hidden in the temple, it was discovered and 'promulgated' only in 621 BC.

Driver states his case as follows.¹

1. Ex. xx. 24 is an 'old law' which authorizes 'the erection of altars, built in the manner prescribed, in every part of the land'.

2. Before and during the monarchy many local sanctuaries sprang up at which sacrifices offered to Yahweh were considered perfectly legitimate before the publication of Deuteronomy.

3. These were 'formally declared illegal' by Deuteronomy, which 'marks an epoch... when the old law (Ex. xx. 24) sanctioning an indefinite number of local sanctuaries' was found incompatible with purity of worship, which was then centralized in Jerusalem.

With this position Rowley is in general agreement. But on the second point he says, 'the multiplicity of altars permitted by the Book of the Covenant continued down to the time of Hezekiah, without any awareness of wrongdoing.'²

These scholars agree that a reform which brought about the centralization of worship in Jerusalem took place some time during the seventh century BC and that the book of Deuteronomy demanded it; and so deduce a connection between the two.

This position depends upon a particular interpretation of the history and also of the book of Deuteronomy and of the key verse Ex. xx. 24.

We shall therefore look first into the history beginning with Josiah's reform and working backwards; and then look again at the relevant parts of the book of Deuteronomy and at Ex. xx. 24.

DEUTERONOMY AND JOSIAH'S REFORM

Wellhausen's dating of Deuteronomy in 621 BC assumed: (1) that Josiah's reform was set in motion by the discovery of the book of the law in the temple; (2) that the principal aim of the reform was the centralization of worship in Jerusalem; and (3) that this

¹ *ICC*, pp. 136-138. These propositions are criticized by R. Brinker, *The Influence of Sanctuaries in Early Israel*, Manchester, 1946, pp. 189-195. Long since they were refuted by A. van Hoonacker, *Le Lieu de Culte dans la Législation Rituelle des Hébreux*, Louvain, 1894, and by W. L. Baxter, *Sanctuary and Sacrifice*, London, 1895.

² *Growth*, p. 29.

was also the aim of Dt. xii-xxvi which was composed expressly with this in view. Each of these propositions is questionable.

1. It appears rather that 'the reform began before the law book was found', and in fact was 'the inevitable religious side of a revolt against Assyria'.¹

The revolution which led to Josiah's accession (2 Ki. xxi. 23-26), and the statement with which the account of his reign begins, that he 'walked in all the ways of David his father', indicate a policy of 'national self-determination and at the same time one of internal renewal'.²

The preaching of Zephaniah³ would aid such a movement, and there is no need to doubt the chronicler's statements that the reform began early in the reign of the young king (2 Ch. xxxiv. 3), and that it had been some time in progress, when the book was discovered in the temple.⁴

2. Next we may ask, what is the place given in the story to a policy of centralization? It is neither stated, nor is it implied, that the sin of the fathers which incurred wrath (2 Ki. xxii. 13) was the worshipping of Yahweh at more places than one. Instead, it was 'because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods' (2 Ki. xxii. 17; cf. Je. vii. 30f.). In consequence, the first step was to bind the people by a covenant, to 'walk after the LORD' (2 Ki. xxiii. 3). Could anything be more explicit?

The next step harmonizes with this. There is no *command* to worship only in the temple; it is assumed that this is already the centre for worship; but what *is* necessary is that it should be cleansed from the idols and abominations with which it had been defiled.

The whole record, whether in Kings or Chronicles, completely justifies Oestreicher's dictum that the aim was 'not unification, but purification'.

¹ H. H. Rowley, 'The Prophet Jeremiah and the Date of Deuteronomy', in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy presented to T. H. Robinson*, Edinburgh, 1950, pp. 161, 165. Cf. 2 Ch. xxxiv. 3 with 2 Ki. xxii. 3. See further Pedersen, *Israel*, III-IV, p. 585 and J. N. Schofield, *Historical Background of the Bible*, London, 1948, p. 193.

² Von Rad, *Studies*, p. 65.

³ Zp. i. 4 (2 Ki. xxiii. 5), i. 5 (2 Ki. xxiii. 12), ii. 2 (2 Ki. xxii. 13).

⁴ Additional reasons for this view are given by D. W. B. Robinson, *Josiah's Reform and the Book of the Law*, London, 1951.

3. The context requires us to believe that it was an *old* book which was found. The wrath of God was impending because 'the fathers' had not hearkened to its words (2 Ki. xxii. 13). It was at once recognized as the 'book of the law',¹ which suggests that such a book was known to have existed, but had been lost or forgotten. These things could not have been if the book were known by some to be the work of men still living.

Many cases of the deposit of books in temples are known;² and the Old Testament records several instances of the deposit of a written document following on the declaration of the law, at Sinai (Ex. xxiv. 4), on the banks of Jordan (Dt. xxxi. 26), at Shechem (Jos. xxiv. 26)³ and Mizpah (1 Sa. x. 25). There would therefore be nothing improbable in the deposit of a law-book in the temple at the time of its building.

Moreover, the correspondence of the laws of Deuteronomy with the acts of Josiah is not so close as to prove an *immediate* connection.

Where they agree, as in the putting down of wizardry and idolatry, they deal with sins which are denounced elsewhere in the Pentateuch. But certain evils of the time, such as the *kēmārīm* ('idoltrous priests'), though known to Hosea (x. 5) and Zephaniah (i. 4, 5), and put down by Josiah (2 Ki. xxiii. 5), are ignored in Deuteronomy. The same is true of the burning of incense to Baal (Ho. ii. 13, xii. 2; 2 Ki. xxiii. 5), and of the 'sun-images' (Is. xvii. 8, xxvii. 9; 2 Ch. xxxiv. 4).

On the other hand there are many commands in Deuteronomy, such as the destruction of the Amalekites and the assigning of the cities of refuge, which are not mentioned as part of Josiah's reform, and would have been anachronisms at that time.⁴

Hilkiah's book of the law probably was, or included, Deuteronomy; but even in this point there is no consensus of opinion.⁵ Vatke thought that it consisted of parts of Exodus, some think it may have been the Holiness Code.

¹ The same title is used in the account of Jehoshaphat's reform (2 Ch. xvii. 8, 9), which appears to rest upon an ancient authority.

² E. Naville, *The Discovery of the Book of the Law under King Josiah*, London, 1911; Ricciotti, *Histoire d'Israel*, pp. 500f.

³ Cf. Nielsen, *Oral Tradition*, p. 45.

⁴ See p. 102.

⁵ Nielsen pronounces it 'impossible'! *Oral Tradition*, p. 56.

DEUTERONOMY AND HEZEKIAH'S REFORM

A better case could be made out for A. Westphal's view that Hezekiah's reform drew its inspiration from the book of Deuteronomy. This was, he says, a 'peculiarly appropriate epoch' for its composition, although he regards its spirit and important elements in it as going back to Moses himself.¹

Certainly the author of the books of Kings, after concluding the summary of several previous reigns with the words 'but the high places were not taken away', omits these words when he comes to that of Hezekiah. Instead of this, we have the positive statement that 'he removed the high places, and brake the pillars, and cut down the 'Asherah' (2 Ki. xviii. 4, RV). We have in the words of the Rabshakeh the only direct reference to 'centralization' in the whole book, when he says, 'Is this not he whose high places Hezekiah hath taken away, and hath said to Judah and Jerusalem, Ye shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem?'²

We must beware of building on the words of this Assyrian officer whose ulterior motive was transparent to all (2 Ki. xviii. 36, xix. 6). The book of Kings, like that of Isaiah, assumes that Jerusalem was already the centre of worship; Hezekiah did not make it so. He was no innovator; he did 'according to all that David his father did' (2 Ki. xviii. 3). The high places which he removed were corrupted with Canaanite abominations, as is attested by the presence of the fertility symbols the *mṣṣēbhôth* and *'ašērîm* (2 Ki. xviii. 4).

With regard to these events, H. H. Rowley says 'there is every reason to believe that Hezekiah did carry through a reform of religion, and none to doubt that he attempted its centralization'. If this meant only that he restored the temple to the place it had previously enjoyed, we might agree. But there is no evidence that Hezekiah was making a radical change in the habits of the people, depriving them of a privilege which they had always enjoyed with the sanction of their leaders. There is no hint of hardship, no sign of protest, no comment in this sense by the historian.

Because no book of the law is mentioned in connection with the

¹ *The Law and the Prophets*, 1910, pp. 297ff.

² 2 Ki. xviii. 22; 2 Ch. xxxii. 12; and (omitting 'in Jerusalem') Is. xxxvi. 7.

reform, Rowley looks upon Deuteronomy not as its cause, but as its sequel, whence his date of c. 680 BC. This avoids many of the difficulties connected with Wellhausen's date, but encounters others no less serious. Some of these will be found stated below (p. 142); we need only add here that this solution, equally with that of S. R. Driver, lies open to Kuenen's caustic criticism, 'The reformation is called into life by persons who have not planned it, and are only blind instruments in the hands of an unknown author. Such an assumption has no analogies. Almost equally impossible is the part which is assigned to the author of Deuteronomy in connection with it; he states his wishes in writing and urges their fulfilment with the greatest earnestness—but leaves them to chance.'¹

TABERNACLE AND TEMPLE

It is true that the unity of the nation and the one-ness of Yahweh called for one sanctuary round which the people could gather. But this was no discovery of later times, it went back to the covenant in Horeb (Ex. xxxiv. 23; Dt. v. 2, 6, vi. 2). The simple fact is that from Joshua onwards there always existed a national centre for worship, first the tabernacle, then the temple.

'The tabernacle-tradition', says C. R. North, 'undoubtedly goes back to pre-Jerusalem times';² from the earliest times we see the tribes organized round a central sanctuary.³

The tabernacle was erected at Shiloh and 'there the whole congregation assembled' (Jos. xviii. 1). Thither also 'Elkanah went up from year to year to worship and to sacrifice' (1 Sa. i. 3), and there Samuel received his call to be a prophet (1 Sa. iii. 17-21). Jeremiah spoke of Shiloh as the place where Yahweh set His name at the first (vii. 12). Was he not right? Is not the tabernacle envisaged in Deuteronomy as more particularly the place where Yahweh put His name?⁴

The tabernacle was superseded by Solomon's temple, and if ever there was a day when worship might be said to have been

¹ *Einleitung in die Bücher des Alten Testaments*, I, 209.

² *OTMS*, p. 69. See also Orr, *POT*, pp. 165, 173.

³ Cf. G. E. Wright, *The Old Testament against its Environment*, p. 61, where reference is made to the work of Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth.

⁴ Or was it more particularly the ark? See C. Ryder Smith, 'The Stories of Shechem: Three Questions', *JTS*, XLVII, 1946, p. 36.

'centralized' in Jerusalem, it was on the day of its dedication. Then all Israel gathered (1 Ki. viii. 4, 5) to celebrate an act of national significance (1 Ki. viii. 1-3). From that time forward the temple was recognized as the seat of Yahweh's worship (Am. i. 2) and the centre to which the tribes went up for the annual feasts (1 Ki. xii. 27, 32), as Jeroboam well knew.¹

The pre-eminence of Jerusalem was therefore not established either by Josiah or by Hezekiah; it went back to the days of David and Solomon.

The facts about the temple are not open to question. The same cannot be said concerning worship at local sanctuaries, which we must now consider.

LOCAL SANCTUARIES

The term 'local sanctuaries' is somewhat vague, and if used loosely is apt to mix together things which differ, and which need separate treatment. The information at our disposal concerning local altars is scanty, and the shortage of facts encourages speculation. It is tempting to group together every place of sacred memories or where a sacrifice is recorded, and to reckon them all as permanent sanctuaries, each with a complement of sacrificing priests who followed a particular ritual and built up its own body of traditions. The wiser course, however, is to adhere as closely as possible to the record and to observe certain obvious distinctions, such as between acts on the one hand which claimed divine sanction and, on the other, cases where the people 'did evil in the sight of the LORD'.

We shall begin with a brief survey of what is recorded of sacrifices, (1) at altars and (2) at high places, in the books of Joshua to 2 Samuel, that is, before the temple was built.

In these books there are seven instances of an 'altar' being erected, two in connection with theophanies (Jdg. vi. 26-28, xiii. 20), and five on other occasions (Jos. viii. 30;² Jdg. xxi. 2-4; 1 Sa. vii. 17, xiv. 35; 2 Sa. xxiv. 25). Moreover there is the state-

¹ There may have been local centres for the feast of weeks, which was dated by the barley harvest, the gathering of which varied from place to place. Hence Pedersen says 'it would seem to follow that the feast was celebrated by families for each farm, or at any rate for each village': *Israel*, III-IV, p. 417. Cf. Brinker, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

² See pp. 134, 163.

ment in Jos. ix. 27 concerning the Gibeonites serving the 'altar of the LORD', presumably at the tabernacle, and the story of the 'altar of witness' in Jos. xxii.

It is a curious fact, and may be only a coincidence, that both in these books and in the legislation of Deuteronomy, the plural 'altars' occurs only once, and then in each case in reference to those of the Canaanites (Jdg. ii. 2; Dt. xii. 2).

We read also of sacrifices at Bethlehem (1 Sa. xvi. 5, xx. 29) and Gilgal (1 Sa. xiii. 8) and by the men of Beth-shemesh in the presence of the ark (1 Sa. vi. 15).

Gideon's altar was still standing when the story was written, and that at Shechem at the time of Joshua's death (Jos. xxiv. 26); the site of David's altar was used for the temple. The others fade into oblivion.

The 'high place' (*bāmāh*) is not the same as the 'altar'. The two words differ in origin and meaning¹ and call for separate treatment.

The word *bāmāh* is absent from Joshua and Judges, but in 1 Samuel two are mentioned.

There was one at Ramah to which Samuel 'went up' (1 Sa. ix. 13), and one nearby the 'hill of God', from which a band of musical prophets came 'down' (1 Sa. x. 5). On the former was a 'guest chamber' where Samuel entertained thirty persons at a sacrificial feast. The language employed shows that these *bāmōth* were, or were situated upon, eminences.

This ends our information about sacrifices offered to Yahweh, which are authorized and approved. When under the judges the people 'forsook the LORD and served Baal and Ashtaroth' (Jdg. ii. 13), this was something quite different, and was condemned.

A new phase is introduced with the building of the temple; the tone changes, and the word *bāmāh* begins to acquire a new and evil connotation. A transition can be seen in 1 Ki. iii. 1-4, where the writer tells us that 'the people still sacrificed in high places because there was no house built to the name of the LORD until those days'; this practice on the part of 'the people' is deprecated rather than condemned.

We next read that Solomon walked 'in the statutes of David his

¹ On the various meanings of *bāmāh* see the appendix at the end of this chapter. On the notion of 'height' involved in it see Lods, *Israel*, p. 84.

father; only he sacrificed and burned incense in high places', which also involves a tone of disapproval. The writer adds: 'The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there; for that was the great high place' (1 Ki. iii. 4).

Here the LXX translates *ἡψηλοτάτη καὶ μεγάλη* (highest and great), as if its lofty elevation was in mind (Gibeon being the highest point in the region); but possibly the reference is to the presence of the tabernacle there (cf. 2 Ch. i. 1-3). Up to this point the notion of height lingers about the word *bāmāh*; it now disappears, and it comes to represent some kind of structure which can be 'built' (1 Ki. xiv. 23), and destroyed and rebuilt (2 Ki. xxi. 3), in a city or in a gateway (2 Ki. xxiii. 8).

The continued existence of the *bāmōth* is considered a blot on the record of otherwise good kings;¹ the building of them by the people is condemned outright (1 Ki. xiv. 22-24), a condemnation passed equally upon the *bēth-bāmōth*, whatever their exact nature may have been (1 Ki. xii. 31; 2 Ki. xvii. 29, xxiii. 19).

This disapproval cannot be attributed merely to the Deuteronomic bias of the author, for it is expressed with great vigour by the prophets also (Ho. viii. 11, x. 1; Am. iii. 14, iv. 4-6, v. 4-6; Mi. i. 7; Is. ii. 8).

The ground of objection has no relevance to a centralizing law, but is to the idolatry and corruption introduced by syncretism with the Canaanite religion, against which stern warnings had been given not only in Dt. xii. 29-32, but earlier in Ex. xxxiv. 12-16 (J).

In the northern kingdom the pure religion of Yahweh was threatened with extinction by the royal patronage of the Phoenician Ba'al worship under Ahab and Jezebel. This was fiercely contested by Elijah; the altars of Yahweh to which he referred (1 Ki. xix. 10) may have been erected by pious Israelites who were prevented from going up to Jerusalem to worship, or were possibly some of more ancient origin.

Archaeology has little to add to this picture. Canaanite shrines which have been discovered at Gezer and elsewhere belong to the pre-Israelite period, and 'it still requires explanation why no Hebrew high place or other shrine for worship, whether of Yahweh or of some "strange god", is known from the period of

¹ 1 Ki. xv. 14, xxii. 44; 2 Ki. xii. 3, xiv. 4.

Hebrew domination and the area of Hebrew occupation in Palestine.¹

This is the historical background, cleared of conjecture, against which Wellhausen's interpretations must be judged.

INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS XX. 24
AND DEUTERONOMY XII

In the light of these facts what interpretation should be given to Ex. xx. 24? It runs, 'An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.'

The scene is laid in Horeb, the speaker is Yahweh, and the saying is addressed to Moses. A similar construction is found in Gn. xx. 13, where Abraham gets Sarah to promise him a 'kindness' 'at every place where we shall come'. It is only by tearing the words from their context, and changing their reference, that they can be transformed into an 'old law' sanctioning an indefinite number of local sanctuaries in the land of Canaan. There are old laws in Ex. xxi, xxii, but this does not find its place among them.

The real meaning is perfectly plain; the verse contains a command and a promise. The sequel relates (Ex. xxiv. 4, 5) how Moses executed the command, built an altar of unhewn stones (cf. Ex. xx. 25) and 'offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings'. The promise also is for Moses, a guarantee of Yahweh's presence and favour, wherever he may go.

The statement that when Deuteronomy was composed the old law 'was revoked, and worship centralized in Jerusalem' is also contrary to the facts and inconsistent with the theory itself. Would any author engaged on an 'expansion' of the JE code revoke an important element in it without a word of explanation?

And as for Jerusalem, we may quote Prof. Skinner's words: 'It must be insisted, in opposition to a common critical opinion, that the book of Deuteronomy itself lays no stress whatever on the

¹ C. C. McCown, 'Hebrew High Places and Cult Remains', *JBL*, lxix, 1950, p. 206.

peculiar claim of Jerusalem to be the one place of worship.¹

Indeed, so far from revoking the former command and promise, Dt. xii could fairly be said to establish them under the new conditions.² We read again of a 'place' (*māqôm*)³ where Yahweh will cause His name to dwell, where 'sacrifices and burnt offerings' shall be offered, and where His blessing shall be acknowledged.

As to centralization, 'the language used . . . is capable of having this interpretation read out of it or read into it'.⁴ The real force of the contrast in Dt. xii is not between many Yahweh altars and one, but between those of the Canaanites to 'other gods' whose name is to be destroyed, and the place where the name of Yahweh shall abide. It is not their number, but their character, which is in question.

Whether the words be read as pointing to one centre, or to more than one, they do not exclude the possibility of other altars duly authorized.⁵ Indeed the rule in Dt. xvi. 21, 22 contemplates the existence of such,⁶ and in xxvii. 1-8, the erection of one is commanded.

We may be pointed to Dt. xii. 14, which speaks of 'the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes'. The Hebrew idiom here employed, however, has two uses; it may have either a restrictive or a distributive force.

Long since, Oestreicher⁷ pointed also to Dt. xxiii. 17, where we have the same grammatical form;⁸ there the latter sense is necessitated; 'one of thy gates' must here mean one of many. Thus Dt. xii. 14 does not necessarily mean one and *only one* tribal territory where Yahweh may be worshipped.

To support the centralization theory a series of strained interpre-

¹ *Prophecy and Religion*, 1922, p. 167. Cf. H. H. Rowley, 'There is, of course, nothing in the Book of Deuteronomy to indicate that its central and sole legitimate sanctuary was to be Jerusalem': *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, p. 166.

² 'Deuteronomy builds on this earlier regulation', Welch, *Code*, p. 30.

³ *Māqôm* may denote a sacred place; but also a city or the bare ground (see p. 33). The word for temple (*hēkāl*) is noticeably absent, here and elsewhere in Deuteronomy.

⁴ Welch, *Code*, p. 195. ⁵ See R. Brinker, *op. cit.*, p. 199. ⁶ See p. 101.

⁷ *Deuteronomiums Grundgesetz*, p. 105. See also Welch, *Code*, p. 48.

⁸ See also Dt. xix. 5.

tations is given to verses which precede and follow. For instance, the words 'the things which we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes', which are so appropriate to the waiting period before the crossing of Jordan, are wrested from their context, and made to apply to the worship at the local sanctuaries in Canaan.¹

Then the permission for profane slaughter in xii. 15, which puts the use of domestic animals for food² on the same level with those taken in the chase, already sanctioned (Lv. xvii. 13), is transmuted into a compassionate provision intended to mitigate the hardship imposed by the centralizing law, thus rendering pointless the reference to the gazelle and the hart.³

Stranger still is the distortion of Dt. xviii. 6-8,⁴ which concerns a wandering Levite, into a compassionate provision for priests attached to local sanctuaries.⁵

The author of Deuteronomy writes elsewhere with force and clarity; it is not rational to think that in regard to the main purpose of his reform he would indulge in such obscurities.

What then becomes of the claim that worship at the 'high places' was 'formally declared illegal' by the publication of Deuteronomy? The astonished reader might well ask, where? They are not even mentioned!

We search for the word *bāmôth* in vain in the legislative section; and when we find it in xxxii. 13 and xxxiii. 29 it has the same primitive meaning of lofty heights as in 2 Sa. xxii. 34. This only makes its absence in the laws more conspicuous.

We know from 2 Ki. xvii that the *bāmôth* which kings and people built in the seventh century were a crying evil against which 'all the prophets' had testified (verse 13). How then can we account for the fact that the zealous reformer studiously avoids mentioning them? We are not aware that any satisfactory answer has been given to this question.

Further, the author himself, or some successors, prefixed Dt. v-xi as a suitable introduction to the law. These chapters deal at length with the covenant made in Horeb, with all the attendant circumstances, but they do not remotely hint at the existence of the *bāmôth*. It must be admitted that 'If . . . the purpose of the code

¹ Cf. Robertson, *OTP*, p. 45.

² Cf. Welch, *Code*, pp. 49-55.

³ See p. 92.

⁴ See p. 107.

⁵ Welch, *Code*, p. 91.

was to insist on centralization, the introduction can only be called a complete failure.¹

DEUTERONOMY XXVII. 1-8

The command in Dt. xxvii. 1-8 to raise an altar on Mount Ebal and to inscribe the law upon stones is a fatal stumbling-block to the centralization theory; as von Rad said, it raises a barricade (*sperrt sich*)² against it. It manifestly commands that which the law is supposed to forbid and, to make matters worse, uses the very words of Ex. xx. 24 which Dt. is supposed to revoke! When read without prejudice, it is 'not only in full agreement with all that precedes, but forms an admirable conclusion to the whole'.³ It is confirmed by the account in Jos. viii. 30-35⁴ of the erection of the altar by Joshua. When the two passages are compared they are seen to be independent; for they agree in substance but differ in detail;⁵ and besides, the style of the passage in Joshua is not 'Deuteronomic'.

It is not without a certain significance that Shechem is one of the places where fragments of primitive Hebrew writing have been found belonging to the invasion period; and there is an increasing tendency to accept a real connection between Shechem and the Deuteronomic law.⁶ There is therefore every reason to regard Dt. xxvii and Jos. viii as well based.

This passage cannot be brushed aside lightly as a later insertion. S. R. Driver frankly admits 'considerable critical difficulties'; the parts are imperfectly joined together, and 'it stands in a most

¹ Welch, *Code*, p. 178.

² Thus in *Deuteronomium Studien*, p. 47. In the ET (p. 68) he says, 'The Shechem traditions contained in chapter 27 are at odds with the demand for centralization.'

³ Welch, *Code*, p. 184. 'Clearly an appendix to the laws', Kennett, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴ In verse 32 (ix. 5, LXX) the LXX inserts τὸ δευτερονόμιον.

⁵ Thus Dt. xxvii commands first the setting up of stones to be covered with plaister, and after that an altar. Jos. viii begins with the altar of unhewn stones, then proceeds to the inscription, but with no mention of the plaister. In Deuteronomy there is no mention of 'judges and officers' or of the reading of the law; in Joshua there is none of the dividing of the tribes.

⁶ E. Nielsen connects Jos. viii. 30-35 with xxiv. 26 and calls Shechem the starting-point of the 'Deuteronomic trend'. See also von Rad, *Studies*, p. 41, and Ryder Smith, *art. cit.*, p. 33.

unsuitable place'.¹ Nor do the difficulties end there; for the insertion, if such it be, shows that the person who made it could not have regarded the Deuteronomic law as forbidding the erection of the altar. This passage, therefore, affords the strongest confirmation of the straightforward interpretation of chapter xii, namely that whereas it forbids any association with Canaanite worship, and looks forward to a centre for national worship, it allows for the worship of Yahweh at any duly authorized altar elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

Little is needed to press home the lessons of this chapter. The centralization theory, the 'keystone' of Wellhausen's hypothesis of the origin of Deuteronomy, has been shown to be anything but firmly fixed; it can be supported only by a misreading of the history, and by artificial interpretations of the text. The investigation has led also to some positive results, which may now be stated.

1. When the history is cleared of conjecture, we see the tribes entering Canaan, and gathering from time to time around the ark or the tabernacle. Altars are raised, and sacrifices offered, with divine approval, at Shechem, Ophrah, Ramah and a few other places. Soon however the people fall away, forsake Yahweh and adopt Canaanite evil practices. With the building of the temple there is a revival of Yahweh worship, but further declension and syncretism follow, and increase to the end of the kingdom.

2. Read in this context and taken at its face value, the Deuteronomic law fits in admirably, if placed at the close of the Mosaic era. The Canaanites are in the land, and their shrines, a cause of temptation, must be completely destroyed. The gifts and sacrifices of the people must be brought only to a legitimate altar of Yahweh, under the aegis of His name. There are certain prohibitions: there must be no disorder (xii. 8); the altar of Yahweh must not be defiled with fertility symbols (xvi. 21, 22); above all, the worship of 'other gods', and the snare of admixture with the Canaanites, must be avoided (xii. 29-32). After Jordan is crossed an altar is to be raised in Mount Ebal and the law inscribed on stones (xxvii. 1-8).

3. Thus understood the legislation and the history agree, and

¹ ICC, p. 294. The difficulties betray the weakness of the hypothesis.

objections vanish which the centralization theory once raised to the early origin of Dt. xii-xxvi. Its primitive character is confirmed by the absence of the words Ba al and *bāmôth*, and by the indefiniteness about the allusions to the 'place' which Yahweh would choose to put His name there.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER IX

THE DIFFERENT MEANINGS OF *BAMOTH*

Insufficient attention has been given to the fact that the word *bāmôth* has different meanings in different contexts.

The Briggs-Driver-Brown Lexicon distinguishes four meanings:¹ (1) 'Mountains' (Mi. iii. 12; Ezk. xxxvi. 2); (2) 'Battle-fields' (Dt. xxxii. 13; 2 Sa. i. 19, 25); (3) 'Places of worship', of different kinds; and (4) 'Funereal mounds' (?) (Ezk. xliii. 7).

The translators of the LXX also distinguish some from others by translating differently.² In Dt. xxxii. 13 the LXX translates *ισχύον*, 'stronghold', and in xxxiii. 29 *τράχηλον*, 'neck'; both paraphrases. In 2 Sa. i. 19, 25 the word used is *τὰ ὑψηλὰ*, 'heights'; in 1 Ki. iii. 2, 3 we have *ὑψηλοῖς*, and in 1 Ki. iii. 4 Gibeon is described as *ὑψηλοτάτη καὶ μεγάλη*, 'the highest and great'.

In Lv. xxvi. 30; Nu. xxi. 28, xxii. 41, xxxiii. 52 the word is *στῆλη*, 'monument', possibly indicating a knowledge of a standing stone on the Amorite *bāmôth*.

In 1 Sa. ix, x the word is uniformly transliterated *βίμα* as if the word had once been a place-name there.

In the book of Kings the standard word is *ὑψηλον* even when the idea of height had quite disappeared. But in 2 Ki. xxiii. 13 the word is *οἶκον*, 'house'. The context, which states that this high place was only 'defiled' while others were 'destroyed', also indicates a substantial building.

In Is. xiv. 14 the RV, in spite of its regard for uniformity, translates 'heights', which is evidently correct.

It appears, therefore, that there is an original connotation of actual height, which in the later usage disappears.

¹ See also G. B. Gray, *ICC: Numbers*, article on Nu. xxxiii. 52.

² This might in part be due to different translators.