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IN SEARCH OF THE ORIGIN OF THE DEUTERONOMIC MOVEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

For quite some time now the study of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic school has been an area of ferment in the field of the Old Testament. A lot of work has been done¹ but there seems to be no solution in sight to most of the questions usually raised. The authorship of the Book Deuteronomy has been as problematic as the right candidates to whom to ascribe the Deuteronomic traits in Old Testament literature. Difficult and nagging though the problem is, much weight continues to be accorded to Deuteronomism in Old Testament studies both in the compilation of the literature as well as the shaping of the Biblical faith.

As early as the Nineteenth Century, Baudissm and others² following after him have offered their well argued propositions for the right candidates for the Deuteronomic school. But, as normally happens in a controversial area of research, each proposition presented so far has shown itself to be defective in one point or another when subjected to serious scrutiny.

¹ See among others; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972; A.H.A. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, New Century Bible. (Greenwood S.C. Attic Press, 1979), p.25-108; L.J. Hoppe, 'The Levitical Origins of Deuteronomy, Reconsidered' *Biblical Research*, 28, (1983), pp. 27-36; A.C. Welch, *The Code of Deuteronomy, A New Theory of Its Origin*, (London, 1924).

² W.W.F.G. Baudissm, *Geschichte des Alttestamentlichen Priestertums* (Leipzig Harzel, 1889; See also, Horst F. *Das Privilegrecht Jahres, Rechtsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen Zum Deuteronomium* (Frlan't F. xxviii). (Göttingen Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1930).

As a result Edward Nielsen³ has described the subject in his study of Deuteronomy, as one of the most peculiar phenomena in the entire Old Testament Literature. This is because, in his view, Deuteronomism in the Old Testament has its own characteristic language, style and phraseology which makes it particularly peculiar. In his own contribution, Eichrodt⁴ has labelled it a document without father, mother, and without genealogy. According to him, this is due to the sudden way it made its appearance in the history of Israel.

Bewildering though the subject appears to be, scholars like Burney, Welch and Bentzen⁵ among others have claimed categorically that the group responsible for Old Testament Deuteronomism should be sought among the clerical circle of the Northern Kingdom. These clerics, they claim, inaugurated their work in the Northern kingdom and perfected it at Jerusalem after the Syrian conquest of Samaria in 721 B.C. According to them, the distinctive traits exhibited by Old Testament Deuteronomism⁶ in areas of language, style and special interests, support the view that it emanated from the priestly circle.

But Nicholson⁷ and others have contested this with their own suggestion that the circle of the prophets should be seen as the

³ E. Nielsen, *Shechem: A Traditio-historical Investigation*, (Copenhagen, 1955) p. 344.

⁴ W. Eichrodt. *Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift*, 3, (1921), p.14.

⁵ A.C. Welch. *The Code of Deuteronomy: A New Theory of Its Origin*, London, 1924, pp. 206 ff. Cf. Burney, *Commentary on the Book of Judges*, London, 1918, p. XLVI; A. Bentzen, *Die Josianische Reform und Ihre Voraussetzungen*, Copenhagen, 1926

⁶ Here we are referring to the Deuteronomism found in the Pentateuch and in the books of Samuel and Kings. It embraces the deuteronomic document found in the Temple in 621 B.C; the book Deuteronomy and other Old Testament Deuteronomic passages. See E.W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*. Oxford, 1967, p.113 ff.

⁷ See A.D.H. Mayes, *Commentary on Deuteronomy*, (Oliphants, 1979) p.103. And for a discussion on the very close affinities in

likely authors. The prophetic structures and the general critical attitude to the religious and secular institutions of Israel found in the prophets, they claim, inform the contents of the Deuteronomic literature.⁸

In reaction to this, however, Gerhard Von Rad has said that the prophetic elements or traits found, for instance, in Deuteronomy should rather be credited to the general religious tenor of the period of writing than to any specific and direct part played by the prophets in its production.

While opinions are hardly agreed on the authorship of Old Testament Deuteronomism, some scholars have tried to hazard a likely date when it made its appearance in Israelite literature. On this, there have been as many suggestions as there are scholars writing on the subject. As a result, we find that Old Testament Deuteronomism has been dated from the Mosaic to the post-exilic period and that no consensus has been reached. It is in the light of the foregoing that the phenomenon called Deuteronomism in Old Testament Literature makes itself an ever fresh and attractive subject for scholarly endeavour or investigation.

In this presentation, we want to concern ourselves with the socio-religious setting which we believe gave birth to the movement which metamorphosed into the Deuteronomic school in Israel. With our proposition, we hope to answer many of the questions which have not received adequate answers in the past.

PART 1

Our concern here will not be so much with the question of who wrote the book Deuteronomy and when it was written, — a debate that has engaged the attention of a lot of scholars, but rather how Deuteronomism arose in Israel and what were its roots.

idioms between Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, see Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), pp. 359-361 and W.L. Holladay, *JBL* 79, (1960), pp. 351-367.

⁸ Here Deuteronomic Literature refers broadly to all the Old Testament Deuteronomic traits.

In order to provide the required basis for our discussion, we will first take a cursory look at suggested candidates for the authorship of Deuteronomy, pointing out in the process some of the points raised for or against them.

Baudissm in 1889 was the first to suggest priestly/levitical circles as possible authors of Deuteronomy. Others who followed in his trail developed his thesis adding their own modifications. Although some scholars have suggested groups⁹ outside the priestly circle as likely authors, it seems that the majority of scholars are of the opinion that the circle of priests is the most likely candidate for the authorship. In this, a distinction has to be made between serving/Torah giving Levites and altar priests¹⁰ and between Northern priests of Israel and Jerusalem based priests. Whichever of these groups one opts for, there will always be problems to face.

For instance, scholars who suggest Torah giving priests claim that Deuteronomy contains excellent examples of expository preaching and teaching which are the hall marks of the Levites in Israel. Instances which are cited from scriptures to buttress this point that the chief function of the Levites in the Old Testament was the work of teaching and exposition of Torah include Deut 33:10; II Chron 17:7-9; 35:3; Neh 8:7-9; Deut 27:9 etc.

But these client priests or country Levites¹¹ could not have been responsible for Deuteronomy which advocates centralisation of the cult. For the landless Levites to have been behind such a programme would have amounted to sawing off the branch on which they were sitting. This, however, has been defended by saying that the centralisation policy of Deuteronomy should be seen to belong to a much later layer of tradition.¹²

Horst and Clements believe that the Northern priests were responsible for the authorship but that they had their projects

⁹ See 7 above.

¹⁰ G.E. Wright, 'Deuteronomy', *IBZ* 325-326 and 'The Levites in Deuteronomy', *VT* 4, (1954), pp. 325-330.

¹¹ G. von Rad. *Studies in Deuteronomy*- S.C.M., London, 1961, p.67.

¹² *Ibid*, p.68.

completed at Jerusalem. While Horst actually holds that members of the Jerusalem based wisdom writers completed the project, Clements thinks that it was the same Northern priests who settled in Jerusalem after the 721 B.C. conquest of Israel that completed the writing. If this view of Northern provenance is upheld, then one has difficulty in explaining the observation made by Nicholson.¹³

According to him, the Jerusalem tradition concerning the special relationship between Yahweh and Mount Zion appears to have greatly influenced the Deuteronomist. The impact of this influence, he claims, appears to be the basis of his bitter polemic against the Northern Monarchy in setting up Bethel and Dan as rival sanctuaries to Jerusalem (I Kings 12:26; 13:1 ff II Kings 17:7 ff.; etc. cf I Kings 8:16, 44, 48; 11:13,82; 14:21; II Kings 21:7; 23:27).

The problem which this observation causes is that if the document is taken as coming from the pen of the priestly circle who until the eve of their displacement in 721 B.C. were officiates at the Northern sanctuaries, one finds it difficult to understand why they should be involved in a polemic against Bethel and Dan where they had been earning their livelihood as rival altars to Jerusalem.

In another dimension, however, some have seen Deuteronomy as a document of religious revival¹⁴ offered by the Northern priesthood for the religious refurbishment of the Jerusalem Temple. But one wonders how this could have happened if for years the same priests faced with the idolatrous worship at Bethel and Dan did nothing to inject new life into them. It is in view of these and other associated problems that Hoppe¹⁵ has found it difficult to accept Gerhard Von Rad's very illuminating thesis on the priestly authorship of Deuteronomy and so has instead opted for authorship by the Elders of Israel. He, however, fails to explain who these elders who had the responsibility of teaching the law actually were.

¹³ E.W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*, Oxford, 1967, p.110 ft.

¹⁴ F. Dumermuth, 'Zur Deuteronomischen Kulttheologie und ihren Voraussetzungen'. *ZAW* 70, (1958), pp. 59-98.

¹⁵ Leslie J. Hoppe. 'The Levitical Origin of Deuteronomy Reconsidered'. *Biblical Research*, 28, (1983), pp. 27-36.

This is because the Biblical tradition has it that the priests were the custodians and preachers of the law as they were the ones to whom Moses purportedly handed it over after writing, (Deut 31:9; 31:24-26; 17:18-19; cf Jer 5:31,28; 18:18; Neh 8:13).

The above serves to show that a clear consensus has not yet emerged in scholarship as to who the Deuteronomist(s) were. The variegated facets of Deuteronomy with its various layers of tradition have not made the problem any simpler either. But since our primary concern here is not the authorship of Deuteronomy *per se*, but the beginning of the Deuteronomic movement in Israel, we may now address ourselves to that problem.

PART II

It is commonly acknowledged among Old Testament scholars¹⁶ that the introduction of the monarchical system in Israel gave birth to some tension between the new establishment typified by Jerusalem, and the old ideal of rural particularistic Israel typified by the Shiloh of olden days. The Monarchy as an innovation in Israelite life made some effort to consolidate itself and become acceptable by engaging in conciliatory policies which were not completely acceptable to the people. Its accommodation and adjustments to the sedentary Canaanite culture i.e. the Jerusalem Jebusites, for instance, was not popular with the conservative Israelites.

During this period, the immediate heir to the Shiloh sanctuary, Nob, saw itself as the bulwark of the old system and of true Yahweh worship in contradistinction to the syncretistic Jerusalem cult of the monarchy. Saul probably sensed the incipient sacral importance of Nob early and decided to erase it by commanding the annihilation of its priesthood on the very flimsy excuse of showing kindness to the King's enemies. Unfortunately, Saul's Israelite runners saw the execution of the king's command as sacrilege, (I Chron. 16:22) and refused to act. It was only the non Yahwist Edomite mercenary Doeg who carried out the order and killed about 85 priests (I Sam. 22:18). The gravity of this crime on

¹⁶ See Aelred Cody, *A History of the Old Testament Priesthood*, (Rome Pontifical Biblical Institute), 1969, p.108.

Nob, the legitimate heir of Shiloh¹⁷ whose high priest Ahimelech had direct ancestral link with Eli, the Chief Priest of Shiloh, and the importance of the Nob sanctuary itself which though located in Benhamen, yet housed the sword of Goliath (I Sam. 22:10) killed by David a Judean, was enough to arouse resentment against the monarchy. As I Sam. 22:20 has it, it was only Abiathar who escaped the cold-blooded massacre because he fled with David.

The impact of Saul's crime on the Nob Levites was, however, later cushioned by David when he became king of Israel. In recognition of the services rendered to him by Abiathar and in a bid to perpetuate the Levite lineage of priests, he made Abiathar the high priest of Jerusalem. In this action, the priesthood of the house of Eli took consolation in the fact that Eli's house was still in control of the central cult of the land like Shiloh. As we shall see later, this is probably why David is projected as the ideal king after the heart of Yahweh while Saul is condemned outright, even for sins from which he could had been exonerated.¹⁸

But as the reign of David ebbed to its close, the situation gravitated back to its ugly beginning from where David had picked it up.

The palace intrigue which put on the throne a successor to David apparently split the religio-political seat of power into two camps as we find epitomised in the support mustered by the two contenders - Solomon and Adonijah. While the modernists or upstarts, Zadok and Beniah, supported Solomon, the conservatives Abiathar and Joab rallied round Adonijah.

The ultimate succession of Solomon to the throne and his subsequent reshuffling of the cult cabinet which made Zadok the high priest and retired Abiathar to Anathoth, where he had to stay under house arrest, was very disturbing to the Levites. With Abiathar thus defrocked (I Kings 2:26-27, 35) the high priesthood of the Temple passed on to the line of Zadok. And, what is more, any other priests

¹⁷ J. Morgenstein, 'The Ark, the Ephod and the Tent of Meeting', *HUCA* 18, (1944), p.9.

¹⁸ Cf. I Samuel 15:1 ft.

other than the Zadokites had to earn their living from, then on as subordinate clerics.

This new arrangement put two non Israelites or half Israelites in power, Solomon the son of Bathsheba, and Zadok the Jebusite. This, in addition to what Saul did earlier, drove the disgruntled Levites underground to bemoan their fate and reconsider their position. The arrival of the defrocked Abiathar to his estate among them¹⁹ would provide a rallying point for their own 'government in exile'. It would be an opportunity for them, under the leadership of Abiathar, to put their thoughts down in writing and appraise the situation in which they found themselves.²⁰ This, of course, would make them keep a critical eye on the royal and cultic establishments in Israel and it would explain why in their writing they would not see anything good in the two establishments. It is worth noting that even Jeremiah the prophet hailed from Anathoth and also belonged to the priestly line. It is, therefore, not difficult to assume where he imbibed his iconoclastic ideas which made him very ruthless towards the religious and cultic establishments of his day as he carried out his mission to pull down, uproot and to destroy (Jer. 1:10).

The wound which the Levites sustained on the retirement of Abiathar which eclipsed their line of priesthood in the Temple may probably be responsible for the failure of the priests from the North and in other high places outside Jerusalem to take up appointments in Jerusalem (I Kings 23:9). Without doubt, at the time, the relationship between them and the Zadokites would have been seriously strained. With the original line of the priesthood thus eliminated and the new line of Zadok substituted, the Zadokites made

¹⁹ Anathoth was a levitical city in Benjamin about 3 miles North of Jerusalem. The birth place of Jeremiah, now called Anata.

²⁰ G. von Rad had recognised this group and its activities when as a result of the protestant atmosphere of their work, he described them as a body of Levites turned proletarian and who had evidently outgrown the cultic sphere proper and was busying itself with the scholarly preservation and transmission of the old tradition, see *Studies in Deuteronomy*, London: S.C.M., 1953, p.68.

efforts to consolidate as well as to legitimise themselves in office. In the process, Zadok was given fictitious genealogies which have made him a controversial figure.

Over the years, it has been difficult for Old Testament scholars to agree on the nationality and true genealogical line of Zadok.²¹ The two genealogies so far provided for him have both been written off. While one is certainly due to textual corruption, the other has been described as a pious fabrication of a later age.²² In II Samuel 8:17, he is mentioned as the son of Ahitub and a member of David's Jerusalem administration. If Ahitub is considered to be his father, this means he was Abiathar's uncle and therefore of the family of Eli. But in I Chronicles 24:3, he is described as belonging to the house of Eleazar which is contrasted with the house of Ithamar to which Eli belonged. Moreover, in I Sam 22:18-19 we are not told that any other priest other than Abiathar of the house of Ahitub survived Doeg's massacre. And even in I Sam. 2:35-36, his house is presented as a substitute for the house of Eli to which II Sam. 8:17 says he belongs. At one point, efforts were made to give him a direct line of descent from Aaron, the 'forefather of Israelite priesthood, (I Chr. 5:30-34: 6:35-38). Wherever he appears beside Abiathar as in I Sam. 15:24-29, there are two accounts of him — a sign of the frantic effort to legitimise him in office. In some places, the account is so bad that we cannot actually say who he was; in II Sam. 8:17; Ez. 7:2, he is the son of Ahitub; in I Chr. 9:11; Neh. 11:11, he is the grandson of Ahitub. In all these, either the Bible is not referring to the same Ahitub or there are many biblical Zadoks.

²¹ See among others, C.E. Hauer (Jr.), 'Who was Zadok' *JBL* 82, (1963), pp. 89-94; H.H. Rowley, *JBL* 58, (1939), pp. 113-141; J.R. Bartlett 'Zadok and His successor at Jerusalem', *JTS* NS 19) (1965), pp. 1-18; G. Widengren, *Accadian and Hebrew Psalms of lamentation as Religious Documents*, Uppsala, 1937, p.322; H.R. Hall in A.S. Peake ed. *The people of the book* (Oxford, 1925) p.11; A Bentzen, *Studier over det Zadokidiske Praesteskabs Historier*, 1931, and compare his own summary in *SAW* 51, (1933), pp. 173-176 and A. Cody, *History of Old Testament Priesthood*, (Rome, 1969) pp. 91-92. 22.

²² .H.H. Rowley, *JBL* 58, (1939), p.113

It is on account of this genealogical puzzle that some like Hauer and Rowley have expressed the opinion that Zadok should be seen as a Jebusite priest who defected to David's camp either at the capture or prior to the capture of Jerusalem²³ It has even been suggested that he was the priest Saul brought in to serve after killing all the priests at Nob though there is no biblical backing for this notion. This suggestion is plausible in the sense that II Sam 20:25 and II Sam 15:24-29 present him as serving with Abiathar during David's reign. But in I Chr. 16:39 where he is presented as being in charge of the Ark, Israel's most sacred emblem, one wonders how a foreigner could have been allowed to take care of such a sacred and hallowed national cultic object. If it is accepted that he ministered at Gibeon and also probably at Kirjath-Jearin in connection with the Ark, then by the time of Abiathar's retirement, he would have lived more than three score years, and yet, we are told he ministered with the son of Abiathar, (I Chr. 24:6; 18:16). As if the above state of confusion is not enough, I Chr. 12:28 calls him an army leader.

Our conclusion is that the defrocking of Abiathar caused such a stir in Israel that his substitute had to labour much to entrench himself in office. In the process, fictitious genealogies were made up for him and important figures in the Israelite priesthood were given as his father. McConville even thinks that the programme of legislation in Deut. 18:1, 6, 7 about the Levites being given equal status with the Zadokites was rendered ineffective as can be inferred from II Kings 23:9 because the Zadokites ensured by their position that this legislation did not work so that the Levites remained and continued where they were in the high places.²⁴

The implication of this is that the substitution of what was perhaps an originally Jebusite dynasty of priests in place of that of

²³ Haner, *JBL* 82, (1963), p.89 ff; Rowley, *JBL* 58, (1939), p.113. But F.M. Cross would like to uphold Zadok's Levitical Ancestry, see *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cambridge Mass, 1973, pp. 55 ff supported by Haran *Temples and Temple Services in Ancient Israel* (Jerusalem), 1978, p.88.

²⁴ J.G. McConville, *Law and Theology in Deuteronomy*, *JSOT* Suppl. Series 33, (Sheffield, 1984) p.125.

the Elides, set up an antipathy between the Zadokites and those who favoured the Israelite levitical Elide line of Abiathar. And because it was Solomon who gave the rift the prominence it received, he and his successor as well as the Zadokites became the target of the opposing group. It made Solomon's foreign and home policies easy preys for the group which sought to justify its claim and stance. But as a dissident voice, they were often snubbed by the king and his echelon along with the cultic officials because they were recognised for what they were, a disgruntled dissident group. And they had a tradition of not seeing anything good in the monarchy and the cult. It is even probable that the allegation we have against Jeroboam I in II Chron. 13:9 and I Kings 13:33, led to the exit of some Levites in the Northern sanctuaries who would not co-operate to meet their defrocked father, Abiathar. Thus they increased or strengthened the new movement by a vote of no confidence in the new system, kingship and cult.²⁵

This apparent alignment of opposing forces and interests between the new order in the Jerusalem kingship and Zadokites, and the representatives of the religious traditions of old Israel - the Levites, constituted the beginning of the movement which was later christened the Deuteronomic movement with its dissident outlook. The Levites who rallied round Abiathar now saw themselves as the symbol of Shiloh, the centre of traditional Israelite Yahwism unsullied by Canaanite influence. Their stance made them the idealistic centre of those elements opposed to the new centre at Jerusalem where strategic adaptation to Canaanite co-existence with Canaanite conversion and absorption into Yahwism had taken place and where foreign influence had had its full sway.

This conservative group²⁶ prided itself on its fidelity to the Ancient Covenant. Understandably enough, they opposed the entrenched priesthoods of the royal establishments, not only out of

²⁵ S. Talmon, however has his doubt as to whether all the priests from the North were Levites. See his 'Divergences in Calendar-Reckoning in Ephraim and Judah', *VT* 8, (1958), pp.53 ff.

²⁶ See H. W. Wolff, 'Hoseas Geistige Heimat', *Th LZ* 81, (1956), pp. 83-94.

rivalry, but from religious ideals too. Of course, in this they had the co-operation of the prophets like Hosea who shared this same spirit of fidelity to the old purely Israelite Yahwism. It is even the opinion of Wolff that Hosea did not only share in the ideals of this group, but also showed considerable sympathy for these non-official levitical circles.²⁷

Thus, the nucleus which gathered itself round the defrocked Abiathar can be seen as the nucleus of the movement which metamorphosed into 'Deuteronomism' in Israel. If our submission is accepted, it will answer some of the problems so far posed in Old Testament studies but which have not been adequately answered.

PART III

In the above, we have tried to maintain that the retirement of Abiathar by Solomon constituted the religio-political situation which gave birth to the gathering of a levitical nucleus which later metamorphosed into the Deuteronomic School. In this section, we want to examine some of the popularly acknowledged traits of Deuteronomism to see how far they are found in this levitical circle.

First, our proposition by implication affirms that the candidates for the Deuteronomic School are to be found among the priests. It is commonly agreed among Old Testament scholars that teaching and exposition constitute the major features demonstrated by the Deuteronomic author.²⁸ Although Hoppe has tried to argue that the elders of Israel were the best qualified to fill this position²⁹, the biblical evidence we have points to the contrary, giving the credit to the priest whose primary task was teaching and exposition (Deut. 33:10; II Chron. 17:7-9; 35:3; Neh. 8:7-8; Deut. 27:9; etc). Abiathar and his brother Levites would therefore qualify as author(s).

²⁷ Here see A.H.J. Gunneweg, *Leviten und Priester*, Göttingen, 1965, p.71 ff.

²⁸ See G. von Rad, 'The FormCritical Problem of the Hexateuch', in his, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), pp. 1-18.

²⁹ L.J. Hoppe, *Biblical Research*, 28, (1983), pp. 27-36.

But the question then arises: if the candidates for the Deuteronomic School were priests, why do they manifest anti-priest tendencies, even, at times, giving a poor portrait of the priesthood? With the background we have given, this is not surprising because they were reacting against the usurpation of the Elides position by the Zadokites who constituted the official clerics in the Temple. The subtle polemics or abuses of the priesthood were directed against the Zadokites whom they now saw as their enemies.

This leads to the next question which is usually a puzzle in Old Testament studies. How was Yahwist exclusivism maintained and retained in the atmosphere of the royal cult centres of the two kingdoms which was riddled with compromise and syncretism? (Amaziah and Amos at Bethel, Amos 7:10-15; II Kings 11:18; Jerusalem with a Temple of Baal, I Kings 16:32 Ahab built an altar and house of Baal and Manasseh built altars for Baal in Jerusalem). Evidently, at this time, the Yahwist priests in the official sanctuaries were not particularly zealous for any ideal nor were they inclined to oppose the royal policies. It was, therefore, the Abiathar group who claimed to stand in the tradition of the fathers and to be unaffected by the immediate surveillance of the king and his agents that could afford to have an ideal or tradition to maintain. Through them, the Yahweh alone party, with the aid of prophets who aligned themselves to them, survived in Israel.

Over the years, scholars have noted that the description of the figure David in the succession narrative presents a striking contrast to that in the history of his rise to power. From what we have in II Samuel chapters 2 to 7, we see David in the account of his rise to power as a blessed person chosen by Yahweh himself as king. But in II Samuel chapters 9-24, which give the succession account, David is portrayed as an object of scandal, a man of indecision and a dotard. One wonders, as Tomoo Ishida³⁰ has well noted, why a writer could so persistently continue to disclose in the succession narrative the weak points and decadence of David. The reason for

³⁰

See his article, 'Solomon's Succession to the Throne of David - A Political Analysis', in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, ed. by Tomoo Ishida, Tokyo, 1982.

this is to see the work from the political standpoint of those with a critical attitude towards the regime of David who assisted Solomon to establish his kingship. The group of the 'Abiatharites', though, hold David as their mentor and as doyen of all Israel, yet want to show that at the time he helped Solomon, who retired Abiathar, to take the throne after him, he had deteriorated and lost the full impact of the glory and blessedness of Yahweh. By so doing, they have implicitly discredited Solomon and the ground is eroded, as it were, from under his feet. Therefore the shadow of Divine favour did not fall on him.³¹

This also explains the difference between the way Yahweh behaved towards David and towards Saul. When compared with the king before and the kings after him David stands head and shoulders above them all. He was the king under whom Abiathar functioned in his rightful position as the High Priest of Israel. Others committed sins that others committed and had no forgiveness for them, e.g. Saul, (I Samuel 13; 15). But when David committed similar sins and even more heinous ones, he was granted forgiveness. Yahweh did not forgive Saul, the man who ordered Doeg against the priests at Nob! Moreover, Solomon's character is painted as a bane in Israelite kingship. Apart from David, almost all other kings fall short of the esteem of this group, the Deuteronomists. In fact after David there came a longing that a man like him would arise. In the passage of time this longing was theologically developed and was couched in Messianic terms, but it represented a hope that was never realised in Old Testament times.

As we mentioned earlier, the socio-political situation in which the Abiathar group found themselves made them develop what Von Rad has described as 'the protestant atmosphere of the Deuteronomists.'³² Gerhard Von Rad sensed that at the time, the Levites who authored Deuteronomy had outgrown the cult and were no longer concerned with the cultic centre. But the truth of the

³¹ See Ahlstrom 'Solomon the Chosen One', *HR* 8, (1968), p.100, Note 29.

³² G. von Rad. 'The Provenance of Deuteronomy' in *his Studies in Deuteronomy*, London: S.C.M., (1953), p.68.

matter is that they were really no longer in the official list of clerics in the central cult, having been displaced by the Zadokites. As a result they developed a critical attitude towards the cult and its functionaries, a fact which made them see things from the dissident point of view.

As opponents of the Jerusalem cultic functionaries, they were not only out to criticise but even to discredit some of the avowed cultic theological formulations. This point brings us to what has been styled the demythologisation traits of the Deuteronomist. Although the Deuteronomist, i.e. the Abiathar group, still held the central sanctuary in honour it was bent on divesting it of God's actual immanence within it. In this connection, when the central cult was making too much of the Ark as the visible presence of the invisible Yahweh, the Deuteronomist came in to correct the view that after all, the Ark is only a receptacle for the two tables of Stone, (Deut. 10:1-5; Ex.25:10-25). This radical reinterpretation or rationalisation of an old view could only have arisen as a counter to a more elaborate view probably then current in Jerusalem.³³ Like the voice of a reformer, they were out to curb the religious and theological excesses of the cult. From their point of view the theology of election concerns Yahweh and Israel and not Yahweh and the king. Much as they loved David, they were not prepared to recognise the perpetuity of Davidic posterity because of the misbehaviour of his son. This radical re-interpretation was extended to Yahweh's relationship with the land of Canaan in which the cult served as a mediating link.³⁴ To the Abiatharites, this sounded abhorrent! They believed that the bond between Yahweh and the land was morally rather than cultically conditioned. The cult where their members only served as subordinates is thus being robbed of the high esteem in which others held it. In the course of the group's demythologisation policy, it also implicitly engaged in subtle

³³ The view that W.R. Arnold has expressed that there could have been two arks is not our concern here. For his views, see 'Ephod and Ark', *Havard Theological Studies* III (1917), pp. 23 ff.

³⁴ See R.E. Clements 'Deuteronomy and the Jerusalem Cult Tradition', *VT* 15 (1965), pp. 317-318, and Hoppe L.J., p.31.

polemics against a sacral interpretation of various aspects of Israelite life.

In the light of the above, we can see that the members of the Deuteronomic School were certainly not official members of the central cult but rather Levites who, because of their distance from the cult, had started viewing cultic activities from a different perspective.³⁵ The fact that they regarded the central cultic officiates as their opponents precluded their viewing things from the perspective of those officiates.

This means their social setting as a group and their historical background gave colouring to their views and actions. If we understand the origin of Biblical Deuteronomism in this light it will help us to understand some of the peculiar traits of the Deuteronomic Movement which have been so puzzling to Old Testament students.

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³⁵ Cf M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) pp. 59-157.