

'Hilkiah and the Law (2 Kings 22) in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Some Influences on W.M.L. de Wette' in N. Lohfink (Ed.), *Das Deuteronomium* (Leuven: Peeters, 1985) 9-12.

HILKIAH AND THE LAW (2 KINGS 22) IN THE 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES: SOME INFLUENCES ON W. M. L. DE WETTE

It is widely known that de Wette thought the book of the law, found by Hilkiah, was Deuteronomy, written shortly before. In this short paper I want to answer three questions :

- 1) Who identified in the previous centuries the law in 2 Kings 22 with Deuteronomy?
- 2) Who suggested earlier that the law was not only found, but also written at the time of Josiah?
- 3) Is there any traceable influence in this respect on de Wette?

1. Hilkiah found Deuteronomy

G. E. Lessing wrote between 1771 and 1774 a short article about Hilkiah. In it he says that the most and excellent exegetes are of the opinion that the book which was found, contained the main parts of the second law ¹ (i.e. Deuteronomy). J. Hempel who called attention to this article of Lessing, thinks the appeal to the Consensus doctorum is only a mask ². But I think it is only a little exaggeration, because there are some exegetes who have expressed the just mentioned opinion.

R. Smend in his excellent study about de Wette mentions some interpreters of the early church, and of later time Lessing and Th. Hobbes ³, who identified the law with Deuteronomy ⁴, But there are more scholars who have done this. The tradition of the early church is preserved in the Middle Ages, e.g. by Alphonsus Tostatus ⁵. When in 1642 in his commentary on 2 Kings Cornelius a Lapide speaks about the identity of the book, he tells us that Chrysostomus, Athanasius and Tostatus thought it was Deuteronomy ⁶. J. S. Menochius,

¹ After his death his brother KARL published it for the first time in *Der Theologische Nachlass*, 1784. K.

LACHMANN (ed.), *G. E. Lessings Sämtliche Schriften*, vol. 16, Leipzig, 1902, p. 245.

² J. HEMPEL, *Chronik*, in *ZAW* 51 (1933), p. 299.

³ TH. HOBBS, *Leviathan*, 1651, ch. 42.

⁴ R. SMEND, *Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Welles Arbeit am Alten und Neuen Testament*, Basel, 1958, p. 36.

⁵ A. TOSTATUS or ABULENSIS (1455 †), *Commentaria*, vol. 7, Coloniae Agrippinae, 1613, pp. 378-379 (2 Kings 22).

⁶ C. A LAPIDE, *Commentaria* (ed. A. CRAMPON), vol. 4, Paris, 1877, p. 81.

another [p. 10] Roman-catholic exegete, made the same choice, saying that there are many interpreters who held this view ⁷.

In Germany Hermann von der Hardt wrote his *Dulcia arva Virgilii* in 1740. He supposes that the whole of Deuteronomy comes from the highpriest Hilkiah ⁸. In the Jewish tradition there is suggested, when Josiah opened the Scriptures, the first verse to strike his eye was the one in Deuteronomy: «The Lord will bring you, and your king whom you set over you, to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known» (Dt 28,36) ⁹. So the book contained at least part of Deuteronomy. This tradition is preserved too, e.g. by Grotius ¹⁰. With a slight variation Calmet thinks that the book consists of the chapters 28-31 of Deuteronomy ¹¹.

The English philosopher Lord Bolingbroke writes: «That the book, thus found, contained nothing but the law of Moses, strictly so called, or than the recapitulation of it, made in Deuteronomy, not the mosaical history, we may, nay we must conclude, from the little time that the reading in the presence of the king, and before it was sent by his order to the prophetes Huldah, took up» ¹².

So it is clear that de Wette was not the first to identify the book of the law found by Hilkiah with Deuteronomy.

2. Deuteronomy written in the 7th century B.C.

Our second question is: «Who suggested earlier that the law was not only found, but also written at the time of Hilkiah?» In 1814 in his *Recherches nouvelles sur l'histoire ancienne* C. F. Comte De Volney attributed the final redaction of the Pentateuch to Hilkiah, very likely without reading the work of de Wette ¹³. Is this accidental, or are the same ideas advanced

⁷ J. S. MENOCHIVS (1594 †), *Brevis Explicatio Sensus Literalis Totius S. Scripturae*, vol. I, Coloniae Agrippinae, 1630, p. 515.

⁸ H. VON DER HARDT, *Dulcia arva Virgilii, Quintilius Varus, in tertium typographiae jubilaum*, 1740. See H. MOELLER, *Hermann von der Hardt als Alttestamentler*, Theologische Habilitationsschrift, Leipzig, 1962, pp. 426 and 453 (unpublished); *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 7, pp. 668-669 (art. of H. BARDTKE).

⁹ *Yoma* 52b.

¹⁰ H. GROTIUS, *Annotationes ad Vetus Testamentum*, in *Opera Omnia Theologica*, vol. I, Basel, 1732, p. 173 (2 Kings 22,10).

¹¹ A. CALMET, *Commentaire littéral*, vol. 2, Paris, 1724, p. 924 (2 Kings 22,8).

¹² *The Works of Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke*, vol. 3, London, 1754, pp. 276-277.

¹³ C. F. COMTE DE VOLNEY, *Recherches nouvelles sur l'histoire ancienne*, vol. I: *Examen de l'histoire des Juifs jusqu'à la captivité de Babylone*, Paris, 1814, pp. 67-93. A. WESTPHAL, *Les Sources du Pentateuque. Étude de Critique et d'Histoire*, vol. I: *Le Problème Littéraire*, Paris, 1888, pp. 158-160.

earlier? The first time – as far as I know – some doubts are issued about the integrity of Hilkiah is in 1693 by the Deist Charles Blount in his *Oracles of Reason*. About the finding of the law he [p. 11] says: «We have only Helkiah’s Word for it»¹⁴. Nearly 50 years later the bookseller Samuel Parvish concludes «that the Whole depends only on Hilkiah: Of whose Ability and Honesty we know nothing; but whose Interest it was to have a Law, either genuine or spurious»¹⁵. In France Voltaire confidently rejected a Mosaic Pentateuch, but he is less certain about the alternative. Sometimes he puts forward the theory that the scroll discovered in the temple included the modern Pentateuch, written for the occasion by the Levites¹⁶. In *Dieu et les Hommes* Voltaire hides himself behind others: «The scholars have strongly suspected the priest Hilkiah for having himself compiled the book»¹⁷.

So we may say that in the circle of the Deists and Rationalists the integrity of Hilkiah was questioned¹⁸. It was one of their arguments to attack the reliability of the Bible.

Let us now consider two well known Old Testament scholars at the end of the 18th century: Eichhorn and Michaelis. In his *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* Eichhorn defends that neither the priests in the time of Josiah, nor the priest sent to the Samaritans invented the Pentateuch. In connection with the first opinion he gives no names. Is it because he didn't like to mention Freethinkers? He only speaks about «enemies of these books»¹⁹. In his book *Einleitung in die göttliche Schriften des Alten Bundes* Michaelis sums up some questions as: Are the Books of Moses from Esra? Are they from David? And then: Are the Books of Moses from Hilkiah? In five pages he firmly rejects this view²⁰. Regrettably he too doesn't mention any name.

3. Influences on de Wette

¹⁴ Ch. BLOUNT, *The Oracles of Reason*, London, 1693. Reprinted in *The Miscellaneous Works*, 1695, pp. 17-18. C. HOUTMAN, *Inleiding in de Pentateuch*, Supplement, Kampen, 1980, p. 33, note 3.

¹⁵ S. PARVISH, *An Inquiry into the Jewish and Christian Revelation*, London, 1739. P. KLEINERT, *Das Deuteronomium und der Deuteronomiker*, Bielefeld und Leipzig, 1872, p. 2.

¹⁶ *La Bible enfin expliquée par plusieurs aumôniers de S.M.L.R.D.P.*, Londres, 1777, 103 (anonymous, but written by VOLTAIRE).

¹⁷ *Dieu et les Hommes*, Londres, 1770, ch. 19, p. 52. B. E. SCHWARZBACH, *Voltaire's Old Testament Criticism*, Genève, 1971, p. 87.

¹⁸ I have already mentioned H. VON DER HARDT. In his last years he went away from the pietistic movement and became more rationalistic.

¹⁹ J. G. EICHORN, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, vol. 2, Leipzig, 1781, pp. 229vv. (3rd impr., 1803, pp. 257vv.).

²⁰ J. D. MICHAELIS, *Einleitung die göttlichen Schriften des Alten Bundes*, vol. I/I, Hamburg, 1787, pp. 201-205.

In 1805 de Wette published his thesis²¹. His main purpose is to show that Deuteronomy stands apart from the other four books of the [p. 12] Pentateuch. In a footnote he suggests that the book found by Hilkiah may have been Deuteronomy. But this suggestion is only touched upon in passing, and it does not look like a new suggestion, but no names are mentioned. His greatest concern is the centralisation of the cult. Deuteronomy demands centralisation. Attracted by the idea of a late origin of the Pentateuch de Wette seeks to demonstrate the late origin of Deuteronomy, and not so much the link with Josiah, which became so very important in later research²². In his *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* he adds many arguments. This work is intended to elaborate the small thesis. Now de Wette clearly shows that Deuteronomy is not only found, but also written in the time of Josiah. Possibly it is a fraud of Hilkiah himself, but he is not sure about that²³. So it seems de Wette is brought to his conclusion only by his exegetical insights. But many of the exegetical insights are noted earlier. So the tension between Ex 20 and Dt 12 is felt by Michaelis²⁴ and many others. But they are less critical than de Wette and usually defend a Mosaic origin of the Pentateuch. The identification of the book with Deuteronomy did not lead the exegetes in previous centuries to the assumption that the book was originated from the 7th century. That assumption came from the Rationalists and Freethinkers. At least via Eichhorn and Michaelis he must have known this. When we look at the religious conviction of de Wette, we see that it was a very rationalistic one. Not in the sense of declaring miracles as naturally possible, but in giving the Ratio a very prominent place. Influenced by Herder he was a Romantic too. He sought after a very radical criticism: We cannot read the Bible as our forefathers did. Once the criticism has begun, it has to go to the end. The Bible is not a historical book; it contains myth in each book. Only in this way the path shall be opened to read the deeplying message of the Bible²⁵. So it is explainable de Wette felt very much attracted to philosophers like Voltaire, directly or indirectly.

²¹ W. M. L. DE WETTE, *Dissertatio critico-exegetica qua Deuteronomium a prioribus pentateuchi libris diversum, alius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris opus demonstratur*, Jena, 1805. The title of the reprint in G. M. L. DE WETTE, *Opuscula Theologica*, Berlin, 1830, pp. 151-168, is slightly different: *Dissertatio critica qua a prioribus Deuteronomium Pentateuch in libris diversum*, etc.

²² R. SMEND, *De Welles Arbeit*, pp. 32-36. G. J. Wenham, *The Structure and Date of Deuteronomy*, Unpublished thesis, London, 1970, pp. 29-37.

²³ W. M. L. DE WETTE, *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, vol. 2, Halle, 1807, p.179.

²⁴ J.D. MICHAELIS, *Mosaisches Recht*, vol. 3, Reutlingen, 1785, pp. 42-50.

²⁵ R. SMEND, *De Welles Arbeit*, pp. 30-31. G.J. WENHAM, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 22-26.

Therefore I think we have to look to the philosophical and theological position of de Wette and the influence of it on his great discovery, more than is usually done ²⁶.

Shawzijde 86

M.J. Paul

NL-2725 PZ Zoetermeer

²⁶ In my thesis about Josiah and the centralisation of the cult I hope to investigate this subject more extensively.