Summary: The People of God in Deuteronomy

This monograph investigates the rhetoric and literary features of the final text of the book of Deuteronomy, which aim at establishing Israel's sense of identity as the people of God. These features are to be analysed on two levels. Firstly, within the world of the text, Moses forms Israel through his speeches on the last day of his life in Moab. Secondly, the book of Deuteronomy in its final form aims at recreating collective identity for Judeans in Persian times, who are to identify themselves with "Israel" as the people of God (pp. 291–295). These two levels are discerned as the internal and the external pragmatics of Deuteronomy (pp. 15 and 295–297). Exegetical analysis concentrates on texts relating to the Moab covenant (esp. Deut 29f; chapter 3) and to the end of the book in Deut 31–34 (chapter 4). These analyses are framed by a hermeneutical introduction (chapter 1), a systematic investigation of literary features of Deuteronomy relating to the formation of the people of God (chapter 2) and concluding evaluations (chapter 5).

The introductory chapter (pp. 1–17) starts with a brief discussion of previous scholarship that has led to a deeper understanding of the final form of Deuteronomy, especially by Gerhard von Rad, Norbert Lohfink, Georg Braulik, Eckart Otto, Robert Polzin and Jean-Pierre Sonnet (pp. 1–9). This chapter then lays hermeneutical foundations for the following analysis. The main aim is to investigate the 'text pragmatics' of Deuteronomy, which is understood as the summary of potential effects on addressees that can be reconstructed from the text (p. 11). This aim requires an integrative method that combines specific methodological instruments apt for analysing the four main discernible genres, which are partly interwoven within the book of Deut – narrative, rhetoric, law and poetry (pp. 12f). Moreover, the study employs the terminological distinction between internal and external pragmatics. It introduces the term 'metapragmatics', referring to those passages in which the reception of texts of Deut is commanded; and it emphasises the importance of indexicals such as personal (e.g. "I," "you," "we") and temporal (e.g. "today," "now") deictic expressions for the pragmatics of Deut (p. 15).

Chapter 2 (pp. 18–87) provides a systematic overview of rhetorical and literary features that are employed in Deut to establish the notion of Israel as the people of God. Regarding the "functional structure of Deut" (pp. 18–46) it is argued that the four superscripts in Deut 1:1; 4:44; 28:69; 33:1 serve distinctive purposes for the narrative structure of the book. Yet, the narrative structure of Deut is partly overlaid by a rhetorical structure (pp. 18f). Deut 26 plays a double structural role, concluding both Deut 12–26 and Deut 6–26 (pp. 32–35). The law code is incorporated within several literary frameworks (pp. 35–43 and chart 1, p. 44). The main aim here is to show that Moses' speeches and the narrative passages in Deut 1–11; 26–34 share common rhetorical and literary features that aim at the reception of the central law code (Deut 12–25) and the Decalogue (Deut 5:6–21). The metapragmatical function of Deut 1–11; 26–34 forms a functional framework for the law code of Deut (pp. 43–45) that is underlined by quantitative similarities (chart 3, p. 46).

Moses' speeches in Deut can be described in terms of political rhetoric (pp. 47–56). Israel is continuously addressed in second person (pp. 48f). Yet, Moses also forms Israel's collective identity using "I" and "we," especially in the brief creed texts of Deut 6,20–25; 26,1–15 (pp. 51–55). Moses' speeches concern the themes of 'orientation, legal order and decision for the future,' which Uwe Pörksen called the three domains of political speech. Moses' speeches in Deut, therefore can be described as a 'compendium of political rhetoric' (pp. 55f).

Deut shows a high awareness of pedagogy and didactics. The verbs "to love" (אהב) and "to fear" (ירא) regularly appear in combination with expressions for obedience to the law und thus show that the emotional relationship with God, according to Deut, is the basis for obedience towards God's torah (pp. 57–62). Similarly, knowledge of God (ידע) and remembering God's deeds (זכר) shall lead to obedience (p. 62). A special role is played by the verb "to learn / teach" (למד), a verb shown to appear regularly in the same sequence of verbs in Deut (pp. 62–66).

Deut employs further specific literary techniques to communicate with its readers. One of its most remarkable features is the use of the word "today" (היום), which occurs 75 times in the book (pp. 70–79). Mostly, Moses refers to his present communication of God's torah. Yet, in quotations "today" refers to significant past experiences such as the day of the Horeb theophany (Deut 5:24) or 'future' experiences such as Exile (Deut 29:27). The narrator uses the word to refer to the time of addressees (esp. Deut 34:6; cf. chart 5, p. 77). On the whole, the different connotations of "today" are purposefully interrelated in order to actualise Moses' torah-communication for the readers of Deut.

Another mode of reader communication is achieved through the theme of the writing of the torah book (Deut 31:9). The book is mentioned several times already in Moses' speeches. For readers it is only accessible through the book of Deut which they are reading and physically holding in their hands (pp. 79–81).

Most importantly, Moses grounds Israel's identity in the relationship with God, which is unfolded in the themes of the covenant and the first commandment (pp. 81–85), but also constantly repeated through reference to Yhwh as Israel's God (cf. the table p. 82). Moreover, Moses conveys moral identity to Israel through the motifs of honour and shame. Honour is related to the people's unique relationship with God, whereas shame is provoked by past or future faithlessness and disobedience (pp. 85–87).

Chapter 3 analyses the making of the Moab covenant in Deut (pp. 88–125). The superscript Deut 28:69 comes as a surprise for the reader and serves as a new hermeneutical lens for the whole book (pp. 90f). Deut 29–30 are seen to be coherently structured (pp. 91–95). Their rhetorical dynamics are to be viewed on two levels – that is, of the Moab generation and the implied addressees (pp. 95–103). Moses' digression to the future in the centre of the speech (Deut 29:15–30:10) relates to the experience of the addressees – Exile (esp. Deut 29:27) and restoration (Deut 30:1–10). At the centre of these decisive historical developments, the enigmatic verse Deut 29:28 is seen as an expression of commitment suggested to the addressees (pp. 103–107). The speech as a whole is marked by pragmatic intensity and culminates in the urgent appeal to make the decision between life and death (pp. 107f).

The Moab covenant is already anticipated in Deut 26:16–28:68 (pp. 109–116). Deut 26:16–19 provide a theological paraphrase of the covenant which is still to be made (pp. 109–111). 27:1–8 prepare the covenant rituals that are to be performed after crossing the Jordan, whereas Deut 27:9–10 express the covenant relationship that is to be established, testifying God's commitment to it (pp. 111–114). In a similar way, Deut 27:11–26 prepare the covenant ritual of blessings and curses that is to be performed on Gerizim and Ebal, whereas Deut 28:1–14, 15–68 contain Moses' blessings and curses proclaimed in Moab (pp. 114f). The rituals that are to be performed in the Promised Land are meant to guarantee the covenant's continuity in the land despite of Moses' death at its border (pp. 115f).

As the covenant speech Deut 29–30 refers back to both the Torah of Deut and the blessings and curses, all previous speeches of Moses in Deut are integrated into the dynamics of the Moab covenant (pp. 116–121). In Deut 31:1–32:47 the making of the covenant is first concluded by Moses' writing and handing over of the torah (Deut 31:9–13), but then its character is transformed by God's theophany and revelation of the Song (Deut 31:14–32:43; pp. 121–123). The Moab covenant mirrors and transforms many elements of the Sinai covenant as it is told in Ex 19–24. A decisive new element of the Moab covenant is the integration of its future breach into the narrative, which offers a chance of its subsequent re-establishment (pp. 123–125).

Chapter 4 provides an intense exegesis of Deut 31–34 (pp. 126–290). These chapters form a literary close to both Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch (pp. 127–130). Deut 31–34 are formed by the two narrative passages Deut 31:1–32,47; 32:48–34,12, both of which contain a poetic text (the Song and the Blessing of Moses, pp. 131–133).

Deut 31 shows an elaborate concentric structure with the speech of God Deut 31:15–21 in its centre (pp. 134–137). Contrary to Norbert Lohfink's view, the fabula is seen as corresponding with the narrative sequence (pp. 138–140). The exegesis of Deut 31:1–32:47 culminates in the conclusion that this narrative is formed as a sublime interplay between stabilisation and destabilisation. Joshua is first commissioned and strengthened by Moses (Deut 31:7f), then discouraged and again encouraged by God (31:15–21, 23). An analogous interplay concerns the people of Israel who are first entrusted with the conquest of the land and the transmission of the torah (31:1–6, 9–13), then confronted with the message of the Song (31:24–32:43) and finally reassured by Moses' last words 32:45–47 (pp. 228f). Several aspects of the narrative show that both the handing over of the torah and the anticipated future breach of the covenant, with all its consequences, are depicted as a transformed re-enactment of the Horeb-events as they are narrated by Moses in Deut 4; 5; 9:1–10:11 (pp. 229f). Moses' final speeches aim at teaching Israel courage, eagerness to learn, fear of God and humility (pp. 230f).

The Song of Moses is analysed with regard to some specific literary features (pp. 231–242), its context within Deut (pp. 242–252) and its intertextual relationships with other canonical texts of the Hebrew Bible (pp. 252–281). The structure of the song is seen as developed by four questions in Deut 32:6, 20, 34, 37. Its double dynamics in Deut 32:5–33, 34–43 are marked by contrasting parallels between God's speeches in Deut 32:20–27, 37–42 (pp. 232–238). The complex communicative introduction of the Song of Moses intensifies its function as a witness against Israel. It is to be uttered by a crowd of witnesses (pp. 246f). Although the Song of Moses exhibits usage very different from the usual

language and style of Deut, it shows some specific thematic connections esp. with passages from Deut 4; 8; 28; 29–30 (pp. 247–252).

The comparison between the Song of Moses and the Song of David (2 Sam 22 // Ps 18) shows that these poetical texts, both situated at the end of the lives of their respective speakers, have several features and themes in common, but depict Moses and David in contrastive roles (pp. 253–258). The manifold intertextual connections between the Song of Moses and both the Latter Prophets and the Writings (cf. the tables on p. 279) show that the Song of Moses forms a "canonical bridge" at the end of the Pentateuch with other parts of the Hebrew Bible. In this way, Moses is portrayed as the archprophet of Israel. In a canonical perspective, many prophetic texts can be read as unfolding the Song of Moses or reacting to it (pp. 280f).

Deut 32:48–34:12 form a literary conclusion of the Pentateuch, which is clearly marked by several references to previous books of the Pentateuch in Deut 32:48–34:12 (pp. 282–285 with chart 8, p. 283). Moses' blessing (Deut 33) is shaped in contrast with the Song of Moses, now emphasising Israel's positive role in the relationship with God (pp. 285–288). Deut 34 discloses Moses' lasting importance for Israel (pp. 288–290).

Chapter 5 evaluates the literary analysis of the previous chapters in five steps.

– Firstly, Deut is seen in the context of the Pentateuch as a programme to reconstruct the collective identity of 'Israel', the people of God, under Persian dominion (pp. 291–295).

– Secondly, the internal and the external pragmatics of Deuteronomy are summarised, showing especially that: the concluding evaluation of the narrator in Deut 34:10–12; the covenant speech in Deut 29–30 with its central response suggested to addressees (Deut 29:28); and the professions in Deut 6:20–25; 26:1–15 appeal to readers and therefore function on the level of external pragmatics (pp. 295–297).

– Thirdly, Deuteronomy's place within the legal hermeneutics of the Pentateuch is evaluated. Whereas the Book of the Covenant is honoured within the Pentateuch as a document of historical value, the law of Deuteronomy is systematically presented as providing an actualised replacement of the Book of the Covenant, which is both of lasting significance and a paradigm of actualisation (pp. 297–300).

– Fourthly, Deuteronomy's political theology is summarised (pp. 300f). Comparably to the Sinai covenant, Deuteronomy forms for Israel a "constitutional theocracy." The theocracy is understood as the kingdom of God (Deut 33:5), which is constitutionally realised through the making of the covenant, which depends on Israel's consent (Deut 30:15–20).

– Fifthly, the preceding pragmatic analysis of Deut is tested regarding its earliest accessible history of reception (pp. 302f). Both the literary evidence of Early Judaism as well as the early practice of prayer and torah learning suggest that the scribes of Deuteronomy did not fail their aims. On the contrary, the central importance of Deut 6:4–9 and other concerns of Deuteronomy for emerging Judaism suggest that the "today" of Deuteronomy is the "birthday" of Judaism. At the same time, Deuteronomy is the crucial book leading to the emergence of the notion of canonical scripture, by which both Christianity and Islam were influenced most significantly.