

The classical formulation of the Documentary Hypothesis supposes there were four independent sources for the Pentateuch: J [Yahwist], reflecting southern traditions around 850BC; E [Elohist], reflecting northern traditions around 750BC; a JE redaction and compilation around 650BC; D [Deuteronomist], reflecting laws and traditions of centralized worship in Judah during Josiah's reign, about 620BC; and P [Priestly], reflecting a priestly codification and genealogical framework around 550BC.

Their dating of D [comprised mostly of Deuteronomy] is based on an evolutionary assumption of the development of Israelite religion. The way they have separated the material, J and E have many holy places, ordinary people can offer sacrifices, and feasts are nomadic and agricultural, while D calls for one sanctuary, priests and Levites make sacrifices, and the feasts commemorate historical events, and in P one sanctuary is assumed, priests only offer sacrifices, and the feasts commemorate great events only. Thus, with this evolutionary perspective, they see D as occurring during Josiah's day, when he called for centralizing worship as part of his reforms.

However, there are many reasons to believe in Moses as the source for much of the material. First, the text itself refers multiple times to Moses writing things down for the community: in Exodus 17.14, Yahweh told Moses to write an account of the victory over Amalek; in Exodus 24.4 and 34.27, Moses wrote down the words of Yahweh; in Numbers 21.14, there is reference to the Book of the Wars of Yahweh; in Numbers 33.2, Yahweh commanded Moses to keep journals of their journeys; in Deuteronomy 31.19-22, Yahweh commanded Moses to write down a song; and in Deuteronomy 31.9, Moses wrote the law and gave it to the priests. For those who believe in the New Testament, there is the further evidence of Jesus' attestation to a Mosaic source for the Pentateuch in Matthew 8.4 [Mark 1.44; Luke 5.14]; 19.8 [Mark 10.3]; Mark 7.10; 12.26 [Luke 20.37]; Luke 16.29-31; 24.44; John 5.45-47; 7.19-23.

There is other literary evidence that the original material dates to the period before the monarchy. In literary form, the book of Numbers is similar to Late Bronze Age Egyptian Military Journals. Ancient Near East treaty and law forms of the late second millennium are more consistent with the Pentateuch than are first millennium forms. Examples are the presence of historical prologues, promises of blessings, and the provision for deposition and regular reading of the document, all of which were the custom for second millennium Hittite treaties [which were known in Egypt], but not in later Assyrian treaties. Also, there are remnants of archaic poetic forms in Deuteronomy 32-33. If the original source for the material had come from a much later date, these details would be off, because they had been forgotten; the same is true for the many cultural aspects depicted in the biblical account which are consistent with what we have discovered from other second millennium finds.

Furthermore, Deuteronomy is inconsistent with the monarchic political ideology which would have been used if it were written at the time of Josiah as Liberal scholars suppose, especially in that it contains subordination of the king's authority to the legal document. Thus, it is far more likely from a socio-political perspective that Deuteronomy predates the monarchy. It also would be inconsistent, if Josiah's reforms and centralization of worship were in view, to create a document that calls for renewing the covenant at an altar on Mt. Ebal near Shechem; that would be more consistent at least with the early monarchy, before the split, probably pre-temple construction. Also, according to the historical account of the later monarchy, the centralization of worship was begun before Josiah became king, and Josiah's reforms had been progressing for six years before the discovery of the law book, which is inconsistent with the idea of creating Deuteronomy for the purpose of justifying the reforms.

If the material was written during the period before the monarchy, Moses would be a logical candidate as author, because he was educated in the finest schools in Egypt and aware of such things as literary forms for covenants, law codes, and battle journals. In summary, it seems reasonable to say that Deuteronomic law can be understood just as it is represented: as an expansion of the older Exodus law with adaptation to the anticipated life in the promised land; and thus being sourced before the monarchy, in contrast to the view of the Documentary Hypothesis.