
Introduction

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For many years, the book of Kings was taken to be a record of events in the life of ancient Israel during the period of the monarchy that revealed in an unencumbered way the deeds of the kings, the complaints of the prophets, and the intervention of divine forces into political affairs when punishment was due. In more recent times, though, researchers have approached the study of the book of Kings from a variety of perspectives that have moved beyond a basic reading of the text as an historical record. Structural, theological, linguistic, ethnoarchaeological, anthropological, and more methods and disciplines constantly appear to be added to the field.¹ Part of this is doubtlessly the result of interdisciplinary dialogue that has led scholars to recognize the potential for tilling the common ground that has long gone uncultivated between traditions of study.² But another reason why the plethora of approaches has grown so rapidly in the last few decades is because of a breakdown of certain assumptions regarding the literary place of Kings in the biblical canon that has grown increasingly clear in recent years. In this sense, the study of Kings has evolved in similar directions to other areas in biblical scholarship, such as pentateuchal studies. Just as that field of research has seen major challenges to long-enduring theories and perceptions, so too has the book of Kings been the subject of reevaluation and vastly different understandings of how it should (or for some, how it must) be read.

Kings and the Theory of the Deuteronomistic History

Martin Noth's influential model of an exilic Deuteronomistic History (DH), that is, the historiographic work spanning Deuteronomy–Kings, became the essential point of departure for qualifying the composition of Kings in relation to the other narratives presenting the history of Israel, from the period of the “conquest” to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile.³ Since the middle of the twentieth century, the book of Kings was almost always viewed within the context of the larger DH, worked into its current place by a Judahite scribe residing as a captive in Babylon. For many, the idea of such a redaction taking place in the exile made—and continues to make—very good sense.⁴ The majority of the population deported to Babylon was composed of the socioeconomic and intellectual elite of Judahite society, precisely the people who would have either had genuine archival sources in their possession or who would have been well steeped in the contents of those sources upon being taken captive to Mesopotamia. Many arguments that support such a view can be adduced. For instance, a recent examination of scribal culture by David M. Carr makes clear that “education-enculturation” in ancient Israel (as elsewhere in the ancient world) would have led scribes in exile to be able to reproduce documents replete with historical information;⁵ the conditions of exile would have doubtlessly led those scribes to determine the causes of their recent experiences and read those causes back into their history. Assuming five main sources of Kings (the Succession Narrative in 1 Kings 1–2*, the “books of the chronicles of the kings of Israel,” the “books of the chronicles of the kings Judah,” the “books of the acts of Solomon,” and prophetic traditions, namely the prophetic narratives⁶), Noth's Deuteronomist edited these sources, shortened and/or enlarged them, and embedded his own speeches. From this perspective, there was no “book” of Kings beyond the context of the larger DH, as the major sources were combined into Kings at the same time as the sources in the other parts of the DH.

A major stage in the development of Noth's theory came at the hands of Frank M. Cross, who observed that the DH appeared in a penultimate form during the reign of King Josiah in the last quarter of the seventh century BCE, concomitant with Josiah's reported religious reform, itself apparently motivated by the discovery and influence of the book of Deuteronomy (2 Kgs 22:8–23:25). Only a fairly small amount of material was added during an exilic updating of the largely complete work.⁷ One of the core notions of Cross's model is the integration of the genuinely pro-Davidic and prodynastic themes currently found in Deuteronomy–Kings (though there

is little overt pro-Davidic ideology in Deuteronomy in comparison to the subsequent texts in the DH) alongside the obvious antinorthern sentiments encountered therein. For Cross, a preexilic setting provides the most satisfactory explanation for these thematic dynamics.⁸ As a literary entity, then, Kings was primarily a product of the royal court itself, alongside an abundance of material in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, and Samuel.

Both Noth's and Cross's hypotheses took on enormous popularity on both sides of the Atlantic, establishing for many scholars the basic paradigm in which to consider not only the literary context for Kings but also the way in which ancient Israelite religion and thought could be charted and critically evaluated. A number of important studies emerging throughout the 1980s and 1990s developed Cross's theory further, with some scholars suggesting that the historiographic enterprise had pre-Josianic roots that were then subjected to successive accretions down to the time of exile.⁹ On the other hand, the model of an exilic redactor proposed by Noth led to new scholarly results in the literary history of Kings beyond the context of the royal court. Following the lead of R. Smend, the "Göttingen School" brought about variations on Noth's model, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. Their model saw successive redactions of the DH from Deuteronomy–Kings during the exile and beyond,¹⁰ with the incorporation of different elements—historical, legal, theological—stemming from different redactional hands.¹¹ One of the attractive features of this model was that it explored the complexity and the nuances of the Deuteronomistic theology within texts that advocates of the "Cross" school assigned primarily to a single circle of authors/redactors. What seemed certain for the majority of researchers, however, was that the concept of the DH was the best way to view the relationship between the texts attributed to it.

Alternate Literary and Compositional Models for Contextualizing Kings

Most current approaches to the material in Deuteronomy–Kings or Joshua–Kings, then, have continued to assess the texts within the theory of an expansive DH. But the present state of source criticism in Kings has become much more complex than the model set out by Noth. Some scholars conceive of a very limited group of scribes in an equally limited time period during the exile producing a modestly finite expanse of literature. Others, however, see a far more expansive movement spanning several centuries, as Deuteronomistic language and thought were in use for a much longer period of time

than that of the exilic era (587–538 BCE).¹² With regard to the use of sources, we are left with rather pressing questions. Did a preexilic or an exilic group establish a discourse taken up by later writers who were *not* self-conceived “Deuteronomists,” or did a Deuteronom(ist)ic “school” indeed persist well into the Persian period?¹³ There is also debate with regard to the social location of this group: were they descendants of northern Levite/prophetic groups, sage-scribes in Jerusalem, or a combination of both? Answering this set of questions determines the manner in which scholars can determine the expanse and purpose of the sources used by the authors/redactors of Kings. The same collection of archival or oral sources would inevitably be taken up and developed differently by scribes working in different social environments (for example, a scribe answering to a native Israelite king as opposed to one answering to a priest or governor that was in turn accountable to a foreign emperor). As a consequence, “Deuteronomistic” layers may not be uniquely associated with the exilic epoch but demand a larger scope of evaluation.

For the followers of Noth’s theory, evidently, the Deuteronomistic material in Kings required reexamination on the basis of language and content, resulting in controversies regarding dating, sources, and literary emphases and forms. While many scholars still took an exilic (or postexilic) perspective of the historiographic work from Deuteronomy–Kings for granted, the redactions within this work were much more complex, they persevered for a longer period, and the redactors apparently used different working methods. This became an even more intricate matter when preexilic versions of Kings or the larger DH were taken into consideration, in no small part due to the shift in circumstances from an independent Israelite scribal culture based securely in Jerusalem to that of scribes functioning under the shadow of a foreign empire (Babylonian or Persian).

Two examples for research on the DH illustrate this. The Göttingen school attempted to substantiate what was suggested to be the latest Deuteronomist reworking. For instance, Timo Veijola considered in intense studies the language and theology of “nomistic” Deuteronomists, assumed to be the last late exilic layer (DtrN).¹⁴ Beyond this, Thomas Römer suggests that the so-called DH was edited and enlarged in the Persian period.¹⁵ This reconsideration had numerous bearings on the understanding of Kings as an independent book. A brief glance at two random examples illustrates the complexity of reconstructions of redactional processes in Kings: André Lemaire suggests ongoing, partly pre-Deuteronomist stages of composition and redaction in Kings beginning in the ninth century,¹⁶ and recently Marvin Sweeney put forward five major periods that shaped the book of Kings

during the reigns of Solomon, Jehu, Hezekiah, Josiah, and, the exile. Notably, Kings obtained its place within a DH only during the latest stages of this redactional model.¹⁷

In recent years, however, many scholars have begun to question the viability of the term *Deuteronomistic*, suggesting that it has become too amorphous a qualification.¹⁸ This speaks to the diversity of sources on which “Deuteronomistic” language has been imposed, but it also calls into question the usefulness of the entire paradigm as a basis for evaluating literary units within Deuteronomy–Kings. Indeed, the papers presented at the Deuteronomistic History sessions at the annual Society of Biblical Literature meetings of the last several years often call into question the viability of this model. Though it is common for scholars to accept a unit of material spanning Samuel–Kings as a block of historical and ideological discourse, anything beyond this no longer benefits from the surety of presumption.¹⁹ Joshua is often grouped among a narrative block involving pentateuchal materials, and the book of Judges is similarly called into question as an original part of a single historiographic narrative.²⁰ And for some, even Samuel is open to question as the foundational “book” from the preexilic or exilic period.²¹ Many scholars still favor the construct of a DH, but an ever increasing number of scholars find weaknesses with this approach and, paralleling developments within the field of pentateuchal studies, prefer to see smaller units of material on the level of compositional cohesion.²² For them, these works were eventually shaped into a more coherent whole, but not in the context of a Deuteronomistic paradigm or at the hands of a single, identifiable group or school of thought. The overall literary and theological context for Kings has become much more complex than the proposals of Noth or Cross, or than the literary source model of the Göttingen school.

Over the last few decades, a potent classical alternative to the theory of a DH has been to view Kings as part of a larger framework spanning Genesis–Kings, a unit called the “Enneateuch” or the “Primary History.”²³ Two compelling elements provide the basis for scholars to consider this literature as a unified whole. First, it spans the major collection–narrative material in the Hebrew Bible, telling the tale of Israel’s history from the creation of the world to the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the nation; it is followed in the masoretic tradition by the prophetic books, which constitute a wholly different literary genre. Second, a number of thematic threads come together with this model. For instance, as B. Peckham has discussed, it implies an odyssey of sorts, with the creation of the Garden of Eden ostensibly set somewhere in Mesopotamia in the opening of Genesis and with a

return to that locale at the end of Kings.²⁴ The implication is that the exile to Babylon is an integral part of the divine plan for Israel woven into the very fabric of creation; the destruction of Jerusalem and deportation of its population is not the end of Israel as a nation. Though this literary model carries with it a new and rich way of ascribing meaning to the text, it also imposes on Kings certain ideological problems regarding the composition of the Pentateuch that have yielded major questions and avenues of inquiry within old and modern pentateuchal scholarship.²⁵ Thus, while Kings becomes subject to a larger theology within the unit, it inherits critical difficulties that are not connected to its discourse when read in isolation.²⁶

Considerations about the *Sitz im Leben* of the theology found in Kings showcase how much the interpretation of Kings gained from considerations about its contexts. The narrative of Kings is genetically related to the manner in which nations conquered and controlled other nations; more specifically, the ideology of the authors/redactors of the book is in significant dialogue with the treaty language common to these praxes.²⁷ It is here where even as a self-contained literary work, the study of Kings in the last two decades has benefited greatly from a consideration of Deuteronomy's adaptation of near eastern treaty language for the purposes of establishing a hierarchical relationship between Israel and its suzerain overlord, YHWH.²⁸ Only Deuteronomy's intimate familiarity with the neo-Assyrian treaties in particular explains why its authors constructed their work in part as a response to them.²⁹ The overt concern with neo-Assyrian dominance over both the northern and southern monarchs from the late eighth through the late seventh century and the standards of evaluation regarding these monarchs reveals that the author/redactor of Kings developed a religious understanding of history along very similar lines, with certain rulers lauded for adhering to the suzerainty of YHWH and others lambasted for forming illegitimate treaties with the Assyrian emperors instead.³⁰ The cultural background of the author/redactor is of especial importance when it comes to the sources of the book of Kings that were subjected to this critical and theological scrutiny. When scholars consider the nature of the judgment formulas in Kings against their cultural background reflected in the Akkadian (especially Babylonian) chronicle literature, the book suddenly stands out as a unique entity in comparison to the works that immediately precede it in the biblical canon, and the relationship between the authors/redactors and component parts reveals much about the way the composite whole would have been understood in antiquity.³¹

Sources, Redaction, and Historicity in Kings

The aforementioned relationship between the authors/redactors of Kings and the component parts they inherited and shaped requires special consideration for any critical engagement with the book. The authors/redactors of the work regularly engage ideas both imported from foreign cultures and recycled from Israelite religious and social traditions, and the end result is a corpus that both creates a linear historical narrative and yields a complicated system of thought and political/theological meditation. But on almost all research fronts, scholars recognize that understanding the construction of Kings hinges on the questions of historiographical interests, treatment of sources, and redactional strategies. We limit ourselves to highlighting a few telling examples in this regard.

On the one hand, what can the recovery of these concerns reveal about the needs and expectations of audiences and authors? To what degree do sources call attention to themselves within the work, and why?³² Did the authors/redactors deliberately emulate forms of historiography from neighboring cultures, and if so, what does this say about their understanding of Israel's place in that world? On the other hand, if Kings is an integral part of a larger matrix of biblical literature, what were the relationships between the authors/redactors of Kings and the writers behind those other works?³³ Were they, as is often believed, royal scribes writing records on behalf of their monarchic patrons and thus connected to other literary works produced under monarchic auspices?³⁴ Did the authors/redactors of Kings possess shifting allegiances commensurate with the shifting forces and fortunes of the nation at pivotal moments in their corporate existence? How do the conflicting thematic foci of the book (for example, the incomparability of a Hezekiah or a Josiah or the predetermination of destruction due to Manasseh's actions) relate to larger ideological confrontations in the exilic or postexilic periods?³⁵ The diversity of these questions is understandable given the range of opinions regarding the authorship of the book of Kings and the ideological platforms or preferences infused into its chapters.

The Mandate of the Present Volume

The essays in this volume emerged from discussions following special sessions at the European Association of Biblical Studies and the Society of Biblical Literature meetings in 2007 in Vienna, Austria, and San Diego, California. These sessions were devoted to the question of the form, function, origins,

and transmission of the book of Kings, and a special emphasis was placed on the need for scholars in both Europe and North America to engage in an open discussion on the problems faced by the predominant models in both continents. This volume represents the consensus that scholarship demands new methods and avenues into the study of Kings as a work of literature, a testament to intellectual culture, a window into scribal methodology, and significantly, a platform for the development of various theologies in ancient Israel. The essays in the present volume represent the disparate perceptions of scholars for whom the book of Kings remains a central focus of research into the religion of ancient Israel, but it also represents the common concern with recognizing its polyvalence as a literary work and its importance as an historical resource. In an attempt to lend equal perspective on related approaches, the essays have been divided into three parts.

Part one, "Sources and Transmission," focuses on where the texts underlying the current shape of Kings were derived from, what conditions led to the selection of those sources, and what they suggest about the cultural profile of the scribes who inherited and worked on them. In chapter 1, "Text and Literary History: The Case of 1 Kings 19 (MT and LXX)," Philippe Hugo focuses on the text-critical method as a tool for understanding the divergent forms of the book of Kings in the traditional Hebrew and ancient Greek versions of the work. Since both the LXX and MT textual witnesses for the book of Kings attest to different literary text forms or editions, the task of research involves identifying these text forms in order to locate them chronologically in relation to one another. This entails a review of theories of the redactional history of the book of Kings, which is usually based only on evidence from MT. Hugo's paper contributes to this debate by focusing on the story of Elijah and showing that the Hebrew text underlying the LXX is older and that the proto-MT is a theological rewriting of the narrative. In chapter 2, "Warfare and Treaty Formulas in the Background of Kings," Klaus-Peter Adam examines formulaic phrases regarding warfare and treaties that recur consistently throughout a collection of narratives in the book of Kings. This points to an older stratum of narrative closely related to Akkadian chronicles governed by similar formulas, which served the interests of dominant dynasties; this stratum is preserved and transmitted within the larger narrative of Kings, which has significant implications concerning the time and place of the redaction.

Hugo and Adam each approach the book of Kings at points before final canonization. According to Hugo, the MT, in its difference from LXX, is the result of ongoing theological developments in Kings. This manner of looking at the text has a venerable legacy in scholarship, and others have

recognized that the theological paradigm at one stage of development gives way to divergent readings of history and determinations of its meaning at later stages. Similarly for Adam, the reliance on Akkadian antecedents in the construction of a chronicle of military confrontation yields a work of a very different character well before this major stratum was submerged into a far more expansive narrative. For Adam, however, the matter is an earlier one than the differences identified by Hugo, pointing to an intellectual system in a more primitive form struggling to determine its place within the larger ancient Near Eastern cultural continuum.

Part two, "Prophecy and Redaction," considers the hermeneutical agendas implicit in the different redactional strata within Kings, as well as the symbolic function of those redactional accretions in dialogue with extant historical and ideological presumptions promoted by earlier literary versions of the texts now found within the book. Michael Pietsch brings this to bear on the oracle of Huldah in 2 Kings 22:14-20 in his essay "Prophetess of Doom: Hermeneutical Reflections on the Huldah Oracle (2 Kings 22)." Pietsch looks to the hermeneutical significance of Huldah's oracle as an exilic prism through which we can discern the theology of the book of Kings. The oracle evinces important assumptions of both the redactors/authors and their audience regarding historical events and their religious significance, but also suggests that the oracle was an exilic work introduced into an earlier narrative that was known to the audience of Kings. With a similar eye to the qualification of preexilic events in light of the reality of exile, Jeremy Schipper considers successive redactions of Kings in thematic relation to Hezekiah's reign in his essay, "Hezekiah, Manasseh, and Dynastic or Transgenerational Punishment." Schipper looks to the parallel material regarding Hezekiah found in Kings and Isaiah, and identifies an "anti-Hezekiah" redaction emerging from the deportation of 597 but dating to a time before the fall of Jerusalem in 587. Upon considering a pattern of generational punishment oracles taken up by a number of prophetic traditions, Schipper reconsiders the conditions and concerns that led a later redactor to blame Manasseh for the fall of Jerusalem, thereby exonerating Hezekiah.

Schipper and Pietsch both see the prophetic personality and the phenomenon of prophecy as pivotal in the growth of the literary work, triggering different redactional strata as later writers attempted to reconcile prophetic oracles and experienced history. This speaks on one level to the close connection between the prophetic purview and the sensibilities of the redactor or redactors of Kings, as noted above. However, it is also clear that by reshaping the historiography in light of prophetic phenomena, the writer

who reformulated Kings also extended his own vision over the prophetic tradition, countering criticism with criticism, superimposing recurring patterns in history over the spontaneous pronouncements of the oracles, and taking liberties with the literary form of (once) oral dicta. This ensured that subsequent audiences would be privy to the “correct” ways of recalling earlier events above and beyond the voice of independent prophetic figures or texts.

Part three, “Authors and Audiences,” attempts to look to the social context in which the literature in question was conceived, disseminated, and quite likely debated. In “The Preexilic Redaction of Kings and Priestly Authority in Jerusalem,” Jeffrey Geoghegan addresses the matter of lineage and ideology in relation to the redaction of Kings and the significance of Jerusalem as the background for this redactional activity. Geoghegan identifies the cultic concerns of the narratives in Kings as consistently highlighting the role of northern Levites. This points to the Levitical identity of the redactors of Kings as well as their relationship to the larger “Deuteronomistic” literature, which in turn reveals much about the factions of the royal court in the late preexilic period. Geoghegan’s essay brings up the thorny issue of whose interests were ultimately reflected in the shape of Kings; the essay also suggests new ways of understanding the relationship of Kings to the various legal traditions (especially Deuteronomy) preserved elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. Mark Leuchter provides a different angle on the issue in his essay “The Sociolinguistic and Rhetorical Implications of Source Citations in Kings.” Leuchter considers the three major sources cited by the author of Kings (the book/s of the “chronicles” of the kings of Judah/Israel; the book of the “events” of Solomon) from the perspective of sociolinguistic inquiry to determine presuppositions regarding the author’s intended audience. The evidence suggests a literate but non-elite rural audience, for example, the *‘am ha’aretz*, or landed gentry of Judah living shortly after the reign of Josiah. Upon identifying this audience, he then considers the source citations from a rhetorical-critical perspective, shedding light on the conditions behind the redaction of the book as well as carrying implications for the redactional relationship between Samuel–Kings and the alteration of an earlier and enduring Davidic myth.

The studies by Geoghegan and Leuchter are suggestive of the significance of Josiah’s reign on the formation of Kings, insofar as the authors identified in each respective study appear concerned with conditions faced by the population of Judah following that king’s death and the failure of his reform. But both of these works further signal the difficulty in simply identifying the

primary redaction of Kings during Josiah's reign. The presuppositions of the authors regarding their audiences and the treatment/evaluation of history (and, notably, the ancient vehicles for the *telling* of history) point to a time of turbulence in the years following Josiah as the backdrop for a significant contribution to the formation of the book of Kings. This alone raises questions regarding how the book might qualify as a "royal" historiography, a position many scholars have adopted: if Kings was primarily constructed to relate to a particular king's reign once it was over, and not in relation to the reign of a contemporaneous monarch, the monopoly some scholars have suggested regarding the production of literature and the Jerusalem royal court requires reevaluation.

The present volume also includes a response from Graeme Auld, who considers the essays herein in light of his own well-known work on the literary scope, sources, and ideological *Tendenz* in both Kings and Chronicles. Auld is an ideal respondent to the ideas proposed in this volume, as his own monograph *Kings without Privilege* posed a major challenge to prevailing scholarly models regarding the composition of Kings upon its debut in 1994. Auld considers the various approaches in the essays herein in relation to his own highly developed theory regarding the growth of the book of Kings from a source shared with Chronicles (his "Book of Two Houses"), and determines the degree to which his theory and those proposed in the present volume share common ground or, alternately, disagree on pressing matters involving content, scope, and methodology. His response is a fitting conclusion to a collection of scholarly voices that all recognize the need to question consensus views when cracks in the surface become all too clear.

The essays in the present volume represent an international cross-section of research into the book of Kings and provide an insight into the state of the field. It is clear that the different angles taken by the contributors to this volume evidence a diversity of understandings and preferences both conceptually and methodologically, but these essays also suggest that these understandings may be complementary. These studies carry important implications for perceiving the development of hermeneutics, literacy, social identity, theology, and politics in ancient Israel both in terms of the world within the text and in the world behind it. It is our hope that this will lead to new and meaningful ways for scholars to continue to see the pivotal role of Kings in the formation of the Bible and, consequently, in the definition and reification of biblical audiences in antiquity and beyond.