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THE BOOK OF KINGS
AS NARRATIVE LITERATURE

The book of Kings is *narrative* literature, rather than some other sort (e.g. poetic literature). A story is narrated, involving a number of characters; events follow each other in chronological sequence, from its beginning to its end; and the whole is bound together by verbal and thematic links between its parts. The main characters in the story are the LORD God of Israel, various Israelite kings and prophets, and a number of significant foreigners—although it is not always the main characters who are accorded the most prominence. It is a recurring feature of the Elisha narratives in 2 Kings 3–8, for example, that it is characteristically the humble and lowly who are the channels of God's salvation to Israelite and foreigner alike, rather than those of status and importance. The account of the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5 offers a particularly good example of this, in its account of the arrogant army chief who is set and kept on the path to healing by his servants (5.2-3, 13) and ends up as 'a little child' (5.14) under prophetic authority (cf. further Chapter 6).

Narratives commonly have plots. The plot of the book of Kings concerns the attempt that Israel makes under its monarchy (or more often, does not make) to live as the people of God in the promised land, and how God deals with his people in their success and failure. It is a plot worked out gradually, as king succeeds king from David (1 Kgs 1.1) through to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 25.7), with an epilogue reserved for Jehoiachin (25.27-30). It is also a plot worked out in an

ordered way, as the reign of each king is situated in the framework with its 'regnal formulae' within which the book is constructed (see Chapter 1.3.a for an account of the framework). These formulae, with their general regularity of expression throughout Kings, not only indicate how firmly rooted in the 'real' world the narrative is intended to be, but also contribute much to the book's sense of narrative coherence—to the sense that it 'hangs together' as a single piece of work (cf., for example, 1 Kgs 14.22-24 with 2 Kgs 16.2-4, and both with 2 Kgs 17.7-11). Ancient tradition ascribed the book, in fact, to a single author—to the prophet Jeremiah (cf. *B. Bat.* 15a).

1. Theories about Authorship, Date and Place

Modern scholarship has, on the whole, doubted the reliability of the above-mentioned tradition. It has generally been doubted whether a single author could have written the whole book at all. Although there is certainly a significant degree of coherence to be found within it, yet (it has been argued) there is a greater or lesser degree of incoherence as well. The book of Kings has features which are unexpected in the work of a single author—inconsistencies, repetitions, variations in style and language, and so on.

For example, there is an obvious inconsistency in 2 Kgs 17.24-41. Here, in the account of the religion of the peoples settled in the land of Israel after the exile of the northern Israelites to Assyria, we are first told that these peoples 'feared the LORD but also served their own gods' (v. 33). Almost immediately, however, this statement is disputed: 'they do not fear the LORD, and they do not follow the statutes...' (v. 34). It is made quite clear that the worship of other gods is incompatible with the worship of the LORD (vv. 35-40). Yet the summary statement of v. 41 appears to return to the perspective of v. 33: 'So these nations feared the LORD, and also served their graven images'. There appear to be two competing views here.

Then again, 2 Kgs 18.9-12 essentially repeats information we already find in 2 Kgs 17.1-6. We are told twice of Shalmaneser's siege of Samaria, of the fall of the city in

Hoshea's ninth year, and of the exile of the Israelites in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. This kind of repetition requires an explanation.

Finally by way of example, there appear to be differences in style and language between the regnal formulae in the majority of the book of Kings and those in the closing chapters. Nelson (1981) argues that the regnal formulae up until the reign of Jehoahaz of Judah (2 Kgs 23.31-35) display a fascinating diversity within an overall unity of expression. The formulae for the last four kings of Judah, however, are all virtually the same, are shorter than their predecessors, and are not supplemented by additional information. For Nelson, there is a rigidity about these formulae which suggests an imitator of the original author of Kings who lacked his creative flair.

a. Author and Sources

Examples like those just described have persuaded the majority of modern scholars that, whatever else may be true about the composition of the book of Kings, at the very least the person who put it together was not a free agent, able to do just as he wished. He was to a greater or lesser extent constrained by the material available to him; and he was unable or unwilling to impose complete consistency upon it. The 'tensions' within the book, on this view, are the result of the straightforward incorporation within it of source materials of differing perspectives. For Martin Noth, for example, who in 1943 published a study of all the books from Deuteronomy to Kings which has proved highly influential in subsequent discussion, the person behind these books—given the name 'Deuteronomist', because of the centrality of Deuteronomy to his thinking, '...did not intend to create something original and of a piece but was at pains to select, compile, arrange and interpret existing traditional material...' That is why '...the separate parts of the work seem disunited and heterogeneous' (Eng. trans. 1981: 77). The Deuteronomist, working in the period after the events described in 2 Kings 24-25 (the exile of Judah from the land), was content to allow his own voice to be heard in the midst of the voices expressed in this 'existing traditional material', occasionally offering more

extended passages of interpretation to help the reader to grasp his own point of view (e.g. 2 Kgs 17.7-23, which summarizes the history of Israel from a Deuteronomistic point of view).

The book of Kings itself refers, of course, to sources: 'the book of the acts of Solomon' (1 Kgs 11.41); and much more frequently, 'the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel' (e.g. 1 Kgs 14.19) and 'the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah' (e.g. 1 Kgs 14.29). Even those modern scholars who have been content to accept that such sources actually existed have doubted, however, whether they can account for the variety of the material that we find in Kings. Various other theories about sources have therefore been put forward. It was the common belief before Noth that the hypothetical Pentateuchal sources J and E continued beyond the Pentateuch at least into Joshua; and some thought that these sources extended as far as Kings. Then again, many have found a 'Court' or 'Succession Narrative' in 2 Samuel, the final section of which provided the basic material for 1 Kings 1-2; while it is widely accepted that cycles of prophetic narratives lie behind the presentation of such prophets as Elijah and Elisha. It is to a great extent the differing character of such sources, it has been alleged, which has produced the 'unevennesses' that we now find in the finished product that we are studying.

b. *Text and Editors*

Other Old Testament scholars, however, have not been convinced that all the tensions within a book like Kings can be explained in terms of the use of source material. Some of these tensions, it has been argued, imply that the original work has been expanded by one or more later editors. They, too, were constrained by what lay before them; and they, too, were only able to make the text convey their particular message to a certain extent. There are various forms of theory about secondary editing. The two main lines of thought, however, are that the book of Kings known to us now is an updated version either of an originally pre-exilic book or of an originally exilic book.

That the book of Kings is pre-exilic in origin is an older

critical idea which never entirely disappeared, in spite of Noth's hypothesis about Deuteronomy-Kings, and in due course has come to shape for many scholars the way in which Noth's overall thesis is understood. F.M. Cross is widely acknowledged as the leading influence in establishing a school of thought which understands Noth's entire Deuteronomistic History as originally pre-exilic, dating from the reign of king Josiah (cf. 2 Kgs 22-23). For Cross the work was a propaganda document designed to persuade northern Israel to return to Judah and the temple, and to persuade Judah that its restoration to ancient grandeur depended upon the return of the nation to the covenant with the LORD and the return of her king to the ways of David. Its optimistic tone is now rather subdued in the exilic edition by more pessimistic passages such as 2 Kgs 21.2-15, which speak of the inevitability of Judah's condemnation and cloud the earlier distinction between Israel and Judah. These passages represent the perspective of Deuteronomists who have experienced the exile. This view of the composition of the Deuteronomistic History in general and of Kings in particular has proved attractive to Old Testament scholars, particularly in North America, although by no means everyone who has subscribed to a pre-exilic edition of Kings has also thought that the description of Josiah's reign represented the highlight of this original. There has been some support, rather, for the figure of Hezekiah as the original 'hero' of the book.

The second main theory is more German than North American. It is associated in the first instance with the University of Göttingen and the particular figure of R. Smend. On this view, Noth's exilic dating of the Deuteronomistic History (including Kings) is quite correct. However, the original (DtrG) has subsequently been expanded by Deuteronomistic editors who were interested, first of all, in prophecy (DtrP), and secondly in law (DtrN). There is a two-fold redaction of Kings, then, each redaction introducing new emphases. The prophetic redactor introduced such texts as 1 Kgs 14.7-11, 16.1-4, and 21.20b-24, which are concerned with prophecy and fulfilment. The 'nomistic' redactor added passages like 1 Kgs 6.11-13 and

9.1-9, which emphasize the theme of obedience and disobedience and present a more advanced theology of law.

c. *Date and Place*

For most scholars of the modern era, then, what we have in Kings is a composite work, put together over a longer or shorter period of time by a number of authors or editors, its various parts speaking with more or less conflicting voices. The date which scholars give for the book, or at least emphasize as the date of the 'main' work, obviously depends upon which theory about composition is adopted. Although some scholars have argued that there was already a substantial and continuous narrative about the Israelite monarchy as early as the ninth century BCE (e.g. A.F. Campbell), what we might refer to as the 'mainstream' datings of Kings in line with the major theories about composition just discussed would begin with a hypothetical pre-exilic version of the seventh century BCE (e.g. Provan, 1988: 133-55; McKenzie, 1991: 117-34). In its present form, of course, the book could not possibly have been written before the sixth century (cf. the description of Jehoiachin's release in 2 Kgs 25.27-30, which means that this passage could not have been written before 561 BCE), which is precisely when some think it was *first* put together (e.g. Noth, 1981: 79-83). W. Dietrich, working with the Göttingen model, dates DtrG around 580, DtrN around 560, and DtrP at some point in between. Other scholars, however, maintain that Kings is the product of a still later time, and it must be said that there is evidence that at least some reworking of the text has taken place in the Persian period. For example, the intriguing phrase 'governors of the land' in 1 Kgs 10.15 seems best understood in the light of the organization of the Persian empire, when the land described in 4.24 [MT 5.4] as lit. 'Across-The-River' (RSV's 'region west of the Euphrates') was indeed administered on behalf of the Persian emperor by governors (cf. Ezra 8.36; Neh. 2.7, 9). In fact, the Hebrew text's 'kings of the evening' in 10.15 (RSV's 'kings of Arabia') is possibly a poetic reference to kings of the *west* (where the sun sets), the rulers of areas within Solomon's empire. Solomon's wealth, then, comes from revenue deriving from within the empire, as well as

from explorers and traders perhaps working outside the empire; but the point is that this reality is described in language which suggests a Persian perspective.

Scholarly opinion on the place of writing also varies. The two main contenders are Palestine and Babylon, with the former clearly being implied on the pre-exilic theory of composition and being favoured also by the majority of those who write of exilic composition or editing. The sources, it is argued, would have been more accessible in Palestine, and the interests of the book are more in Palestine than in Babylon. For example, the idolatrous practices described in Kings are Canaanite rather than Babylonian, while the book is clearly more interested in the destruction of Judah than in the exile.

2. Reading the Book of Kings as Narrative

a. *'Traditional Modern' Reading*

It is hardly surprising, given the general perception of the nature of Kings within the academic community throughout most of the modern period as I have just described it, that scholarly reading of the book *as* a book in this period should generally have ceased. It is not difficult at all to find monographs and articles from this period which hypothesize along the lines mentioned above about the original source material used by the editors of Kings, or about the various levels of editing which might exist in the text. It is not even very difficult to find discussion of the theology or theologies of the various people supposed to have been responsible for the book, as we shall see later (Chapter 5). What is thin on the ground before the last decade or so is writing on the book itself in its final form as a piece of narrative. This is also true of commentaries. There is a plentiful supply of commentaries which tell the reader, on the one hand, what individual pieces of Kings might have meant before they were incorporated into the book; or, on the other, which pieces are 'original' to the book and which are later additions. We may fairly characterize the commentaries of Gray, Jones and DeVries, for example, as those which place emphasis on such matters. Then again, there is no shortage of discussion of the histori-

cal and cultural background of the various parts of Kings; of the likely geographical location of the various cities mentioned in the text; of the obscurities of Old Testament flora and fauna. Cogan and Tadmor, and Wiseman, for example, tend to give great attention to such things. Of the analysis of bits and pieces there has been (and continues to be) no end. Of the reading of a reconstructed narrative of some kind—the text rearranged to make it more ‘plausible’, and the various ‘inconsistent’ parts filtered out or subordinated to the narrative line being pursued by the commentator—there has been a little. But of the reading of the book as it stands *as a complete story* there has been, until recently, scarcely any.

This is not surprising, given the widespread conviction among scholars that the book is not in its fundamental nature a story in the conventional sense, but a more or less incoherent combination of sources and redactional layers. It is unsurprising in particular when we remember that the predominant interest of many scholarly readers of Old Testament narrative throughout the modern period has been in the history which is thought to lie behind the text rather than in the text itself. There has been a general tendency in exegetical endeavour, in fact, to view the text more as a quarry out of which ‘facts’ are to be mined than as a story that is to be read—a tendency which is just as evident in what are generally termed ‘conservative’ works as it is in any other sort. It is striking that in Wiseman’s recent commentary, for instance, the author spends much more time relating pieces of text to events outside the text, many of which the text knows nothing of, than he spends explaining the connection of the various pieces of text *to each other*. The nature of the text as continuous narrative is simply not taken seriously when it comes to its interpretation. His comments on 2 Kgs 8.1-6 offer a particularly good example of this. Apparently we may only say, in spite of its narrative location, that the incident described here ‘*may* [my italics] have taken place in the reign of Jehoram’ (1993: 212). What is going on *behind* the text is regarded as much more important than what is happening *in* it—even though the text may be viewed as one inspired by God himself. This is only one example of what has generally been the case in modern read-

ing of Hebrew narrative. The text has all too often been thought to exist only so that it may be peeled away, layer by layer, to reveal historical ‘reality’—the coherent entity behind the multi-faceted incoherence of the text.

b. *Newer Narrative Approaches*

The past decade or so, however, has seen something of a challenge to this way of thinking about Hebrew narrative, a challenge with far-reaching implications for the way in which it is read. It has come, perhaps predictably, not from those interested primarily in history, but from those with expertise and broader interests in literature. It is expressed in the first instance in terms of scepticism: scepticism about the assumption of incoherence which is so widely shared by Old Testament exegetes. Is repetition necessarily an indication of multiple sources or editors? Various authors have shown, to the contrary, that repetition in narrative can be understood as an aspect of literary artistry (e.g. Licht, 1978: 51-95; Alter, 1981: 88-113). What of variation in style and language and ‘inconsistency’? Can individual authors not vary their style and language for their own particular literary purposes; and what is that which compels us to use the word ‘inconsistent’ rather than terms such as ‘theologically complex’ or ‘ironic’ (cf. Sternberg, 1985: 84-152, 186-320; Gunn and Fewell, 1993: 46-89, 147-73)? Is there anything, in fact, which *compels* us to see incoherence in a book such as Kings? Or is it simply that Old Testament scholars, often lacking general competence in literary matters, and approaching the text with inherited presuppositions about its incoherent nature (among other things), have largely found what they expected to find?

The questioning has been sharp; and traditional modern Old Testament scholarship has often found it difficult to mount a successful rearguard action in attempting to respond to it. The cause has not been helped by the fact that much of the more recent work on Hebrew narrative, which has eschewed speculation about the way in which the biblical texts might have reached their present form, and has attempted to understand them just as they are, has been extraordinarily fruitful in its efforts to make sense of them.

It has revealed the extent of the artistry which has been involved in constructing, not only individual stories, but also whole sections of text and entire books. Incoherence tends to dissolve in the course of such analysis; and models of composition which presuppose frustrated or reluctant authors, not fully in control of their material, or incompetent editors, intruding their presence sufficiently that we should notice them, but unable fully to impose themselves—such models have appeared increasingly implausible. It is more and more difficult, in the light of the evidence, to view the authors of the biblical narrative texts as victims either of their sources or of their own incompetence. It is correspondingly easier to adopt the general hypothesis that, whether they used sources or not, they have presented to us the material which they wished to present, ordered and crafted in the way they wished to do it; that they have produced texts intended to make sense as they are read cumulatively from beginning to end, each part being seen in the context of the whole. This appears to be the assumption with which we approach narrative literature in general. There has increasingly seemed little reason to depart from it in the case of Hebrew narrative literature in particular, and good reason to adopt a commitment, within this general framework, to consider it possible in the first instance that individual 'problems in the text' may actually be 'problems with my understanding of the text' that can be resolved by closer attention to the data.

c. Problems in Kings Revisited

We may return with these thoughts in mind to our three particular examples from Kings. Is it possible to understand the 'inconsistency' in 2 Kgs 17.24-41 in a way that is consonant with the general view of Hebrew narrative that has been outlined above? That is, of course, to put the question in a way that invites a somewhat defensive answer. Attack being the best form of defence, however, it might be best to begin rather by drawing attention to the implausibility of the position adopted by those who positively argue for 'competing' voices in this passage.

Let us consider in more detail what 2 Kgs 17.24-33 says. It is true, we are told, that when the new peoples first settled in

the land of Israel, they did not worship the LORD. When the lions, struck, however, they realised that the god of the land was against them, and they contacted the king of Assyria. He sent one of the exiled Israelite priests to Bethel, who taught them how to worship the LORD. The LORD was thus truly worshipped alongside all the various other gods of the peoples concerned. Merely to state what the passage is claiming is to see how at variance it is with the whole thrust of the story of Kings thus far. Its fundamental assumption is that the LORD is simply a local god. He must be appeased, certainly, by the new residents in his land. He must be worshipped correctly alongside all their other gods. But that is as far as their duty in matters of religion goes.

Now this is clearly at variance with what the remainder of Kings has to say about God and humankind. The God of whom the remainder of Kings knows is the LORD of all peoples and all history. He does sometimes use lions as his emissaries (1 Kgs 13.24-25; 20.35-36); but he is not confined to a single territory, and his demands are not limited in their scope. As the only God who exists, he claims exclusive worship. Those who point out the tension between 2 Kgs 17.29-33 and the remainder of the book are clearly quite justified. It is certainly unlikely that the author(s) of Kings who have told us all that has gone before should now seriously be telling us that a broad pantheon of gods is acceptable—that this new use of the high places, with its new priesthood (vv. 29, 32; cf. 1 Kgs 13.33), is any less reprehensible than the old Jeroboam cult which it has replaced. The kind of worship of the LORD which is taught by the exiled Israelite priest is evidently—and predictably, since the priest concerned bases himself in Bethel (cf. 1 Kgs 12.25-13.34)—just as flawed, from this point of view, as the worship which led to Israel's exile in the first place. And this is what 17.34-40 in fact tells us. So even if a 'source' is included here which spoke in polytheistic terms (that is, 17.24-33), it is presumably not included with the intention that we should take its various statements about religion at face value.

If it is unlikely, however, that the author(s) of Kings could have inserted such a passage intending their readers to take its 'voice' seriously, it is scarcely any more likely that a later

editor would have done so. To imagine that this is the case, we must imagine an editor who either added all of 17.24-41, even though verses 34-40 undermined his own perspective (that it is possible simultaneously to fear the LORD and worship images), or simply added verse 41 to an already existing passage. In either case we have to reckon with an editor who wished to introduce a perspective to Kings radically at odds with the book as a whole, yet did so in an extraordinarily muted way, leaving the book as a whole apparently untouched. Such a person may well have existed; but the distinction between an almost invisible redactor and an entirely non-existent one is a fine one.

In fact we need not posit his existence at all. All that we need do to explain 2 Kgs 17.24-41 is to posit the presence of irony. The statements about religion in verses 24-33 and 41 are not meant to be taken at face value. The author(s) are simply setting up a particular point of view in order to demolish it—rather in the manner of a participant in a debating competition. That is the extent to which the ‘voices’ of 17.24-41 truly ‘compete’. The tone of the passage is best caught, in fact, if the reader mentally supplies quotation marks to the words ‘fear’ and ‘feared’ in the RSV translation of verses 28 and 32-33. For the author of Kings certainly does not regard the ‘worship’ described in these verses as *true* worship—as vv. 34-39 make clear. It is an intrinsic feature of *true* worship, these verses tell us, that it is also *exclusive* worship. Any worship which is mixed is not truly worship of the living God at all; for he is a God who has from the beginning demanded ‘You shall not fear other gods’ (vv. 35, 37-38). What is clear by the end of the chapter on this view, then, is that the exile of Israel for her sins has not led to any improvement in the religion of the people dwelling in the land. They pursue their path of ‘fearing’ the LORD while serving their idols. Nothing has changed.

Our second example is the case of repetition in 2 Kgs 17.1-6 and 2 Kgs 18.9-12. Are we bound to see this repetition simply in terms of the rather unthinking duplication of information due to the combination of differing sources (e.g. Gray, 1977: 671-72)? Or is it possible to explain this, too, in terms of the conscious narrative art of a single author? The

context in which the ‘repetition’ occurs may well be our best clue to its possible purpose. We have read in 2 Kgs 17.1-6 of a king whose name promised much (Hoshea, deriving from the Hebrew verb *yšc*, ‘to save’), standing as he does in a long line of those through whom the LORD has brought salvation to Israel (Elisha, whose name is derived from the same verb; Jeroboam, 2 Kgs 14.27; other unnamed saviours, 2 Kgs 13.5). Hoshea is, indeed, a relatively good king as kings of Israel go (2 Kgs 17.2). Yet Israel is nevertheless taken into exile by the king of Assyria. Now in 2 Kings 18 we read of the best of the Judean kings so far: Hezekiah, whose trust in the LORD was unparalleled (v. 5). Here was a king who engaged in wholesale religious reform (vv. 3-6) and would not continue to serve the king of Assyria (v. 7). 2 Kings 18.9-12 function to remind us, to emphasize indeed, the kind of environment in which Hezekiah pursues this bold policy, and to prepare us for the story to come in 18.13-19.37. This was a time when rebellion against Assyria met with an aggressive, devastating response (vv. 9-11). We can hardly doubt that in such an environment, Judah, too, will soon be attacked. What will be the outcome then? The reminder in v. 12 that the people of the north, unlike the people of Judah under Hezekiah, had departed from ‘all that Moses...commanded’ (cf. 2 Kgs 17.7-23), is suggestive of a different fate for Judah, whose king clearly kept these same commands (v. 6). The Assyrian victory over the north was itself only possible because it was the will of God that Assyria should execute judgment on a sinful people. Yet it was under the best of the northern kings that judgment fell (2 Kgs 17.2). Is it possible that Hezekiah’s reforms have come too late to make any difference? 2 Kgs 18.9-12 imply this question, and thus create narrative suspense. They may or may not derive from a different source from 17.1-6; but whether they do or not, they do not appear to be without purpose in their present location.

Our final example concerned the apparent differences in style and language between the regnal formulae in the majority of the book of Kings and those in the closing chapters. Does the ‘rigidity’ of these formulae necessarily imply that an original author of Kings has been imitated by one who lacked his creative flair? The problem with the argu-

ment is that this same 'rigidity' is found elsewhere in Kings. As Nelson himself notes, the formulae for northern Israel's kings also rigidify into a more static pattern towards the end of that kingdom's history (1981: 33; cf. 2 Kgs 13.10; 14.24; 15.8, 18, 24, 28). Yet on this occasion, he offers a *literary* explanation, rather than a redactional one. Hammering repetition, he affirms, expresses the stubbornness of the disobedience. Why is it that variations in the style and language of the northern formulae are due to the creativity of a single author, yet variations in the style and language of the southern formulae necessitate that we posit a redactor? It is by no means clear. What this example does indicate, however, is just how subjective arguments from style and language can be. The fact is that individual authors can and do vary their style and language for their own particular literary purposes.

d. *The Story and the Larger Tale*

A review of the data that I presented earlier as examples of 'incoherence' in Kings has demonstrated that we are by no means compelled to the conclusion, at least in these three examples, that incoherence does in fact exist. The working hypothesis that Kings may be read as a unified whole has proved plausible in these cases. In the nature of the case, that is as far as we may go in a brief guide to the book. This is not a commentary. My own view, however, is that our findings in these cases are entirely in line with what we find elsewhere in Kings when we approach traditional modern readings of the book in the same spirit of critical enquiry. When a different set of general expectations is brought to the text as narrative, accompanied by a willingness to give careful attention to individual passages in their broader and narrower contexts within the book as a whole, difficulties with regard to the unity of Kings tend to evaporate in a cloud of admiration for the artistry and skill with which the text has been constructed.

This does not necessarily imply, of course, that the book of Kings was after all produced by a single author at one particular moment in time, never to be touched by human hand again. It is possible to conceive of a text which is artistically and skilfully constructed, yet the product nevertheless of a

number of authors/editors working over an extended period of time. There are reasons other than 'tensions' in the text which might lead us to such a conclusion in respect of a particular text. In fact, I do believe that good reasons exist in the case of Kings to believe that it was not produced at one time by a single hand. I am persuaded, in fact, that the books of the Old Testament generally grew gradually into their present form in dialogue with each other, each shaping the developing tradition and being shaped by it. Only thus is it possible to explain the high level of what we may term 'intertextuality' in the Old Testament—the way in which individual books either share portions of text with other books, or quote them, or otherwise reveal that they are aware of them (e.g. by narrating stories in such a manner that they evoke other stories with which they might usefully be compared or contrasted—what I shall refer to as 'narrative patterning'). The degree of intertextuality within the Old Testament has often been underestimated, largely because modern scholars working on individual Old Testament books have seen their main task as interpreting the reconstructed 'original text' of the individual book in relation to its presumed historical context, rather than as interpreting it, as it is, in its larger literary context. Yet it is a marked feature of our Old Testament texts, and one which implies an extended history of composition in which it was possible for mutual influence to take place.

So far as the book of Kings is concerned, for instance, we may note first of all the large sections of text which are essentially shared with the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. 2 Kgs 18.17–20.19 bears striking similarity to Isaiah 36.1–38.8; 38.21–39.8; while 2 Kgs 24.18–25.30 parallels Jer. 52.1–34. Secondly, at a lower level of sharing, but not therefore less significant, we may observe the way in which the closing words of the prophet Micaiah in 1 Kgs 22.28 are also the opening words of the prophet Micah in Micah 1.2. At the very least we are thus invited to consider the book of Micah and the story in 1 Kings 22 in relation to each other. The former is, indeed, an interesting book to read against the background of the whole Ahab story, looking forward as it does to the destruction of Samaria because of idolatry and prostitu-

tion (1.2-7) and condemning both social injustice (2.1-5) and false prophecy (2.6-11; 3.1-12). The Solomon story, likewise, frequently echoes themes from the book of Proverbs, as it grapples with the nature and consequences of that king's 'wisdom'.

Finally, we may consider a particular example of 'narrative patterning' in 1 Kings 12, where Jeroboam king of Israel is first of all presented as a Moses figure, leading his people out from slavery under the house of 'Pharaoh' (Rehoboam), only to be transformed later into an Aaron figure who fashions golden calves for them to worship. The people's complaint as the chapter opens is that they are no longer the people set free to live in the promised land. They have become once more a people under harsh labour, as they were in Egypt (Exod. 1.14; 2.23), toiling as oxen would under a heavy yoke. Jeroboam's similarity to Moses in this situation extends in the Hebrew (cf. the RSV footnote to v. 2) to a certain reluctance to take on such a role (cf. Exod. 4.1-17). He remains in Egypt, we are told, and has to be sent for. Rehoboam takes a hard line in response to these complaints (1 Kgs 12.8-11), behaving exactly as Pharaoh had behaved before him by increasing the oppression (cf. Exod. 5.1-21). It is divinely ordained so (v. 15): in the midst of all the human decisions, God's decision is being carried through. Echoes of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exod. 4.21; 7.3-4, 13; and so on) are distinctly audible. No sooner has the new Exodus taken place, however, than it leads (as the first had done) to sin—to the worship of golden calves. Jeroboam, like Aaron (Exod. 32.1-35), makes gods for the people to worship in defiance of the LORD's words at Mount Sinai (Exod. 20.4). His words to them in 1 Kings 12.28 ('Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt') are, indeed, almost exactly the words with which the people greet the construction of the first calf (Exod. 32.4). His subsequent actions also recall Aaron. For Aaron, too, having made his golden calf, built an altar and announced a festival on a date of his own choosing (cf. Exod. 32.5); and it was the Levites who on that occasion also were to be found distanced from the celebrations (Exod. 32.26).

The story is told in such a manner that it evokes other

stories with which it might usefully be compared or contrasted. This is not an isolated instance, but a recurring feature of the book of Kings. The kings of Judah are compared and contrasted with David; Elijah recalls Moses; both Manasseh and Josiah, in their own ways, remind us of Ahab; and so on. It is all part of the way in which the story is integrated into the larger tale.

It is this kind of evidence which suggests that the book of Kings is intrinsically bound up, not only with the other books of the 'Deuteronomistic History' which it so obviously presupposes, but also with that much wider circle of literature which was to develop into what is known as Tanak by Jews and the Old Testament by Christians. It suggests that Kings grew gradually into its present form in dialogue with other Old Testament books, shaping the developing tradition and being shaped by it. It was not the product of a single author in a particular place at a particular moment in time. For this reason I shall from this point on use the plural 'authors' when referring to the composition of the book.

Further Reading

For a brief and accessible introduction to the general issues raised in this chapter:

T. Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (FBI; Grand Rapids: Academic Books, 1987).

Essential reading for those interested in the composition of Kings remains:

M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup, 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), an English translation of the 1943 German original.

For summaries of the main positions with regard to composition and editing:

I.W. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate about the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (BZAW, 172; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), pp. 1-31.

S.L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History* (VTSup, 42; Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 1-19.

For a helpful discussion of the sources which are often thought to lie behind the book:

G.H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings* (NCB; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), I, pp. 47-77.

On the diversity of style and language in the regnal formulae:

R.D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup, 18; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981).

For discussion of such compositional issues in the context of ancient history-writing:

B.O. Long, *1 Kings, with an Introduction to Historical Literature* (FOTL; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 14-21. A brief introduction.

J. Van Seters, *In Search of History: Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). An extensive treatment.

On Hebrew narrative in general:

R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981).

S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989).

A. Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983).

D.M. Gunn and D.N. Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (OBS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

J. Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978).

M. Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

On intertextuality within the Old Testament in particular:

D.A. Carson and H.G.M. Williamson (eds.), *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture. Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 25-83.

M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

Commentaries which take a keen interest in reading Kings in its present form as narrative:

T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985)—see especially his excellent introduction 'On Reading 2 Kings', pp. xxvi-xxx.

B.O. Long, *1 Kings, and 2 Kings* (FOTL; Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1984, 1991).

R.D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1987).

I.W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995).