PART THREE

KINGS AND ITS NEAR EASTERN MILIEU
1. Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Historiography

The Book of Kings is a narrative of historiographic nature. The problems of its literary structure and of the chronological development of its composition are dealt with in other chapters of the present volume. Here, we can just recall that the basic structure of the book belongs to the so-called Deuteronomistic History, which is variously dated between the 7th and the 5th centuries BCE, and constitutes the earliest recorded achievement of a historical narrative in Israelite literature.

The problem of its relationships to ancient Near Eastern texts of similar nature is quite obvious, although in the past it was cast into doubt by the prejudice that Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures were unable to produce any history writing. The roots of this prejudice go back to the racist theories of the 19th century, as expressed especially by Renan, according to whom the “Chamito-Cushitic peoples” (Sum erians and Egyptians) were quite productive in the realm of material culture, but unfit for spiritual achievements in the fields of poetry, philosophy and also history writing – that only the Semites (Hebrews) and Indo-Europeans (Greeks) would achieve. Even after the formal dismissal of the racist theories, the idea that history writing began only in Greece and Israel was quite resilient, and found space in the work of the major (German) Alttestamentler, from Gunkel and Gressmann,

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