

THE APPROACH OF THIS BOOK

The primary data pool from which I draw is the Hebrew Bible and other material remains from first millennium BCE Israel and Judah. Some preliminary remarks are warranted regarding my approach to those data. It is not my intention to forward any new theoretical models related to source criticism or the dating of the biblical texts, and so I will adopt existing models that I consider broadly representative of the state of the field. While early West Semitic poetry has an obscure *terminus post quem* (that is, earliest possible date of origin) the preponderance of evidence indicates that narrative prose developed in the regions around the highlands of Israel and Judah no earlier than the mid-ninth century BCE, which suggests that texts employing narrative prose to describe events preceding that period were committed to writing no earlier than the mid-ninth century.¹⁰ That is not to say they cannot reflect historical events from earlier periods, only that their textualization would have followed a period of oral/material transmission during which there would have been a higher likelihood of change (despite some degree of constraint imposed by different sociomaterial dynamics).¹¹ Additionally, the commitment of earlier traditions to writing would have been refracted through the lenses of the sociocultural contexts and concerns of the later authors and editors.¹² What this means for this book is that I will consider historical narratives describing periods preceding the Mesha Stele and the rise of an Israelite monarchy to have been committed to text in a later period, and therefore to have in some way reflected the rhetorical goals of the latter authors and editors. The growth of the Omride kingdom in the ninth century would have provided ample administrative support for the development of royal histories—and scholars have long pointed to indications of northern origins for

¹⁰ The Mesha Stele is the earliest example of narrative prose writing in the regions of and around early Israel and Judah (Sanders, 2010, 113–14). The reference on the Mesha Stele to Omri's oppression of Moab prior to Mesha suggests that Omri's kingdom had administrative structures at least as developed as Moab's, and therefore may have been capable itself of producing narrative prose around the same time period, though nothing survives.

¹¹ By *sociomaterial* I refer to the fundamentally material objects and channels through and with which society and sociality are created and maintained. By *oral/material* I refer not only to orally transmitted stories, but also to the association of mnemohistory with material media, such as cultic objects, buildings, geography, and even ruins. For discussions of mnemohistory, materiality, and the Hebrew Bible, see Pioske 2018; Wilson 2018; cf. Miller 2021, 189–92.

¹² See Pioske 2018, 80: “as older memories aggregate within a stream of oral tradition, they often, by necessity, adapt and cohere to ‘new social and symbolic structures’ within a community so that this remembered past retains its meaning and significance for those listening to a past they never experienced themselves.”