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978-0-521-03709-9 - Israel in the Books of Chronicles

H. G. M. Williamson

Excerpt

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Introduction

The author of the books of Chronicles lived during a period in which one of the major issues for the Jewish people was the precise definition of the extent of its own community. Before the exile to Babylon, this was less of a problem, because the community was co-extensive for the most part with the nations of Israel and Judah. The loss of sovereignty, however, combined with the divisions caused by the transportation of many of the leaders to Babylon and the later return to the land, created a quite new situation in which the 'terms of membership' had to be re-defined. The emergence of the Samaritan sect and the secession of the group responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls are only two of a number of witnesses which demonstrate that this question was not quickly resolved.

In the present study, an attempt is made to analyse one contribution to the debate. This is not by any means to imply that the Chronicler had only one purpose in writing his history; it is evident, however, that in the circumstances of his day he could hardly avoid giving some attention to this question, and furthermore it will emerge that in fact he does present a distinctive point of view which is of value in the attempt to unravel the lines of thought in a period for which we have notoriously few sources.

The work is divided into two parts. The second is devoted to a presentation of the Chronicler's concept of Israel. At an early stage in the preparation of this study, however, it was discovered that the results of previous studies of 'Israel in Chronicles' had been largely determined by an almost universally prevailing assumption, the common authorship of Chr. and Ezr.-Neh. This assumption is accordingly examined in Part One.

Two main attitudes have dominated the approach of critical scholarship to our topic, the one being a direct extension of the other. The earliest view was propounded in what is now generally regarded as the first modern work on the books of Chronicles, de Wette's *Beiträge*. In this, de Wette included a section on the Chronicler's love for Judah and hatred for Israel (pp. 126ff.), and for obvious reasons this view was adopted without question by all subsequent writers.

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Our interest here, however, concerns rather the development of this view, an understanding of the Chronicler's ideology that may be said to have begun with Torrey.¹ It does not seem to have been noticed, however, this his starting point for detecting an anti-Samaritan *Tendenz* was a desire to refute Meyer's arguments in favour of the authenticity of the Persian documents in Ezra.² Only in a subsequent article did Torrey develop this idea in the books of Chronicles themselves,³ and then with a reference back to his earlier remarks as justifying this approach in Chr. as a whole.⁴

Torrey's view did not receive much attention for some considerable time,⁵ but it finally became accepted by a wide range of scholars through the influence of Noth's study.⁶ In dealing with 'Die theologische Leitgedanken' of Chronicles, however, Noth acknowledged his great debt to von Rad's well-known monograph,⁷ and it is indeed to the section of this work on 'Das Volk'⁸ that we must look for the detailed

¹ According to the English translation of his *Prolegomena*, Wellhausen mentioned the Samaritans once as the real objects of the Chronicler's supposed polemic against the Northern Kingdom (p. 188), but in fact Wellhausen wrote only of 'die Samarier' without any indication that he intended thereby a reference to the later Samaritans; cf. J. Wellhausen: *Prolegomena*, p. 182.

² C. C. Torrey: 'Aramaic Portions', in which, on pp. 220ff., he seeks to answer Meyer's argument that there is no discernible *Tendenz* to suggest fabrication of these documents. In reply, Torrey stresses as one of the main purposes of the documents 'the triumph over the Samaritans' (p. 225).

³ Torrey: 'The Chronicler as Editor'.

⁴ *Idem*, p. 157: 'As I have already pointed out, and as will appear still more fully in the sequel, the Chronicler's great task was to establish the supreme authority of the Jerusalem cultus, in all its details (see this *Journal*, vol. xxiv, pp. 223-26).' Thus we can see that, without hesitation, Torrey moved straight back from Ezra to the books of Chr.

⁵ The first commentary to appear after Torrey's articles was the ICC volume by Curtis and Madsen (1910). Though they cite the articles in their bibliography (p. 54), they do not seem to have had any material effect on the commentary itself in this respect, except in an odd comment on 2 Chr. 13:7, on pp. 375f. Elmslie's commentary in the Cambridge Bible series (1916) accepts wholeheartedly the viewpoint of Torrey (cf. especially pp. xxxviii-xli) with such remarks as 'it seems very probable that the Chronicler's work was directed specifically against the Samaritans' (p. xxxix), but the major commentary of this period, that of Rothstein and Hänel on 1 Chronicles (1927), relegates the subject to a very minor theme (cf. pp. xxvii ff., where again the evidence of Ezra is mainly appealed to, and pp. 376f., where anti-Samaritan polemic is considered possible at 1 Chr. 22:1).

⁶ M. Noth: *US*.

⁷ At the start of his section on the Chronicler's main theological themes, Noth writes: 'Nachdem G. v. Rad der Theologie des Chronisten eine ausführliche und vorzügliche monographische Behandlung hat zuteilwerden lassen, kann sich die folgende Ausführung kurz fassen, und sich auf die Hauptpunkte beschränken' (Noth: *US*, p. 171).

⁸ G. von Rad: *Geschichtsbild*, pp. 18-37.

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formulation of what is now so widely accepted as the Chronicler's teaching on the concept of Israel. Whilst the substance of von Rad's exegesis will be dealt with later in our discussion, it is instructive to notice at this point how von Rad set about his task. After asking 'wo muss da die Untersuchung einsetzen?' (p. 18), he acknowledges the problems that the nature of the books of Chronicles themselves pose, and concludes: 'Nicht ebenso liegen die Dinge bei den Quellenschriften von Esra und Nehemia. Hier hören wir die Stimme von Männern, die dem Chronist zeitlich und theologisch ungleich näher standen; hier liegt guter Grund vor, Ansätze und Anbahnungen auch besonderer chronistischer Gedanken vorauszusetzen' (p. 19). Similarly, after his analysis of Ezra and Nehemiah, he concludes: 'Von da aus wird nun die Anschauung des Chronisten über Israel deutlicher' (p. 24). There can be no doubt, therefore, that all the major analyses of the Chronicler's view of Israel that have come up with an exclusivist answer have started from results based on examination of *Ezr.-Neh.*

In contrast to this, the studies that have produced opposite conclusions have started from examination of *Chr.* alone. Thus Welch's work¹ tends to stress throughout the continued contacts between Judah and Israel, though without formulating them into the expression of a specific stress by the Chronicler. Danell² sees in *Chr.* a development of 'the idea of pan-Israelism which is undeniably a leading tendency' (p. 280), and if he later tends to modify this view (pp. 284-6), then it is only, as Japhet has correctly observed,³ because he still maintains the unity of *Chr.-Ezr.-Neh.*

The four major works that have appeared recently on *Chr.* all maintain that he is not anti-Samaritan, Japhet⁴ on the basis that the author of *Chr.* is quite separate from *Ezr.-Neh.*, Willi⁵ (followed by Welten⁶) on the basis that they are separate works, though written in fact by the same man, and Mosis⁷ alone maintaining continuity of authorship. For Mosis, however, the subject is of subsidiary importance only, and he deals with it only in so far as it might clash with his own distinctive approach to *Chr.* (Along similar lines to these, we may add in passing, statements have been advanced concerning the Chronicler's eschatology,⁸ his messianism⁹ and his understanding of theocracy.¹⁰)

¹ A. C. Welch: *The Work of the Chronicler.* ² G. A. Danell: *Israel*, ch. vi.

³ S. Japhet: *Ideology*, p. 274. ⁴ *Ibid.* p. 4. ⁵ T. Willi, pp. 176-84.

⁶ P. Welten, pp. 172f. with p. 4, n. 15. ⁷ R. Mosis, pp. 11-16 and 205ff.

⁸ Cf. Rudolph, p. xxiii, followed notably by O. Plöger: *Theokratie und Eschatologie*; W. Th. In der Smitten: 'Aufnahme der Nehemiaschrift', pp. 215-21.

⁹ See, for instance, P. R. Ackroyd: *The Age of the Chronicler*, p. 50, and A.-M. Brunet: 'Théologie'.

¹⁰ E.g. A. Noordtzi: 'Intentions'; Rudolph: 'Problems', where he writes: 'What is the purpose of the Chronicler's work? In answering this question,

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It is clear, therefore, that if our conclusions about 'Israel in Chronicles' are to be firmly based, the question of the extent of the Chronicler's work must be settled first. This is accordingly undertaken in Part One. A discussion of 1 Chr. 1–9 is also included, since that too has a bearing on the later discussion.

scholars frequently go astray because they isolate the Books of Chronicles and forget that they are continued in Ezra and Nehemiah. If we look at the *whole* work of the Chronicler, then the question of purpose can only be answered in this way: It is to present the realisation of theocracy in Israel' (p. 404).

PART ONE

The Extent of the Chronicler's Work

For the past 150 years, the view has reigned almost unchallenged that the books of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah were originally all part of a single work. Although there had been some who earlier hinted at this idea,¹ it was in 1832 that L. Zunz² set out the evidence which, with later additions and refinements, convinced the overwhelming majority of scholars. Confirmation of this statement may be found by reference to virtually any modern commentary or introduction written from that time down to the present day.³

Four main arguments have been advanced in favour of this view:⁴

1. The presence of the opening sentences of Ezr. at the end of 2 Chr.
2. The evidence of 1 Esdras, which starts at 2 Chr. 35 and continues without interruption into Ezr.

¹ Cf. Willi, p. 37.

² L. Zunz: *Vorträge*, ch. 2.

³ The small number of those who have rejected this consensus only emphasizes the point. They include W. M. L. de Wette: *Lehrbuch*, pp. 262 and 265; E. König: *Einleitung*, p. 285; A. C. Welch: *Post-Exilic Judaism*, pp. 185–7; M. H. Segal: 'The Books of Ezra-Nehemiah'; W. A. L. Elmslie (*IB*), pp. 345–8 and 547; J. M. Grintz: 'Aspects of the History of the High Priesthood'; E. J. Young: *Introduction*, p. 390; B. Mazar: 'Chronicles'; J. Liver: 'History and Historiography'; R. K. Harrison: *Introduction*, pp. 1149f. More recently, it has been suggested that the Chronicler originally extended his work only as far as the end of Ezr. 6: D. N. Freedman: 'Purpose', V. Pavlovsky: 'Chronologie' and F. M. Cross: 'Reconstruction'. The only major work directed specifically against the consensus, however, is the article by S. Japhet: 'The Supposed Common Authorship'. Whilst some scholars appear to have been influenced by this article (e.g. R. L. Braun: 'Solomonic Apologetic'), no other work, so far as I am aware, has been devoted specifically to this question. (J. D. Newsome: 'Toward a New Understanding', was published only after the completion of this work.)

⁴ It is not necessary for our present purposes to discuss the original form of Ezr.-Neh. A number of scholars, for instance, argue that the Nehemiah Memoir was only added much later (e.g. K.-F. Pohlmann: *Studien*), whilst others suggest that parts of the Ezra material are out of order in their present form (e.g. W. Rudolph: *Ezra und Nehemia*, p. xxii). Such questions do not immediately affect the question of the extent of the Chronicler's work, for sufficient material remains for analysis without recourse to the disputed material. Naturally, where these points may touch on our discussion in a secondary way, they will be given due attention.

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3. The similarity between the books in style and choice of vocabulary.

4. The similarity of outlook, interests and theology.

Whilst it may be argued that these points have a cumulative effect, they must in the first instance, at least, be examined individually. It should be stressed that it is recognized that these books do all treat similar themes and interests, and that there is a chronological continuity that none can gainsay. Whether these themes are treated from the same angle, however, or whether these points are sufficient to prove identity of authorship is another question.

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2 Chronicles 36: 22f. and Ezra 1: 1-3a

L. Zunz,¹ and most scholars since, have argued first for the common authorship of Chr. and Ezr.-Neh. from the observation that the ending of Chr. and the beginning of Ezr. are verbally almost identical. It is held that when the books were separated, an overlap was left to make clear the original connection. Representative of the explanations as to why this separation should have taken place at all is that of CM:

The separation in the Canon is apparently due to the fact that the contents of Ezra-Nehemiah were regarded as the more important, since its narrative was a proper continuation of the sacred history already canonised in 1 and 2 S. and 1 and 2 K., and its narrative chronologically concluded the history of Israel; while Chronicles was only supplementary to 1 and 2 S. and 1 and 2 K., and therefore was not at first very highly valued and was only at a later period received into the Canon.²

In a few introductions, almost the whole case for identity of authorship is seemingly made to hang on this point,³ whilst many scholars list it as being first in significance.⁴ However, the evidence in itself, and the explanations of the present text, are ambiguous.

A. INTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

(1) Identity of authorship is not the only logical conclusion to draw from the fact of the overlap, and indeed, some have taken it to imply precisely the reverse. Welch, for instance, has maintained that 'men do not take the trouble to stitch together two documents, unless they have been originally separate'.⁵ Rudolph himself has used just this kind

¹ L. Zunz: *Vorträge*, p. 19.

² CM, p. 3.

³ E.g. W. Rudolph: *Esra und Nehemia*, p. xxii; A. Bentzen: *Introduction*, p. 205.

⁴ Notable examples include G. W. Anderson: *Introduction*, p. 215; W. O. E. Oosterley and T. H. Robinson: *Introduction*, p. 110; A. Weiser: *Einleitung*, p. 284; H. H. Rowley: *Growth*, p. 162.

⁵ A. C. Welch: *Post-Exilic Judaism*, p. 186.

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of argument in order to explain the rather abrupt ending of 1 Esdras: 'Die Worte κ. ερισ. aber sind nichts als eine Glosse, die darauf aufmerksam machen wollte, dass der Text anderswo noch eine Fortsetzung hat; hätte es damals schon Kapitel- und Verszahlen gegeben, so hätte es geheißen: Fortsetzung s. Neh. 8 13ff.'¹

On the other hand, Harrison² has suggested that the only real literary parallel we have for this phenomenon is the use of a *Stichzeile* in Babylonian colophons. Harrison gives no documentation to support this view, but we may perhaps point to the work of Hunger, who describes the device thus: 'Die Stichzeile kommt bei Tafeln vor, die Teil einer Serie sind, und ist mit der ersten Zeile (oder wenigstens mit den ersten Wörtern) der folgenden Tafeln identisch. Ihr Zweck ist es, beim Vorlesen den Übergang von einer Tafel zur anderen zu erleichtern . . . Sie steht meist vor den eigentlichen Kolophon.'³ If this is a true parallel to our text, then it must argue in favour of the original continuity of the work.

Before this be conceded, however, it must be observed that it would be unique in the OT,⁴ even though there are instances where we might otherwise expect such a device. We know hardly anything about the original materials for the writing of the Biblical texts,⁵ but if the Deuteronomistic history were indeed conceived in its present form as a single work,⁶ it must have been broken up at some points. More pertinently, the same would probably have applied to the books of Chr. themselves. Thus if the *Stichzeile* were the work of the original author, why has no trace of the device survived elsewhere? It seems to be the case of a situation where, if on other grounds the unity were proved, the Babylonian parallel could be adduced as illustration, but in itself the Babylonian material is not strong enough to prove the case in question.

(2) Japhet⁷ seems to go much further and suggest that 2 Chr. 36: 22f. represents the original ending of the Chronicler's work, as though the overlap were not a conscious device of any sort, but rather quite fortuitous. This, it must be made clear, is not stated in her article, but it seems to be an inevitable concomitant of her discussion on pp. 338–41. Here she observes that in Ezr.–Neh. there are eighty theophoric names

¹ W. Rudolph: *Ezra und Nehemia*, p. xv.

² R. K. Harrison: *Introduction*, p. 1169.

³ H. Hunger: *Kolophone*, p. 1.

⁴ The suggestion of E. Nestlé ('Zur Frage nach der ursprünglichen Einheit') that the overlap in the LXX of I–II and III–IV Reigns provides a parallel is not convincing because the overlap of Chr.–Ezr. is so very much longer.

⁵ Though cf. D. J. Wiseman: 'Books in the Ancient Near East'.

⁶ M. Noth: *US*, pp. 3–12, established this widely, though not universally, accepted theory.

⁷ S. Japhet: 'The Supposed Common Authorship'.

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with the ending *-yh*, mentioned altogether almost two hundred and seventy times. There is only one exceptional case of the longer ending *-yhw*, and this may be due to scribal error (Ezr. 10: 41).¹ In Chr., however, ‘the first outstanding fact is the variety of material in which both short and long endings occur’. Japhet concludes her discussion of this point by saying ‘in spite of the existence of names with the יה ending it is impossible to deny the general tendency to use the long ending יהו. The difference between Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah is clearly expressed in a parallel text:

2 Chr. 36: 22 לכלות דבר ה' בפי ירמיהו

Ezra 1: 1 לכלות דבר ה' מפי ירמיה'

It seems clear, therefore, that this involves attributing 2 Chr. 36: 22 to the original work of the Chronicler.

Against such a view, however, it must be urged that the form in Chr. might well have been influenced by the preceding verse, where already there is reference to the *ḏbr yhwsh bpy yrmyhw*. Thus, the text of Ezr. 1: 1 might have stood here and later been assimilated by a scribe to the form in the earlier verse. This could explain too the difference between the readings *bpy* and *mpy*. This must have taken place quite early, however, as the LXX seems to support the MT here, reading *dia* for 2 Chr., and *apo* for Ezr. 1. This does not, of course, detract from Japhet's point as a whole; it merely combats the implication that 2 Chr. 36: 22 is necessarily original to the Chronicler.

2 Chr. 36: 22f. has all the appearance of being extracted from Ezr. 1: 1. The break at *w^eγā'al* would be quite unnatural, and if indeed, as more recent scholars are now willing to agree, a genuine document lies behind the edict of Cyrus,² it is difficult to see why the Chronicler did not include it in full. On the assumption that Chr. was written after Ezr.-Neh., it is conceivable that the Chronicler wished to indicate to his readers where the continuation of the story might be found, but we must ask whether he has not already in fact done this without the artificial inclusion of 2 Chr. 36: 22f.

2 Chr. 36: 11–20a gives an account of the fall of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. Verses 20b–21, however, already point us forward to the end of the exile, and give a clear indication of the libera-

¹ Cf. W. Rudolph: *Ezra und Nehemia*, p. 100.

² Before 1946, the genuineness of Ezr. 1: 2–4 in containing an original document was widely discounted. In that year, however, E. Bickermann wrote vigorously in its defence ('The Edict of Cyrus'). He has succeeded in convincing a number of scholars, including the two most recent commentators, J. M. Myers: *Ezra. Nehemiah*, p. 5 and L. H. Brockington: *Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther*, pp. 14f. and 48f.

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tion to be granted by the Persians (v. 20a). Furthermore, since v. 21 refers to the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy within a specific time limit, the theme of restoration would have already suggested itself to the Chronicler's original readers. This, we would argue, furnishes from every point of view a more satisfying conclusion to the work than the fragmentary v. 23.

We conclude, therefore, that of all the possibilities still open, the one certainty is that if the Chronicler was not responsible for *Ezr.-Neh.*, he was not responsible for 2 Chr. 36: 22f. either.

B. EXTERNAL CONSIDERATIONS

As we have not found it possible to conclude that the overlap automatically demands unity of authorship, external considerations must also be examined.

(1) It is apparently agreed that the kind of explanation represented above by CM is entirely speculative. Eissfeldt, for instance, has to admit after his discussion of this point: 'So lassen sich, ohne dass wir im einzelnen über Vermutungen hinauskommen könnten, schon die Gründe ausfindig machen, die für das Zustandekommen des dritten Teils der kanonischen Bücher unserer hebräischen Bibel massgebend gewesen sind.'¹

If, then, we are in the realm of 'Vermutungen', it is entirely legitimate to ask whether in fact the theory is inherently probable. Do we have any instance in the process of canonization of a book being divided up and only that part retained which does not repeat material found elsewhere? On the contrary, it is most striking to find that even so close a reproduction of a separate work as is found in Isa. 36-9 is nevertheless faithfully retained, and, again in contrast, if the usual view of the authorship of Isaiah and many other OT books is correct, the tendency was to add to works already established, rather than to subtract from them. Furthermore, whilst indeed Chr. often runs closely parallel to Sam.-Ki., yet it must be at once apparent that it contains a very great deal of its own material which we might suppose a later generation would be anxious to preserve. Finally, if Chr. were originally excluded from the Canon, why was it later introduced?

(2) In a short, but extremely important, section of his recent book,² Willi has in fact gone a step further than this. In his view, what evidence we have of the history of canonization points to an original distinction between Chr. and *Ezr.-Neh.*

Against the normal view, he first points out that in fact the canonicity

¹ O. Eissfeldt: *Einleitung*, p. 768. ² T. Willi, pp. 176-84.