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Chronicling the Chronicler

The Book of Chronicles and
Early Second Temple Historiography

Edited by

PAUL S. EVANS AND TYLER F. WILLIAMS

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To Our Children

Chaim Randall Evans and Talyah Lee Evans

and

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and Isaac Nelson Williams

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Contents

Acknowledgments	vii
Abbreviations	ix
Introduction	1
<i>Paul S. Evans</i>	

Part 1 Texts and Studies

The Genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1–9: Purposes, Forms, and the Utopian Identity of Israel	9
<i>Steven Schweitzer</i>	
Reading the Lists: Several Recent Studies of the Chronicler’s Genealogies	29
<i>Keith Bodner</i>	
Seeking Saul in Chronicles	43
<i>P. J. Sabo</i>	
Let the Crime Fit the Punishment: The Chronicler’s Explication of David’s “Sin” in 1 Chronicles 21	65
<i>Paul S. Evans</i>	
Of Jebus, Jerusalem, and Benjamin: The Chronicler’s <i>Sondergut</i> in 1 Chronicles 21 against the Background of the Late Persian Era in Yehud	81
<i>Louis Jonker</i>	
Historia or Exegesis? Assessing the Chronicler’s Hezekiah-Sennacherib Narrative	103
<i>Paul S. Evans</i>	
Reading Chronicles and Reshaping the Memory of Manasseh	121
<i>Ehud Ben Zvi</i>	
The Cohesiveness of 2 Chronicles 33:1–36:23 as a Literary Unit Concluding the Book of Chronicles	141
<i>Shannon E. Baines</i>	

Part 2

Central Themes

- “To Him You Must Listen”: The Prophetic Legislation in Deuteronomy
and the Reformation of Classical Tradition in Chronicles 161
Gary N. Knoppers
- Divine Retribution in Herodotus and the Book of Chronicles 195
John W. Wright
- Gazing through the Cloud of Incense: Davidic Dynasty and
Temple Community in the Chronicler’s Perspective 215
Mark J. Boda
- Toward a Sense of Balance: Remembering the Catastrophe of
Monarchic Judah / (Ideological) Israel and Exile
through Reading Chronicles in Late Yehud 247
Ehud Ben Zvi

Part 3

Future Prospects

- Response: Reflections on the Book of Chronicles
and Second Temple Historiography 269
Christine Mitchell
- Bibliography 279
- Indexes 311
Index of Authors 311
Index of Scripture 316

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Paul S. Evans and Tyler F. Williams, eds.

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Response:
*Reflections on the Book of Chronicles and
Second Temple Historiography*

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Let me begin by saying that I was honored to have been asked to be the respondent to the papers that were presented at the fifth meeting of the Ancient Historiography Seminar of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies in Montreal in 2010. I am similarly privileged with offering the response here to the revised essays, as well as to a few additional pieces that were not discussed in Montreal. With the variety, richness, breadth and depth of the essays, I fear that I cannot do justice to all of them in my allotted space. I beg the forgiveness of the contributors if I do not adequately deal with the intricacies of the argument of each. My remarks here incorporate my oral response in Montreal as well as some further thoughts.

In preparation for the Montreal meeting, I was asked to reflect on the future of the study of Chronicles and early Second Temple historiography. As Mark Boda points out in his essay (p. 233), the book of Chronicles itself invites us to think about the future, as it ends with “Let him go up . . .” (2 Chr 36:23). In this response, therefore, I do not focus on the “state of the field,” because the summaries of research given by Rodney Duke in his 2009 article and by Mark Boda in his essay in this volume contain all that one might need to know.¹ I instead pick up on a few questions that I see as potentially fruitful for further work.

When I began my study of Chronicles as a doctoral student some 15 years ago, I chose to focus on Chronicles for a number of reasons. One reason included my sense that I could legitimately “master the literature” in a way that was difficult or impossible to do with the scholarship related to many other biblical books. This situation has changed—just look at the bibliography after 1990

1. R. K. Duke, “Recent Research in Chronicles,” *CBR* 8 (2009) 10–50. I see his essay as a somewhat idiosyncratic summary of recent research. For example, Duke states that “there still is no consensus on the unity of Chronicles” (p. 14); the essays in this volume belie that statement and seem to me to be a truer reflection of the state of the field.

in Boda's essay (p. 218)—and I doubt whether a doctoral student beginning today to study Chronicles could master the literature in the same way. This may be a good thing, because it will force new scholars to begin more imaginative and focused projects rather than attempting to fill gaps in scholarship or undertake broad projects. The groundwork has been laid: we now have a good understanding of how Chronicles works as a text. The publication of the Qumran texts and the resulting shift in text-criticism have cemented the recognition that texts were pluriform in antiquity. With this realization, a realization that is also a caution, the focus of research has shifted from an examination of minute textual differences between Chronicles and its assumed source texts to a more holistic examination of the trends and techniques used by Chronicles.² Alongside this realization has come the welcome shift to reading Chronicles in its own right rather than as a defective and slightly tedious version of Samuel–Kings. From my reading of the essays for this volume and my broader sense of the field, I am here going to give a few suggestions for future projects.

After working with Chronicles for a great part of the past 15 years, I am not convinced that it is historiography. I am not convinced that it is not, either. But I am concerned that so many have not sufficiently probed this question, including many or even most of the authors in this volume. The assumption of the historiographical genre by most authors here is my major criticism of most of these essays. I remain torn about whether a generic classification of historiography existed in pre-third-century B.C.E. Yehud/Judea. On the one hand, historiography as a Hellenistic genre could well have made an impact by the fourth century B.C.E.; on the other hand, because Chronicles is following and innovating the genre of texts such as Samuel, it might make little sense to use the “invention” of historiography in late-fifth-century B.C.E. Athens as a demarcation line. As a heuristic device, for us, *historiography* as a genre label may be useful—it allows us to compare Chronicles with other biblical books and with other ancient texts. However, we often lose sight of the tool's heuristic nature. Notwithstanding the arguments of Marc Zvi Brettler, among others, narratives about the past are not necessarily historiography or historical writing.³ Labeling Chronicles as “rewritten Bible” or “early exegesis/midrash” may be a closer generic label descriptively, but both terms leave unresolved the question of the Chronicler's point of view on his pre-texts. “Bible” is anachronistic—as Gary Knoppers acknowledges while still using the term “rewritten Bible,”⁴ and “exegesis/midrash” likewise presumes an authoritative text that cannot

2. See the very useful discussion in D. M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) esp. pp. 57–101.

3. M. Z. Brettler, *The Creation of History in Ancient Israel* (London: Routledge, 1995) 12.

4. G. N. Knoppers, *1 Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2004) 130.

be changed, only commented upon. The uncomfortable thought remains that we do not know what Chronicles is—or at least what it was to its author and intended audience. Whatever it was, it was most definitely not *ιστορίη*. During the meeting in Montreal, I noticed that every time the topic *genre* came up in discussion, there was a distinct and rapid skittering away from it. My sense is that scholars of Chronicles (alongside most biblical scholars) have not thought about the concept of *genre* theoretically since form criticism gave up the ghost in the early 1990s. This is too bad, because *genre*, the mixture of prescriptive and descriptive elements of form and content, is an important way that all scholars—nay, all readers—approach texts.

Nevertheless, there are a few of the essays that do open up some new possibilities for understanding the genre of Chronicles. In the discussion in Montreal, Gary Knoppers suggested that the Chronicler may have seen himself as one more prophet in a prophetic line. He argues in his essay that “Chronicles reforms images of the classical prophets found in the prophetic books in accordance with its reformation of the Deuteronomistic prophetic schema” (p. 164). That is, Chronicles operates within a distinctly Deuteronomistic notion of prophecy (especially Deut 18:9–22).⁵ As Knoppers points out, all prophecies in Chronicles are fulfilled, all prophets are true, and prophets are never criticized. More tantalizing is his suggestion that Levitical *singing* was a key component of both temple-based prophecy and a possible prophetic line inaugurated by Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun (1 Chr 25:2–3; pp. 184–191). If I might extend Knoppers’s argument in his essay, not only did Chronicles recast prophecy into a Deuteronomistic mode, the Chronicist (singing?) voice became the next incarnation of the prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15). One way into the genre question, therefore, might be to examine Chronicles further as a prophetic text rather than a historiographical. The debate in Second-Temple Yehud about true and false prophets and the status of prophecy was an open debate (see Haggai 1 and Zechariah 13 for opposing views). Perhaps what a prophetic text looked like was also up for debate. That prophets were seen later in the Second Temple period as recorders of the past (i.e., historiographers) is obvious from the canonical organization of “Prophets,” which encompassed Joshua through 2 Kings, as well as from writers such as Josephus.⁶ Aligning our genre expectations with some ancient expectations could be a new way into this text for us. It would fully break with the modern reader’s expectation that the book can be used as a source for historical reconstruction of Iron Age Judah. It would force us to confront our own expectations of a text that speaks about the past and reorient ourselves to a different mode of thought.

5. Contra W. M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period* (JSOTSup 197; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 247.

6. *Ibid.*, 227–28, 230.

Another genre avenue that deserves to be more fully explored is the idea that Chronicles was an educational text—a textbook, as it were. In his essay “A Sense of Balance,” Ehud Ben Zvi points to Chronicles as being “didactic” literature (p. 256), although he notes that most biblical texts, including Samuel–Kings, have this purpose. The work of David Carr, especially, should be more thoroughly discussed as it relates to Chronicles.⁷ Duke discusses it briefly in his review article, yet there is much more to be done.⁸ There are two ways that Carr’s work could be engaged: (1) understanding the textual transmission process as a process of memory on the orality-literacy continuum; and (2) understanding the implications of textual production as part of what he terms “education-enculturation”—that is, as a textbook. My sense is that many scholars of Chronicles see the importance of Carr’s work and the potential it has for providing a different way into Chronicles but that the task is too daunting. Putting the genre question another way: Why would the Chronicler write a “history”? What purpose would it serve? What does a text such as Chronicles actually do? I suspect that a serious engagement with Carr’s work would lead to questioning the genre tools we have used and would force us into a new paradigm, just as taking seriously a consideration of Chronicles as prophecy would do. These are uncomfortable thoughts for those of us whose work has been based on the current paradigm.

Because of the systematic analysis of the Chronicler’s style over the past two decades, we now have a good idea of how the Chronicler wrote and how he used earlier textual material. This shift in focus from finding redactional layers in Chronicles to understanding the Chronicler’s literary techniques has been a most welcome development. Ehud Ben Zvi’s essay on Manasseh and Paul Evans’s essay on 2 Chronicles 32 in this volume are examples of this kind of work. This systematic analysis of style has, I believe, led to a greater appreciation of the Chronicler as an author and of Chronicles as a text. I am not sure how many people outside the room in Montreal and the contributors to this volume share this appreciation, but certainly we scholars of Chronicles have given others in the future something with which to work. While further work on the style of Chronicles would certainly be welcome, perhaps it is time to turn (or return) our attention to the themes of Chronicles.

Mark Boda’s essay is an example of the reexamination of the themes of Chronicles, specifically the theme of the future of the Davidic Dynasty after the restoration of Jerusalem by Cyrus. He attempts a Hegelian synthesis in each of three scholarly debates: (1) Are the promises to David fulfilled in a Davidide or in the community? (2) Are these promises fulfilled in the Chronicler’s present or in a (perhaps eschatological) future? And (3) are these prom-

7. D. M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

8. Duke, “Recent Research,” 38–39.

ises fulfilled through continuity or through cataclysmic change? Through this method of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, he can conclude that there is a balance between Davidic messianism and communal fulfillment (p. 233). He conflates the second and third debates as a debate between seeing the Chronicler as a "legitim�er of the present" and seeing him as a "visionary of the future" (p. 236). Again, he concludes that Chronicles both legitimizes and envisions. While I can certainly sympathize with Boda's desire to rehabilitate Chronicles from Wellhausen's derision (pp. 215, 245), I wonder about trying to wrap up Chronicles neatly in a synthesized package. There are tensions in Chronicles, to be sure, and there is a reason why some scholars have read the text as hoping for a future Davidide while others have read it as presenting communal fulfillment of the Davidic promises. The text itself, as Boda so ably shows, contains evidence that supports both readings. To attempt to synthesize these two arguments is to impose an order on the text that is not there. I have always argued that Chronicles is a text of "yes, but. . . ." That the text might hold mutually contradictory elements within it is our problem: What does it say about us? In conclusion, while I hold Boda's research and analysis in the highest esteem, I disagree with the epistemological premise on which he builds his work: to synthesize Chronicles is not and cannot be possible.

Another essay in this volume that works with a theme is Louis Jonker's on Benjamin and Benjaminites. While he attempts to use the appearance of Benjaminite terminology in Chronicles as an index to identity formation in the Persian period, more interesting is the literary analysis of the Benjaminite theme of the text. As he points out, it is not as though the text holds a single position on Benjamin: "Sometimes Benjamin is used in the service of a Jerusalemite claim, while in other instances it is put in contrast to Jerusalem" (p. 94). Although Jonker labels this portion of his essay "Synthesis," he is happier to leave the messy loose ends of the text apparent and in fact builds them into his analysis and argument. He demonstrates that it is possible to see a *theme* in the book without having to reduce this theme to one meaning.

One striking feature of this volume is the contribution of the two essays devoted explicitly to the genealogies along with serious engagement with the genealogies in many of the other pieces. Keith Bodner's and Steven Schweitzer's essays both take as a starting point John Wright's essay "The Fabula of the Book of Chronicles";⁹ both build on this essay as a strong argument for the integration of the genealogies with the succeeding narrative. Yet these essays have less in common with studies of the style of Chronicles (or even the genre—to which I will return) than they share with the explicitly postmodern literary reading of Peter Sabo. Both Bodner and Sabo draw on

9. J. W. Wright, "The Fabula of the Book of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (ed. M. P. Graham and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 263; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 136–55.

Canadian Northrop Frye's assertion about the value of lists. Sabo probes the scholarly compulsion to visit and revisit the story of Saul in 1 Chronicles 10, noting that it is the beginning of the book for many readers who choose to skip the genealogies (p. 47 n. 17). All three of the essays take Chronicles seriously as a text with its own integrity: none of them presupposes a genre label such as *historiography* for it. Schweitzer's claim of *utopia* as an anachronistic genre label highlights the artificiality of the anachronistic *historiography* used by modern scholars. These three pieces embody for me one of the most fruitful future directions in Chronicles research: reading the text here and now.

Peter Sabo's essay on the compulsion to visit and revisit the death of Saul evoked in my mind another compulsion of Chronicles research: the visiting and revisiting of the death of Josiah and the end of the book. This volume contains two contributions on this second compulsion: Shannon Baines's and Mark Boda's. Boda's essay deals with more than the last four chapters but, since his argument has to do with eschatology and future hopes, the final few chapters figure prominently. Although Boda makes the argument that 2 Chronicles 35–36 and 1 Chronicles 10 should not be linked (pp. 231–232), Baines's careful exposition of the closing unit highlights sin and judgment as themes (pp. 153–156), themes that must surely be seen in 1 Chronicles 10 as well. Reading Sabo's and Baines's essays, I came to the uncomfortable realization that I have participated in both scholarly compulsions: in fact, my very first publication was on 1 Chronicles 10 (as is Sabo's?).¹⁰ My own unscientific impression of my citation index is that these two pieces have been more frequently cited than any other pieces I have written. I fear that I have both participated in and helped to perpetuate this compulsion. Nevertheless, I take comfort in Sabo's conclusion, that the compulsion is the symptom of a text that is not dead but is ever returning to make new meanings (p. 63).

In the early to mid-twentieth century, it was common to see the features of the language of Chronicles that differed from Standard Biblical Hebrew as Aramaizing. Forty years ago, the work of my own teacher, Robert Polzin, led the way in limiting the Aramaizing hypothesis.¹¹ Yet in some ways the influence of Aramaic, particularly Imperial Aramaic, on Chronicles may deserve renewed or further study. My twofold question at this point is: what does it mean for

10. C. Mitchell, "The Dialogism of Chronicles," in *The Chronicler as Author: Studies in Text and Texture* (ed. M. P. Graham and S. L. McKenzie; JSOTSup 263; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) 311–26; idem, "The Ironic Death of Josiah in 2 Chronicles," *CBQ* 68 (2006) 421–35.

11. R. Polzin, *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward An Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose* (HSM 12; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976). Cf. I. Young, R. Rezetko, and M. Ehrensverd, *Linguistic Dating of Biblical Texts* (2 vols.; BibleWorld; London: Equinox, 2008) 1:221.

Chronicles to be written in Hebrew rather than Aramaic, *and* how would the style of Imperial Aramaic have influenced the style of Chronicles?

The meeting in Montreal was held in a room in the center of North America's largest and perhaps only bilingual city. The choice of language to use in literary and other texts is a critical political issue. For me, as a Canadian, whether I spoke English or French when I got my cup of tea in the morning while in Montreal was a political choice. If I chose English, I was speaking the language of Canada's majority but Quebec's minority. As a Canadian, it is my right to be served by the government in the official language of my choice, English or French. This right does not extend to ordering a cup of tea at a downtown coffee shop, but many Anglophone Canadians would see it as a natural corollary. However, for two centuries the English dominated Montreal's politics, economy, and society. To speak English would be an act of colonialism. If I chose French, I was speaking the language of Quebec's majority. I was standing in solidarity with the Francophones who in the 1950s and 1960s began to assert their right to speak their own language in their own place. I was also revealing myself (with my strong English Canadian accent) as politically identifying with the vision of Pierre Trudeau—where Canadians would be bilingual and speak French in Quebec and other Francophone communities and English in Anglophone areas of Canada. Trudeau's vision remains contested, as does his legacy, even more than a decade after his death and almost three decades since he left political office.¹²

I spoke French in Montreal. This was a conscious decision that was revisited every time I interacted with someone at the hotel, the coffee shop, the art gallery, and so on. It is a decision I revisit every time I go to Montreal. Because of my own context, I find it difficult to imagine that the Chronicler's choice of Hebrew as his textual language was not a political decision. Yet presumably he had also been trained in Imperial Aramaic, so how did he manage not to Aramaize his Hebrew more than he did? Was he as fluent in both Hebrew and Aramaic as my brother-in-law, who was raised in Montreal to be fluent in both English and French? Was his use of Hebrew an act of resistance? Following up on Louis Jonker's essay, is the Hebrew of Chronicles perhaps an anti-Benjaminite Hebrew? The interplay of Hebrew and Aramaic should

12. No Canadian of my generation and social location would need a citation for any of my assertions here. They are part of the common knowledge that informs all of us. However, in the interests of non-Canadians, I suggest the following critical-review essay: D. Wright and T. Cheney, "Pierre Trudeau, Michael Ignatieff, and the Flame of 1968," *Acadiensis* 38/2 (2009) 159–67. The interested reader might consult two columns for the journalistic view: D. Frum, "The Disastrous Legacy of Pierre Trudeau," *National Post*, March 23, 2011, <http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2011/03/23/david-frum-the-disastrous-legacy-of-pierre-trudeau/>; and J. English, "Pierre Trudeau Saved Canada," *National Post*, March 25, 2011, <http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2011/03/25/john-english-pierre-trudeau-saved-canada/> (accessed September 3, 2013).

receive broader sociological analysis rather than the linguistic analysis that has usually been done.

Given that Chronicles was written in Hebrew in an Aramaic world, how does Chronicles relate to Aramaic-language texts? Do the themes in Chronicles (Temple, Levites, Davidic House, doctrine of immediate retribution, etc.) in some way relate to concerns about living in a world dominated officially by Aramaic—and by extension, imperial forces? Does the literary style of Chronicles bear a relationship to literary style in Imperial Aramaic? These questions about language choice and Aramaic texts pertain to a larger investigation of Chronicles as a text of colonial Yehud. Recently there has been considerable attention paid to Chronicles and its context of colonial Yehud. This is a good thing. Yet as with many studies (in many literary fields) using colonial and/or postcolonial theory, the conditions are assumed, not investigated. I suggest, therefore, that investigating the texts of the colonizers and comparing Chronicles with these texts would be a worthwhile project. Some beginning steps have been taken by examining the fifth- and fourth-century Greek texts and their similarities with Chronicles.¹³ John Wright's essay in this volume is a welcome addition to this movement, especially as he points out the deep structures of continuity between the Persian and Hellenistic periods: "It is possible to see so-called Hellenization as the continuation and even intensification of 'Persia-fication'" (p. 197). By examining the theme of divine retribution, Wright brings together two streams of further research that I am calling for in this response: a return to examining the themes of Chronicles, particularly in their literariness, and investigating the comparative evidence. However, these pieces on Greek influence may have been the easy steps. Digging out the Aramaic, Akkadian, and Old Persian texts and examining them are yet to come.

As a final direction for Chronicles research, I suggest that contextual readings hold out the most promise. We Canadian biblical scholars have noted in conversation the high number of Canadians involved in Chronicles research. As one of us, John Kessler, said to me a few years ago, on entering a conference room at the (American) Society of Biblical Literature, "It's quite a Canadian mafia here, isn't it?" What is it about the Canadian context—social, political, academic, linguistic—that has led to this concentration of research? Nevertheless, what I would propose is a greater explicit link between our social settings as scholars and our work with Chronicles. Rather than pretending it is simply an interesting intellectual problem, we can read out of our context. The movement of "contextual biblical interpretation" is not new any longer, as the

13. See the cautions in Duke, "Recent Research," 20–22. See also an important article by G. N. Knoppers, "Greek Historiography and the Chronicler's History: A Re-examination," *JBL* 122 (2003) 627–50.

Fortress Press series Texts and Contexts demonstrates.¹⁴ My anecdote about language in Montreal—and, indeed, my explicit framing of this response as having its origin in a real time and place—is meant as an example of this sort of contextualization of our research.

Finally, in the interests of full disclosure and contextualization, I would like to use this opportunity to say that I have gained immensely from working on *Chronicles*. With one or two exceptions, every contributor to this volume and every participant in the Montreal seminar is a person I have come to know over the years and value highly. (The exceptions are students whom I simply have not had the chance to know yet.) Gary Knoppers and Ehud Ben Zvi have been friends and mentors. John Wright and Mark Boda have been great supporters of my own work. Keith Bodner and Mark Leuchter (who participated in Montreal) are latecomers to *Chronicles*, but I flatter myself that this interest may have arisen in part because of our own academic friendship. Knowing Louis Jonker, Steve Schweitzer, Paul Evans, and Tyler Williams has enriched my own life and work. To all of you, many, many thanks.

14. See, e.g., the preface in A. Brenner, A. C. C. Lee, and G. A. Yee, *Genesis* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) xi–xvi.