Introduction

First and Second Chronicles, known as Divre Hayyamim in Hebrew (The Annals) and as Paraleipomena in Greek (Things Omitted), is found in all the canons of the Hebrew Bible. Its English name derives from the Vulgate’s Chronica. In the Jewish Tanakh it is one book, usually located at the end of the third division of the canon, Kethuvim (Writings), thus usually the final book of the canon. In the Christian Old Testament it is two books, located in the midst of the historical books, after 1-2 Kings and before Ezra, and thus in the middle of the canon. By immediately following 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, and being a repetition of much of their content, 1-2 Chronicles is often overlooked or assimilated to the previous books. In the Tanakh, the final Hebrew word vaya`alah (“let him go up”) is a word of hope oriented towards the future, leaving the possibility of restoration unfulfilled. The Old Testament uses that ending to make the transition to Ezra (which begins with the same sentence), which continues the story.

First Chronicles may be divided into genealogies (1 Chr 1-9) and the reign of David (1 Chr 10-29). Second Chronicles may be divided into the reign of Solomon (2 Chr 1-9) and the reigns of the kings of Judah from the death of Solomon to the Babylonian Exile, ending with the degree of Cyrus restoring the Judahites to Jerusalem (2 Chr 10-36). The building of the temple in Jerusalem by Solomon occupies the center of the combined book of 1-2 Chronicles (2 Chr 3-9). Within the largely narrative portions of 1 Chr 10-2 Chr 36 there are lists, psalms and speeches placed at key points.

Almost all of Chronicles has some parallel with another biblical text. The genealogies parallel texts from Genesis, Numbers, and Joshua. The story of David parallels 1 Sam 31 through 1 Kgs 1. The story of Solomon parallels 1 Kgs 2-11, while the story of the remaining
kings of Judah parallels 1 Kgs 13-2 Kgs 26. David’s psalm in 1 Chr 16 uses Pss 96, 105 and 106. Yet Chronicles does not slavishly follow its source texts. It omits the stories of Samuel, Saul and David’s rise (1 Sam 1-30), the stories of Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 17-2 Kgs 6), and almost all the stories about the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel that follow from Solomon’s death (1 Kgs 12 and following). Above all, Chronicles is concerned with the Davidic line of kings, Jerusalem and its temple, the Levites who serve in the temple, and the definition of “all-Israel” as being those who worship God in the Jerusalem temple, no matter their origin as Judahite (southern kingdom) or Israelite (northern kingdom).

Theologically, the God of Chronicles is a rather remote, all-powerful deity, who punishes the wicked kings and rewards the faithful kings within their lifetimes (the doctrine of immediate retribution). The blame for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian Exile lies with the final king, Zedekiah. The ritual impurity and pollution accumulated within the land of Judah over the centuries is removed by the land remaining empty, fulfilling its Sabbaths (2 Chr 36:21). Chronicles deftly combines the theodicy in Kings with the Sabbath and purity laws of Leviticus in its formulation of the reason for the Exile.

There is a general consensus among scholars that Chronicles was written in the 5th-4th centuries BCE, the latter part of the Persian Period, and probably before the widespread Hellenization of Judaea following Alexander the Great’s conquest of the late 4th century. Scholars call the anonymous author the Chronicler; Jewish and Christian tradition has held that Ezra was the author. In the 20th century, many scholars considered that the author of Chronicles was also the author of Ezra and Nehemiah; this hypothesis has been largely discarded. That Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah are all written in the same form of Hebrew (known as Late
Biblical Hebrew) is largely agreed-upon. However, the individual styles and vocabulary of Chronicles on the one hand and Ezra-Nehemiah on the other suggest different authors.

The historical conditions of the 5th-4th centuries in Yehud (the Persian province corresponding roughly to the former kingdom of Judah) are not well understood. The written evidence outside of Ezra-Nehemiah is scarce, the material remains are scanty. Scholars rely on Greek sources such as Herodotus for the history of the Persian Empire, as very few Persian inscriptions or narrative texts from within the empire exist. Nevertheless, we can say that during the second half of the Persian period, Yehud was a relatively small, out-of-the-way province. The Chronicler was likely a Jerusalem temple official/scribe, perhaps a Levite, writing in an impoverished and neglected province of the vast Persian Empire. He does not seem to have had access to any texts outside of those that have come to us as part of the Tanakh/Old Testament. He wrote in a form of Hebrew that was not the classical Hebrew of his sources, perhaps because his Hebrew imitated the spoken Hebrew of his time or because he saw classical Hebrew as the language of the golden age long past.

Issues of interest to women

Chronicles does not seem at first glance to be a book that might hold interest for women. There are very few women in the text; many of the women we find in Samuel or Kings appear in stories that Chronicles does not tell. As Roland Boer has noted, “Chronicles reminds me a little of East Sydney: men as far as the eye can see… And if East Sydney was one of the first gay ghettos in the city, Chronicles is one of the first men-only utopias… [A] feminist criticism is that this male-only world relies on the silencing of women” (251). Overwhelmingly, the most obvious characterization of women in Chronicles is as mothers. Women appear often in the genealogies of 1 Chr 1-9 as the mother of certain children (almost entirely male children). The
most frequent mention of women in 1 Chr 10-2 Chr 36 is also as mothers: the usual formula at
the beginning of each king’s reign notes the name of the king’s mother.

There has been very little feminist scholarship on Chronicles, and this situation does not
look as if it will change soon. The only book-length work is Julie Kelso’s *O Mother, Where Art
Thou?*. While one of the dominant figures of Chroniclers scholarship of the past forty years is a
woman, Sara Japhet, her work has not engaged with feminist discussions.

What can we do for a reading of Chronicles that would be of interest to women?
Cataloguing the occurrences of women would be tedious and short. Instead, I propose to read
through the lens of gender performance. Originating in Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, the
concept that gender may be analyzed as a performance, beyond a simple construct, has been used
profitably in literary analysis. Since Chronicles is such a relentlessly textual book, drawing
explicitly on previous texts and using many more texts than it explicitly cites, looking at how
gender is performed in some other biblical texts may be of some use. In Isaiah and other
prophetic texts, as Cynthia Chapman has shown, gender is performed in the deployment of
imagery that links defeated enemies with women. Yhwh is depicted as performing masculinity
in his treatment of his daughter/wife Jerusalem. Extrapolating from this analysis, we may
hypothesize that femininity is performed by not performing as a man. As a negative formulation
this may be unsatisfactory for the reader of this commentary. As a positive formulation, we may
hypothesize that performing femininity involves performing maternity and submission.

What place is there for procreation? Women give birth – the biological fact. But this
biological fact becomes part of a contested stage of performance. I shall argue that Chronicles
attempts to depict procreation as a masculine performance while attempting to efface the
biological fact of procreation as a woman’s prerogative.
Roland Boer’s essay in *The Queer Bible Commentary* offers one way into an analysis of the male-only world of Chronicles. I offer another. We both use Julie Kelso’s work as foundational, we both seek a liberational reading, and while Boer undoes the male utopia by showing its fundamental campiness, I hold out less hope that the male utopia can be undone. Readers of this commentary hoping for a hermeneutics of recuperation will not find it in this entry. Chronicles is concerned with cleanliness and simplicity (as in the doctrine of immediate reward/retribution). Often described as “inclusive” of foreigners, as having a “pan-Israel” theology, this text is actually highly exclusive: it overwrites, effaces, and erases women. This tendency towards describing that which excludes as “inclusive” is just as strong today. Chronicles teaches us how to see it.

1 Chronicles 1-9

Surely 1 Chr 1 is the most masculine chapter in the entire Hebrew Bible. Beginning with Adam, a genealogy of sons through the male line to Esau and Jacob follows, concluding with a genealogy of the kings of Edom. As Julie Kelso points out, all this procreation happens without women, and more importantly, using the verb *yālad* “he gave birth/he bore.” The men bear other men. The more usual form of the verb used of men is *hōlid* “he caused to bear=he begot,” which does not require a named feminine partner but implies one. Compare Gen 11:12-13, “Arpachshad was alive for 35 years when he caused to bear [*vayyōled*] Shelah. After his causing to bear [*hōlidō*] of Shelah…” with 1 Chr 1:18, “And Arpachshad bore [*yālad*] Shelah” (all translations are my own). The first woman to enter the text is Keturah, Abraham’s *pīlegesh* (secondary wife), who bears (*yālēdā*) sons (1 Chr 1:32). These sons are then explicitly named as “the sons of Keturah” (1:33). This maternal line is not the line of Israel. A woman performs maternity, and her children are outside the people.
The most extensive genealogies in 1 Chr 1-9 are those of Judah, including David and the Judahite kings (2:3-4:23), Levi (5:27-6:66), and Benjamin (7:6-11; 8:1-40; 9:35-43). The Judahites, Benjaminites and priest-Levites who (re-)settled after “Judah was exiled to Babylon” (9:1) are briefly described in 9:1-34, with the bulk of the description going to the Levites. While both the genealogies of Judah and Benjamin include women – although in a complicated manner – the genealogy of Levi includes only one woman: Miriam, the sister of Moses, who is never associated with maternity. Priests follow, in a long line of masculine procreation using the verb hôlid: priests cause – someone – to bear, but the mothers are all effaced and silenced. In a fantasy of masculine performativity, men replicate themselves, bypassing their women altogether.

The mother of Jabez and her son are the only two speaking figures of 1 Chr 1-9. She speaks in 1 Chr 4:9, but she is not named. Her speech is to name her son Jabez (yaḇēts), “because I bore him in pain [ʿōtseb].” A woman who voices the performative act of maternity names it as pain and is herself left unnamed. Jabez’s father is not clearly named – Jabez “dangles.” Julie Kelso argues that Jabez’s speech, his prayer to God (4:10), is a calling upon the surrogate father to negate the mother’s expression of authority through her act of naming. To extend this reading, by calling on God to perform the father’s role, Jabez seeks to undo the expression of the mother’s performance of maternity. It cannot be coincidence that the speech of the mother is immediately overspoken.

We might take the acts of Jabez’s mother and Jabez as typological for the entire book of Chronicles. As the woman performs femininity through the ultimate performative act of birth and naming, the man immediately acts to perform his masculinity. The performance of masculinity requires that all creative acts (speech acts, naming acts, procreative acts) be
appropriated. The allusion in 1 Chr 4:9 to Gen 3:16, Yhwh’s punishment of Eve, “in pain you shall bear sons,” also invites us to consider its continuation: “and/but for your man shall be your desire, and he shall rule over you.” Jabez’s mother, who performs maternity, does not desire any man, so Jabez takes her place and performs maternal desire for God, his man, at the same time as he rules over her speech.

1 Chronicles 10-29

The second major portion of Chronicles is the story of David in 1 Chr 10-29. The story does not begin with David, but with the death of Saul. Saul is positioned in the story as the anti-David: everything David does is the opposite of Saul. We should not ignore the gendered aspects of 1 Chr 10. In the battle of Mount Gilboa, Saul was wounded/pierced by arrows, asked his armour-bearer to run him through, fell upon his own sword, was stripped by Philistines, and had his head nailed through. A body so exposed and pierced is not just humiliated, it is feminized: gazed upon, raped by the sword, pierced by the “uncircumsized” whom Saul fears will humiliate him (the verb hith`allēl has connotations of rape as well as humiliation). No wonder his body is named as a hollow shell (gûphâ), emptied of his sons. Saul performs femininity even as he most fears it.

David, on the other hand, is a masculine man. His first act is to perform the masculine act of war and conquest of Jerusalem, and he succeeds – in contrast to Saul. Then Jerusalem/Jebus/Zion (1 Chr 11:4-5) is renamed the City of David: David is the subject of the act of naming, as if he himself had given birth to the city. The first two chapters of David’s stories then enumerate all the warriors who established themselves or supported David. 1 Chr 11:10 introduces a term that is characteristic of Chronicles and rare outside of it: hithhazzeq “to make oneself strong/to establish/to strengthen;” 15 of the 27 occurrences in the Bible are in Chronicles,
appearing with respect to almost every king (see Table 1). While the common verb hāzaq “to be strong/to grasp” is frequently used, this rarer form emphasizes how the man performs his strength. David’s story begins with an account of his pumped-up manly men, pages and pages of them, all pledging loyalty.

What do these manly men do next? They attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem (1 Chr 13). The manly men start singing and dancing – a moment of high camp, as Roland Boer notes. Perhaps the ultimate manly man, Yhwh, disapproves: he strikes down one man and makes David afraid. The Ark’s journey is interrupted, which gives David time to build a house for himself. This house is both literal: a building; and metaphorical: sons. The text betrays a little anxiety here: David took more women and caused to bear more sons and daughters (1 Chr 14:3), yet the narrative has not given any earlier procreative exploits (only in the genealogy – 1 Chr 3:1-3). Tellingly, none of his Jerusalemite wives are named: David causes to bear all these sons. At this point the manly men warriors fade from the picture, as David’s two battles against the Philistines in 1 Chr 14 are won by God, not by them.

The next groups of men to appear are the priests and Levites, swarms of them in 1 Chr 15, with their instruments and choirs, and David himself leaping and dancing. Michal, daughter of Saul, sees David dancing and “despises him in her heart” (15:29). The reason for her distaste is not given – nor is she named as his wife as in 1-2 Samuel. Michal is the last woman we hear of for quite some time; in fact, she is the last woman we hear of in the story of David. She is a dangling woman, looking out a window, with a dead father and no named husband or sons. She is a decorative object, without function. She despises David. Do we see Chronicles’ masculine utopia disturbed? Do we see a fear that, in their hearts, the women despise the men? If performing maternity has been displaced from women to men already in the text, is hatred all
that is left for the woman to perform? No wonder no other women are permitted to speak or act
until the Queen of Sheba in 2 Chr 9!

The transition from David to Solomon is unmarked by women. Solomon is brought
forward, named as David’s successor, popularly acclaimed and crowned in 1 Chr 28-29. The
transition has been recognized as having been patterned on the transition from Moses to Joshua
in Deuteronomy, complete with instructions for the work to be undertaken by the successor. In
Solomon’s case, this work is the construction of the temple, for which David has provided not
just the idea, but the site, the plans, the materials, and the arrangement of cultic personnel (1 Chr
21-29). For a man of blood (1 Chr 22:8, 28:3), David is peculiarly concerned with decoration
and performance of cultic duties; Roland Boer is undoubtedly right also to describe David’s
arrangements as high camp.

2 Chronicles 1-9

The man of peace (1 Chr 22:9), Solomon, is a peculiar character in Chronicles. Stripped
of his role as temple builder, and relegated to being a mere general contractor and decorator, he
is also stripped of his women: no catalogue of wives and secondary wives.

If to perform masculinity in Chronicles is to produce (give birth to?) sons, and to make
one’s self strong, then Solomon immediately does the latter (2 Chr 1:1), but not the former. We
can see the temple as his procreative issue. In that case, David is the begetter and Solomon the
birther. David causes Solomon to bear the temple, if we return to the causative meaning of the
verb ḥôlîd. At one stroke, Solomon becomes both the feminine object and is effaced as
masculine subject. No wonder that Solomon’s temple, the fruit of his labour, takes the form of
an enormous phallic representation. As Julie Kelso and Roland Boer have both astutely
recognized, modern commentators have been quick to ascribe the 120 cubit high vestibule to
scribal error (2 Chr 3:4). Kelso goes on to suggest that the phallic vestibule in front of the womb-like temple interior is an expression of the text’s desire for mono-sexual reproduction. If we read Solomon as the birther of this temple, his anxieties about performing the feminine role have been overwritten by his monstrously phallic vestibule. Yet we should note that Solomon has not caused to bear any actual sons.

Solomon has effectively effaced the role of the woman in Chronicles. No stories of women are allowed to compete with him as producer-procreator of the temple. No hint that children of unknown fathers may be produced by women (1 Kgs 3). No suggestion that a mother might be important for succession to the kingship (1 Kgs 1). Solomon’s production is a representation of mono-sexual reproduction, the ideal expressed in the genealogies taken physical form. Solomon’s actual wife is mentioned in merely one verse. In this verse (2 Chr 8:11), Solomon gives the reason for moving Pharaoh’s daughter to his own palace: “My own wife shall not live in the House of David, King of Israel, for the precincts are holy since the Ark of Yhwh has entered them.” The Ark of the Covenant of Yhwh was brought into the Holy of Holies of the temple in 2 Chr 5:7, so the House of David is conflated with the temple. No woman can be allowed to remain within the site of mono-sexual reproduction.

Returning to 2 Chr 5, instead of the glory of Yhwh filling the Holy of Holies when the Ark enters (as in 1 Kgs 8:10), the Ark with its long carrying poles is the only representation of Yhwh’s presence. Instead of Yhwh as divine begetter entering the womb-temple, the priests withdraw from the Holy of Holies, because they have made themselves holy (5:11). Holiness is human withdrawal, and so Solomon withdraws his wife from the temple precincts as well. Perhaps Solomon also withdraws from his wife, trusting in his ability to perform mono-sexual reproduction.
The longest episode involving any woman in Chronicles is 2 Chr 9, the visit of the Queen of Sheba. That this episode is in this text, this text that has written so many women out, is surprising. A woman’s judgment on Solomon’s wisdom, wealth and general state of blessedness surely does not count for much in this male-oriented text. How does this episode depict the performance of masculinity and femininity? First, that this woman should come to Solomon places her as performing the active role and Solomon as performing the passive receiver. She tests him with riddles and speaks to him. The last speaking woman in Chronicles was Jabez’s mother in 1 Chr 4, who spoke Jabez into being and was overspoken by her son. The Queen of Sheba can be read as all the displaced women of Chronicles. She comes, she gives of herself, she blesses Solomon and all his men, and then she leaves to return to her own land. By blessing Solomon’s kingdom and his God, she legitimizes the silencing of all the other women.

Solomon does not beget any children in his own narrative. He produces only the temple, not sons. While Solomon’s reign ends on a narrative high, the production of the temple in place of sons soon comes to be a problem. Not until the very last verse of his story is his son Rehoboam mentioned (2 Chr 9:31).

2 Chronicles 10-36

Rehoboam is blamed immediately for the division in the kingdom, for the rebellion (from the Chronicler’s perspective) of the northern tribes under Jeroboam, and the subsequent formation of the northern kingdom of Israel. The remnant faithful to David’s house forms the kingdom of Judah centered on Jerusalem and its temple. Rehoboam attempts early and publicly to perform his masculinity. When confronted by the unhappy people, he ignores the wisdom of his father’s advisors and listens to his contemporaries instead. Their advice is to say, “My little finger is thicker than my father’s loins” (2 Chr 10:10). They advise him to publicly expose
himself, to show he’s a real man. Since Rehoboam’s existence is the only evidence that Solomon could perform his masculinity, the taunt is of greater import than we might expect (Solomon’s wives and secondary wives being written out of Chronicles). But when speaking to the people, Rehoboam declines to comment on the size of his finger, displacing his performance into the promise-threat of more work and oppression for the people.

After the withdrawal of Israel from Judah, Rehoboam performs his masculinity in other ways in an attempt to out-do his father. He takes eighteen wives and sixty secondary wives, and causes to bear 28 sons and sixty daughters (2 Chr 11:18-21). He also spends a good deal of time building fortified cities: words for building and strengthening appear frequently in 2 Chr 11-12. However, he is forced to perform submission, both to Shishak of Egypt and to Yhwh. Rehoboam humbles himself before Yhwh, and then strengthens himself. There is a constant back and forth between performances of masculinity and performances of submissiveness in the story of Rehoboam.

Beginning with Rehoboam’s narrative, a certain number of formulaic features appear in the stories of the kings of Judah (see Table 1). Typically, each king is given a regnal notice(s) that includes his age at accession, the length of his reign, the name of his mother, a source citation, and judgment as to his deeds being good or evil in Yhwh’s sight. (In Chronicles there is recognition that a good king can go bad and a bad king good, so some judgments are mixed.) He is also described as having strengthened himself (hithhazzeq) and having humbled himself (nikna`) before Yhwh – these terms are almost unique to Chronicles. His building activities, especially in regards to the temple are also noted. There is a pronounced tendency to depict the kings in father-son pairs, especially so that a bad king is balanced by a good king. The most conspicuous representative of this trend is Ahaz (2 Chr 28) and his son Hezekiah (2 Chr 29-32):
Ahaz is the most wicked king, the only one to close Yhwh’s temple (28:24); Hezekiah is the best king since David, especially in terms of temple restoration and worship (29:2, 30:26, 31:20-21), and it is not a coincidence that his name means “May Yhwh strengthen.”

Dueling performances of gender are enacted by Jehoiada and Athaliah in 2 Chr 22-24. Athaliah, mentioned in 22:2 as the mother of Ahaziah and daughter of Omri, does not perform the maternal role as expected. Instead, she counsels Ahaziah to do evil (22:3). Upon his death, she comes to the fore. She performs the masculine role: she destroys/speaks (dibber) all the “royal seed” (22:10). The speaking woman then goes on to “be king” (moleketh) over Judah (22:12). The performance of masculinity by Athaliah comes not coincidentally at the point when the Davidic line is closest to extinction. Only a six-year old boy, Joash, remains alive, but hidden. In Chronicles this is the most severe disruption imaginable (given more narrative space than Ahaz’s closing of the temple): not just that a woman reigns, not just that she is a daughter of the reviled house of Omri/Ahab, but that she speaks and performs masculinity.

Athaliah’s performance is ended by the priest Jehoiada – the only non-royal man who strengthens himself (hithhazzeq) (23:1); the term is often translated as “took courage,” but it is important to highlight the performance of royal masculinity by Jehoiada. He arms Joash’s bodyguard and stations the army to protect Joash’s anointing (23:9-10). He makes a covenant between himself, the people, Joash, and Yhwh (23:16), and he restores cultic worship (23:17-18). Jehoiada takes wives for Joash: it is possible to read this sentence as “And Jehoiada took for himself two wives and he caused to bear sons and daughters” (24:3), harkening back to the genealogies where men procreate. Finally, Jehoidada’s death is described the same way as David’s (24:15-16, cf. 1 Chr 29:28). And what of Athaliah? Before this display of male performativity she speaks again: “Treason! Treason!” (23:13). Her performance is overwhelmed.
and negated: she is put to death, but most specifically, put to death by the sword (23:21):
penetrated by a whole army of men. It is not enough to silence this speaking woman by
overspeaking her (as with Jabez’s mother), or by banishing her (as with the Queen of Sheba), she
is subjected not just to the male gaze, but to the performance of masculinity upon her body.

With women so effectively written out of Chronicles, and the ultimate revenge fantasy
enacted upon Athaliah, the final speaking woman is merely the channel for Yhwh’s words. After
Josiah’s men find a scroll of instruction while repairing the temple, they take it to Huldah the
prophet (2 Chr 34:22-28), who says no words of her own, but uses the formula “thus says Yhwh”
three times (23, 24, 26) and “declares Yhwh” once (27). This speaking woman is the vessel for
Yhwh’s speech. She performs as every woman in the genealogies has performed: the elided
means by which the male fantasy of auto-procreation is enacted.

Josiah’s death at Megiddo in 2 Chr 35, pierced by arrows while in disguise, reminiscent
of the deaths of both Saul (1 Chr 10) and Ahab (2 Chr 18), brings to mind the disruptions in the
male bodies found in Chronicles. Even the good kings Asa, Uzziah, and Hezekiah are afflicted
with disease, while the evil king Joram’s innards exit his body in a gruesome parody of birth (2
Chr 21:18-19). Many of the evil kings are “put to death,” some explicitly murdered (e.g., Joash
in 2 Chr 24:25). The frailty of the male body is on display. Yet by erupting in “birth” and by
being pierced by arrows and swords and spears and knives it performs femininity as well. The
idea of mono-sexual reproduction is exhibited, effacing and erasing the women of Chronicles.

Annotated bibliography
Kelso, Julie. O Mother, Where Art Thou? An Irigarayan Reading of the Book of Chronicles
The only book-length feminist engagement with Chronicles.

Drawing on queer theory, utopian readings and Marxian dialectics, an original reading of the genderedness of Chronicles.


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Using the work of Judith Butler, shows how masculinity is performed in prophetic texts.


The 1999 printing has a new preface.
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