INTRODUCTION

This book is about the religion and politics of the Chronicler. The Chronicler’s thinking on these two subjects is labelled here “theocratic” because what we see as two spheres—the religious and the political—he sees as one; in Chronicles, Israel is “the kingdom of Yahweh”. What I want to explore in the following study is the relationship between the Chronicler’s theocratic ideas and the socio-historical context within which he worked; hence, the term ideology. I use the term ideology, not as a synonym for ideas, thought or theology but rather for ideas or language with a particular social force. Applying this to Chronicles, what I will argue is that the theocratic ideas of the Chronicler had a particular social force in the context of the Jewish community centred on Jerusalem in the late Persian period.

The Jewish community of which the Chronicler was a part can be described as theocratic in constitution. The word “theocracy”—literally “rule by God”—was invented by Josephus to describe the blending of religion and politics which characterized the Jewish nation in the Second Temple period and set it apart from other forms of government:

There is endless variety in the details of the customs and laws which prevail in the world at large. To give but a summary enumeration: some peoples have entrusted the supreme political power to monarchies, others to oligarchies, yet others to the masses. Our lawgiver, however, was attracted by none of these forms of polity, but gave to his constitution the form of what—if a forced expression be permitted—may be termed a “theocracy”, placing all sovereignty and authority in the hands of God. To Him he persuaded all to look, as the author of all blessings, both those which are common to all mankind, and those which they had won for themselves by prayer in the crises of their history. He convinced him that no single action, no secret thought, could be hid from Him. He represented Him as One, uncreated and immutable to all eternity; in beauty surpassing all mortal thought, made known to us by His power, although the nature of His real being passes knowledge (Against Apion, 2.164–7).

Insofar as “rule by God” meant in effect “rule by priests” Judah was a theocracy for most of the Second Temple period. Indeed for much of this period Judah was ruled by the high priest, either in a dyarchy
with governors appointed by the Persians or as sole ruler and representative of the people as was the case under the Ptolemies. The Hasmonean kingdom was a theocratic kingdom as well in that the Hasmoneans were both kings and high priests. When Josephus wrote the above description of Judaism, the “theocratic period” had already passed, having fallen victim to Rome’s iron will. Under the Romans and prior to 70 CE the high priest had much less power than in earlier times, but the temple was still the centre of life for the Jews both in Palestine and the Diaspora.¹

Josephus’s nostalgia for the theocratic period comes through in the story he relates of Alexander’s visit to Jerusalem. On hearing that Alexander was on his way up to Jerusalem from Gaza, Jaddua the high priest was, according to Josephus, justifiably concerned about the fate of Jerusalem. He had earlier refused to submit to Alexander on account of his prior commitment to Darius and therefore expected the worst. However, Jaddua is assured by God in a dream that no harm would come to Jerusalem and is further instructed on how he should meet Alexander. Thus,

When he learned that Alexander was not far from the city, he went out with the priests and the body of citizens, and, making the reception sacred in character and different from that of other nations, met him at a certain place called Saphein. . . . [And] when Alexander while still far off saw the multitude in white garments, the priests at their head clothed with linen, and the high priest in a robe of hyacinth-blue and gold, wearing on his head the mitre with the golden plate on it on which was inscribed the name of God, he approached alone and prostrated himself before the Name and first greeted the high priest (Antiquities, 11.5.329–31).

This story is a legend but the image is not that far off the mark. For much of the Second Temple period Jerusalem could indeed be described as a theocratic city-state “sacred in character” made up of priests and citizens with a high priest at it head. Hecataeus of Abdera, the earliest Greek author to refer to the Jews, describes the Jewish nation in similar terms:

The colony [in Judea] was led by a man called Moses, who was outstanding both in wisdom and bravery. On taking possession of the

¹ See L. L. Grabbe’s discussion in Judaism From Cyrus to Hadrian (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp. 73–5 and 607–16.
country [having been expelled from Egypt] he founded many cities including the one which is most conspicuous, which is called Jerusalem. He also founded the Temple which they hold in greatest honour, introduced the honours and ritual paid to (their) god, established laws and organized the form of their state. . . . He picked out the men of greatest accomplishment who would be most able to lead the entire nation and appointed them priests, and prescribed how they should occupy themselves with the Temple and the honours and sacrifices (paid) to God. He also appointed them to be judges in the most important cases, and entrusted to them the guardianship of the laws and customs (of the nation). That is why the Jews have never had a king, but the leadership of the mass of the people is always vested in the priest who appears to excel in wisdom and virtue. They call him the High-Priest, and believe him to be the mediator of God’s commands to them. According to (Hecataeus), it is he who in their assemblies and their other meetings proclaims what is ordained, and the Jews are so obedient in such matters that they immediately fall to the ground and do obeisance to the High-Priest who expounds (these commands) to them. The statement is even added at the end of their (code of) laws that “Moses heard from God these words which he declares to the Jews”.

In the case of Chronicles I use the word theocracy, not in the specific sense of rule by priests, but in the broader sense of a temple-centred polity or (as Weinberg puts it) a citizen-temple community. Chronicles was probably written in the second half of the fourth century BC; perhaps just before Alexander’s conquest of the Persian empire. If Josephus’s story were true one could well imagine the Chronicler taking part in the procession that greeted Alexander. As it turns out, though, we know very little about Judah in the fourth century other than the fact that the temple was all important. The fourth century has not entered into the narrative history of the Jews, biblical or otherwise, and this reinforces the idea that Judah lived in relative isolation from the world in the first half of the Second Temple period. Chronicles thus represents a rare window onto the

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4 Not including Josephus’s legendary anecdotes about the high priests of this period in Antiquities.
thinking (if not the historic-chronological data) of the theocratic com-
community in Judah from this time period. Just as the temple was all important in Second Temple Judaism so too is the temple the central theme of Chronicles and it is for this reason that I speak of theocratic ideology. The theocratic ideology of the Chronicler could mean two things: on the one hand, it could refer to the Chronicler’s own particular thoughts about the temple as opposed to another writer’s theocratic ideology. On the other hand, it could refer to the ideology of the theocratic community as expressed by the Chronicler. In light of the significance of the temple in Judah, what Chronicles tells us about the latter is the more interesting of the two from a socio-historical perspective and it is in this area that I want to concentrate. In my reading of Chronicles I treat it as cross-section of the discourse which enveloped the Second Temple at a particular point in time. It is this discourse, and the practices associated with it, that made the temple what it was in the minds of the priests, patrons and peasants who organized their lives around it.

By speaking of theocracy and ideology I also intend to foreground the socio-political implications of what the Chronicler says. Josephus treats the status of the temple as an accomplished fact or at least as a feat accomplished by Moses in the very distant past. The Chronicler, on the other hand, makes David the founder of the theocratic kingdom of Yahweh. What I aim to demonstrate in the following is that the theocratic constitution of Judah in the Second Temple period was not so much a “reality” to be taken for granted as an ideological achievement in which the Chronicler played no small part.

Interpreting Chronicles in light of its historical context is not new; what is new is that I do so with reference to the concept of ideology as understood in the social sciences. The first two chapters are devoted to explaining this new approach: the first, retrospectively, with reference to the debate about the Chronicler’s purpose; the sec-

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5 By “window” I am not suggesting that Chronicles is “a source of information”, but as information in itself; not as an opening on a reality laying beyond, but as an element which makes up that reality” [M. Liverani, “Memorandum on the Approach to Historiographic Texts,” *Orientalia* 42 (1973), p. 179].

6 Assuming for the time being that if a text survives from the Persian period it must be representative of a relatively significant group within Judaism.
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ond, prospectively, with reference to the social theoretical issues involved in the concept of ideology.

In chapter one, I examine the notion of purpose and the relationship between purpose and ideology in the interpretation of Chronicles. The differentiation between aspects of purpose—intention, motive, and contextual function—and ideology and the interpretative interests that go with them is a central feature of the argument. The survey of research which follows the analysis of these concepts is a critical assessment of modern Chronicles scholarship with a view to highlighting the ways in which the relationship between text and context is conceptualized. The problem as I see it is that the notion of purpose, as it is used in the interpretation of Chronicles, is too cumbersome and undifferentiated. The implication of this view in substantive terms is that the current juxtapositioning of “exclusivist” versus “inclusivist”, “theocrat” versus “royalist” interpretations needs to be re-examined.

The concept of ideology raises a number of important theoretical issues which are addressed in chapter two. Of particular importance is the role of the concept of ideology in interpretation. Ideology is most often associated with critique—Marxist critique in particular—which raises serious questions about the typical hermeneutical stance of the interpreter. There is a tendency to place hermeneutics on one side and critique on the other: interpreters try to understand while critics try to explain in terms of causal forces and expose the false-consciousness involved. The attitude of the former is empathy; the attitude of the latter suspicion. In opposition to this juxtaposition I will argue that interpretation and critique are complementary moves within a broader hermeneutical perspective. At the core of this argument is Ricoeur’s three-stage analysis of ideology as it relates to distortion, legitimation and integration/identity. Ricoeur argues that aspects of the social phenomena called ideology are intertwined and demand a number of attitudes, approaches and conceptual models ranging from suspicion and critique to interpretative empathy.

The three readings which follow in chapters three, four and six deal in turn with each of the three dimensions of ideology identified by Ricoeur (though in reverse order).

In chapter three I examine the Chronicler’s ideology of identity using the notion of exile as my point of reference and comparing his ideology with that put forward in Ezra-Nehemiah. My aim in this chapter is to uncover the nature of the difference between the
Chronicler’s more inclusive ideology of identity and the so-called exclusivism of the writer of Ezra-Nehemiah.

In chapter four I look at the way the Chronicler identifies “Israel” though now from the point of view of legitimation. The relationship between identity and legitimacy is explored from the theoretical side by Ricoeur and Geertz and I draw on their analyses in order to demonstrate the way in which the “broader” definition of Israel is inextricably tied to the question of the legitimacy of the “kingdom of Yahweh in the hands of the sons of David” (2 Chron. 13:8). My aim is to show that the Chronicler’s ideology of identity is at the same time an ideology which legitimates Jerusalem’s role as the sole legitimate centre of Israel for all Israel and in the Chronicler’s day.

Prior to my third reading of Chronicles, I explore the internal social situation in Persian Judah (chapter five). The objective is to uncover the hierarchical structures within Judean society and the exploitation which they enabled. I argue that there was a system of hierarchies within the post-exilic community with the Second Temple at the centre and reaching all the way down to the בֵּית אָבֵי or “houses of the fathers”, the primary social unit in Judah.

Finally, in chapter six I explore the possible consequences of believing the claims put forward by the Chronicler on behalf of the Second Temple. It is my view that such belief was taken up in the interests of power and did contribute to the maintenance of the power and prestige of the temple. These ideological critical deliberations presuppose the distinction between intent and consequence; between what the Chronicler consciously intended to say and do and the consequences of what he said and did. From the point of view of the contextual functions of the Chronicler’s ideology, his work should be characterized as ideological in the sense of supporting the dominant position of the Second Temple within the post-exilic community. Furthermore, the degree to which the Second Temple was an oppressive presence in the community is the degree to which the Chronicler’s ideology—insofar as it supports this presence—is distorted. This is not a judgement about something intrinsic to Chronicles but a judgment about the functional properties of Chronicles in the context of the Jewish theocracy of the early Second Temple period.