From Paraleipomenon to Early Reader: The Implications of Recent Chronicles Studies for Pentateuchal Criticism

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1 Introduction

It is common knowledge that interest in the Book of Chronicles has bloomed in the past three decades. It is remarkable that the book, which was once designated “Paraleipomenon” (“of the omitted things”) by the Septuagint translators, and was devalued in 19th century biblical scholarship as “midrash” of older and more reliable historical books, has now become the study object of a vibrant part of Hebrew Bible scholarship. Whereas earlier studies were mainly interested in the historical value of Chronicles compared to the so-called Deuteronomistic History, recent scholarship has given an own place to the Chronicler as author and theologian. Whereas the Book of Chronicles was studied in an earlier phase merely to glean “the omitted things” from this book in order to append the historical picture we get from the other historical books, the focus in recent studies is much more on the Chronicler’s own engagement with his sources and his contribution towards the socio-religious

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discourse in his own time, most probably towards the end of the Persian era. The primary interest is therefore no longer the positivistic one to establish the “hard facts” of history by means of this book, but rather to determine the rhetorical thrust of this work, which creatively made use of earlier sources within the socio-political and socio-religious conditions in Jerusalem during the late Persian period. Many scholars therefore indicate that the “Cinderella” of biblical scholarship has emerged from her neglected status to become a shining princess.

During the same past decades new focal points also emerged in Pentateuch studies. Particularly two of these developments are significant for our study. On the one hand, the extent of the literary work at the beginning of the Hebrew Bible has become a hotly-debated topic again. The debates focus on whether one should assume a Pentateuch, Hexateuch or even Enneateuch in the early history of literature formation. On the other hand, a renewed interest in the

5 See the various contributions in M. Patrick Graham, Kenneth G. Hoglund, and Steven L. McKenzie, eds., The Chronicler as Historian (JSOTSup 238; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).
7 The first reference to Chronicles as the former “Cinderella” of biblical scholarship appeared in Kleinig, “Recent Research on Chronicles.”
8 The question about the extent of the literary works at the beginning of the Hebrew Bible is not new. Already the seminal works by Martin Noth and Gerhard von Rad struggled with the question whether one should assume a Tetrateuch plus Dtr History (Noth), or rather a Hexateuch in which the promise to the patriarchs finds fulfillment in the book of Joshua (von Rad). For almost the entire second part of the twentieth century these two views stood alongside one another in scholarship, until the debate was reopened in the final decade of the previous century.