The Supposed Common Authorship of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemia Investigated Anew

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A basic hypothesis in the study of Chr. and of Ezr.-Neh. is the supposition that these two books originally formed one continuous work, written or compiled by one author: “the Chronicler”. The work in its entirety is generally termed “The Chronistic Historiography”. Accordingly, it was only during the process of transmission and canonization that the book was divided into two and Ezr.-Neh. was placed separately, in most Hebrew manuscripts before Chr.1

The basis of this general conviction was laid almost simultaneously by two scholars: L. Zunz2 and F. C. Movers,3 and at the end of the 19th century it was accepted as general knowledge.4 It became a point of departure for most of the studies dealing with Chr., Ezr.-Neh. or their period in general and remained up

1) There is also a general unanimity regarding the reason for the assumed separation. With light variations it runs as follows: “The reason for the division has been seen, and probably rightly, in the fact that Ezr.-Neh. became canonical before Chr. for their contents did not appear in the older books which had already become canonical whereas those of Chr. did. When later Chr. too became canonical Ezr.-Neh. still kept its prior place”. O. Eissfeldt, The Old Testament, an Introduction, translated by P. R. Ackroyd, 1965, pp. 530-531. Cf. also J. Myers, I Chronicles, 1965, p. XVII, and W. Rudolph, Die Chronikbücher, 1955, p. IV.
3) F. C. Movers: Kritische Untersuchungen über die biblische Chronik, 1834.
4) Thus it was correctly stated by C. C. Torrey that “It is at present generally agreed that Chr.-Ez.-Neh. originally formed one book, which was put in its final form by the author of the book of Chronicles, commonly called ‘the Chronicler’. “The Composition and Historical Value of Ezra Nehemiah”, B. Z. A. W. 2, 1896, p. I. A systematic summary of the discussion is given by A. Kuenen, Historisch Kritische Einleitung in die Bücher des A. T. 1890, I § 29 p. 111ff., and by S. R. Driver, Introduction to the literature of the O.T. 1891 (Enlarged in the following editions).
to our times unshaken⁵ and unchanged.⁶ An immediate result was that each book was dealt with in constant reference to the other, and the consequences for the understanding of the books, the historical period they describe and the religious concepts they contain were enormous.⁷

The hypothesis is sustained by four main arguments:

1. The presence of the first verses of Ezr. at the end of Chr.⁸
2. 1 Esdras begins with 2 Chr. xxxv-xxxvi and continues through Ezr.⁹

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6) The position recently advanced by K. Galling, *Die Bücher der Chr. Esr. Neh.* (ATD, 1954) that not one author but two are responsible for the present work, is of no consequence from the point of view of this study. Galling maintains that the two strata in Chr. continue also through Ezr.-Neh. as a part of one composition, and thus the main assumption remains unchanged. The same is true also for the view maintained by A. S. Kapelrud who assumed that “The Chronicler is not one single author personality… By this designation we must rather understand a whole circle or more probably groups of circles…” *The Question of Authorship in the Ezra Narrative*, 1944, p. 97. Here, too, Ezr.-Neh. and Chr. are regarded as a linguistic and theological unity.

7) As an example only we could suggest the question of the historical reliability of Ezr.-Neh. The Chr.’s tendentious way of dealing with historical material is famous (although its extent is still in dispute) as is sharply stated by Torrey: “No fact of O.T. criticism is more firmly established than this: that the Chronicler, as a historian is thoroughly untrustworthy”, *op. cit.*, p. 52. If Ezr.-Neh. was written or edited by the same author, how much can we rely on it as an historical source? On the other hand, many scholars find in Ezr.-Neh. an anti-Samaritan attitude (Cf. M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*, I, 1943, p. 164ff.). If the two books are really one, it is only natural to look for it in Chr. too. But is it really to be found there?


9) Zunz, *op. cit.*, p. 30 and others. Rudolph does not mention this argument at all, in either of his commentaries, as a consequence of his general statement that “dass 3 Esra sachlich und in der Anordnung des Stoffes nirgends vor der kanonischen Darstellung den Vorzug verdient” Ezr.-Neh., p. XV.