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CHRONICLER'S WOMEN – A HOLISTIC APPRAISAL

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to fill, in part, the gap in scholarship on the role of women in the book of Chronicles by providing data to show that the Chronicler succeeded in highlighting the roles and status of women in ancient Israel, as he copiously employed materials that are otherwise unknown in the biblical text and modified his *Vorlage*. A relentless focus on kinship and familial ties is discernible in the analysis of the roles and positions of the women who are presented in a way that shows their affinities to the people (or land) of Israel. It is argued that the Chronicler was intent on showing that women – all kinds of women – were a solid part of Israel's story and of its identity that was being redefined and reconstituted. Besides affirming his concept of *כל ישראל*, the Chronicler's presentation clearly reflects the changing sociocultural patterns of his time, especially in relation to exilic/post-exilic Israelite women.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF SUMMARY OF RECENT STUDIES ON CHRONICLER'S WOMEN

A clear dearth of holistic study of women in Chronicles could be observed in ongoing research on the book of Chronicles. This article attempts to fill this gap by fleshing out new perspectives and providing data to show that, by copiously employing materials that are otherwise unknown in the biblical text as well as by modifying his *Vorlage*, the Chronicler has succeeded in highlighting the roles and status of women in ancient Israel. In this instance, holistic study means a comprehensive study that takes into account all the women mentioned in the book of Chronicles. An analysis of the textual data of women in Chronicles will, therefore, be carried out to ascertain their roles and status in the society *vis-à-vis* the entity "All Israel".

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In an essay entitled *Observations on women in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 1-9*,¹ Ben Zvi (2006:174-184) already noted that the genealogical section of the book of Chronicles refers to more than fifty different women, whether named or unnamed.² The study classifies the women into two categories based on their roles. The first category includes women involved “in lineage roles often associated with female members of an ancient household”. These include the roles of *mother-wife* (e.g., the daughter of Machir who married Hezron and gave birth to Segub in 1 Chron 2:1); *mother-concubine* (e.g., Ephah, Caleb’s concubine and the mother of his sons in 1 Chron 2:46); *mother-divorcee* (e.g., 1 Chron 8:8-11); *daughter-in-law-mother* (e.g., 1 Chron 2:4), and *identity as daughter or sister* (e.g., 1 Chron 3:2, 5; 4:18).

The second group consists of “women in roles that were commonly assigned to mature males in the society” (Ben Zvi 2006:184-186). These include women who were heads of families (e.g., Zeruah and Abigail in 1 Chron 2:16-17), and women who built cities (the only instance in this category was Sheerah). However, the issue with Ben Zvi’s classification, especially under the family/lineage roles, is that there are too many overlaps.³ For instance, under the *mother-wife* subcategory, one can observe that not every mother in the genealogies is the wife of some man, e.g., Jabez’s mother in 4:9 or Abigail, the mother of Amasa in 2:17. Moreover, some mother-wife are also recognized as the daughter (or/and the granddaughter) of a so-and-so, e.g., Mehetabel who was a wife and mother but also the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Me-Zahab (1:50) or Judah’s wife who was the mother of his three sons, but also the daughter of Shua, a Canaanite (2:3). Although Ben Zvi provides useful comments on many of the women, the subcategory does not do justice to those women, either who do not fulfil all the roles or whose roles extend beyond those specified by that subcategory.

Indeed, the second broad category of women in roles of mature males in the society overlaps considerably with the first category, for the women in its two subcategories – women as heads of families and women building cities – all perform family/lineage roles! Abigail and Zeruah were sisters to the sons of Jesse, and Zeruah is further identified as the mother of three sons (2:16). Sheerah was described as the daughter of Ephraim. To

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- 1 The essay is Chapter 9 of Ben Zvi’s 2006-book, *History, literature and theology in the Book of Chronicles*. The essay was originally published in 2003 in *Biblica* 84:457-478, and written in conjunction with A. Labahn.
 - 2 See a list of all women in the genealogical section of Chronicles in Laffey (1998:119-120).
 - 3 Ben Zvi (2006:174) himself admits that even the border between the first broad category and the second in Chronicles is porous.

be sure, the unwieldy nature of the genealogical data themselves makes clear-cut classification difficult. Ben Zvi (2006:14) acknowledges that:

[There is need for] a consistent re-evaluation of the constructions and characterizations of women in the rest of the book of Chronicles and of the ways in which they interrelate with and inform (balance?) those communicated in the genealogies.

In the *Women's Bible Commentary*, Laffey (1998:119-122) notes the description of the women of Chronicles as daughters, wives, and mothers (in the genealogies) and some as queen mothers of the Davidic dynasty. While some of the women are additions to 2 Samuel-2 Kings, some are omissions from that corpus. Laffey also remarks that many of the women in Chronicles have only fleeting references, but few of them (e.g., Bath-Shua, wife of David) are also mentioned in more detail in the Deuteronomistic History. However, there seems to be no clear provisions for categorisation in her comments beyond the two broad categories of women in the genealogies and the queen mothers.

In *Women in Scriptures*, Meyers *et al.* (2000) categorise biblical women as named and unnamed. An alphabetical listing of the named women and a book-by-book listing of the unnamed women are then provided with corresponding comments. Thus, for Chronicles, one would find entries on both named and unnamed women, but the issues concerning the women are treated on individual basis and only as part of a general directory of women in Scriptures. The value of Meyers *et al.* (2000) lies in the data it offers, but it does not provide a coherent analysis of what relates the women of Chronicles together.

The question arises: Is there an adequate way of classifying the women in Chronicles in order to facilitate the interpretive task? Besides the fact that Ben Zvi's categories of the women in the genealogies inadvertently overlap, the categories (and the subcategories) may also not be adequate to account for the women mentioned in the remaining part of 1 Chronicles and in 2 Chronicles. I (Olojede 2011:166-174) have already provided a table that examines all the references to women in Chronicles to determine in what ways all these women can be accounted for in the hermeneutical process. The data provided in that table distinguishes between the Chronicler's *Vorlage* and the *Sondergut*.

2. SUMMARY OF TEXTUAL DATA ON WOMEN IN CHRONICLES

It can be assumed that the Chronicler's *Sondergut* consists of the following: 1 Chronicles 1:33; 2:18, 19, 21,* 24, 26, 29, 34, 35, 46, 48; 3:19; 4:3, 5, 6, 9, 17, 18, 19, 27; 7:4, 15a, 16, 17-18,* 23, 24, 32; 8:8, 9, 11, 29; 9:35; 11:39; 16:3; 23:22; 25:5; 2 Chronicles 8:11b; 11:18-19, 21b, 23; 13:21; 20:13; 21:14, 17; 24:3, 7; 28:8, 10; 31:18; 35:25; 36:17 (*in 1 Chronicles 2:21 and 7:17-18, there is no mention in the *Vorlage* of 'daughters' or 'sisters'). No parallels are found for all these references either in the Pentateuchal tradition or in the Deuteronomistic History. I shall comment on the differences before considering the roles and positions of Chronicles women in the society.

2.1 Roles and positions of Chronicles women

Table 1 shows both the kinship relations and the positions or offices of all the women mentioned in the book.

Table 1: Kinship relations and social positions of women in Chronicles⁴

Kinship relation ⁵ / social position	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles
Mother(s)	1:24; 1:32; 1:33; 2:3; 2:16-17; 2:18; 2:21; 2:24; 2:26; 2:29; 2:35; 2:46; 2:48; 3:1(x2); 3:2a; 3:2b; 3:3; 3:5; 4:6; 4:9; 4:17; 4:18(x2); 4:19; 7:13; 7:14; 7:16; 7:18; 7:23; 8:9; 8:11; 11:6; 11:39; 18:12; 18:15; 26:28; 27:4	2:14; 11:19; 11:20; 12:13; 15:16; 20:31; 22:2; 22:3; 22:10; 24:26(x2); 22:2; 25:1; 26:3; 27:1; 29:1

4 In Table 1, the references in bold font represent overlapping roles, i.e., cases in which a referent plays more than one role. The underlined references are those verses in which more than one woman is mentioned, whereas the references in italics represent verses in which there is neither overlap in roles nor multiple occurrences of women.

5 The kinship terms in Hebrew are אִמָּה (mother, grandmother), בַּת (daughter, granddaughter); אִשָּׁה (woman, wife, female); אָחוֹת (sister); פְּלִיגֶשֶׁת (concubine or secondary wife); נְבִיאָה (queen-mother, queen, lady); מִינִיקָה (wet nurse, nurse, foster-mother); נְבִיאָה (prophetess); מַלְכָּה (queen). Although there does not seem to be any difference in terminology between the Chronicler's usages and the parallel texts, whether there are different nuances in the usages that are based on the sociocultural or political conditions of the separate periods involved is a different question that could require further investigation.

Wife/wives	1:50; 2:18; 2:21; 2:24; 2:26; 2:29; 2:35; 3:3; 4:5; 4:17; 4:18(x2); 4:19; 7:4; 7:15; 7:16; 7:23; 8:8; 8:9; 8:29; 9:35; 14:3; 23:22	8:11; 11:18; 11:19; 11:20; 11:21; 11:21; 11:23; 13:21; 20:13; 21:6; 21:14; 21:17; 22:11; 24:3; 28:8; 29:9; 31:18; 34:22
Daughter(s)	1:50(x2); 2:3; 2:21; 2:34; 2:35; 2:49; 3:2a; 3:5; 4:18; 4:27; 7:15; 7:24; 14:3; 15:29; 16:1; 23:22; 25:5	8:11; 11:18(x2); 11:19; 11:20; 11:21; 11:21; 13:2; 13:21; 20:31; 21:6; 22:11(x2); 24:3; 25:18; 27:1; 28:8; 29:1; 21:9; 29:9; 31:18
Sister(s)	1:39; 2:16-17; 3:9; 3:19; 4:3; 4:19; 7:15; 7:17; 7:18; 7:30; 7:32	22:11
Daughter-in-law	1:24	
Concubine(s)	1:32; 2:46; 2:48; 3:9; 7:14	11:21(x2)
Grandmother		15:16
Granddaughter		2:22; 22:2
Woman/Women	2:3; 16:3	15:13; 24:7; 24:26(x2); 28:10; 35:25; 36:17
City builder	7:24 (Sheerah)	
Queen-mother ⁶		15:16
Nurse		22:11
Prophetess		34:22 (Huldah)
Queen		9:1; 3, 9, 12 (Queen of Sheba); 22:12 (Athaliah)
War captives		28:8; 28:10; 29:9
Singers (Temple?)		35:25

Of the designations itemised in Table 1, some are not explicitly mentioned, but are implied in the text. For instance, the role of mother is implied in several verses where children are said to be born to a particular woman or where certain individuals are designated as the sons of a

6 Although a number of women are designated as mothers of kings, the Chronicler did not indicate that they held an official position of queen-mother as Asa's grandmother did (2 Chron 15:16); neither is there any indication that they were alive or dead at the time their sons reigned. The women, all in 2 Chronicles, include Naamah, the mother of Rehoboam (12:13); Maacah, the mother of Abijah (13:2); Azubah, the mother of Jehoshaphat (20:31); Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah (22:2); Jehoaddin, the mother of Amaziah (25:1); Jecoliah, the mother of Uzziah (26:3); Jerusha, the mother of Jotham (27:1), and Abijah, the mother of Hezekiah (29:1).

particular woman (e.g., 1 Chronicles 1:32; 7:14, 16, 18; 2 Chronicles 11:19, 20; 24:26).⁷ As noted earlier, many overlaps can certainly be found in the portrayals of the women as either daughters, mothers (including queen-mothers), wives, sisters, concubines or just plain women. Table 2 presents the overlapping familial or social roles.

Table 2: Women in overlapping relationships or positions

Overlapping roles	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles
Mother ↔ Wife	2:18; 2:24; 2:26; 2:29; 3:3; 4:18; 7:16; 7:23; 8:9	
Mother ↔ Daughter (± Wife)	2:35; 3:2a; 3:5; 2:35; 4:18	11:19; 11:20; 13:2; 20:31; 27:1; 29:1
Mother ↔ Concubine	1:32; 2:46; 2:48; 7:14	
Sister ↔ Mother (± Wife)	2:16-17; 4:19	
Daughter ↔ Sister (± Wife)		22:11(x2)
Daughter-in-law ↔ Mother	1:24	
Woman ↔ Mother (± daughter)	2:3	24:6(x2)
Daughter ↔ Builder	7:24	
Prophetess ↔ Wife		34:22
Woman ↔ Singer		35:25
Queen-mother ↔ Grandmother		15:16
Mother ↔ granddaughter		22:2
War captive ↔ Wife/ Daughter/Women		28:8; 28:10; 29:9

7 It should be stressed in this instance that, although Ben Zvi (2006:185) categorises the roles of Zeruah and Abigail in 2 Chronicles 2:16-17 as lineage heads, I do not consider it expedient to do the same in this instance, because the roles are neither implicitly nor explicitly stated in the text. It is not impossible that they were family heads but the fact that Jether, the father of Abigail's son, Amasa, is also mentioned in the genealogy should be taken into account (2:17). Similarly, the attribution of the role of lineage head to Keturah in 1 Chronicles 1:32 would appear plausible except that the text also brings Abraham's role into the picture.

A different kind of overlap also occurs in the book; some of the referents point to the same women, even though they are found in different verses. For instance, the name Zeruah in 1 Chronicles 2:16; 11:6, 39; 18:12, 15; 26:28, and 27:24 refers to the same woman, and Abigail is also mentioned in both 2:16 and 2:17. According to the Chronicler, both of them were David's sisters.⁸ Maacah in 1 Chronicles 8:29 is the same as in 9:35 – the wife of Jeiel, and Athaliah refers to the same woman in 2 Chronicles 22:2, 10, 11, 12 and 24:7.

2.2 Women in kinship relationships

The following question comes to mind in this instance: Given the multiplicity of roles and functions of women shown in Tables 1 and 2, is there a common denominator that can be used to account for all these women? It appears, from the data presented above, that all the women, whether in public or domestic positions, are described in familial/tribal relationships. The exception, at first glance, would seem to be a visitor to Israel, the Queen of Sheba, but then, she is also designated with respect to her land of origin. It seems that the real issue, in this instance, is kinship, and the women of Chronicles have been presented in such a way that would show their affinities, one way or the other, to the people (or the land) of Israel. Even the "foreign women" in the Chronicler's account were affiliated to Israelite men in kinship relationships as mothers, wives or concubines. The data before us, therefore, deserves better scrutiny.

At this point, we need to consider the possible inferences that can be made from it, especially from the Chronicler's *Sondergut*. To begin, the bulk of the references to women in Chronicles that are not found elsewhere in the Pentateuchal or Deuteronomistic traditions come, primarily, from the genealogical section and are concentrated in 1 Chronicles 2, 4, 7, and 8. In fact, approximately fifty-one per cent of the women are not mentioned in a *Vorlage* or parallel text. Of the twelve verses in 1 Chronicles 2 that contain references to women, only four are found to have parallels in other texts (i.e., 2:3, 16, 17, 48). No equivalent verses are found for the women in the remaining eight verses. In 1 Chronicles 4, eight verses contain references to women, but none of them has parallels in previous texts. In chapter 7, ten verses contain references to women, but only one verse and a half verse (i.e., 7:15b, 30) have parallels elsewhere. None of the four verses on women in chapter 8 has a parallel.

8 In 2 Samuel 17:25, Abigail and Zeruah are said to be the daughters of Nahash.

It can be observed that the genealogies in 1 Chronicles 2 and 4 pertain to the tribe of Judah.⁹ Klein (2006:88) observes that no biblical parallels are found to the genealogy of Judah from 2:20 to 2:48. He, therefore, asserts that:

For the rest of 1 Chron 2:3-4-4:23, I conclude that the Chronicler had access to other genealogical materials, of an oral or written sort, or that the Chronicler composed certain verses himself.¹⁰

Klein (2006:127) argues that the overall intention of the Chronicler in chapters 2-4 was to stress the pre-eminence of Judah.¹¹ Be that as it may, it appears that, in so doing, the Chronicler has added a great deal of his own data or which have become extinct or unknown to us in order to drive home his point. In particular, the preponderance of material on women in the two chapters, which are not attested in older biblical texts, arouses curiosity.

For his part, Knoppers (2004:353-358) regards the genealogies of Judah as rather complex not only in social terms, but also ethnically and geographically (cf. Johnstone 1997:42). He describes Judah as the most socially heterogeneous of the tribes. Furthermore, Knoppers (2004:358) claims that:

The many and varied relations that allow the authors to depict primary, secondary, and tertiary kinship relationships also hint at different levels of social stratification within the larger group. Wives (2:18, 24, 26, 29, 35; 3:3; 4:5, 7, 19), concubines (2:46, 48; 3:9; cf.

9 From 1 Chronicles 4:24ff., the genealogies refer to the tribe of Simeon. Incidentally, only one reference to women is contained in that section (1 Chron 4:27) and no corresponding *Vorlage* has been attested for it. Therefore, our reference to 1 Chronicles 4 in this discussion will focus on the genealogies of Judah (i.e., 4:1-23).

10 On 1 Chronicles 2, Klein (2006:88) further concludes that “[t]he specific verses attributable to the Chronicler’s own editorial activity with some probability are: 2:9, 18-24, 25-33, 34-41, 42-50a, 50aβ-55”. Although we are inclined to agree with Klein’s findings in this instance, it should be pointed out, in addition, that some other verses in the same section, specifically 2:26 and 2:29, also have no parallels, whereas 2:21 seems to be only partially connected to previous texts. For example, Numbers 26:29 mentions Makir as the father of Gilead but there is no mention of his daughter whom the Chronicler claimed married Hezron when he was sixty years old and bore him Segub.

11 For Johnstone (1997:42, 59), the Chronicler accorded pre-eminence to the house of David but within the tribe of Judah, which itself is regarded as pre-eminent in Israel (cf. Freedman 1961:440; Willi 1994:152-154, 160-161).

2:21, 24), sisters (2:16-17; 3:9, 19; 4:3, 19), daughters (2:4, 21, 34, 35, 49; 3:2, 5; 4:18), and mothers (2:26; 4:9) all play recognized roles.

There is no doubt that the varied relations point to different levels of social stratification. However, the probable motivation behind this strategic use of information relating to women is worth probing. If the aim of the Chronicler in chapters 2-4 was to stress Judah's pre-eminence, then it would seem logical also to aim to project the women of the tribe as "blessed among women". It makes sense to acknowledge that all these wonderful men of Judah did not drop from heaven, but were sons, husbands and fathers, etc. of some women.

Taking a cue from Wilson's (1977:38-45) demarcation of the operation of genealogies into three spheres (*viz.*, politico-jural, religious and domestic), Sparks (2008:215) asserts that Judah's genealogy appears to have been formulated in the domestic sphere as opposed to the politico-jural (e.g., genealogies of Issachar, Benjamin and Asher in 1 Chron 7) or religious/cultic sphere (e.g., Levi's genealogy). Sparks (2008:216) rightly observes that:

[Judah's genealogy] contains accounts of marriages, conceptions, births, deaths, as well as the significant names of certain children. Like Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin, Judah mentions not only names of males, but also those of wives, sisters and daughters. Each of these speaks of domestic relationships, rather than political or cultic ones.

In addition, a number of domestic terms are also employed in the genealogy of Judah that confirms its domestic operation (Sparks 2008:222-223). In our view, Sparks's observation that Judah's genealogy is set in the domestic sphere offers a cogent explanation for the many references to women in Judah's genealogy which have no parallel elsewhere in the Old Testament. However, this does not necessarily imply the preclusion of either the politico-jural or the religious sphere.

As for 1 Chronicles 7, although most of the women mentioned are not found in parallel texts, the genealogies in which they are mentioned belong to at least five different tribes (Naphtali 7:13; Issachar 7:14; Manasseh 7:14-19; Ephraim 7:20-27 and Asher 7:30-32). The common element is that they are all northern tribes. Chapter 8 contains the genealogies of Benjamin, but none of the four verses (8:8, 9, 11, and 29) that refer to women shows any correspondence with previous material. The only verse that mentions a woman in 1 Chronicles 9 (*i.e.*, v.35) also belongs to Benjamin and is a perfect replica of 8:29. All other verses in the book that mention women, but have no existing parallels in the Old Testament are scattered throughout

the narrative section. It is no surprise that the compiler of the “things left behind” resolved to pay heed to those women who had been “left out” of the scheme of things!

A more careful consideration of the references to women also shows an interesting concern of the Chronicler, especially in the genealogies. He seemed to be at pain to explain the status of many of the women that are unique to his composition, even when such status would have been regarded as socially flawed. He used the term פִּילְגֶּשֶׁת (concubine or secondary wife) seven times (e.g., in 1 Chron 1:32; 2:46, 48; 3:9a; 7:14 and 2 Chron 11:21b[x2]). Of these seven occurrences of the term, only one (1 Chron 3:9a) has a corresponding *Vorlage*. It is interesting to note that, whereas the Pentateuchal text refers to Keturah as Abraham’s wife, the Chronicler called her his concubine (Braun 1986:22; Knoppers 2003:280; Ben Zvi 2006:191fn).¹²

The Chronicler also noted that Judah’s two sons were born to him by his daughter-in-law (1 Chron 2:4) and that Hezron was already an old man when he married (probably for the first time) the daughter of Machir (1 Chron 2:21). Again, when Sheshan realised that he had no sons, he gave his daughter in marriage to Jarha, his Egyptian servant (1 Chron 2:34-35), while Mered, supposedly an ordinary citizen, married Pharaoh’s daughter (1 Chron 4:18). Both Hushim and Baara were divorced by their husband Shaharaim (1 Chron 8:8), who married another woman. The father of Jabez, that child of sorrow, was not mentioned (1 Chron 4:9). Perhaps that was the source of his pain – his mother was a struggling single parent!

2.3 Foreign women or Israelite women

Another significant feature of the variegated nature of Chronicle’s women is the number of foreign women represented in the material.¹³ The Chronicler mentioned these women with ease and without any hint of disapproval.¹⁴

12 It is equally notable that 1 Chronicles 14:3 relates that David married more wives in Jerusalem and there is no mention of concubines. However, the *Vorlage* (2 Sam 5:13) records that David took more wives and more concubines. In any event, 1 Chronicles 3:9a already shows that David had concubines.

13 Of course, some foreign men are also mentioned in the text. For example, Jether, an Ishmaelite, was the father of Amasa, Abigail’s son (1 Chron 2:17); Sheshan’s daughter was given in marriage to his Egyptian servant (1 Chron 2:34-35), and Hiram’s father was a man of Tyre (2 Chron 2:14).

14 Of the genealogies, Japhet (1993:74) remarks: “The genealogies in general refer constantly to non-Israelite elements, both men and women, whose foreign origins are either mentioned explicitly (e.g. 4:8; 3:17) or learned from their names or titles (‘another wife’, 2:6; etc.). There is never any incrimination

Judah's wife was a Canaanite woman (1 Chron 2:3) and Maacah, Absalom's mother, was a princess of Geshur (1 Chron 3:2). One of Mered's wives was a daughter of Pharaoh (1 Chron 4:18); the mother of Makir, the father of Gilead, was an Aramean (1 Chron 7:14), while Makir himself married from among the Huppites and Shuppites (1 Chron 7:15). Solomon married a Pharaoh's daughter (2 Chron 8:11) and his son Rehoboam's mother was an Ammonite – apparently, these two represent only a sample of his variety of foreign women (1 Kgs 11:1)! The two murderers of King Joash were the sons of an Ammonite woman and a Moabite woman (2 Chron 24:26).

On the other hand, the Chronicler cautiously stressed that some of the women were from Jerusalem or Judah. For example, Jehoaddin, Amaziah's mother (2 Chron 25:1), and Jecoliah, Uzziah's mother (2 Chron 26:3), were both from Jerusalem, whereas Huldah lived in Jerusalem (2 Chron 34:22) and Mered had a Judean wife (1 Chron 4:18). Perhaps, this was a subtle way of maintaining the Chronicler's focus on the pre-eminence of Judah. In addition, it is observable that many of the women were from the upper echelon of society. They were daughters (1 Chron 2:21; 3:2, 9b; 4:18; 7:24; 15:29; 2 Chron 8:11; 11:18-19), mothers (2 Chron 13:2; 15:16; 20:31), wives (1 Chron 3:2-5; 7:14-18; 2 Chron 11:20-21), concubines (1 Chron 2:46-49; 3:9a; 7:14), and sisters (1 Chron 2:16) of kings or statesmen, as well as daughters or wives of priests and seers (1 Chron 25:5; 2 Chron 22:11; 27:1; 29:1). The material included even a prophetess (2 Chron 34:22).

3. CHRONICLE'S WOMEN AND THE CONCEPT OF

כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל

The data in the foregoing suggests a deliberate attempt on the part of the Chronicler to highlight the roles and status of women not only in the genealogies of the tribes of Israel, but also in the overall narrative. He conscientiously showed, even when the existing biblical texts could have restricted him, that women were part of Israel's story. Could this be another strategy by the Chronicler to affirm his concept of כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל – an “all Israel”,¹⁵ which included the bond and the free, the native and the foreign

implied in this data. Indeed, one of the goals of these genealogies is the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of the non-Israelite elements in the people of Israel, by presenting them as an organic part of the tribes, mainly in the status of ‘wives’ or ‘concubines’”.

- 15 Scholars have established that some of the important theological themes in Chronicles include developing the concept of “all Israel and establishing legitimacy especially through the genealogies” (Thompson 1994:32-42; cf. Johnson 1969:56-57). Thompson (1994:32-42) identifies eight themes in the

born, the entrepreneur and the widow, the queen mother and the single parent, the princess and the pauper, the queen and the concubine, the female religious leader and the divorced?

The name Israel is used to refer variously to the land, the descendants of Jacob under the United Kingdom (i.e., the twelve tribes), the people of Judah, the descendants of Ephraim, the people of the northern kingdom, and Jews in Diaspora during and after the exile, and so on.¹⁶ Zobel (1990:418) argues that:

The Chronicler is concerned to emphasize the continuity and totality of Israel; this concern is further underlined by the use of 'all Israel' in 1 Chronicles (21 times) and 2 Chronicles (25 times).¹⁷

twin book: developing the concept of "all Israel"; the temple and worship; the concept of kingship; retribution and repentance; the response of the people; the Chronicler and Messianism; the repetition of historical patterns, and the Chronicler as an exegete of Scriptures and the past. Thompson's observation also reflects the views of other scholars. For Braun (1986:xxix-xli), the focus of the Chronicler was the Temple as well as David and Solomon, "all Israel", retribution, repentance and the disposition of the heart. Dirksen's (2005:14-21) investigation of themes is limited to 1 Chronicles; his themes include the Davidic dynasty; all Israel; outlook on the future, i.e., the Chronicler "wants to put forward a certain outlook on the future"(Dirksen 2005:16); people and land; exodus and exile, and the Temple/temple cult and joy. For Klein (2006:44-48), the central themes in 1 Chronicles include kingship, the Temple and cult, Israel, reward and retribution, attitude toward the Persians, personal piety, and future hope. For other themes in Chronicles, see Freedman (1961:437-438); Selman (1994:27); Riley (1993:29-36); Kelly (1996:13ff); Tuell (2001:5); Schweitzer (2007:7-11).

16 See Zobel (1990:397-420) and Sparks (2006:279) for various uses of the term "Israel".

17 The references to all Israel in Chronicles are listed as: "1 Ch. 9:1; 11:1, 4, 10; 12:39 [38] [twice]; 6:29; 7:6, 8; 9:30, 10:1, 3, 16 [twice]; 11:3, 13; 12:1; 13:4, 15; 18:16; 24:5; 28:23; 29:24 [twice]; 30:1, 5, 6; 31:1; 35:3". The phrases "all the assembly of Israel" (1 Ch. 13:2; 2 Ch. 6:3 [twice], 12, 13) and 'all Israel, the assembly of Yahweh' (1 Ch. 28:8) and also the identification of 'all Israel' with the entire assembly ... comparison of 1 Ch. 29:1, 10, 20 with vv. 21, 23, 25, 26 indicate that the post-exilic cultic community constitutes this Israel ..." (Zobel 1990:418). Sparks (2006:278-279) affirms that the term כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל appears forty-six times in Chronicles, and that some other variants of the expression occur an additional twenty-seven times, totalling seventy-three times. It is interesting to note that thirty-seven of the seventy-three occurrences are unique to the Chronicler. Sparks (2006:179) argues that "these additions are very important to gaining an understanding of what the Chronicler meant by the phrase 'all Israel'".

This may indeed be true, but it seems that, in his attempt to emphasise that continuity and totality of Israel, he engaged in a definition of Israelite identity especially in the genealogies. For instance, Knoppers (2004:471) affirms that the Chronicler was concerned with “national redefinition and revision of Israelite identity”. However, the inclusion of a variety of women (and perhaps even men) in Chronicles that are either unaccounted for or properly designated in the *Vorlage* suggests that the Chronicler had a bigger agenda. Could he be attempting to redefine what constituted a *כל-ישראל* in line with the make-up of the exilic/post-exilic community of faith?¹⁸

The question is significant if we consider Couey's (2008:132) assertion that:

In the exilic and post-exilic periods, identification of Israel becomes more contested. The term refers to the exiles in Babylon or the diaspora more generally in Isa 40-66 and Ezekiel ... In Ezek 11:15, the expression “the whole house of Israel” (... כל-בית ישראל) indicates the exilic community to the exclusion of those remaining in the land of Judah, suggesting conflicts over the use of the name. Such conflicts are evident in Ezra-Nehemiah.

If such conflicts were already brewing or existed at the time of the Chronicler, could his composition, that enabled the otherwise unaccounted for set of women to be recognised and counted, be a strategy to argue that

18 Willi (1994:161) points out that the Chronicler showed that a new Israel was being constituted: “The future reconstituted Israel – not only Judah, not only the kingdom of Judah! – would correspond to that Israel that, according to the citizenship-lists, had been in the beginning, that *confusione hominum* had largely perished, but that now *providentia Dei* had partially re-established in the form of the province of Yehud, and that therefore one day *would again come to be*”. In a related vein, Jonker (p.39, forthcoming) confirms that, “... the issue of post-exilic identity was high on the agenda of the Chronicler. At a time when God's people were still settling into a new religious-cultic and political dispensation, reflection on who they were in these circumstances became necessary. And they did this in continuity with the past, but also in serious engagement with their new present”. The above assertions indicate that the post-exilic Israelite community was undergoing a process of reconstituting or re-establishing a new identity based not only on their history, but also on their situation at the time. It appears that in the process, a new awareness of the presence of different elements and different expressions of what constituted that new Israel began to emerge. The definition of “all Israel” was undergoing a transformation – socially, geographically or biologically – and with much ingenuity, the Chronicler reflected this transformation, this new landscape, in his composition.

“all Israel” was not merely, for example, a patriarchal world or an elitist circle of the House of David? Rather, it was a “new Israel” that recognised the rights and dignity of all, irrespective of gender, class, origin or status.¹⁹

4. WOMEN IN THE (POST-)EXILIC PERIOD

A discussion of women in Chronicles may appear incomplete without the mention of the role of women in the exilic/post-exilic era, the time when the book was probably compiled.²⁰ Eskenazi (1992:25-27) claims that, at first glance, texts in the post-exilic sixth- to fourth-century Persian period present women as being hidden in the shadows. She examines documents on the role of women from the Jewish community in Elephantine, Egypt, and she illustrates these with the lives of three women: Mibtahiah, Tapmut and Yehoishma. Mibtahiah is described as a wealthy woman, three times married, who owned much property. Tapmut or Tamut was a slave who married a free man and later became free. Tapmut owned property and had legal rights. A contract stipulated that both her son and daughter, Yehoishma, were to inherit her estate. Yehoishma is said to own much property and many movable possessions (Eskenazi 1992:27ff.).

In addition, Eskenazi (1992:36ff.) considers evidence from the list of returnees in Ezra 2 (and the parallel text of Neh 7). She points out the presence of a female scribe (Ezra 2:55) in a clan (Barzillai) that was clearly named after the matriarch's family in Ezra 2:61 (Neh 7:63), and female singers (Ezra 2.65/Neh. 7.67). Other female roles included the women who joined to build parts of the Jerusalem wall (Neh 3:2) and that of the prophetess (i.e., Noadiah in Neh 6:14). Eskenazi argues that

19 It should be noted that Jonker, in his forthcoming commentary, points out that “the Chronicler does not shy away from mentioning that the lineage of “All-Israel” includes people (mainly women) of foreign descent” (p.86). Jonker notes, in addition, that the Chronicler's ideology is inclusivist as his understanding of “all Israel” includes even the tribes that formerly belonged to the northern kingdom and the Transjordanian tribes, even though his emphasis in the genealogies was on Judah, Benjamin and Levi. The Chronicler tried to show that all had a common ancestor.

20 Although the arguments on the dating of Chronicles are inconclusive, the various datings of the work range from as early as 529-515 BCE or the period of the destruction of the First Temple to as late as the third century BCE or the late Persian/early Hellenistic period (Braun 1986:xxviii-xxix; Tuell 2001:10; Knoppers 2004:106, 116). Schweitzer (2007:3-5) assumes a late Persian or early Hellenistic period dating and claims that the two options have more supporters among scholars (cf. Japhet 2009:4). On various arguments concerning the dating of Chronicles, see Selman (1994:69-71) and Klein (2006:13-17).

the Elephantine documents highlight some women's roles, which the biblical text does not explicitly describe, such as the rights of women to divorce their husbands, hold property, buy and sell, and inherit, even when there was a son. In addition, evidence of women's presence in the two documents is significant. In Eskenazi's (1992:41) words: "Obviously, they do not establish gender balance but they nevertheless reflect women's presence in symbolic and practical ways".

The evidence on women provided by Eskenazi from both Elephantine and Ezra-Nehemiah texts seems to tally with findings from Chronicles where women are also viewed as heads of families (Abigail and Zeruah), built (Sheerah), prophesied (Huldah) and were divorced (1 Chron 8:8). Ben Zvi (2006:186) confirms that seals bearing the names of women have been found for the Persian period and "they show that some elite women owned property, were involved in trade and financial affairs, and controlled goods owned by or produced by their household". These all point to the fact that women were active participants in public affairs (although they might not have been equal participants with men in terms of percentage). In other words, women were equal participants with men in qualitative, although not in quantitative terms.

5. CONCLUSION

This article attempted to observe the women in Chronicles by considering the similarities and differences between the Chronicler's *Vorlage* and the *Sondergut*. The roles and the status of the women in society are highlighted holistically not only by examining all the women presented in the Chronicles, but also by considering them from the perspective of the concept of קְלִיבַת יִשְׂרָאֵל, an 'all Israel' that included all the women! By showing that the women were a part of the whole, it is argued that the Chronicler's task of spelling out the post-exilic identity of Israel is firmly accomplished.

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