

IV

ANALYSIS OF I CHR. CHAPTERS 23-6

THESSE chapters profess to give the arrangements made by David as to the officials who were responsible for the oversight of the future temple and for the conduct of the worship there. The men are grouped under the headings of levites, priests, and door-keepers; and special attention is devoted to the division of the officials into classes, apparently in order to regulate the system according to which they were to undertake the duties assigned to them. The material is extremely confused, so confused that in certain cases it defies, in my judgement, every effort to bring it into order. Clearly it is also not homogeneous, but bears evidence of having been derived from several hands. How many of these later hands were at work, and whether it is possible to decide in each case their aim in supplementing the original, are questions which remain hard to decide. While it is possible to detect certain broad lines of division on which a student may pronounce with some confidence, there are other conclusions which he must confess to be merely tentative.

The want of unity in authorship appears in the opening chapter, for the same writer cannot be held responsible for the statement in v. 3 that the levites entered on office at 30 years of age, and for that in vv. 24 and 27 which gave the age as 20.

So large a change in the age at which the men assumed their functions points to an alteration in the conditions of the community which demanded a reduction in the age-limit. The suspicion that in vv. 24 and 27 we have to do with a later hand is increased by the fact of those verses being prefaced by a somewhat lengthy description of the levites, which was uncalled for in the circumstances, after the men had been introduced in v. 2 without any such

Whatever be the explanation of these facts, this comparison between the two lists makes it impossible to suppose that their original purpose was to supply the representative levites whom David divided into courses. He could not have both included and excluded the Gershonites: nor could he have set over his courses at the same time a body of men and their sons.

It must next be noted that neither of the lists is integrally related to the preceding context in which it appears. Both begin with a similar rubric, **לְבִנֵי לֹוִי** in the one case, **לְבִנֵי לֹוִי הַנּוֹתְרִים** in the other. The similarity of the headings is not apparent in the R.V., which has translated the two prepositions differently in order to make some connexion with what precedes. In reality there is no such connexion: the **ל**, like **עַל** in other cases,¹ merely introduced an independent document, and is best translated with a capital: Concerning the sons of Levi, or Concerning the other sons of Levi: then followed the genealogy.

This implies in turn that the opening clause of v. 6, 'and David divided them into courses', originally had no connexion with what follows, but formed the conclusion of the preceding five verses.

The opening paragraph belongs to the Chronicler and connects closely with his representation of the situation. He made David summon the leaders of Israel and address them before his death. The charge closed with a command to build the temple and to bring the ark with its vessels into it. When, therefore, C continued with an account of David's arrangements as to the temple officials, he began with the men whom the king had appointed to serve the ark. He made David bring the men together, number them, determine the age at which they entered on their functions, and distribute them into the courses after which they were to fulfil their duties. But he did not feel it necessary to tell who the levites were, as is done in v. 24. Their place in the future temple was well

¹ Compare Neh. 10: 2, where **עַל** introduces a list of names, and Jer. 23: 9, where **ל** precedes a collection of oracles.

known. On the other hand, the earlier list of names has been brought into integral relation to what follows. This connexion must be due to the later hand, since the age at which the levites entered on their duty is set down at 20 years. The writer felt it necessary to characterize the men, and he employed for the purpose language which is reminiscent of the terms used about the levites in the book of Numbers. This description led on naturally to the last paragraph of the chapter, vv. 25-32. Certain aspects of this section have already been discussed.¹ Here it only remains to add that the writer entirely departed from the subject, which was stated in v. 6a. Instead of dealing with the levitical courses, he turned his attention to a careful definition of the relation between priest and levite. Probably the same hand was responsible for introducing vv. 13b, 14, into the list of names which he incorporated into his account. In its original form as a genealogy of Levi, the remark there that the sons of Amram were Moses and Aaron was equally true and innocuous. But when the genealogy was turned into a list of the fathers' houses of the levites, on which list their courses were based, it became dangerous, since it included Aaron among the levites. Accordingly the reviser added a note to the effect that, while Aaron was by descent a levite, by function he was a priest.

In my judgement it is impossible to determine the source of the two genealogies of Levi, as impossible as in the case of the similar lists of I. 5: 27, 6: 1. The reviser found them and used them for his purpose of describing the courses of the levites. A similar case of his use of alien material for the same end occurs later.²

In chap. 24, vv. 1-19 form a single block, which deals with the courses of the priests. The author connected this distribution with the time of David, and so made it clear that the arrangement he described had existed in the temple from the beginning. At v. 3, however, he was careful to state that the king was not alone in the matter, but acted in con-

¹ Cf. pp. 71 ff.

² Cf. p. 88.

currence with Zadok and Ahimelech, the representatives of the two legitimate branches of the Aaronic priesthood. He further added that the settlement made by the king was not only acceptable to his leading priests, but was in itself no novelty, since it followed an ordinance revealed by God to Aaron, v. 19.¹ The order followed by the priests in their courses had existed in the temple during all its history, but it had, before the temple came into existence, been in force in the tabernacle. It was thus possessed of a higher authority than that of David. The paragraph reflects the situation at the period of the Return, for every commentator who has dealt with the list of courses has noted that many of the names which appear in it reappear in Ezra, and to an even greater extent in Nehemiah.

The more interesting and perplexing features in the passage appear, not in the list, but in the verses by which it has been prefaced, vv. 1b-6. These give the impression of the preface having been framed in view of a particular historical situation, even to meet a historical problem. Thus the author went a little out of his way to introduce the story of the rejection of the two priestly clans, Nadab and Abihu, for the sin of offering strange fire.² Why was it felt necessary to refer to the expulsion of two clans in connexion with a statement on the courses of the priesthood? Again, the reservation of the priestly dignity to the families of Eleazar and Ithamar, with special stress laid on the predominance of the line of Eleazar, from which Zadok was descended, is at least peculiar in the same connexion. The combination of the two statements, one of which reserved the priestly office to two families, while the other defined the relative dignity of those two, suggests that the conditions of the writer's time made the decision of the constitution of the

¹ There is no ordinance which refers to this specific question in the present Pentateuch.

² The account in v. 2 is abridged from Num. 3: 4; cf. the longer account in Lev. 10: 1 ff. Both these records are embedded in the law and do not appear in the general history.

higher clergy imperative. The use of the lot in the matter may even indicate that it became necessary to seek a divine decision, and this may point to an impasse having been reached which could be resolved in no other way. Finally, the distinction between princes of the sanctuary and princes of God, coupled with the remark that men of the two types were found in both lines of the Aaronic priesthood, points in the same direction. The fact that the meaning of the distinction has been entirely lost again suggests a historical situation in the affairs of the community. When a settlement was reached which reconciled the contending interests or opinions, even the memory of what caused the difficulty disappeared.

Now the only period at which we hear of division between two bodies of priests in old Israel is that which followed the Return, when the relative claims of the priests who had never been in exile and of those who had come back from Babylon required to be adjusted. I have already pointed out that Joshua's right to the high priesthood was not at once acknowledged, but was seriously questioned.¹ I suggest that the present passage contains an echo of the same debate. If we may interpret it along these lines, it explains why the line of Eleazar, from which the family of Zadok claimed descent, received the higher position here. We know that the leading priests at the temple were deported by Nebuchadrezzar, and, while we cannot accept the large numbers of those who returned according to the book of Ezra, we may venture to conclude that the descendants of these men had stronger motives to return than the rest of the exiles. As Joshua was restored to the high priesthood, the men of his family may have obtained a double representation in the cult service. Before the writer here set down the allocation of the priestly courses in the temple, he indicated the basis on which the allocation was made.

In the conclusion of the chapter the same writer, instead of making David decide on the levitical courses as in 23: 6a,

¹ In *Post-Exilic Judaism*, chap. x.

made the levites cast lots for this allocation and made this take place in the presence of David, the leading priests, and the leading levites, v. 31. He there introduced the second genealogy. The passage presents three unanswerable problems. Why did the author, who had given a list of twenty-four names as heads of the priestly courses, not even attempt to give twenty-four names of leading levites? Why did he carry the genealogy which he included one stage lower than the earlier one? And why did he ignore the line of Gershon? These questions, it may be added, are equally urgent and difficult to answer, if his list of names is not regarded as a genealogy.

At a first reading chap. 25 appears to follow naturally on what has preceded. After the description of the courses into which the priests and levites were divided, came the similar division of the singers. The formal unity, indeed, might seem to be better preserved here than it is in the other cases, since in vv. 7-21 the number of the singers is set down as 288, distributed into 24 courses, each of which consisted of 12 men. Now vv. 1-6 enumerate 24 descendants of the leading singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun,¹ and these 24, when multiplied by 12, give the 288 who were distributed among the courses in the later section.

But Benzinger and Kittel have drawn attention to the fact that the remark at the close of v. 1 as to the number of those who did the work according to their service is an intrusion. For that number does not emerge until v. 7, where it forms the basis for the distribution of the men into courses. Curtis wished to retain the clause and refer the number to the descendants of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun in vv. 2-6, while he referred the number in v. 7 to the following 288. But an examination of vv. 2-6 has disclosed that a number of the names which profess to be those of sons of Heman are impossible as proper names: they really compose the verse of a prayer which invoked the divine

¹ Reading at the close of v. 3, with LXX^{BA}, the Shimei mentioned in v. 17, instead of 'six', the version of M.T. and R.V.

mercy.¹ Verses 2-6 did not originally contain twenty-four names.

When this is recognized, certain other conclusions follow. The writer who enumerated the 24 courses of the singers understood the earlier verses to contain a list of names, for he made them the basis of his series. Evidently, then, he was making use of older material, in which the brief prayer was already incorporated. Again, the correspondence between the numbers in the first list and those in the second disappears. Originally there were not present the 24 names which, when multiplied by 12, give the total of 288. The relation between the two sections must be acknowledged to be artificial, and the clause in v. 1, to which Benzinger and Kittel took exception, is the work of a reviser whose aim was to link up his borrowed material with his list of the courses of the levitical singers.²

The chapter, then, is not homogeneous. After the work of the reviser has been sifted out, his purpose becomes clear. He made use of older material in order to form the basis for his division of the levitical singers into 24 courses, as he used the genealogies of Levi for his classification of the ordinary levites. In both cases he appears to have gravely misunderstood the character of the material which he incorporated in his own account. But his aim was to distribute the priests, the levites, and the singers into the courses which became necessary in the cult after the Return. There remain the opening six verses, from which must be omitted the final clauses of vv. 1 and 5. According to this, David and the captains of the host, without any assistance from Zadok and Ahimelech, appointed certain of the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, whose task it was to prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals. This is not exactly

¹ For the reconstruction cf. Rothstein in his Commentary, and Haupt, *ZAW.* 1914, pp. 42 ff.

² Further evidence in the same direction may be found in Rothstein's note on v. 9. In this he has shown the difficulty, in my judgement the impossibility, of connecting that verse with vv. 1-6.

parallel to the king's act after he had brought the ark into Jerusalem, I 15: 16. There he provided for the choral service in the new sanctuary by instructing the levitical leaders to set apart some of their number to act as singers. Thereupon the leaders selected Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to superintend that service. The present passage described a further development, in which neither the men set apart for the duty nor the function to which they were set apart were the same. Only certain members of the choral guilds were chosen here, and their task was to prophesy with musical accompaniment. These features of the account are sufficient to make it evident that the passage did not merely imply the appointment of the ordinary levitical singers, and that the description of the men as prophesying with a musical accompaniment involved more than that they played and sang in a peculiarly skilful manner. Not only were the men set apart to prophesy with a musical accompaniment, not to sing and play with a prophetic accompaniment, or in a prophetic, i.e. skilful manner, but also their three chiefs are called prophets or seers.¹ If the brief prayer which followed the list of Heman's sons formed part of the original it will offer a confirmation of this conclusion. For according to Rothstein's reconstruction the sentence ended with a petition that God would grant an abundance of visions. Such an ejaculation formed a fitting close to an account of the appointment of a body of men, whose function it was to prophesy in connexion with the cult. The men entrusted with this duty were made to pray for the divine furtherance in their specific task.

The section is part of the Chronicler's account, and links up directly with 23: 6a, according to which David divided the levites into courses. C did not enter into detail about this arrangement or, if he did, his account has been forced

¹ For the implication of this remarkable statement in its relation to the old Israelite cult I must be content to refer to my *Prophet and Priest in the Old Testament*, p. 130, note 2, and to add a reference to Dr. Johnson's valuable article in the *Expository Times*, 1936.

to give place to the account of the reviser. But after David had commanded the community to bring the ark into the temple, and to appoint its ministers, the levites, to conduct the cult there, he added a detail about that cult, which was to be entrusted to a select body from among the levitical singers. As he had done in his first order, so he did here: he took action on his own authority without advice from the leading priests, for according to C he was guided in all such matters by a divine revelation. When, again, C recognized the importance of prophecy and gave it a place in the regular cult, he showed a sense of the significance of that factor in the national religion. It may even be added that, when he spoke of the task being committed to a body of officials, he betrayed the extent to which prophecy had become canalized.

The question of the door-keepers is notoriously involved and perplexing, and it would be an abuse of the courtesy of the Schweich Trustees to attempt to enter on a general discussion. It is only in place to set down the contribution to the perplexity which appears in chap. 26. One general conclusion seems clear. The reviser, who distributed the priests, levites, and singers into their courses, has done the same here for the door-keepers in vv. 1-19. He also included these officials among the levites, and derived them from the two families of Korah and Merari. He gave the names of the representatives of these two families, and was careful to provide the first-mentioned of the two, Meshelemyahu, with a levitical descent, while he stated that the second, Hosah, belonged to the Merarites.

But there are two sections of his account which at least suggest a different source. Thus Rothstein has drawn attention to the appearance of Obed-Edom between the two leaders of the Korahites and the Merarites, whose descendants are followed into the second generation, but who is himself provided with no levitical descent. These vv. 4-8 Rothstein therefore counted secondary. Again, certain features in vv. 13-19 point to a date soon after the Return

and even to a particular situation during that period. The four entrances which are assigned to the temple,¹ the mysterious *parbar*, and the storehouse or **בֵּית הַתְּאֵסָפִים** of v. 15² are all introduced as though they were so familiar that they needed no precise definition. The author also wrote about the gate of *Shalleketh* and the causeway beside it like one who was dealing with matters of common knowledge to every one in the Jerusalem of his time. He, further, it deserves to be noticed, had no hesitation in assigning to Obed-Edom the charge of one of the gates and in placing his descendants over a storehouse. In this he was in agreement with C who stated that Obed-Edom was entrusted with the treasures in the temple.³

To explain the intrusion of vv. 4-8, Rothstein suggested that the descendants of Obed-Edom, who is acknowledged to have been a foreigner in the early records, made good a claim to be admitted among the door-keepers at a period later than the time of the Return. The paragraph here, in his view, was added in order to include them among the levites. Yet the feature of the verses which drew Rothstein's attention was the absence of any levitical descent in the account of the men. Nor does this view pay sufficient attention to the statement in v. 15, where Obed-Edom appears among other levites in charge of one of the gates of the temple. Whether the section in which that remark occurs can be taken to refer to a specific period in the history of the temple or not, it is not later than the time of the Return.

In my judgement we are on safer ground when we count vv. 4-8 and vv. 14-18 older material which was incorporated into the later record, and which *may* derive from the Chronicler. That writer gave a position of honour to Obed-Edom because of his early association with the ark, though he made no effort to conceal that the man was not even of Israelite descent. He also dwelt, both here at v. 5 and at 13: 14, on the fact that God blessed him, as though

¹ Cf. I Chr. 9: 18, 24.

² Neh. 12: 25.

³ Contrast II Chr. 25: 24 with II Kings 14: 14.

that was needed to explain the place he held. He recognized that not only was the man himself a door-keeper, but that one of his descendants reached a place of trust in the temple. But in the later period after the Return stricter views about the descent of the temple-servants came to prevail, as the vehement protest in Ezekiel proves. And the absence of Obed-Edom's name from the lists of I Chr. cc. 1-9 and from the book of Nehemiah suggests the opposite conclusion to that of Rothstein, viz. that the men were expelled from office rather than given a levitical descent. It may be necessary, however, to add that our knowledge of the conditions of the time, especially in connexion with the matter of the door-keepers, is so uncertain that any conclusion must be taken to be merely tentative. All that can be claimed is that there is ground for recognizing two alternatives on the subject.

The situation becomes much worse in the final verses of the chapter. The text is very bad: thus v. 23 cannot be translated as it stands, and 'the sons of Ladan, the sons of the Gershonites belonging to Ladan, the heads of the fathers' houses belonging to Ladan the Gershonite' in v. 21 looks more like three readings which have been combined by a copyist than anything else. The phraseology employed varies also in a way which is quite inexplicable. Within the five opening verses we read of treasuries of the house of the Lord, treasuries of the house of God, treasuries of the consecrated things, and treasuries *simpliciter*. It is equally hard to credit that there were four such sets of rooms, as that the same man varied his description without reason. The Hebronites of v. 30 had oversight of Israel on the western bank of the Jordan in connexion with **מְלֵאכֶת יְהוָה** or the business of the Lord, while their or his brethren fulfilled a similar task on the eastern bank and dealt with **דְּבַר הָאֱלֹהִים** every matter pertaining to God, v. 32. It is scarcely likely that the same man used the variant phrases in what are practically consecutive sentences. Nor is it easy to see why the divine name varies at the beginning and the end of the

passage. The references, again, to officers in charge of affairs in Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh, and the statement that some of the treasures were derived from war-spoils, won by Samuel and Saul and Abner and Joab, point to an early date for part of the material. The men of the Return, so far as we know, took no interest in the country on the east of Jordan and were not likely to credit Abner or Saul with any share in providing for the temple. The material appears to be a collection of *dissecta membra* which have been put together—they cannot be said to have been edited—and inserted at the end of a passage which referred to the similar subject of the temple treasuries.

The analysis which has been offered confirms the impression that the chapters which have been passed in review present the most perplexing riddle which meets a student of the Books of Chronicles. Those who have devoted most time and attention to their contents will most readily acknowledge the tentative character of any conclusions which they venture to present. It is clear, however, that there is evidence for several hands having contributed to the material, though opinion may justly vary as to the number of writers who can be recognized. It is not hard to understand why the passage received special attention, when we break finally from the attitude of the author of Ezra, and reject his view that all the arrangements as to the cult of the second temple and as to the officials who served that cult were settled with the advent of Joshua the high-priest and his fellow exiles. Any one who rejects that smooth solution will recognize that the infant community at Jerusalem was faced with grave difficulties in determining the lines of its future policy after the confusion which resulted from the Exile. There were real divergencies of opinion, which were also justifiable, as to the principles which ought to govern that policy. Naturally the men who held these convictions sought to support their attitude through an appeal to the past. Inevitably the men turned their attention to the story of the foundation of the first temple, and attempted to find

support in the record of David's action, when he planned the first sanctuary. It becomes possible to recognize why an account of David's orders to Solomon on the subject was written, and why it betrays the presence of annotations and additions throughout. It also becomes possible to realize why there should appear the mention of questions such as the relation between the two lines of priests in 24: 1-6. The matter there dealt with is so wholly out of place in connexion with the situation under David that it betrays at once the period of the Return. It bears the marks of a writer who was putting a decision of his own time under the high authority of King David.

There is, however, another feature of the chapters in the form in which we possess them, which in my judgement is clear. It has all been revised by a writer who attempted to arrange the material in order to bring out the courses of the several classes of temple officials. He divided the priests, the levites, the singers whom he did not identify with the levites, and the door-keepers into twenty-four courses for each. To serve this end, he used older material, the source of which it is not always possible to determine, but he used what he thus borrowed for his particular purpose. Now the attitude of this reviser can be recognized in certain directions. His work is integrally related to the age of 20 years, assigned to the levites for their entry on office. It is also closely related to the paragraph which defined the relative status of levite and priest, and defined this after the terms of the late law. He therefore held the position represented in that paragraph and made the temple a surrogate for the tabernacle. Finally, he spoke of David as having consulted with the priests in any arrangement of the clerical courses. He even stated at one place that, in what he did about the clergy, David was obeying the command which God issued to Moses. In all these respects his account corresponds with that which has already been recognized in our preceding chapters.

It may be legitimate to conclude this discussion with a

suggestion as to the reason which produced the divergence between the 30 year and 20 year age-limit for the levites' entry on office. There was a period after the restoration of the second temple which was attended by a scarcity of these officials, for Ezra took measures to supply the deficiency, before he led his company of returned exiles back to Jerusalem. In another connexion I have pointed out that the story of Korah's rebellion may preserve the memory of a time when the levites, who had hitherto occupied a higher status, were relegated to the lower position which the later law assigned to them relatively to the priesthood. While some of their number accepted the situation, a contingent refused to submit, were excommunicated, and hived off to form the nucleus of the later Samaritan schism.¹ One result of this was to produce a serious scarcity in the number of levites who were available for the cult at Jerusalem. The authorities met the difficulty by lowering the age at which the levites were admitted to office.

¹ In *Post-Exilic Judaism*, p. 239 f. with note.