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Published at the invitation of the series editors, the volume contains nineteen articles, eighteen of which were first published between 1976 and 2003, which were the fruit of research conducted as background work for the author’s well-known commentaries on Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. The footnotes have been reworked to have a consistent style throughout the collection, but no updating of the ideas or arguments that are no longer held has been done. The author has decided to maintain them in their original format and context because this is how they have made their historical contribution to the field. The one “new” article in chapter 1 was written many years ago for a volume that was never published.


The collection provides easy access to the author’s detailed thoughts on a range of key issues relating to the three books and the Persian period, some of which could not be discussed in as much depth in the commentaries. Conspicuously lacking is an engagement with the material culture of Yehud in the Persian period other than bullae and jar stamps, many of which bear the same names as people mentioned in the Nehemiah narrative. Also lacking is a sustained effort to situate Yehud within the larger policies of the Persian Empire; one article discusses the Persepolis texts, but again this is prompted by the text of Nehemiah and its mention of letters for travel authorization. The articles demonstrate the author’s primary focus on biblical texts, which would be partially expected of someone who holds a chair in Hebrew, but given his location in a faculty of Oriental Studies one might have expected more interest in the wider ancient Near Eastern setting and in a wider range of extrabiblical inscriptions.

Many of the articles appeared in collections of essays that may not be readily available in all university libraries, and two are in the Tyndale Bulletin, whose academic circulation is limited. For this reason, the present volume can be a worthwhile addition to university or private libraries, especially since the author’s work has been influential in the history of the debate over a number of issues relating to Yehud in the Persian period and relating to Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. He was one of the pioneers in these materials, which have become a major focus of research in the last decade or so. His critique of Weinberg’s “temple-citizen community” has been helpful in beginning a shift away from this problematic model, and his arguments to separate the authorship of Chronicles from that of Nehemiah and also from that of Ezra have gained much ground and now, along with similar ones by Sarah Japhet, are widely adopted.

I feel, however, that if such collections of essays are going to become more standard in the field, then authors should be made to include a chapter that discusses where they have changed their minds and their current stances. The topical arrangement makes for a coherent volume, but it does little to allow the reader to trace developments in the author’s thought over time, which a chronological arrangement would have done. The final article on 1 Esdras, published in 1996, is the only one that specifically revisits a problem and presents a changed opinion. While a claim is made in the introduction that the author does not agree with every word reproduced in the volume, it is also stated that he is not ashamed of anything republished, which leads to a suspicion that very little modification of positions has occurred over time. Given the volume of material that has
appeared on these three topics in the last decade, including many of this own articles, it leads one to wonder if the author is keeping abreast of new developments and weighing the potential impact they are having on his own work, or whether he has decided to rest content with his initial analyses and not revisit them. Such “historic” collections of influential thinkers do not fulfill a useful role unless they bring the “history” of thought up to date and allow others to know where they have changed their mind and why.