

Duke, Rodney K. *The Persuasive Appeal of the Chronicler: A Rhetorical Analysis*. Bible and Literature Series, no. 25. JSOT Supplement Series, no. 88. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990. 192 pp. \$39.50.

For those well acquainted with the books of Chronicles—laity, clergy, and scholars alike—the phrase “the persuasive appeal of the Chronicler” seems at best paradoxical. First and Second Chronicles usually overwhelm the contemporary reader, not with interest and emotion, but more often with a yawn. Duke has therefore set for himself a formidable task in this study: to show that “the Books of Chronicles exemplify artistic persuasion” (p. 151).

Duke begins his study by placing his literary/rhetorical approach within the history of interpretation of Chronicles and Aristotelian rhetorical categories. In the second chapter, the core of the work, the author classifies Chronicles within Aristotle’s category of deliberative or political speech—a speech which exhorts people to a particular course of action. For Duke, Chronicles exhorts its audience to seek and obey Yahweh, and thus insure national well-being. The Chronicler structures his narrative to accomplish this end. He begins with an introduction (1 Chr 1-9) to dispose “the audience to a favorable reception” (p. 52) of the work before presenting paradigmatically the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Chr 10-2 Chr 9) as “the statement of the case”—prosperity results from seeking Yahweh. Chronicles concludes with the “argument”: the demonstration of the benefits of seeking Yahweh through the history of the Davidic kings (2 Chr 10-36).

Duke devotes the rest of the book to articulating the specifics of the Chronicler’s rhetoric through the work’s “logos” (its rational appeal), “ethos” (its credibility), and “pathos” (its emotional appeal). According to Duke, the Chronicler rationally demonstrated his case through the use of “enthymemes” (rhetorical syllogisms with a major premise implied rather than stated) and “examples,” moving from largely inductive arguments in the beginning (via examples) to more risky, deductive arguments (via enthymemes) by the end of the narrative. The Chronicler establishes his credibility through rearranging and omitting, rather than contradicting, earlier traditions; using “external,” authoritative evidence for new materials; and writing in the omniscient, third-person narrative voice. Finally, the Chronicler attempts to move his audience emotionally through contrasting those who “seek Yahweh” with those who forsake Israel’s God, lining up the audience’s emotions with the appropriate character action. These elements, combined with “skill and artistry” (p. 151), produce the work’s “persuasive appeal.”

Duke’s accomplishment has been to support recent scholarship’s reading of Chronicles through an appeal to Aristotelian rhetorical theory. Herein lies the book’s strength—and a major weakness. Duke depends

heavily, and often without sufficient warrant, upon secondary literature. For instance, largely on the basis of G. E. Schaefer's unpublished dissertation "The Significance of Seeking God in the Purpose of the Chronicler," he emphasizes the motif "seeking Yahweh"—as "a total response of the worshiper to God" (p. 50)—as central to the Chronicler's purpose. Yet an examination of the data in appendices 1-3 indicates that this dependence may be problematical. In appendix 2, "Speech Material with 'Seeking' Enthymeme" (pp. 159-161), Duke lists thirty-seven occurrences of the seeking-Yahweh motif. Of these, over half (20/37) are "implicit." More seriously, in at least nine instances that Duke lists as "explicit," the "seeking" motif is not directly stated but, at best, implicit (1 Chr 28:2-8; 2 Chr 7:12-22; 12:5; 12:7-8; 16:7-9; 19:2-3; 20:20; 20:37; 21:12-15; and 25:7-9). While "seeking Yahweh" is an important motif in Chronicles, it does not seem able to bear the structural weight that Duke places upon it unless one broadens the concept to include all religious and cultic behavior. "Seeking Yahweh" becomes an inner, subjective, theological virtue, more appropriate to contemporary American piety than to the Jerusalem temple cult. By his dependence upon Schaefer, Duke empties Aristotle's "deliberative rhetoric" of any real political force, transforming the Davidic dynasty into "every person" rather than a viable political institution.

Duke's work, despite its limitations, opens up at least two new fields of inquiry into Chronicles. A literary analysis of Chronicles is welcome in light of a tendency to read the history exclusively as a reworking of Deuteronomistic History, rather than as a narrative in its own right. Second, Duke's appeal to Aristotle raises the question of the relationship of Chronicles to Greek theory and historiography of approximately same period. Duke utilizes Aristotle's *Rhetoric* because he considers it to be "one of the earliest and most influential descriptive works on rhetoric" (p. 38).

Does Duke succeed in proving the literary artistry of the Chronicler? Not really. For example, he strains for consistency in his argument on the progressive importance of the enthymeme, after showing its presence and importance in 1 Chr 1-10, and underemphasizes the radical results of the Chronicler's rewriting of history while trying to establish the Chronicler's rhetoric of credibility. His brief chapter (9 pages) on Chronicles' emotional appeal will move few towards his position. Theologically, though, Duke has succeeded in bringing a reading of the often neglected books of Chronicles closer to the theological discourse of the church. Within the academe, Duke has begun an agenda that may help us ultimately to better understand Chronicles within the dimly seen world of postexilic Judaism. Despite the work's limitations, then, we can thank Duke for the fruits of his labor.