

BEYOND THE TEXTS

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An Archaeological Portrait of Ancient Israel and Judah

William G. Dever

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With profound gratitude to an anonymous benefactor
whose generosity is outstripped only by her modesty.
Without her unwavering encouragement and support,
I would never have been able to undertake this project.

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Foreword

This book has been in the making for nearly sixty years, at least in my mind. It began in 1958, when as a young seminary student I discovered Ernest Wright's *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*. Wright had declared, "In biblical faith everything depends upon whether the central events happened" (1952, 126–27).

I still remember the thrill I felt upon reading that declaration. I had been reared in a southern fundamentalist preacher's home, and at twenty-five I was an ordained minister myself, now enrolled in a liberal seminary and in an identity crisis. How could I reconcile the higher learning to which I was committed—preparing for an academic career—and my Christian faith? Ernest Wright, a prominent Christian clergyman, and also America's leading scholar at the time in both the fields of Old Testament theology and biblical archaeology at Harvard, had shown me the way.

I finished my BD degree (now an MDiv), and then in 1959 I submitted an MA thesis on the "revival of Old Testament theology," a movement in which Wright had been a leader. And since Wright had moved from McCormick Theological Seminary to Harvard in 1958, I resolved to pursue my studies with him. I was going to show that the "central events"—patriarchal migrations, the promise of the land, a unique monotheism, Moses leading an exodus and conquest—that these events had actually happened.

Unfortunately, at Harvard I soon discovered that, while I may have had the necessary dogmatic temperament for theology, I had little talent. Nevertheless, Wright, who knew me better than I knew myself, steered me into archaeology at Shechem in the summer of 1962. I never looked back.

After finishing my doctoral dissertation in 1966, I moved on to the Directorship first at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem (1968–1971) and then of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research (1971–1975). For the next twenty years I concentrated on fieldwork in Israel and

the West Bank. Most of my publications during that period dealt with the Bronze Age and increasingly with issues of theory, method, and mounting critiques of traditional biblical archaeology.

At the University of Arizona after 1975 (until 2002), I continued with efforts to foster a newer, more secular and professional “Syro-Palestinian” archaeology, employing explicitly socioanthropological approaches and training a generation of graduate students who would embody the departure. For many years I had advocated a dialogue between archaeology and biblical studies, but not until the mid-1980s did my interests turn to the biblical period: the Iron Age.

By 1987 I had read Robert Coote and Keith Whitelam’s *The Emergence of Early Israel in Historical Perspective* and Thomas Thompson’s *The Origin Traditions of Ancient Israel: The Literary Formation of Genesis and Exodus 1–23*. Then at the 1987 meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research and the Society of Biblical Literature in Boston, I convened a plenary session on “Earliest Israel.” The invited speakers were Whitelam, Norman Gottwald, Lawrence Stager, and Israel Finkelstein, in addition to me. Thompson and Diana Edelman, in the audience, rose to confront us. The battle was joined.

Finkelstein’s *The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* appeared the next year, but the seminal papers at the Boston meetings were never published. In 1991, I published papers on historicity in Edelman’s edited volume of seminar papers, *The Fabric of History*, and in a Festschrift for Gottwald. The gauntlet was thrown down the following year by Philip Davies’s *In Search of “Ancient Israel.”* Then 1994 turned out to be a pivotal year for me: papers at symposia in Bern, Rome, and Pisa, as well as contributions to the Neil Richardson and Philip King Festschriften, all in one way or another on the interaction between text and artifact.

In 1996 the issues were sharpened with the publication of papers from a Jerusalem symposium volume edited by Volkmar Fritz and Davies, *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite State* (I was invited but unable to attend), in particular by Whitelam’s provocative *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History*. I recall reading Whitelam’s diatribe against Israeli and American archeologists as “Zionist” ideologues with dismay and growing anger. By now I knew who the ideologues really were.

The next year (1997) I published nine chapters in various volumes, seven of them on the specific topic of how to write better, more archaeologically informed histories of ancient Israel and Judah. The same year there appeared Lester Grabbe’s edited volume *Can a ‘History of Israel’ Be*

Written? I critiqued this volume in a session at the ASOR/SBL Annual Meetings. Grabbe, in the audience, introduced himself and insisted that my skepticism about the members of his European Seminar on Method in Israel's History was misplaced. But it was not: neither he nor his colleagues ever subsequently produced any history of ancient Israel (see below and excursus 1.1). It was then that I resolved that I would do so. In the previous decade of this controversy, I had been in my fifties and sixties. It was now time, but I was not yet ready.

From the late 1990s on, I thought about a new, revolutionary archaeological history of Israel. But not until the turn of the millennium, in retirement, did I resolve to undertake the task. Now in my mid- to late seventies, I had the necessary gravitas and nothing to gain, nothing to lose. The result is this volume.

I am indebted to many along the way, although it was lonely at first—colleagues, friends, family without whose encouragement I would never have had the temerity to undertake such a daunting task, one that others thought impossible or at best undesirable. I would single out Larry Stager, a staunch defender of sound historical method and an unfailing supporter of my work. Other colleagues who inspired me were Susan Ackerman, Beth Alpert Nakhai, and Carol Meyers, who helped me to be more sympathetic to the lives of women in ancient Israel. Ron Hendel and Ziony Zevit have shown me more sophisticated ways of reading the biblical texts.

Two recent works have had an immediate impact on me during the writing of this history. Lester Grabbe, originally an adversary, became a model with his *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (2007). This work provided me with a prolegomenon, and my employment here of a *continuum* from proven to disproven is borrowed from him. Avraham Faust, an innovative younger Israeli archeologist, gave me a draft of his 2012 *The Archaeology of Israelite Society in Iron Age II*, a harbinger of things hopefully to come.

I am also grateful to my thirty-one PhD students, with whom I explored many trial runs in graduate seminars in Jerusalem and at the University of Arizona in the 1970s–1990s. They are my real legacy, and I dedicate this book to them with affection and esteem.

Most of all, I acknowledge an incalculable debt to my wife Pamela, who believed confidently in this enterprise (and me), even when I thought it might be folly. She saw me to the finish. I am also indebted to Norma Dever, my first wife, who is unique in being able to turn my handwritten manuscripts into print suitable for publication.

I am also indebted to Nicole Tilford and Bob Buller of SBL Press, who with great skill and patience turned a cumbersome manuscript and illustrations into a real book.

Finally, I owe more than I can say to an anonymous benefactor who coaxed me out of “retirement” in my late seventies and made me believe that I had one more work in me—as it turned out, my magnum opus.

This book is intended primarily as a handbook for biblical scholars, historians of the ancient Near East, and nonspecialists interested in the biblical world. In order to keep the narrative flowing, I have confined the discussion of some controversial issues that could not be avoided to endnotes for each chapter, where references to a full bibliography will be found. I have tried to cite all major works that I think relevant, as well as offering reasons for my preference where sharp disagreements are apparent. I am not defending any particular “school,” only trying to provide a reasonable, balanced view of what really happened in the light of the best current archaeological evidence we have. This is *a* history of ancient Israel, not *the* history. Other histories should be and will be written in due time, but we do not need any more paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible. Future histories will likely be largely archaeological histories—advancing on this one—because archaeology is now our only source of genuinely new data.

The main text is deliberately written in the third person, in the interest of a dispassionate style of inquiry. In the notes to chapter 1 and in the conclusion, however, I use the first person because I happen to know almost all of the scholars whose views are discussed, and I have often been involved in the controversies and in all honesty cannot always separate the individual from methods and aims. I can only hope to have been fair, despite some sharp disagreements. In the conclusion, I step beyond fact to some personal convictions, and for these I take full responsibility.

On a few practical matters, I note that discussions of sites with no specific reference depend largely on Stern’s edited five-volume *New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Stern 1993, 2008), which can be supplemented by entries in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Freedman 1992); the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (E. Meyers 1997); and *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East* (Sasson 2006). Where final report volumes published after these works are available, they may be cited. A recent and valuable resource is *The Oxford Handbook of the Archaeology of the Levant c. 8000–332 BCE* (Steiner and Killebrew 2014). Several chapters in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (Coogan

2001), although brief, are written by archaeologists or biblical scholars familiar with the biblical data. Finally, a definitive corpus of pottery was published after this book was ready for press, a two-volume work edited by Seymour Gitin: *Ancient Pottery of Israel and Its Neighbors from the Iron Age through the Hellenistic Period* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2015). This is a magisterial work by numerous experts and should be consulted to supplement the necessarily brief discussions of pottery here.

The bibliography contains mostly English-language works. That is because the international dialogue is most often in English, and all the basic Israeli archaeological publications (even doctoral dissertations) have long been published in English.

Biblical chronology follows Cogan and Tadmor 1988 and Cogan 2001. For Egypt, dates are those of Shaw 2000. For wider ancient Near East chronology, Rainey and Notley 2006 is taken as authoritative.

All dates are BCE unless further specified. The term *Palestine* is used only for ancient Canaan (although Roman in origin) and has no implications for the modern situation in the region.

Since this is a history of ancient Israel, not that of either the biblical literature or the history of Near Eastern archaeology, the reader is simply referred to other discussions. Few biblical commentaries are listed, for reasons elaborated below; the biblical text is what it now is, and the historical claims that the narratives are making are clear enough to be tested critically. Later interpretations—“cultural memories”—are irrelevant for our purposes.

Most of the histories of ancient Israel written over the past fifty years or so are cited. But no attempt is made to compare them to the history offered here, because ours is quite simply unique. Readers will have to judge which histories are more satisfactory, more in keeping with what we now know and may want to know in the future.

No literature after mid-2015 could be cited, although many discussions are ongoing, and there is a constant flow of new archaeological data. That is why this is a provisional history—and perhaps more a “phenomenology,” a “portrait,” as the title has it.

Alambra, Cyprus
Spring 2016

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Abbreviations

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AAT	Agypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, David Noel, ed. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
ABS	Archaeology and Biblical Studies
ADAJ	<i>Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan</i>
ADPV	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Palästinavereins
AHUCBASJ	Annual of the Hebrew Union College Biblical and Archaeological School in Jerusalem
AJA	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
ALASPM	Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas und Mesopotamiens
ANEM	Ancient Near East Monographs/Monografías sobre el Antiguo Cercano Oriente
ANESSup	Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement Series
ANET	Pritchard, James B., ed. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
ANGSBA	Annual of the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
ASOR	American Schools of Oriental Research
ASORDS	ASOR Dissertation Series
AWE	<i>Ancient West & East</i>
AYB	Anchor Yale Bible
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>

BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CANE	Sasson, Jack M., ed. <i>Civilizations of the Ancient Near East</i> . 4 vols. New York, 1995. Repr. in 2 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006.
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient Near East
ConBOT	Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series
CRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CurBS	<i>Currents in Research: Biblical Studies</i>
EB	Early Bronze Age
ErIsr	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ESHM	European Seminar in Historical Methodology
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
GBSNT	Guides to Biblical Scholarship: New Testament
HANES	History of the Ancient Near East Studies
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IDB	Buttrick, George A., ed. <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962.
IEJ	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
JANER	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JEA	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
JESHO	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JFA	<i>Journal of Field Archaeology</i>
JHS	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
JMA	<i>Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
JNES	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
JSOT	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSSEA	<i>Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities</i>
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel

LB	Late Bronze Age
LC	Late Cypriot
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LM	Late Mycenaean
MB	Middle Bronze Age
MMA	Monographs in Mediterranean Archaeology
MPP	Madaba Plains Project Series
NEA	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
NEAEHL	Stern, Ephraim, ed. <i>The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land</i> . Vols. 1–4: Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta; New York: Simon & Schuster. 1993. Vol. 5: Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2008.
NGSBA	Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBOSA	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Series Archaeologica
OJA	<i>Oxford Journal of Archaeology</i>
Or	<i>Orientalia</i>
OrAnt	<i>Oriens Antiquus</i>
OTS	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
RSR	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
SAHL	Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SHANE	Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East
SJOT	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
SO.S	Symbolae Osloenses Fasciculi Suppletorii
SWBA	Social World of Biblical Antiquity
SymS	Symposium Series
TA	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
UF	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZDPV	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

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