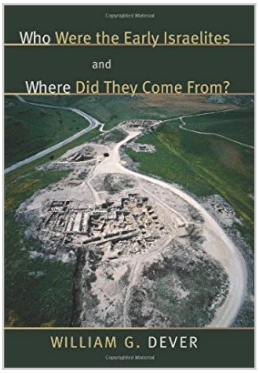

Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?

By William G. Dever

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This book addresses one of the most timely and urgent topics in archaeology and biblical studies -- the origins of early Israel. For centuries the Western tradition has traced its beginnings back to ancient Israel, but recently some historians and archaeologists have questioned the reality of Israel as it is described in biblical literature. In *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* William Dever explores the continuing controversies regarding the true nature of ancient Israel and presents the archaeological evidence for assessing the accuracy of the well-known Bible stories.

Confronting the range of current scholarly interpretations seriously and dispassionately, Dever rejects both the revisionists who characterize biblical literature as "pious propaganda" and the conservatives who are afraid to even question its factuality. Attempting to break through this impasse, Dever draws on thirty years of archaeological fieldwork in the Near East, amassing a wide range of hard evidence for his own compelling view of the development of Israelite history.

In his search for the actual circumstances of Israel's emergence in Canaan, Dever reevaluates the Exodus-Conquest traditions in the books of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, and 1 & 2 Samuel in the light of well-documented archaeological evidence from the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age. Among this important evidence are some 300 small agricultural villages recently discovered in the heartland of what would later become the biblical nation of Israel. According to Dever, the authentic ancestors of the "Israelite peoples" were most likely Canaanites -- together with some pastoral nomads and small groups of Semitic slaves escaping from Egypt -- who, through the long cultural and socioeconomic struggles recounted in the book of Judges, managed to forge a new agrarian, communitarian, and monotheistic society.

Written in an engaging, accessible style and featuring fifty photographs that help bring the archaeological record to life, this book provides an authoritative statement on the origins of ancient Israel and promises to reinvigorate discussion about the historicity of the biblical tradition.

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Editorial Review

Review

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"William Dever is a superb archaeologist with a deep knowledge of the issues and controversies concerning Israel's origins. In this book he presents a compelling case for early Israel as a reformist frontier society, and along the way he demolishes many rival theories. Dever's discussion is authoritative, polemical, and very readable. He is the exemplary heir of W. F. Albright, with the knockout punch of Mike Tyson."

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"William Dever treats Israel's origins as no one before him ever has. This unique, lively synthesis of the archaeological and textual data will shape our understanding of Israel's emergence for years."

Richard Elliott Friedman
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About the Author

William G. Dever is professor emeritus of Near Easternarchaeology and anthropology at the University of Arizonain Tucson. He has served as director of the Nelson GlueckSchool of Biblical Archaeology in Jerusalem, as director ofthe W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research inJerusalem, and as a visiting professor at universitiesaround the world. He has spent thirty years conductingarchaeological excavations in the Near East, resulting in alarge body of award-winning fieldwork.

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