Preface

The title of this volume honoring W. G. Dever, Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel, reflects the broad scope of Bill’s scholarship. Dealing with a wide range of subjects relating to the Bronze and Iron Ages, Bill confronts the historical implications of archaeology—as he has so often remarked, “If archaeology is not history, it is nothing.” The essays presented herein also include those dealing with data from earlier and later periods originating within the geographical area of ancient Israel, considered part of the wider biblical world as understood by Bill’s mentor, G. Ernest Wright, and his teacher, W. F. Albright. In addition to celebrating Bill’s contribution to the world of scholarship, this volume demonstrates the deep appreciation, respect, and affection in which he is held by the community of archaeologists and other scholars in the wider field of ancient Near Eastern studies. This is our tribute to our teacher, colleague, and friend, and to his scholarship and unswerving dedication to excellence.

William G. Dever was born on November 27, 1933, in Louisville, Kentucky, USA. Because he was the son of a Christian Church minister, it was only natural that early on he showed an interest in biblical studies, which he was to pursue throughout his academic career. In 1955, Bill earned a B.A. in Religious Studies at Milligan College, Tennessee, where he had met Norma Elizabeth Spangler; Bill and Norma were married in 1953. Continuing his studies, he received both a B.D. in Hebrew and Greek from Christian Theological Seminary and an M.A. in Semitics from Butler College in Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1959. Subsequently, he entered the doctoral program in Biblical Theology at Harvard University under the supervision of G. Ernest Wright. At Wright’s suggestion, he changed his major to archaeology, and in 1962 and 1964, he participated in Wright’s excavations at Shechem. Under Wright’s and Frank Moore Cross’s tutelage, Bill earned his Ph.D. from Harvard University’s Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations in 1966, with his dissertation on The EB IV–MB I Period in Syria-Palestine, ca. 2150–1850.

In 1964, Bill joined the staff of the long-term excavations at Tell Gezer initiated by Wright and Nelson Glueck. The project was sponsored by the Hebrew Union College Biblical and Archaeological School in Jerusalem (HUCBASJ) (renamed the Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology in 1972), and was also supported by the Semitic Museum of Harvard University. Bill remained with Wright in Jerusalem as the Archaeological Fellow at HUCBASJ from 1964 to 1965, and returned to Harvard in 1966 to finish writing his dissertation. From 1966 to 1971, he served as the Director of the Gezer excavations, with H. Darrell Lance as Associate Director. In 1967, Bill was appointed Assistant Professor of Archaeology at HUCBASJ, and from 1968 to 1971, he served as its permanent Archaeological Director. While at HUCBASJ, he also directed the excavations at Khirbet el-Qôm and Jebel Qa’aqir (1969–1971). In 1971, Bill became the fourth long-term Director of the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem (AIAR), formerly the American School of Oriental Research, and in 1973, he was also appointed AIAR Professor of Near Eastern History and Archaeology. In 1972 and 1973, he conducted salvage excavations at Shechem. In 1969, while Bill and Norma were living in Jerusalem, their son, Sean William, was born.

In 1975, Bill and his family returned to the United States, where he was instrumental in creating a graduate program in Syro-Palestinian Archaeology at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He held appointments as Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology in the departments of Oriental Studies (now Near Eastern Studies) and Anthropology and he led the Near Eastern Studies Department during two terms as Department Head, and also became the first faculty member of the Committee on Judaic Studies. During his 28 years at the University of Arizona, Bill served as the major adviser to 24 doctoral students in archaeology. He also co-directed the Central Negev Highlands Project with Rudolph Cohen of the Israel Department of Antiquities (now the Israel Antiquities Authority), which involved three seasons of excavation at Be’er Resisim from 1978 to 1980. Bill also served as the Principal Investigator for two excavations led by his students, one directed by Steven Falconer and Bonnie Magness-Gardiner at Tell el-Hayyat in Jordan from 1981 to 1985 and the other directed by J. P. Dessel, Beth Alpert Nakhai, and Bonnie Wisthoff at Tell el-Wawiyat in Israel from 1986 to 1987. He returned to Gezer for two seasons of excavation in 1984 and 1990.

In 1981–1982, Bill was the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellow in Israel, and in the spring of that year, he
was awarded the Israel Museum’s Percia Schimmel Prize for distinguished contributions to the Archaeology of Eretz-Israel and the Land of the Bible. Bill has also held a number of distinguished lectureships, including the Winslow Lectureship at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, in 1972, the Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectureship at the University of Washington in Seattle in 1985 and again in 1990–1991, and the Archaeological Institute of America’s Charles Eliot Norton Lectureship in 2003–2004. Since the early 1970s, Bill has been a visiting professor at several major universities and has been invited to lecture at institutions and conferences throughout the world. In 1997, the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) honored Bill with the P. E. MacAllister Field Archaeology Award for distinguished contributions to Near Eastern archaeology. Also in 1997, the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati awarded him the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters honoris causa for his scholarly contributions to the field of Biblical Archaeology. From 1978 to 1984, Bill served as the editor of the Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research, and from 1989 to 1997 as the editor of the Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research series. As a long-term ASOR trustee, he served as its vice-president from 1982 to 1988 and also as Vice-President of the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute from 1994 to 1996. Since 1989, he has also been an AIAR trustee. Bill retired in 2003, and now holds the position of Professor Emeritus of Syro-Palestinian Archaeology at the University of Arizona.

In 1989, after Bill and Norma divorced, he and Pamela Jo Gaber were married, and Bill converted to Judaism. Bill, Pamela, Pamela’s daughters/Bill’s stepdaughters Jordan Lee Gaber Saletan and Hannah Susan Gaber Saletan, and Bill and Pamela’s son, Evan Jacob Gaber Dever, born in 1990, now live in Westchester County, New York.

Tragically, Bill and Norma’s son, Sean William Dever, after successfully overcoming cancer at an early age, died of an aneurism in 2001. In his memory, Bill and Norma, with the help of their friends, established the annual Sean W. Dever Memorial Prize awarded by AIAR for the best published article or paper presented at a conference by a Ph.D. candidate in Syro-Palestinian and Biblical Archaeology.

One of Bill’s most significant and enduring contributions to the field of archaeology—and perhaps the most defining characteristic that emanates from all of his professional endeavors—is his concern and aspiration for increased rigor and professionalism in the discipline as practiced by Americans. In the four primary components of his professional career—fieldwork, scholarship, editing, and teaching—Bill constantly worked to raise the level of professionalism within “Syro-Palestinian Archaeology” (for many years the term he championed over the more cloistered “Biblical Archaeology,” to which he returned later in his career). His goal in this pursuit was clear: to bring the archaeology of the southern Levant more in line with the anthropologically oriented archaeology that was practiced in the New World. Under Bill’s leadership at Gezer, beginning in the mid-1960s, emphasis was placed on excavation methodology and a multidisciplinary approach to fieldwork that included the systematic collection of animal bones, plant remains, and soil samples and the integration of a geologist, Rueben Bullard, as an essential staff member of the excavation team. While all of this was not entirely innovative, the incorporation of these elements into the explicit conceptual framework of the excavation and its methodology was revolutionary. Some 40 years later, it is now clear that Gezer led the way: these practices soon became standard operating procedures at the vast majority of excavations in Israel and Jordan. The Gezer project was also dedicated to training the next generation of American archaeologists, fostered through its pioneering program of a large-scale archaeological field school. The staff that the project nurtured went on to direct excavations at Ashkelon, Gush Halav, Tell Halif, Meiron, Tel Miqne–Ekron, Nabratein, Sephoris, and Shema in Israel, at Khirbet Iskander and Tall al-Umayri in Jordan, at Idalion on Cyprus, at Carthage in Tunisia, and at Tell Mas-kuta in Egypt.

In his scholarship, Bill emphasized the same set of ideals and aspirations for increased rigor and professionalism, and this had a major impact on the subjects and issues that he addressed. Based on the research he conducted in the 1970s as a follow-up to his Ph.D. dissertation on EB IV (MB I) pottery, he published a number of landmark articles that came to define the character of this period and its material culture. This was also true of his analysis of Iron Age material culture and especially his work on cultic practices in ancient Israelite religion, initiated with his excavation and publication of the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, which mentions the name of the goddess Asherah, later defined as the consort of Yahweh. Bill also produced expeditious interim field reports, including reports on his excavations at Gezer, Khirbet el-Qôm, Jebel Qa‘aqir, Shechem, and Be‘er Resisim, in which he continually stressed the integrity of the data and especially the importance of stratigraphic relationships. Among his most important publications are his multivolume final reports on the Gezer excavations.

Bill also worked assiduously to decouple archaeological chronology from the biblical narratives, for example, in the publication of his 1972 Winslow lectures, *Archaeology and Biblical Studies: Retrospects and Prospects* (1972).
But perhaps most importantly, he devoted much effort and thought to explicating the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings of the practice of archaeology in a way that was quite rare for the discipline. For many years after the conclusion of the Gezer excavations, in articles such as “Impact of the ‘New Archaeology’” (1988), he wrote forcefully about the importance of processual archaeology. With a distinctive clarity and sense of purpose, Bill sought an understanding of the archaeological data devoid of any biblical reference, which could wait until after the data had been properly excavated, analyzed, contextualized, and thoroughly studied. Only then would it be proper to reconsider the texts (usually the Hebrew Bible) and work at reintegrating them with archaeological and historical evidence. More recently, in articles such as “Archaeology, Texts, and History-Writing: Toward an Epistemology” (1994), Bill has devoted himself to reintegrating a more rigorous style of historical analysis and reshaping the study of Bronze and Iron Age archaeology into a form of historical archaeology more resonant with the wider global archaeological perspective. In his later scholarly work, he has unabashedly achieved this objective, and thus in a way has come full circle to a reformulated and unapologetic form of “Biblical Archaeology.” In this more recent role, Bill has taken the lead in responding to the “minimalists” among biblical scholars and to the few archaeologists who unjustifiably seek to alter the traditional Iron Age chronology and with it the early history of ancient Israel. His passion for these issues and for teaching and sharing his knowledge and interests has had an enormous impact on his students and colleagues, as well as on the lay community—so much so that his more than 300 publications, many of which have become basic reference works, have helped to shape definitively the discipline of the archaeology of ancient Israel. His most recent books, What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel (2001), Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From? (2003), and Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel (2005) were written for the serious student, as well as for the general public and have been critically acclaimed by both groups.

Bill brought the same approach and dedication that he demonstrated in his scholarship to his editorial work, one of his most important achievements. After the conclusion of fieldwork at Gezer, Bill’s 17-year stewardship as editor of the Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research and the Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research provided a strong guiding hand in bringing a greater degree of professionalism to these ASOR publications. In his role as editor, he again was able to articulate his all-abiding concern for the integrity of the data and attention to scholarly rigor and in this way had a powerful impact on how ASOR presents itself to its constituency and the public at large.

In tandem with his editorial work, Bill endeavored to reshape the pedagogical core of the field of Biblical Archaeology in the United States by initiating a new graduate program in Syro-Palestinian Archaeology at the University of Arizona in 1975. It is rare for an individual scholar single-handedly to build a complete academic graduate program, but this is precisely what he did. In this endeavor as well he maintained the guiding principles that had brought him so much success in his excavation programs and scholarship: professionalism and rigor. Working with the Department of Anthropology, he conceptualized the study of Syro-Palestinian archaeology as part and parcel of the study of archaeological anthropology. He fully appreciated the deep roots archaeology has in anthropology, as well as in history, and encouraged his students to study not only texts but also archaeological method and theory and comparative method. While this has now become standard practice in most graduate programs focusing on the southern Levant, it was highly innovative in 1975.

Few scholars are able to contribute to shaping a field of scholarship and to influence a generation of scholars as much as William G. Dever has for the past 40 years. On behalf of all of Bill’s colleagues, students, and friends who have experienced his infectious enthusiasm and passion for scholarship, we express our abiding friendship and our deep sense of gratitude by dedicating this festschrift to him. May he go from strength to strength ’ad me’ah ve’esrim.

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J. EDWARD WRIGHT
J. P. DESSSEL