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**Book review:**

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GRABBE, LESTER. *The Dawn of Israel: A History of Canaan in the Second Millennium BCE* (London: T&T Clark, 2023), pp. xviii + 354. ISBN: 978-0-5676-6321-4. £21.99, pbk.

One is more accustomed to Grabbe writing about the Persian Period, so his foray into the second millennium BCE feels new. Nevertheless, his underlying aim remains the same: to uncover the historical realities behind the biblical presentations of history. He admits as much, stating plainly that the aim of this book is ‘to illuminate the origins of Israel’ (271). That term takes on many meanings in the book: Grabbe attends at length to its meaning in the Merneptah stele, but also to uncovering the history of the state with that name in the northern portion of Canaan. One also finds extensive attention for the Davidic rulers in Judah associated with the amalgamated idea of an ‘ancient Israel’.

Grabbe’s exploration follows a wholly chronological structure, with major divisions for the Middle Bronze, Late Bronze, and Early Iron Age. It treats, in detail, the period from 2000 to 900 BCE. The resulting book reads more like a reference work than an historical study. Indeed, the episodic nature produced by the structure of the book makes the reader feel the manuscript is an expanded set of bibliographies and lecture notes Grabbe employed in his teaching with light revision into prose. Still, the form does facilitate one strength of the volume: copious bibliography at the start of each section that provides an easy and immediate list of further reading for anyone interested in the topic under discussion.

The book is by no means introductory. The discussions of material culture, inscriptional evidence, and the biblical material all presume a developed understanding of those fields. The text will be more appropriate for someone with substantial prior study of the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible, not someone new to the topic—a feature to be borne in mind by potential readers and for those who might recommend this volume to others.

Grabbe’s findings, while robustly evidenced and supported by existing scholarship, will be no surprise to anyone familiar with existing studies of these issues. Critical scholarly ideas on these topics advanced in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century on continental Europe and in Israel dominate. Grabbe favours material culture and archaeological analysis in his approach, and thus his findings are deeply intertwined with the work of Nadav Na’aman, David Ussishkin, and Israel Finkelstein (something he admits in the preface). Where there are discussions of the Hebrew Bible, Grabbe is not unaware of scholarship post 2010, but reflexively leans on studies from the 1970s to 1990s while shying away from more recent, and now more progressive ideas. All this increases the sense of reference work, with well-rehearsed lines of argument that lead to now well-established positions on key issues.

Grabbe has produced a reasonably priced, moderate length reference work on this period of history that presents a coherent synthesis of where mainstream European critical scholarship stood on the origins of Israel at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. That is valuable. It means too that the book will (and should) appear in most libraries and on the shelves of many students who need such a work to support their studies.

C. A. STRINE

Word count: 512