

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910779013803321
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Titolo	The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal : Excavation and Interpretation
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Winona Lake : , : Eisenbrauns, , 2014 ©2014
ISBN	1-57506-674-2
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (300 p.)
Collana	Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement ; ; v. 6
Disciplina	933/.53
Soggetti	West Bank - Antiquities Iron age - Israel Excavations (Archaeology) - West Bank - Ebal, Mount Ebal, Mount (West Bank) - Antiquities Ebal, Mount (West Bank) Antiquities West Bank Antiquities
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references and index.
Nota di contenuto	""Stratum II""""Stratum IB""; ""The Faunal Assemblage from Mt. Ebal""; ""Conclusion""; ""Historical and Sociological Considerations of the Mt. Ebal Site""; ""The Amphictyony Hypothesis""; ""The Mt. Ebal Site and Biblical Tradition""; ""Scholarly Response""; ""An Overview of Regional Surveys in Israel""; ""The Survey of Manasseh Compared with Joshua, Judges, and the Question of Israelite Origins""; ""Conclusion""; ""Summary and Conclusion""; ""Bibliography""; ""Index of Authors""; ""Back Cover"" ""Physical Parallels to el-Burnat: Domestic and Military""""Village""; ""Farmstead""; ""House or Other Domestic Space""; ""The Central Structure at Mt. Ebal and the Four-Room House""; ""Watchtower""; ""The Biblical Term MigdA?! and Ancient Watchtowers""; ""Towers in the Late Bronze Age""; ""Towers in Iron Age I""; ""The Tower of Shechem""; ""Conclusion""; ""Physical Parallels to El-Burnat: Religious Structures""; ""Gilgalim""; ""Altars""; ""Early to Middle Bronze Age""; ""Late Bronze Age""; ""Iron Age""; ""Discussion""; ""Conclusion""; ""Literary Parallels""; ""Location of the Site"" ""Cover""; ""Preface and Acknowledgments""; ""Abbreviations"";

""Introduction""; ""Discovery and Excavation of the Ebal Structure""; ""Overview of the Discovery and Excavation of the Mt. Ebal Complex""; ""Overview of Zertal's Conclusions Regarding the Ebal Site""; ""Methodology and Criteria for the Identification of the Site""; ""Analysis of the Ebal Installation""; ""Stratum II""; ""Stratum IB""; ""Stratum IA""; ""Pottery""; ""Stone and Metal Artifacts""; ""Faunal Remains""; ""The Faunal Assemblage""; ""Two Egyptianized Scarabs from Mt. Ebal""; ""Conclusion""

Sommario/riassunto

In Josh 8:30-35, Israel constructs an altar on Mt. Ebal in fulfillment of the command of Deut 27:1-8. This structure had very important social, political, and religious implications for Israel, for it was the first structure to be built after the people entered the land of Canaan. Once the altar was completed, sacrifices were to be offered on it, and a renewal of the covenant was to be carried out (patterned after the ritual of Deut 31:9-13). This covenant renewal was necessary to integrate the people into the covenant who had not been a part of the Sinai experience. The event was significant enough to establish nearby Shechem as the tribal league shrine, and it was the first political and religious ceremony that the Israelites undertook following their entry into the land. As a covenant ratification, it could be described as their ratification as a nation. The altar on Mt. Ebal and its concomitant ceremony were, therefore, according to the claims of the Hebrew Bible, of supreme importance in the life of ancient Israel. In 1980, during the survey of the territory of Manasseh, Israeli archaeologist Adam Zertal discovered a site on Mt. Ebal dating to the period of Iron I, during which the Israelites began to sedentarize in the central hill country of Canaan. The site was excavated over eight seasons, from 1982 to 1989, under the auspices of the University of Haifa and the Israel Exploration Society. In 1985, Zertal published an article in which he suggested that the structure on Ebal may have been the altar of Josh 8:30-35. In *The Iron Age I Structure on Mt. Ebal*, Ralph Hawkins reviews the excavation on Mt. Ebal and its results, including the scarabs, seals, and animal bones found there. He examines the architecture of the site in relation to Mesopotamian watchtowers, altars, and the descriptions of altars in mishnaic materials, Ezekiel, and Deuteronomic passages. This fascinating book examines the Mt. Ebal site using a comparative method for both the physical data and the textual data. The site and its artifacts are analyzed and then compared with alternative proposals and literary traditions. The site is placed in its broader regional context in order to determine how it might relate to the larger settlement picture of Iron Age I. The primary purpose is to examine the data with a view to determining the nature and function of the site and its possible relation to Josh 8:30-35. A compelling read for biblical and archaeological students and scholars, who will better be able to envision sites of past events.
