

The Coins of Maqatir
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Khirbet el-Maqatir has four occupational phases as established by archaeological evidence: an Amorite Bronze Age fortress, an Israelite occupation from the Iron Age I (IA I), a city from the NT Hellenistic/Roman time, and a Byzantine monastery. First occupied near the end of the Middle Bronze III period (1600-1485 BC), Khirbet el-Maqatir was sporadically occupied until the Byzantine Period (AD 320 - 636). Numismatic evidence assists in defining occupational periods from the Persian Period (539-332 BC) through the Byzantine Period (AD 320 - 636).

While pottery remains the most used means to establish chronological understanding of a specific site, "coins are among the most helpful archaeological articles for dating purposes when recovered in legible condition."¹ Khirbet el-Maqatir has been blessed with an abundance of coins. This became abundantly clear after 2011 when the antiquities authority changed its policy to allow metal detectors on site. This policy change has allowed Ellen Jackson (Figure 1), a



Figure 1: Ellen Jackson -
Metal Detectorist

wonderful metal detectorist, to work on the site which has dramatically increased the number of coins excavated each year. However, just like pottery, it is essential to realize that there is an "important limitation on the use of numismatic (coin) evidence ... we do not know precisely how long coins stayed in circulation."² As stated in the Holman Bible Handbook: "The presence of coins at a site can aid in the dating of the particular strata in which they are found. The layer or stratum cannot be dated to an earlier time than the date of the coin found in it."³ But, a date is not the only retrievable data from a coin. Coins can provide information on cultural aspects of the society that minted the coin. Political, religious, and social concepts all have been worthy of being stamped on coins around the world. Sometimes, images of the current king or ruler are engraved on the coin as well as wives and other prominent people of the time. Because of these images on the coins, if the coin is from the Roman occupation in the first century AD, and is found in good condition, assignment of a precise date might be possible. However, coins struck before this timeframe are assigned a relative date.⁴

The Kirbert el-Maqatir coins were either hidden intentionally or dropped accidentally. These coins then wait patiently many centuries for the excavator's trowel. Once excavated, cleaned and analyzed, the coins are used to explain the chronology of the site. The graph below (Figure 1) shows the overall distribution of the 690 coins excavated at Kirbert el-Maqatir as of dig season 2014. The distribution of coins unequivocally supports the NT and Byzantine

¹ Paul J. Achtemeier, Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 1091.

² James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 21.

³ David S. Dockery et al., *Holman Bible Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1992), 69.

⁴ John Wilson Betlyon, "Guide To Artifacts: Numismatics and Archaeology." *Biblical Archaeologist* (American Schools of Oriental Research, 1985).

occupation periods defined from other archaeological evidence (pottery, architecture, C-14 dating, and objects). Once the coins from the 2015 dig season are analyzed, this chart will require an update, but the general distribution is still expected.

**Coin Distribution at Kirbet el-Maqtir
(as of 2014 Season)**

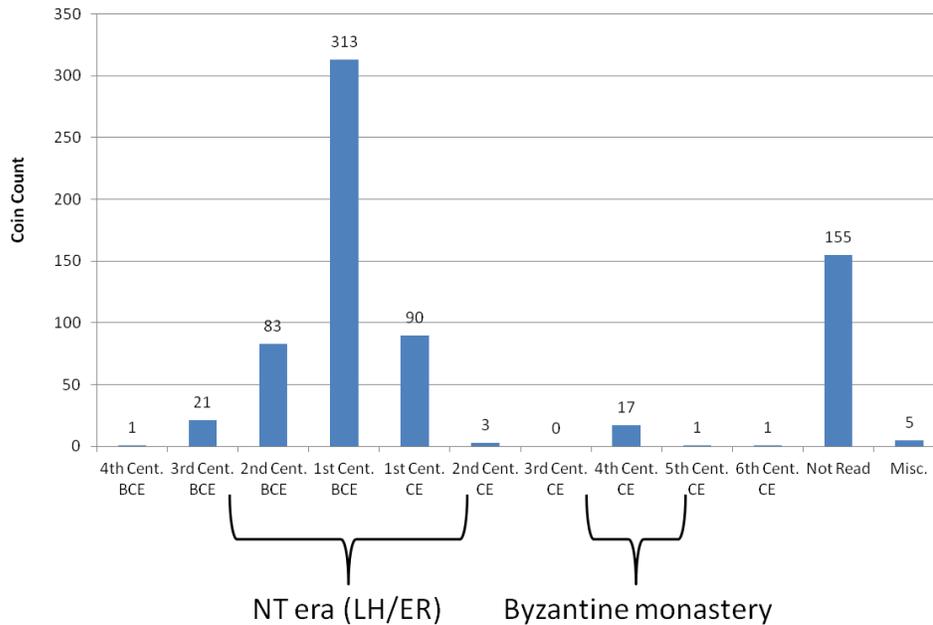


Figure 2: Coin Distribution by Century

However, the earliest coin (Figure 2) excavated thus far was minted in the late Persian Period (4th century BC). Staff numismatist Yoav Farhi identified that the coin was minted during the Late Persian Period and is one of the Yehizkayah coins (*A Treasury of Jewish Coins* (TJC) reference number 24).⁵ This information has the potential to extend backwards in time the occupational times especially when combined with a partial Persian period lamp and a piece of Persian era jewelry excavated in 2014. The coin, lamp, and jewelry may indicate a minimal occupation of this site in the Persian era, but more excavation and analysis is required. It is interesting that coins began to be used for commerce during the Persian Period. But, normally only independent states could mint coins, while in some cases, where there was limited autonomy, the local authorities could mint coins.⁶ Finding Israelite minted coins from the Persian Period would change our understanding of the site. Unfortunately, as of the end of the 2014 season, no Israelite minted coins have been found.



This coin (Figure 2) minted during the Later Persian Period is in fairly good shape for being in the ground so long.

⁵ Yoav Farhi, "Numismatic Report," in *Khirbet el-Maqtir 2014 Excavation Report*, ed. Scott Stripling (Akron, PA: Associates for Biblical Research, 2014), 127-139.

⁶ Oded Borowski, "From Shekels To Talents: Money In The Ancient World." *Bible and Spade* (1994): 110–114.

As the Associates for Biblical Research (ABR) continues the excavations at Maqatir, the staff and volunteers will be on the lookout for two coin types. First, coins "bearing Hebrew script from the middle of the 4th century BC bearing the legend Yahud, the name of the province of Judea in the Persian period."⁷ Secondly, the staff and volunteers will be on the lookout for oval-shaped gold darics. These coins were minted during the reign of Darius the Great (Darius I of Persia, 521–486 B.C.) who sponsored the minting of coinage in Palestine. On these darics the obverse (front side), there will be "depicted the Persian king robed and crowned, facing right, and kneeling with his left knee up and his right knee down. In his left hand he held a bow, and in his right a long arrow or lance. The reverse (back side) of all Persian imperial coins carried no markings."⁸

The following table illustrates the remaining chronology of the Maqatir coins. By reading from left to right, the first column provides the archaeological period when the coins were minted, which is followed by each coin type (normally named after the king who authorized the minting). Next listed are specific times when the coins were minted and this is followed by the total coins for that coin type (as of 2014). Finally, a picture of significant coin(s) associated with the archaeological periods is shown.

Period	Coin Type Names	Timeframe	Number Coins	Representative Coins of Period
Persian Period	Yehizkayah	550-329 BC	1	 <p>Above: Yehizkayah From Maqatir</p>
Early Hellenistic (332-198 BC)	Ptolemy II	285–246 BC	4	 <p>Above: Ptolemy II From Maqatir</p>
	Ptolemy III	246–221 BC	1	
	Antiochus III	223–187 BC	17	
	Indeterminate	332-198 BC	2	
Late Hellenistic (198-63 BC)	Seleucus IV	187–175 BC	1	
	Antiochus IV	175-164 BC	14	

⁷ Avraham Negev, *The Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1990).

⁸ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 485.

Period	Coin Type Names	Timeframe	Number Coins	Representative Coins of Period
	Demetrius I	162–150 BC	4	Above: Antiochus IV From Maqatir
	Antiochus VII	138–129 BC	2	
	Hasmonean	167-63 BC	24	
	John Hyrcanus I	135–104 BC	12	
	Demetrius II	145–141 BC & 129–125 BC	2	
	Ptolemy X Alexander I	107–88 BC	1	
	Alexander Jannaeus	104–76 BC	316	
	Indeterminate	198-63 BC	9	
Early Roman (63 BC - AD 135)	Mattathias Antigonus	40–37 BC	2	
	Herod I	37–4 BC	15	
	Aretas IV	9 BC–AD 40	1	
	Herod Archelaus	4 B.C.–A.D. 6	1	
	Valerius Gratus	AD 15–26	6	
	Pontius Pilate	AD 26–36	3	
	Agrippa I	AD 37–44	7	
	Festus	AD 60–62	3	
	Antonius Felix	AD 52–60	3	
	Porcius Festus	AD 59–60	1	
				
				

Period	Coin Type Names	Timeframe	Number Coins	Representative Coins of Period
				Above: Festus From Maqatir
	Jewish Revolt	AD 66–70	45	
	Marcus Ambibulus	AD 70	2	
	Tyre	AD 73	1	Above: Jewish Revolt From Maqatir
	Trajan	AD 98–117	2	
	Indeterminate	63 BC - AD 135	21	
Early Byzantine (AD 324- 491)	Theodosius I	AD 379-383	5	
	Early Byzantine III	AD 392-450	4	
	Early Byzantine IV	AD 450-491	13	
	Indeterminate	AD 324-491	3	
Late Byzantine (AD 491- 640)	Late Byzantine	AD 491-640	1	
Modern	Modern coins		5	
In Process	Being processed and analyzed		135	
Total coins			690	

Occupational History Based on the Numismatics: A Recap

As is readily seen from the table, there is only one Maqatir coin prior to the Early Hellenistic Period. As already noted, additional excavation and research is required prior to any definitive statement concerning Persian occupation at Maqatir. However, coins from the Early Hellenistic period (332-167 BC) featuring Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC) and Ptolemy III (246–221BC) have been identified on the site, as have Antiochus III (223–187 BC) coins. With over 75% of this period's coins associated with Antiochus III (223–187 BC), one is tempted to look for some historical reason. When Antiochus III defeated the Ptolemies at the battle of Paneas, the Land of Israel passed to Seleucid dominion. This rulership transfer might be indicative of the establishment of an initial village settlement c. 200 BC near the end of the Early Hellenistic Period, though, as noted above, some minimal occupation from both the Persian and Ptolemaic periods is possible. But, the magnitude of the Seleucid coins suggests that something happened. From the coin evidence, this village continued to exist through the Late Hellenistic

(LH) Period (198-63 BC) and into the Early Roman (ER) Period (63 BC - AD 69) for a total of 269 years. The demise of this city occurred during the third year of the First Jewish Revolt against Rome (AD 68/69) based on other archaeological evidence and the sudden absence of coins after AD 69.

Between the time of the city's demise and the next occupant, the site was vacant for 315 years. The Byzantine coinage from Maqatir suggests that during the reign of Theodosius I (AD 383 - 395) the site was re-occupied and a memorial basilica and monastery built on the summit above the old LH/ER city. But, this is another story.

I invite you to come to Israel and work with the archaeological team as we collectively learn more about the occupants of the site through the coins, but also all other artifacts (pottery, objects, architecture, etc.).

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