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DIGGING UP JOSHUA'S AI

The 2009-2010 Seasons at Khirbet el-Maqatir

LOCATING BIBLICAL BETHEL

EXCAVATING the BYZANTINE MONASTERY
at
KHIRBET el-MAQATIR

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Contents

Editorial

Henry B. Smith, Jr.....1

We Hear You!

Editors.....2

Locating Biblical Bethel

David Livingston.....4

Digging Up Joshua's Ai:

The 2009–2010 Seasons at Kh. el-Maqatir

Bryant Wood.....10

A Canaanite Massebah or Stele at Khirbet el-Maqatir?

Titus Kennedy.....17

ABR's Excavation of a Byzantine Church

ABR Staff.....22

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An Editorial Comment



The Battle Continues... Won't You Join Us?

By Henry B. Smith, Jr.

In June 2008, the Lord graciously reopened the doors for the Associates for Biblical Research to once again begin excavating at Khirbet el-Maqatir, Israel. This site has credible archaeological and geographical evidence to be correlated with the city of Ai, found in the momentous, redemptive-historical events of Joshua 7–8. A team of ABR staff and volunteers traveled to Israel in 2009 and 2010 to perform further excavations at our site.

This issue of *Bible and Spade* is dedicated to the archaeological efforts being made at Khirbet el-Maqatir. The foundation for this excavation was laid by the faithful and sacrificial work of our founder, Dr. David Livingston. *If not for Dave's vision, ABR simply would not be.* His extensive research on the subject of Ai and its important relation to the city of Bethel is of the utmost importance. We have republished his article in this issue, "Locating Biblical Bethel," with updated photos. Additionally, Dr. Bryant Wood, who is supervising the excavation, provides the reader with a summary of the results of the 2009 and 2010 excavation seasons. Titus Kennedy analyzes a possible stele found at our site in 2009.

Dr. Scott Stripling led a group to Israel in January of 2011 to excavate the Byzantine monastery at Khirbet el-Maqatir. This structure could possibly have a floor mosaic, commemorating the events that took place there. An article is included in this issue to share with you the significance of this monastery.

I had the great pleasure of joining the team during the 2010 season for the first time. It was literally a life-changing experience. Of course, I had always been excited about what the ministry was doing at our dig. I was thankful to serve the ministry by performing the "behind the scenes" work here in the States.

Upon my arrival in Israel, however, I soon discovered what I had been missing. I did not realize it was *imperative* that I participate in the work at Khirbet el-Maqatir to truly grasp the significance and importance of this critical archaeological project. To stand at the site and to look south to Jerusalem, to look into the same shallow valley where the king of Ai came out for battle, to see the hill where Joshua likely stood with his javelin, to stand at the city gate, *to be at the very place where God brought His people victory over His unrighteous enemies.* It was a profound, life-changing experience.

The Lord graciously provided time and resources so that my wife Birzavit could join me. It was her first trip to Israel. We were together on the optional tour of biblical sites, which I knew she would thoroughly enjoy. I was a bit uncertain how she would respond to getting up at 4 am, digging in the dirt, carrying around tools and walking up the steep, rocky hill every morning. It turned out that I underestimated her enthusiasm and

determination. I will let her tell you about it:

What an amazing experience and opportunity! If I could, I would certainly participate each year. It's not just a bunch of people getting up early to dig in dirt (though many of the locals may think so!). The evidence from Dr. Wood's research is mounting. I'm motivated to learn how God continues to use ABR to unearth such evidence with every season that goes by. It was a tremendous blessing to meet folks from all over the world working for a common purpose and to learn so much about archaeology and how it relates to the Bible. I was privileged to have been a part of such an adventure!

One of the most important spiritual facets of the dig is the morning devotional time on the bus. Typically, it takes us about 45 minutes to reach the site, and at 5 o'clock in the morning, 45 minutes feels like a lifetime! Several staff members and others share testimonies of God's faithfulness and grace. It can be an emotionally powerful experience for everyone, and establishes a prayerful groundwork for the long day ahead. The testimonial is followed by the singing of hymns and other songs that bring glory to our faithful God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So...why don't you join us? If you have been considering making this trip, we encourage you to sign up today! Contact our office or visit the ABR website for more information. We cannot be certain how long the doors will remain open for ABR to continue doing this work. We would not want you to miss out on participating in an archaeological excavation *whose primary purpose is to bring glory to God!*



Henry Smith

Birzavit Smith after a hard day of digging and washing pottery.

We Hear You!



My short question I have is, are you aware of any credible archaeological evidence of Canaanite corruption, particularly of child sacrifice, and, if so, what or where is it? The context behind that question is that, years ago I saw a picture in *Haley's Bible Handbook* (which is not footnoted and completely untraceable) of an infant skeleton in a jar, which had been embedded in a stone wall, supposedly indicating the child was a Canaanite fertility sacrifice. Recently, I've become interested in God's justice in ordering the Israelites to destroy the Canaanites. So, I have spent some time on the Internet researching Canaanite religious practices. I've learned some about Ras-Shamra, which does tell a lot about the Canaanite pantheon. Certainly their gods were erotic and immoral but, in particular, I'm interested in direct evidence of child sacrifice or the like because if there was extra-biblical evidence to support that the Canaanites were "passing their children through the fire of Molech" (e.g. 2 Kings 3:27, 16:3-4, 17:29-33; 2 Chron. 28:2-4; Ez. 16:20-21), I think that would serve as rather conclusive evidence of why God would destroy the Canaanites...

-S. Chisham

A response by ABR staff member Henry Smith, from an unpublished paper, reflecting on the issues of justice and the character of God in the Conquest of Canaan:

1. The relevant Scriptures speak predominantly of the expulsion of the Canaanites, not annihilation. A cursory review of the relevant passages indicates that God gave the Canaanites ample opportunity to flee the land instead of coming under His wrath through the agency of Israel. There is much Scriptural evidence to this effect, summed up in Deuteronomy 12:29-30:

The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and **dispossess**. But **when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you**, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same."

Note that some inhabitants would be driven out, implying that they would continue to live and be allowed to settle elsewhere. Some would be destroyed. The biblical references show that the primary purpose was to drive the Canaanites out of the land, not annihilate all the people. The implication seems to be that God's primary intention was to destroy the Canaanite culture, or nation, not the life of every person in that society. The survivors would be forced to assimilate into other cultures, and severely limit their ability to engage in such immoral practices in any kind of wholesale fashion ever again. The focus of destruction was on the Canaanites, not other city-states in the land. The Israelites, upon entering the land, were forbidden to attack the Moabites (Dt 2:9), the Ammonites (Dt 2:19), and the descendents of Esau (Dt 2:4-6). They were also required to make a peace offering to cities in Canaan from a distance (Dt 20:10-16). The actions of the Israelites were not characterized by naked aggression for the purpose of conquest and genocidal extermination.

2. God did not commit "genocide." Genocide is mass murder, usually based on racist ideology. The destruction of the Canaanites had nothing to do with their ethnicity; rather, it was based on their abhorrent moral behavior. God is morally perfect, has eternal knowledge, and is the Creator and Judge of men, and thus His actions cannot be classified in such terms. When God orders the Israelites to kill the inhabitants of Canaan, it is an entirely just and holy command. God is absolutely holy and morally pure, incapable of malice or lawlessness, as expressed in Deuteronomy 32:4: "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he" (NIV). When He commands Joshua and the Israelites to kill the inhabitants of the land, He does so because He is delivering His wrath upon sin. It is sometimes hard for us to accept the fact that God is using *human agency* to bring about judgment. But it is really the same effect as destroying Sodom and Gomorrah or causing the world to be judged with the Flood. When God takes human life, it is within His divine prerogative as Creator, and that divine prerogative is always exercised within the parameters of His own morally perfect character, His infinite knowledge, wisdom, etc. His command to kill the Canaanites cannot be equated with a flawed, fallible and sinful human being arbitrarily and capriciously ordering a military force to do the same thing.

3. While it is true that God promised the land to Abraham and his descendants, the land itself was not the reason for the destruction of the people there. The reason God used such severe **means** to deliver the land was because of the morally despicable practices of Canaanite society. In promising the land to Abraham, God had complete foreknowledge that the Canaanites would never repent of their evil practices. This verse speaks directly to the question:

After the LORD your God has driven them out before you, do not say to yourself, “The LORD has brought me here to take possession of this land because of my righteousness.” **No, it is on account of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is going to drive them out before you** (Dt 9:4).

4. According to Scripture, the situation in Canaan had been proliferating for centuries, testifying to God’s patience and forbearance toward the people in the land of Canaan, despite their sin. Their immoral behavior can be

traced back *six centuries*, at the very least, to the time of Abraham in Genesis 15:13–16:

Then the LORD said to him [Abram], Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country [Egypt] not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for **the sin of the Amorites [Canaanites] has not yet reached its full measure.**

I hope these considerations help you understand some of the theological issues involved in the matter of God’s justice towards the Canaanites. As for hard archaeological evidence for child sacrifice, this is a current subject of research for another issue of *Bible and Spade* to come later this year. We hope that issue will provide a more full answer to your important question.

Join Us in Israel!

The Kh. el-Maqatir excavation has been made possible by the pioneering work of Dr. David Livingston. Beginning in 1979, Dave established a cordial relationship with the Israel Antiquities Authority that has made it possible for ABR to conduct archaeological fieldwork in Israel for over 30 years. The Kh. el-Maqatir project follows the methodology established by Dave, in which manpower and funding for the project are provided by volunteer support. Participants in the dig have what we call “the Israel experience.” They not only get to participate in the excavation of a biblical site, but they are also transported back to Bible times. To give an example—every morning the cameras come out as the local shepherd brings his flock of sheep across the dig site just after sunrise. In addition, volunteers tour Israel, meet Messianic believers at Yad Hashmona (the ABR headquarters in Israel, see <http://www.yad8.com>), and get to know friendly and helpful Palestinians who live in the vicinity of the dig site.

The Kh. el-Maqatir excavation has added a few things to Dave’s original vision. We have inaugurated a consortium which allows schools, churches and other institutions to partner with us financially in carrying out this crucial work. Members of the consortium enjoy significant benefits, such as being able to send professors and pastors to the dig at no cost. In addition, we run an archaeological field school whereby participating professors and pastors are trained as square supervisors, and students can earn college credit for their dig experience.

Many folks who would like to participate in the dig may feel that they cannot due to the cost. Because our program is such a life-changing and educational experience for professors, pastors, students and Christian laypeople, we encourage potential participants to view the dig as a short-term missions trip. By appealing to churches, family members and friends, prospective diggers can raise the necessary funds to make the dig experience a reality.

Three weeks of participation with ABR’s dig at Khirbet el-Maqatir left me with a kaleidoscope of first-time memories: excitement to be in Israel, early morning sunrises, military checkpoints, driving through the West Bank, carrying supplies up (and down) the hill, setting up shade tents, digging in dirt (and rocks), learning on-site, new friendships, hard work (and blisters), laughter, team work and camaraderie, excitement over “treasures” discovered, midday Islamic calls to prayer, pottery readings, weekend sightseeing, and fun! Most importantly, however, I had the privilege of participating with the ABR team in seeking to demonstrate the historical reliability of God’s Word.

— Debbie Dyk, Dallas Theological Seminary student

Locating Biblical Bethel

By David Livingston

Most scholars today locate Old Testament Bethel at the Arab village of Beitin, about 11 mi (17.7 km) north of Jerusalem. An examination of the evidence, however, indicates that this identification is incorrect. It is important to correctly locate Bethel because Ai is located with relation to Bethel (Gn 12:8; Jos 7:2), and finding Ai has been a major focus of ABR's research work.

Besides the name, the only other evidence Robinson used in the identification was the distance of Bethel from "Aelia" (Jerusalem) mentioned by the early Church Fathers Eusebius (fourth century AD) and Jerome (fifth century AD). His measurement of the distance was done on horseback, estimated by the length of time his horse traveled from Jerusalem to Beitin. Is this an accurate way of measuring distance? One hundred



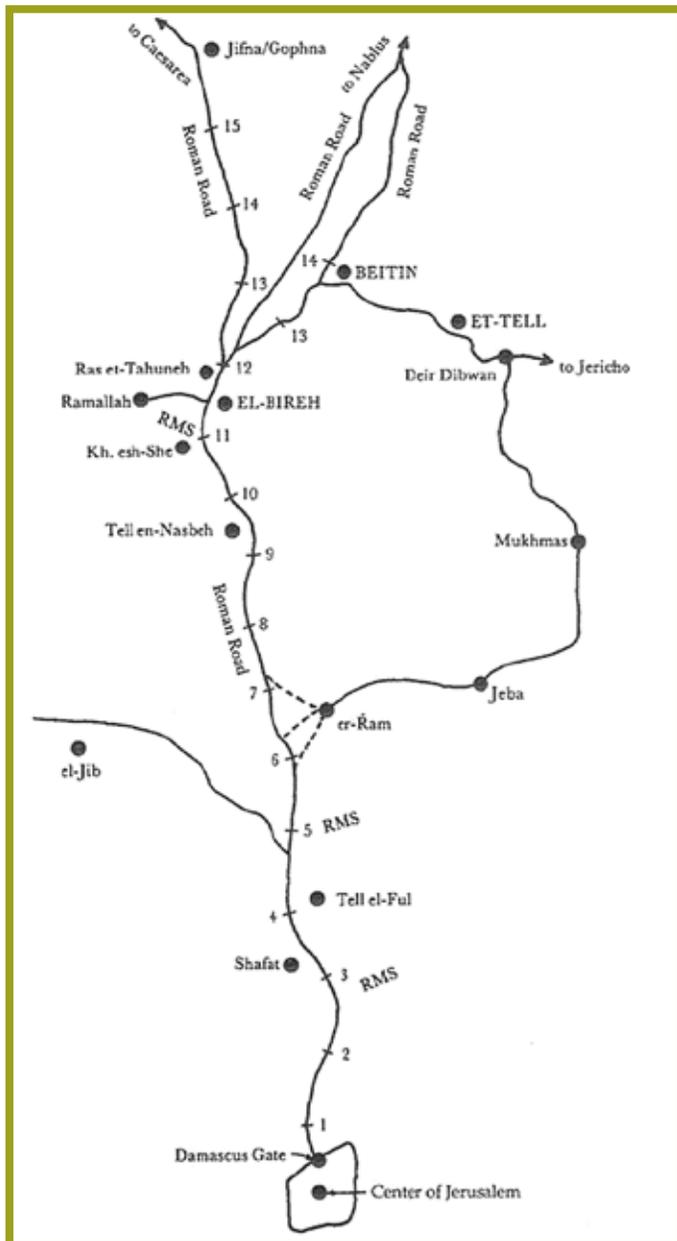
Michael Luddeni

The modern village of Beitin.

How was Beitin originally identified as Bethel? Edward Robinson was the first to identify it in the 1830's. He equated the modern Arabic name of "Beitin" with "Bethel" (which is feasible, but not compelling). Actually, there was no village at the site in Robinson's day. Apparently, it was an area name rather than a village name. In fact, for over 1400 years the very name "Bethel" had been completely forgotten in the area.

years later, W.F. Albright accepted Robinson's identification without even checking the distance, either by horseback or automobile!

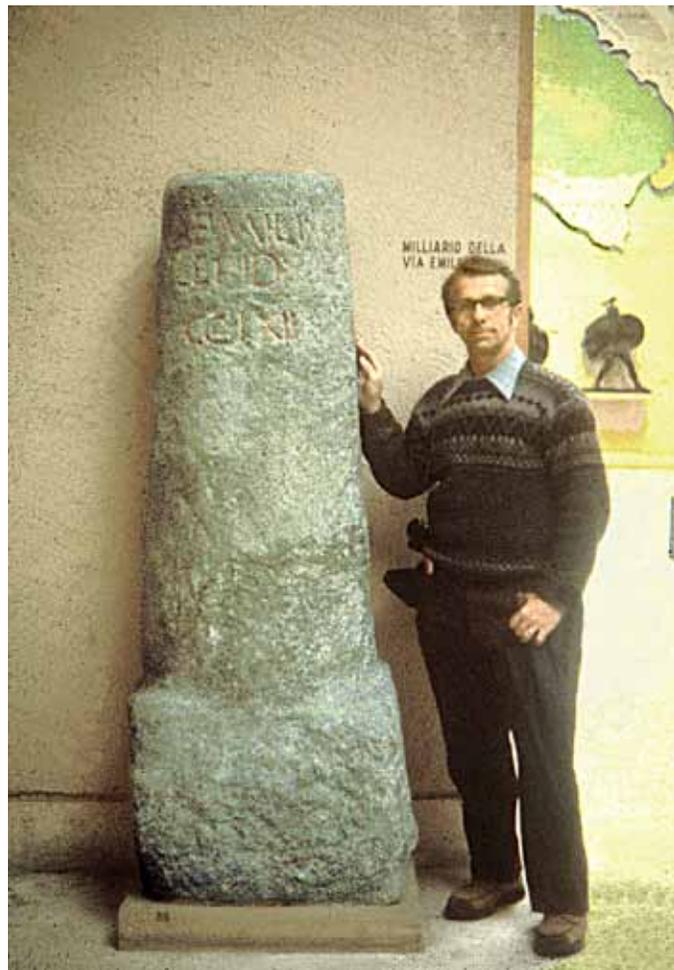
On this basis, then, Albright, and later James Kelso, excavated Beitin for several seasons. The results were published in 1968 (Kelso). We read the report before it was published, looking for archaeological proof that Beitin was truly Bethel. However, we



Map traced from the Survey of Western Palestine sheets. "RMS" indicates Roman milestones, which were still in place in 1883.

could not find anything in the report to prove it. So, we wrote Dr. Albright and asked to what proof he could point. Albright answered that there was no archaeological proof (no inscriptions or anything specifically confirming that Beitin was really Bethel). He insisted that the identification was maintained by the biblical and patristic (Church Fathers) evidence.

With that, we restudied the biblical references and concluded that one could not locate Bethel precisely from them, either. So we wrote again asking about the biblical proofs, thinking surely we had missed something. His answer was that there was no biblical proof at all. The identification was made using the archaeological and patristic evidence. But, he had already eliminated the former himself. Now we were left with only the patristic evidence of Eusebius and Jerome. What was it, and how accurately could it be checked?



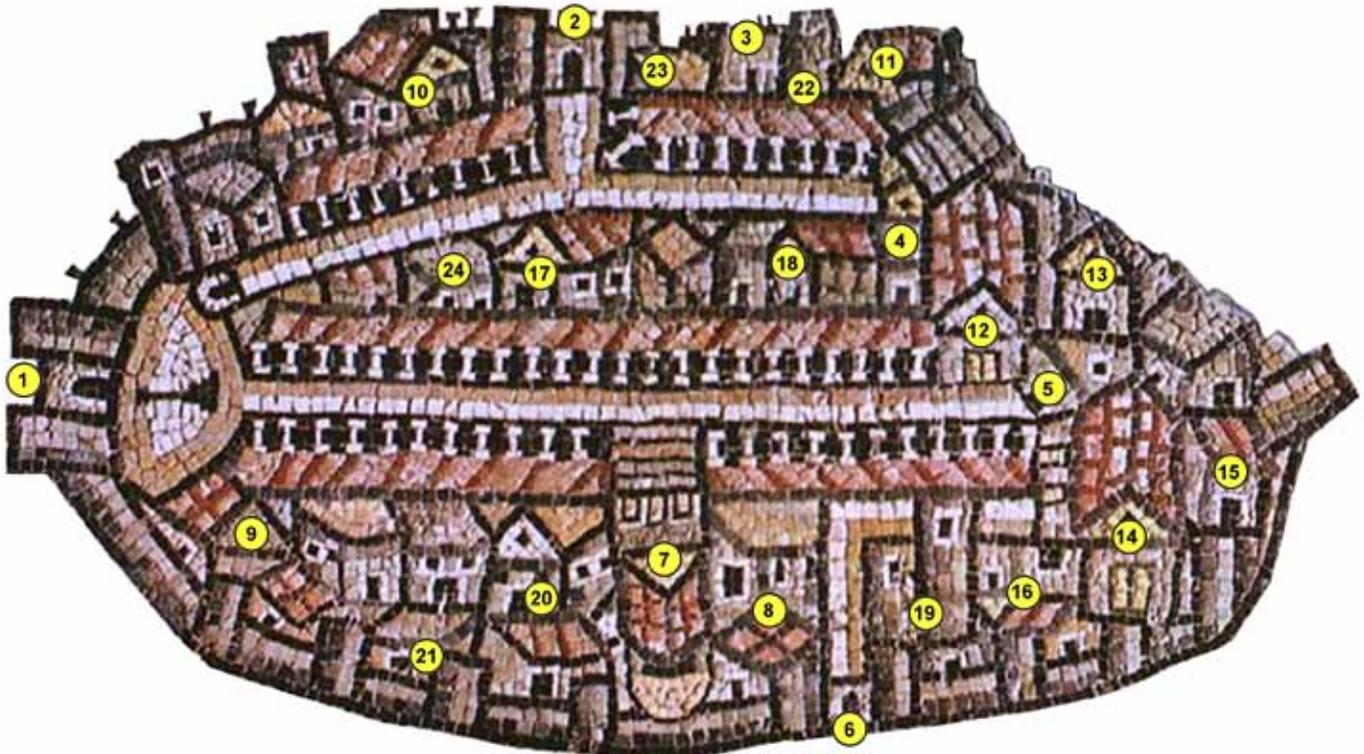
David Livingston

Roman engineers not only constructed roads throughout the empire, but also erected mile markers. The author is standing beside a typical Roman milestone.

Roman Milestones Tell the Story

What did the two Church Fathers actually say? They both said, Eusebius in Greek and Jerome in Latin, that Bethel was located near the 12th Roman milestone north of Aelia (Jerusalem) on the road to Neapolis (modern Nablus). Keep in mind when using this source that the Church Fathers were not writing about road measurements. They were referring to specific mile markers, or milestones. On the 1883 Survey of Western Palestine map, actual mile markers (found by the map makers) are delineated "RMS," Roman Mile Stone.

Although the Church Fathers were referring to specific milestones, it is also helpful to use road measurements in trying to determine where the 12th mile marker was located. In terms of distance, one Roman mile is about 1,620 yd (1,481 m); an English mile is about 1,760 yd. For this study, we may consider that 11 modern miles equal 12 Roman miles rather closely. We measured the distance by auto (three times) from the Damascus Gate to the center of El-Bireh. It consistently proved to be slightly over 10 mi (16 km). This equals a little more than 11 Roman miles. Adding one-half mile, more or less, to reach the zero milestone near Jerusalem's center would put the 12th Roman milestone near the north end of modern El-Bireh.



Richard Lanser

Mosaic map of the city of Jerusalem (“Aelia”) in the sixth century AD, part of a larger map of the Holy Land in St. George’s Church in Madaba, Jordan. Notice the single tall black column on the left, standing in the plaza of the Damascus Gate, the city’s northern gate (1). While there is no trace of the column today, it is remembered in the Arabic name for the Damascus Gate, Bab al-Amud, “Gate of the Column.” The ancient road proceeded north from here to Damascus, passing by Bethel. The city street running south from the Damascus Gate was known as the Cardo (from the Greek word *cardia*, “heart”), since it went through the heart of the city. Notice the small white columns lining both sides of the Cardo. They were for the covered sidewalks of the Roman city, which archaeologists have now excavated. The large structure opening onto the Cardo from the east (7) depicts the Constantinian Church of the Holy Sepulcher. At the southern end of the Cardo is the Nea (“New”) Church (12) with its long roof running east and west. Somewhere between the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Nea Church stood the actual 0 mile marker of Roman and Byzantine Jerusalem. Unfortunately, that location is not noted in the Madaba map. Other points of interest include: (2) St. Stephen’s Gate, (3) Golden Gate, (4) Dung Gate, (5) Zion Gate, (6) Jaffa Gate, (10) Church of the Sheep Pool, (11) Church of the Pinnacle of the Temple, (13) Church of the Pool of Siloam, (14) Basilica on Mt. Zion, (16) Church of the House of Caiaphas, (19) Tower of David.

Where Was the Zero Milestone Located?

Contrary to what many scholars assume (e.g., Vincent 1901: 100; Magen 1988: 6), the pillar at the Damascus Gate on the Madaba Map cannot be the zero milestone. It is more likely a commemorative column of Hadrian. Columns like this erected by Hadrian and Trajan can be seen to this day in Rome. We do not know the shape of the zero milestone.

But the base of one with the inscription *milliarium aureum*, “Golden Milestone,” is still visible in the Forum at the Palatinate in the very center of ancient Rome. Another parallel is found in London on Cannon Street.

Further negating the possibility of the zero milestone being at the Damascus Gate was the discovery of the first, third, fourth, and fifth milestones at the turn of this century. Measuring backward from the first milestone clearly indicates that the zero milestone was at least as far south as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and possibly as far as the Nea Church (both on the Madaba Map). This allows us to add several tenths of a mile to our measurements by odometer, putting Beitin almost 14 Roman miles north of Jerusalem and El-Bireh 11.5–12 miles.

The Distance of Rama from Jerusalem

Both Eusebius and Jerome place Rama at the sixth milestone. However, Jerome also mentions that it was at the seventh (*Onomasticon*, 145, n. line 13). It appears that the sixth and seventh milestones straddled Rama, which was slightly east of the ancient Roman road. This presents the possibility that one turned off the main road at the sixth milestone to go in when traveling northward, or turned in at the seventh when traveling southward.

The preceding accords also with milestones discovered and published in the last century. The fifth milestone on the road northward from Jerusalem had clearly inscribed numbers in both Latin and Greek (Avi-Yonah 1940: 44; Thomsen 1917: 70). Its location allows one more, the sixth, to have been located at the road turning into Rama off the main northward route (for an actual milestone comparison, see Clermont-Ganneau 1888: 284). The seventh, then, would have been where the road north out of the village joined the main road. If so, the remaining distance north to El-Bireh puts the 12th milestone in El-Bireh. The 14th would have been at Beitin, ruling it out as “Bethel” according to its placement by the Church Fathers.



Michael Luddeni

Roman milestones. Two milestones housed in the museum at Mt. Nebo, Jordan.

Locating the 10th or 11th Milestone

Michael Avi-Yonah listed a milestone at Khirbet Esh-She, about a mile south of El-Bireh (1940: 44). He called it the tenth milestone. However, in correspondence with him, he replied, "The milestone has probably been assigned to the tenth mile from Jerusalem because of its situation, because if it had an inscription it would have been published, then or later" (1970). If, in truth, it is the tenth, then the 11th was in El-Bireh which, in turn, puts the 12th between El-Bireh and Beitin. This would mean Beitin is at the 13th milestone, which does not match the location according to the Church Fathers. However, if the stone at Esh-She is really the 11th milestone (which it should be by all other considerations), then the 12th milestone was at El-Bireh.

Beeroth is Not Located at El-Bireh

Having considered the milestones, it may help to review the identification of some ancient towns relative to the location of Bethel. Edward Robinson made a number of amazingly accurate locations of biblical towns. But he also made mistakes. One of them was equating biblical Beeroth with El-Bireh (1856, 2: 132). This incorrect location was dealt with in an earlier study (Livingston 1970: 39–41). S. Yeivin agrees that El-Bireh cannot be ancient Beeroth:

As to Beeroth, there is a large divergence of opinion among scholars... Abel identified it with El-Bireh... (this suggestion has been adopted by many scholars). The identification, however, clashes with Eusebius' statement in the *Onomasticon* that Beeroth is seven miles distant from Jerusalem (1971: 141–45).

It is clear in both Eusebius and Jerome that Beeroth was on the road to Nicopolis, not on the road to Neapolis (modern Nablus, Livingston 1970: 40–41). Beeroth was only six or seven miles out of Jerusalem, barely half the distance to El-Bireh. Although Edward Robinson recognized that Beeroth was near the seventh mile marker on the road to Nicopolis, he misinterpreted the Church Fathers by thinking that one could see Beeroth (in his opinion, modern El-Bireh) from a seventh marker located near El-Jib (Gibeon). As for the location of Nicopolis, Avi-Yonah suggests that Emmaus became the Nicopolis referred to by the Church Fathers in AD 220 (1940: 115). Today it is Imwus in the Valley of Ajalon. Thus the road to Beeroth went mostly westward (and a little north) from Jerusalem, not northward. Beeroth was in the Gibeonite confederation and thus must have been not far from Gibeon. According to Joshua 9:17, it was near Kiryat-Yearim, which is nowhere near El-Bireh. Some have suggested that Beeroth might be located at Biddu.

Site of La Grande Mahomerie

In the early centuries of the Church, some European Christians who took pilgrimages to the Holy Land wrote journals about their travels, several of which were published. Since the locations of many biblical sites were still known then, their reports can be helpful in finding correct locations, and tend to confirm identifications made by Eusebius and Jerome. An important consideration from one of these reports follows.

El-Bireh was the location of *La Grande Mahomerie*. What was *La Grande Mahomerie*? The best explanation of its meaning was by F.M. Abel. He indicated that the Crusaders named it thus because a Muslim sanctuary was prominent there at that time, but afterward fell into disuse and was forgotten (1926: 274–75). Recently, remains have been uncovered in El-Bireh of a Crusader church. Next to it on the south is an ancient Muslim holy place, a *weli* built over an earlier church. W.M. Thomsen noted:

It is part of the tradition that the ruined church was erected here by the Knights Templars to commemorate that event in the life of Jesus [when his parents returned to Jerusalem to look for Him], since el Bireh is the limit of the first day's journey of pilgrim caravans northward from Jerusalem (1882: 87).

How can the location of *La Grande Mahomerie* help locate ancient Bethel? One problem is that scholars cannot seem to let go of the traditional location of Bethel at Beitin. Typical of the misinterpretation caused by this error is seen in the following:

Bethel, ancient Luz, where Jacob built his altar, was identified by most Christian travelers of the Crusader period with Kh. Luza on Mt. Gerizim. In this way they followed the



Michael Luddeni

A stone retaining wall surrounds the top of Ras et-Tahuneh in modern El-Bireh. Could this be the “high place” of ancient Bethel?

Samaritan tradition. Only a few identified it correctly with the village of Beitin, north-east of Ramallah. One of them, an anonymous traveler, wrote: “Mahomerie was first called Luza and afterwards Bethel,” identifying Bethel with Mahomeria or al-Bira, two kilometres [sic, actually 3 km] from Beitin. Burchard of Mount Zion, in grand style, locates it near Nablus and further on near Ramallah (Benvinisti 1970: 318).

Note in the above that, to begin with, Benvinisti equates Bethel with Beitin, the traditional identification. Then he quotes a pilgrim and Burchard who both contradict him! The first traveler equates Mahomeria with Bethel. Benvinisti himself correctly understands the pilgrim to say that Bethel was at “Mahomeria or al-Bira.” If so, this means Bethel is at El-Bireh. But Benvinisti then makes a leap of logic and places Bethel at Beitin, only because that is the traditional view! Finally, he notes that a location for Bethel suggested by the second pilgrim, 13th century German monk Burchard, is near Ramallah (adjoining El-Bireh). This all supports our contention that most pilgrims understood Bethel to be at El-Bireh.

All North-South Roads Go Through El-Bireh

A final consideration is that El-Bireh is the natural crossroads for the whole area. All roads from the north and all roads from the south converge like the waist of an hourglass at the narrow ridge on which the city sits. This is necessary because of the extremely deep and rugged wadis extending east and west of the town.

Taking this into consideration, the high point on which the town sits would be very strategic in controlling travel going north or south. It is the best place to establish a north-south road block. The Israelis effectively did just that in the 1967 war. We believe Jeroboam did the same when he set up a golden calf at Bethel (with a battalion of soldiers?) to deter northern Israelites from traveling south to the Temple. This way he could control the travel of pilgrims from the northern kingdom as they tried to go to Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:25–33).

This is not true, on the other hand, of Beitin. It lies in a relatively level area and does not seem strategic for controlling travel in the area, although a road to Jericho and another going to Nablus passes through it.

Other Possibilities for the Identification of Beitin

Two possibilities are that Beitin is “Ophrah” (Jos 18:23; 1 Sm 13:17) or “Zemaraim” (Jos 18:22; 2 Chr 13:4). Y. Aharoni (1966: 287) mentions that Zemaraim must be in the vicinity of Ramallah and El-Bireh on the Judean border. Beitin fits this identification very well.

Most scholars place Ophrah at Et-Taiyibeh (Aharoni 1966: 110; Baly 1974: 175). However, this may be because Bethel itself has been misplaced. Kaufmann (1953: 13–14) says Ophrah “may not be at Et-Taiyibeh at all” since it is in the lists of both Benjamin and Ephraim. Thus Beitin itself might be considered a candidate for Ophrah.

How to Verify the New Bethel?

Even if our conclusion about relocating Bethel is reasonable, we cannot verify that El-Bireh might be Bethel. It is a heavily

populated modern city. One section of the city, however, has a high point called “Ras et-Tahuneh.” It was surveyed by the Israel Department of Antiquities in 1969. Surface finds indicate that it was occupied in almost every period of ancient times and as early as the Chalcolithic, Early and Middle Bronze Periods (Kochavi, 1972: 178). If Bethel is at El-Bireh, this high point is probably not Bethel, but it may be the “high place” at Bethel. It needs to be excavated. However, Ramallah/El-Bireh is very tense politically. So excavation is not feasible for now.

Conclusion: Biblical Bethel Is Located at El-Bireh

Taking into consideration the topography of the area, its strategic placement in controlling the north-south roads, mileage measurements, and Roman milestone studies outlined above, biblical Bethel should be found under modern El-Bireh. There does not seem to be any substantial reason to any longer equate Beitin with ancient Bethel.

Read more about Dr. Livingston’s research concerning Bethel on the ABR website, at www.BibleArchaeology.org.

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Digging up Joshua's Ai: The 2009–2010 Seasons at Kh. el-Maqatir

By Bryant G. Wood

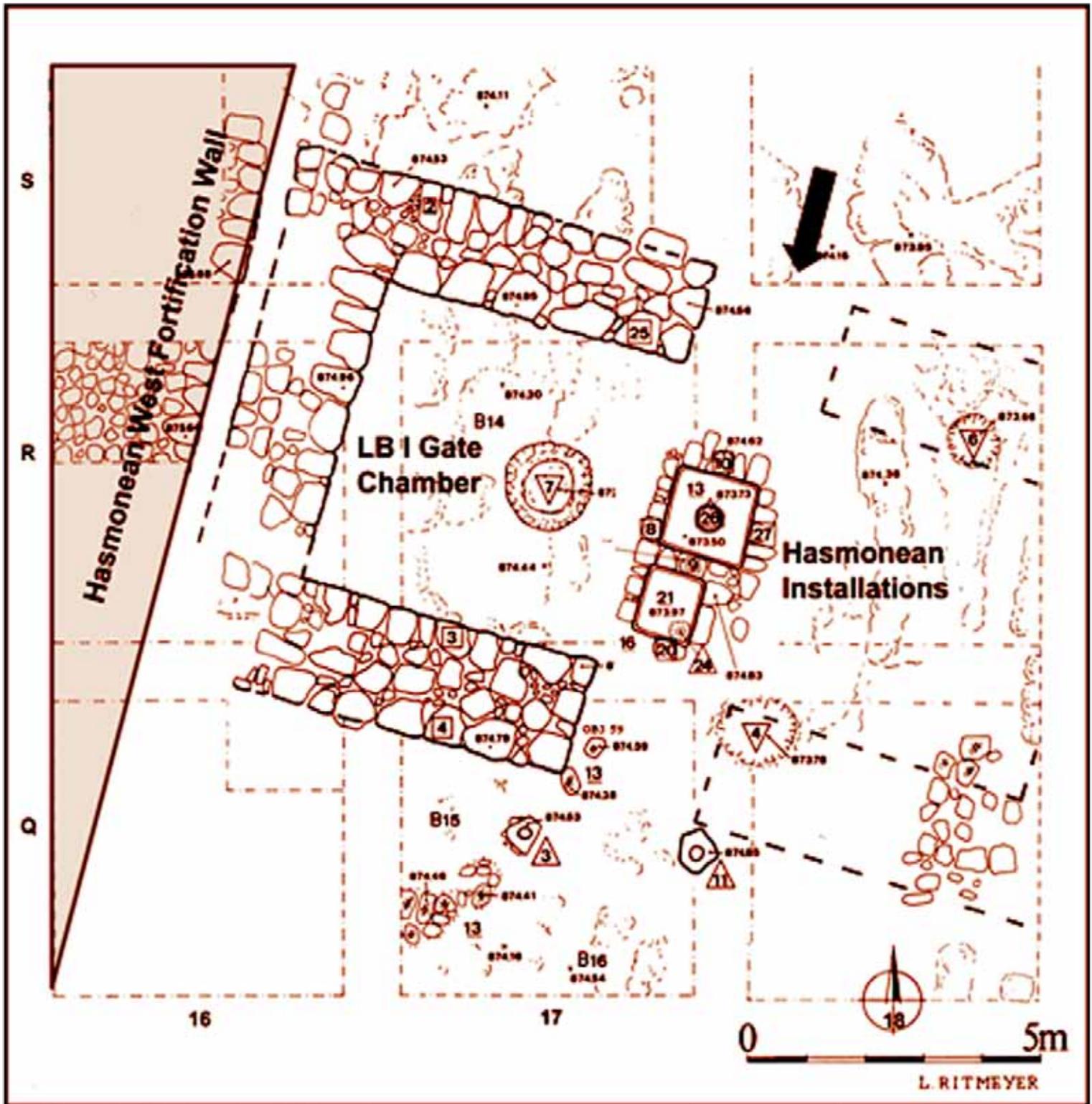
After a hiatus of nine years due to political unrest in Israel, the Associates for Biblical Research resumed excavations at Kh. el-Maqatir for a seventh season May 22–June 5, 2009, and an eighth season May 24–June 4, 2010, under the direction of the author.¹ In 2009, 23 volunteers from the US and Canada, plus a

number of local residents participated. In 2010, 38 volunteers from the US, Australia and Israel made up the dig team. The site is located in the West Bank 9 mi (15 km) north of Jerusalem. Finds continue to support the identification of the site as the Ai of Joshua 7–8.



Michael Luddeni

West wall of the 15th century BC fortress at Khirbet el-Maqatir. Square supervisor Oral Collins, of the Berkshire Institute for Christian Studies, stands atop the western fortification wall of the Late Bronze I (ca. 1500–1400 BC) fortress at Khirbet el-Maqatir, the proposed location of the Ai of Joshua 7-8, at the end of the 2009 excavation season. The preserved width of the wall is 12 ft (3.6 m) at its base and the remaining height is 4 ft (1.2 m). Behind Dr. Collins is a modern wall enclosing an agricultural area which covers the southwest sector of the fortress.



Plan of the gate area on the north side of the Late Bronze (LB) I fortress. Obj. 59 is an upper gate socket stone, $\triangle 3$ and $\triangle 11$ are lower gate socket stones. The Hasmonean installations and west fortification wall are later constructions from a fortress built over the east half of the LB I fortress during the Hasmonean period (152–37 BC).



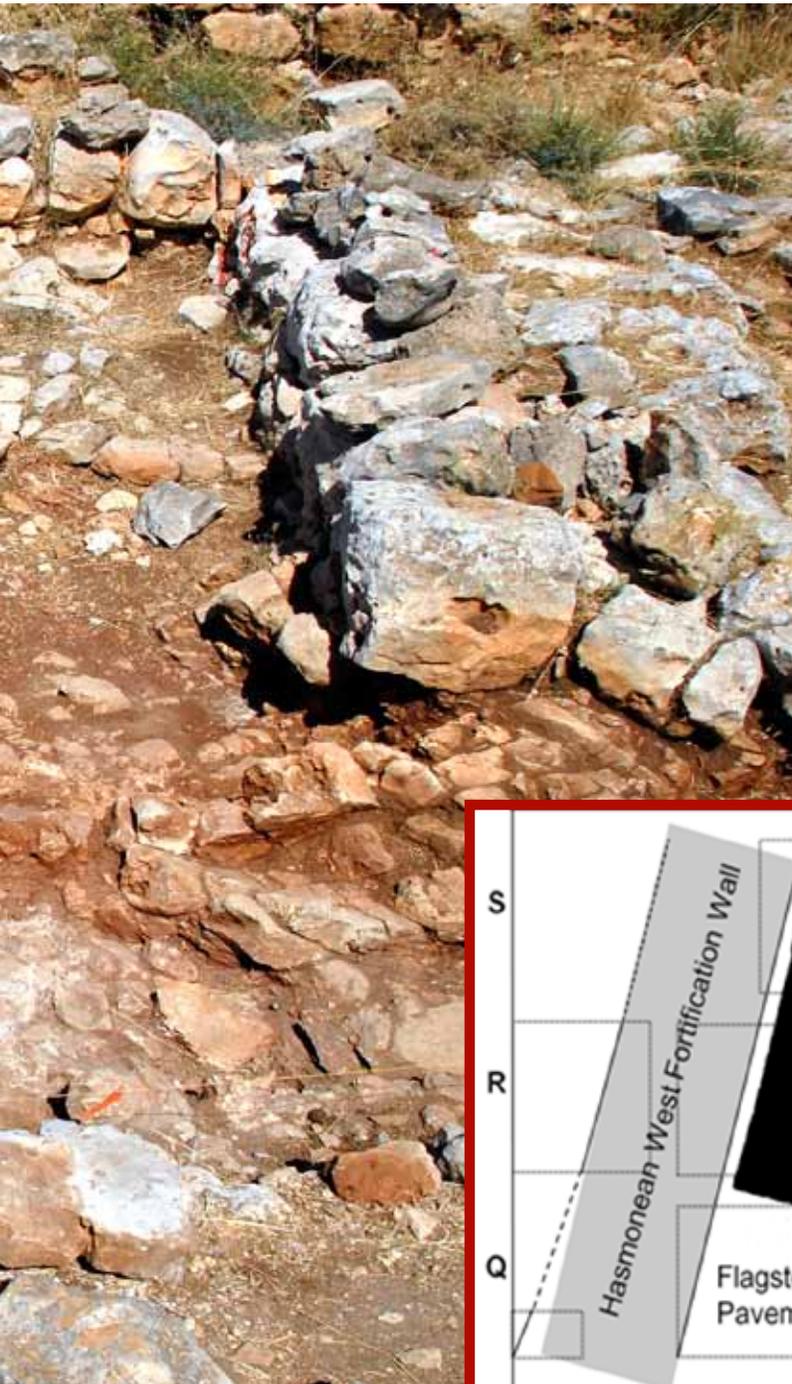
Passageway of the LB I gate, view west. In the upper half of the photo is the west chamber of the gate, with walls 6.5 ft (2 m) wide. The passageway. The two small rectangular installations in the lower part of the photo are from the second–first centuries BC.

The 2009 Season

Gate Passageway

In 1996 the west chamber of the gate of the fortress of Joshua’s time (LB I, 15th century BC), was excavated. Much evidence for fire in the form of burned stones and calcined bedrock was found. The east chamber of the gate is no longer in existence as all of its stones were removed for later construction,

most likely when another fortress was built over the east half the LB I fortress in the second century BC. In 2009, the gate passageway in Square R17 was excavated to bedrock. The passageway sublayers were found to be comprised of clay fill on bedrock. The bedrock throughout the passageway is fractured and disintegrated, and the clay and bedrock are red in color. All of this appears to be the result of an intense fire in the LB I gate passageway in antiquity, most likely from the burning of Ai recorded in Joshua 8:28.



Michael Luddeni
In the foreground is the burned

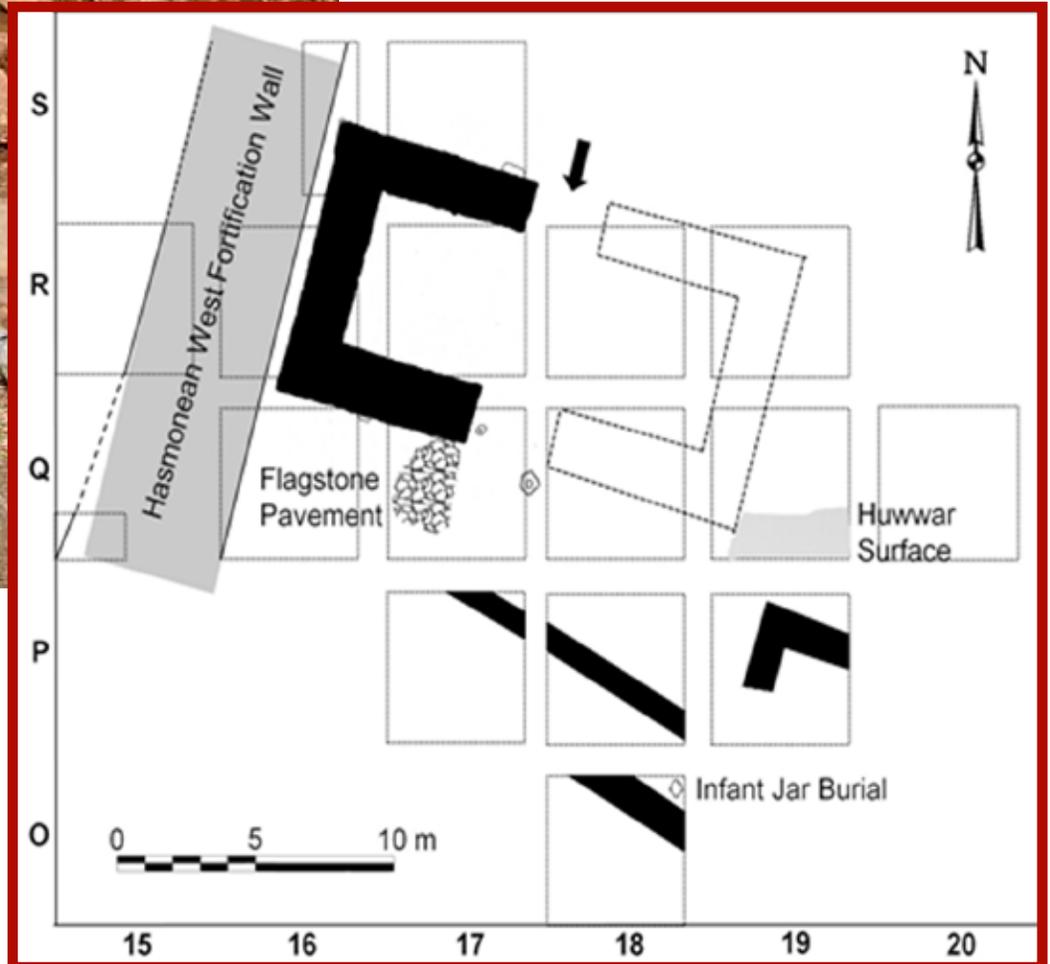
Infant Jar Burial

A number of poorly-preserved walls have been found inside the gate of the LB I fortress. In 2009 an infant jar burial was discovered between two of these walls, in the northeast

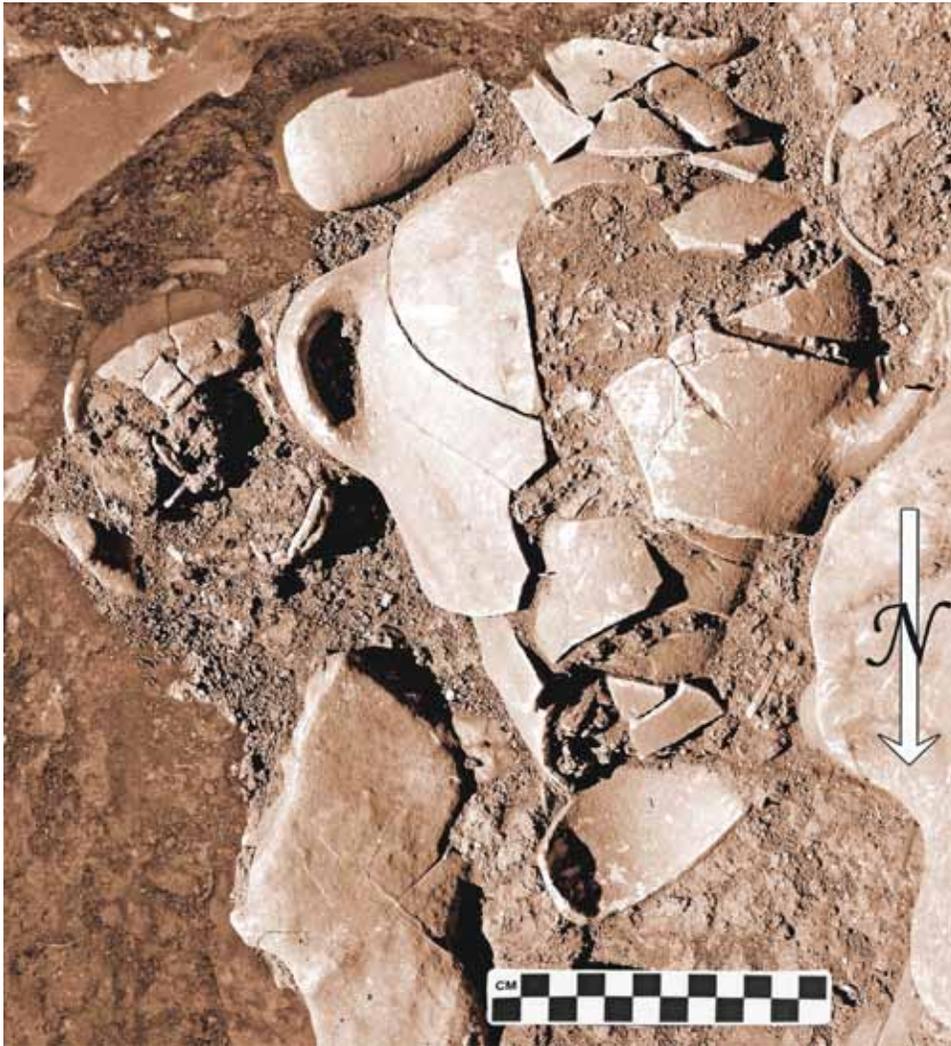
Going on a dig was a far-fetched dream for two years before my husband and I were able to do it. In my two weeks there, I found not only lots of pottery, but also a coin! It was really exciting. Further, by literally getting my hands dirty in the past, the Bible became alive. I could see how Joshua and the Israelites would be able to take Ai. I felt connected not only to the land of Israel, but also the reality of the Bible. It only made me appreciate the Bible and its reliability more and more.

— Christine Curley, University of Toronto

corner of Square O18. The burial jar was 15 in (37 cm) below the ground, resting on bedrock. Four offering vessels were placed around the outside of the jar, which faced south. In the MB period, grave goods were typically placed inside the burial jar, along with the remains of the interred, whereas in the LB I period placement outside the jar became more common. A hole had been cut into the bottom of the jar to insert the remains of the infant.



ABR File
Plan of the LB I gate and walls inside the gate. In 2009 an infant jar burial was found between two of the walls, in the northeast corner of Square O18.



Michael Luddeni

Infant burial jar and offering vessels. Remains of an infant around the age of birth were placed in the jar and buried beneath the floor of a building just inside the gate of the LB I fortress. The location of the building and a fine ware pedestal vase included with the burial suggest the structure was the commandant's headquarters. The find confirms that there were women in the fortress as stated in Joshua 8:25.

This type of insertion is somewhat unusual since in the vast majority of infant jar burials the neck and rim were broken off, and insertion was made from the top of the jar. The mostly broken bones of an infant around the age of birth were found scattered around the outside of the jar. The remains had been removed from the jar in antiquity, undoubtedly by a rodent.

Intramural (within the walls) infant jar burials were common in urban settings in the Middle Bronze (MB) period (ca. 1900–1500 BC) and less common in the LB I period (ca. 1500–1400 BC). At one time it was thought that such burials were infant sacrifices. Since large numbers of these burials have been found, and infant mortality was high in antiquity, it is now believed that they were simply ordinary burials made beneath the floors of houses so that the family could have their deceased infant close by.

Two of the offering vessels, a dipper juglet and piriform juglet, are the most common grave goods found with infant jar burials. The other two, a small flat-bottomed cooking pot and a pedestal vase, however, are unique to infant jar burials. The four vessels date to the end of the MB period, whereas the burial jar itself is LB I in date. The typology of the burial, the offering vessels and the burial jar indicate a date for the internment early in the life of the LB I fortress, somewhere around 1500 BC.

The cooking pot and the pedestal vase are significant because they are non-traditional. Kh. el-Maqatir was an out-of-the-way border outpost, so it is possible that traditional offering vessels were not available. Since the cooking pot was a simple utilitarian vessel that was readily available, it might have been pressed into service as a container for a food offering. The pedestal vase, on the other hand, was an expensive, finely made item of table ware indicating an elite status for the residents of the building. In the Bronze and Iron Ages important administrative buildings were many times located near the city gate. Our building was perhaps a residency serving as the administrative headquarters for the fortress, as well as the commandant's living quarters. The presence of an infant burial indicates that women were present in the fortress, a fact alluded to in Scripture (Joshua 8:25).

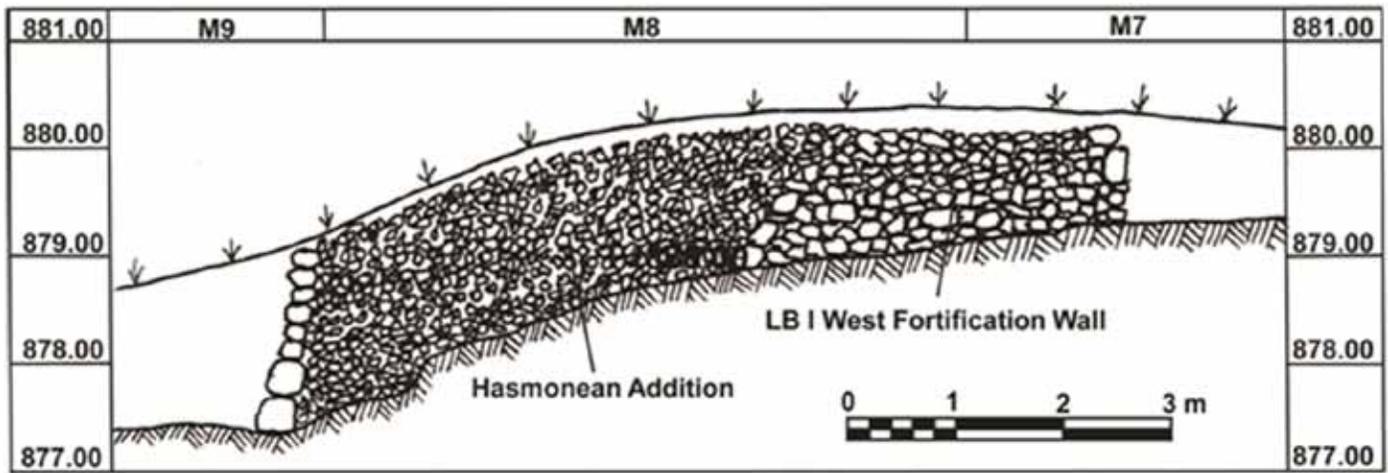
The 2010 Season

A Major Wall

Although the north, west and southern walls of the LB I fortress have been located, we have yet to find the east wall. After several seasons of searching, we may now have found it. In the southeast corner of Square G17 the inside face of a wall was exposed during the 2010 season. The presence of a megalithic stone 6.5 ft (2 m) long and 3.3 ft (1 m) high indicate that this was a significant wall. Pottery found in association with the wall dates to the LB I period. We hope to determine the width of the wall and confirm its dating during the 2011 season.

West Wall of the LB I Fortress

In the 2000 season a probe trench on the west side of the LB I fortress revealed the west fortification wall. During the 2009



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South section through the west LB I fortification wall and later Hasmonean addition.

and 2010 seasons a section was cut through the wall to obtain pottery for dating purposes, and also to clarify its construction. Even though it appears that the inner and outer faces of the LB I wall were partially robbed out, the wall is still preserved to a width of 12 ft (3.7 m) at its base. This compares to a width of 13 ft (4 m) for the northern section of the fortress wall. On the inside of the LB I wall, a massive addition 16 ft (5 m) in width was constructed in the Hasmonean period.

The most significant aspect of the Hasmonean addition is that the pottery in the structure is primarily LB I in date, and nearly all of this pottery had been refired to a cement-like hardness. This leads to the conclusion that when the Hasmoneans built the addition, they used debris from the destroyed LB I fortress, including pottery which had been burned by a severe conflagration. Although we do not have a thick layer of ash to prove the burning of Ai, since that eroded away centuries ago,



Michael Luddeni

Inner face of a significant wall in Square G17. The very large stone suggests that this was an important wall, possibly the east fortification wall of the LB I fortress.



Michael Luddeni

Section through west wall, view west. In the foreground is the inner face of a Hasmonean addition to the interior of the LB I wall. The inner face of the LB I wall can be seen in the upper portion of the photo.

we do have considerable amounts of refired LB I pottery, not only from the west Hasmonean addition but from other areas as well, that attest the fortress was destroyed by fire at the end of the 15th century BC.

Notes

¹For reports of previous seasons, see Bolen 1999; Wood 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001, 2008, 2009b. For reports of the 2009 season, see Wood 2009a, 2010.

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A Canaanite Massebah or Stele Found at Khirbet el-Maqatir?

By Titus Kennedy

Finding the Stone

During the 2009 season at Khirbet el-Maqatir, near the town of Deir Dibwan in the West Bank, a large, worked, semi-upright stone was discovered inside the southwest area of the 2.5 acre (10 dunam) walled fortress. The specific location was Field A, Square C17, just inside what is believed to be the wall of the fortress.¹ The stone came from Locus 5, which was a rough pavement of limestone packed with earth approximately 12 in (30 cm) deep, with pavement stones measuring generally about 1.5 to 2.5 in (4 to 6 cm) in diameter. The stone was found wedged into the pavement, 12 in (30 cm) at its deepest point (the lower right corner), and leaning to the northwest as if knocked over, with the flat, worked face of the stone facing away from the wall, towards the center of the fortress.

The stone, appearing to be a massebah (standing stone) or a stele (decorated commemorative stone) because of its shape and context, is a carved limestone slab, tan in color, measuring 31 in (79 cm) high, 16 in (40 cm) wide, and 7 in (18 cm) thick, with a flat base and a pointed top.² In Canaan, important stones such as orthostats and stelae are often made out of basalt, but two prominent stelae from Ugarit, displayed in the Louvre Museum, are also limestone. The stone was well-balanced enough that when erected on a flat surface, it was able to stand on its own without a trench or any supports. Although the

stone appeared to be extremely weathered, it appears that some type of figure on the main face of the stone was originally carved in bas-relief, and the figure rises from the face 0.6 in (1.5 cm) high in an even plane. The type of weathering displayed by the stone is a result of exposure to acidic liquids, such as rainwater or even crushed grapes. Because severe weathering is present on both sides, this suggests that the stone was exposed to the elements while standing upright, rather than as a piece in a wall or a floor slab, all of which would display different weathering patterns.

Dating Considerations

Pottery from the pavement was sparse, likely due to the nature of the site.³ The sherds found in the immediate context of the stone date predominantly to Late Bronze I, with a minority of Late Hellenistic-Early Roman sherds. The entire locus contained sherds mostly from LB I, with a small minority from both the end of the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Hellenistic-Early Roman periods. The pottery, along with the shape and proposed nature of the stone, indicates that the pavement and the stone extracted from it date to the LB I period.

The stone itself is easily a massebah, or standing stone, but likely could be classed as a stele from Bronze Age Canaan. Masseboth (plural of massebah) from the Bronze



Michael Luddeni

This is the heavy and mysterious stone, interpreted to be a stele with a weathered depiction of a face, discovered at Khirbet el-Maqatir in 2009. It is currently in the storage of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

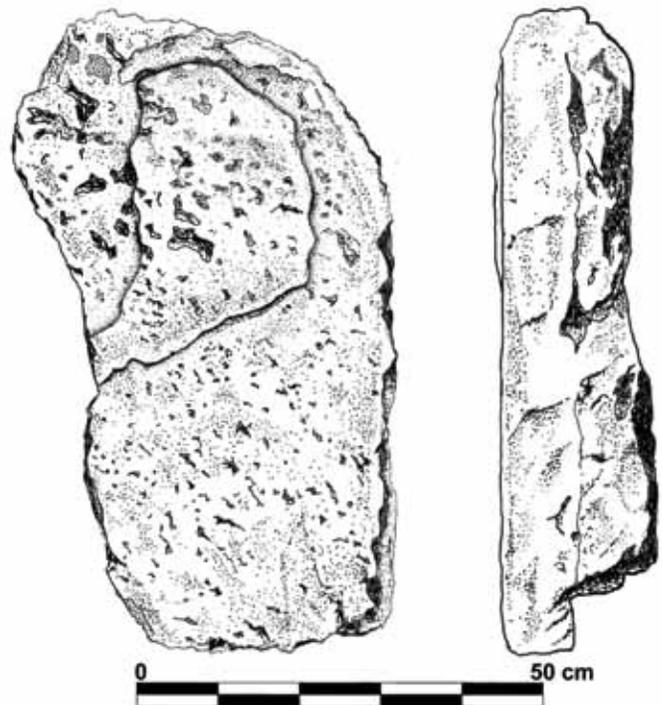


Titus Kennedy

This stele, on display in Amman, is a unique Late Bronze Age Levantine stele because it contains an inscription. However, scholars evaluating this faded inscription generally regard it to be Egyptian, and thus it probably was inscribed by visiting or resident Egyptians and not local people of the Levant. It is relevant to the stele from Maqatir because both have pointed, uneven tops.

and Iron Age periods in the southern Levant are usually unworked or simply worked into a typical rounded, tapering shape. “A massebah is a stone (or several stones) arranged in a certain prescribed form to which a cultic meaning was attached, or set up to commemorate an important event” (Negev 1996: Massebah). Although the difference between a massebah and a stele is somewhat muddled, in the context of Near Eastern archaeology a massebah is generally a plain commemorative stone, while a stele contains pictures and/or text (Kipfer 2000: 337, 534). Egyptian and Mesopotamian stelae consistently demonstrate this distinction, along with the more limited number of stelae from the Levant. The stone from Khirbet el-Maqatir was at least moderately worked, making the entire face flat, a simple bas-relief carving on the face, a flattened bottom, a

tapered top, and balance given to the stone to allow easy upright standing. Part of the left side of the stele from about 26 in (65 cm) down to the base appears to be broken off, including the extreme left edge of the relief. Although there was no inscription present on the stele from Maqatir, this is to be expected if it dates to the Late Bronze Age. Local stelae from the southern Levant in the Iron Age, specifically Iron Age II, are known to have inscriptions. This includes the Tel Dan Stele, Mesha Stele, Melcarth Stele, Sefire Stelae, Stele of Zakkur, and the Amman Citadel Inscription, among others (cf. Hallo and Younger 2000). In contrast, stelae from the Bronze Age Levant are decorated only with illustrations carved in relief, excepting the unreadable Balu’a Stele from Ammonite territory, which may have only been inscribed because of heavy Egyptian influence or perhaps even because it was worked on by Egyptians scribes who, as some epigraphers believe, inscribed the stone with Egyptian hieratic (Martin and Ward 1964: 8–9; Routledge 2004: 82–85). Clear examples of Egyptian stelae discovered in the Late Bronze southern Levant come from Beth-Shan Level VI (Ahlström 1994: 207). According to their inscriptions, these basalt stelae were in commemoration of military campaigning by the Pharaoh Seti I (Hallo and Younger 2000: 25–27). Yet, these stelae are distinct from the Levantine examples, since they were clearly crafted and erected by Egyptians. A locally made, unpublished stele, dating to the 18th-17th centuries BC from the Levant, contains an inscription of what is thought to be the name Puhik or Pihak—1 line with 3 letters, P or G, H and K in Proto-Sinaitic. A lack of inscriptions on stelae from this period follows the trend



ABR File

In this drawing, the outline of the face can be more clearly seen. Specifically, features such as the long, curving beard, mouth, nose, recession for the eyes, and some type of headwear can be made out—with a little imagination.



Titus Kennedy

Hazor moon stele. This Late Bronze Age stele from Hazor in northern Israel, with a worshipper's arms raised to the moon disk, demonstrates both the use of bas relief imagery on a stele and a religious function for stelae of the Late Bronze Levant. The stele, now housed in the Israel Museum, was part of a group of standing stones discovered in a Canaanite temple.

of any written material from the Late Bronze southern Levant being extremely rare. Two contemporary comparison examples for the Maqatir stele come from Late Bronze Age Ugarit and Hazor, in which cultic material is carved on the stelae in relief. A stele from Ugarit housed in the Louvre depicts a god with a plume headdress, while a stele from Hazor now housed in the

Israel Museum depicts what appears to be a worshipper with arms raised towards a cultic symbol, possibly a crescent and disk and dedicated to a moon god (Yadin 1958: pl. XXIX:1–3).⁴ A third example comes from the previously mentioned Balu'a Stele, which is housed in the Jordan Archaeological Museum on the Amman Citadel. Dated to the end of the Late Bronze Age, this stele would be roughly contemporary with the stele from Maqatir, and located just to the east of it, still in the southern Levant. The Balu'a Stele is made from basalt, and although the figures carved in relief show the work of a skilled artisan and the once present inscription suggests the work of a scribe, the stone itself is not completely symmetrical; the top is somewhat pointed and leaning towards the left side, similar to the object found at Maqatir. Thus, all three of these examples share many similarities with the stele from Maqatir. All are free standing with a flat base (some stelae, notably from Egypt and Mesopotamia, have a protruding "stand" about half the width of the stele extending from the base like a post that would be inserted into a hole, a characteristic which the Maqatir stele shares in primitive form), carefully worked on the front face but rough on the back, carved in bas-relief, tapered on the top, and medium sized. Three are lacking any inscriptions (that on the Balu'a Stele may be due to the Egyptians), and are made of basalt or limestone. Finally, all are from the Late Bronze Age southern Levant.

Identifying the Relief

Perhaps the most interesting and yet most difficult question involves the identification of the relief on the face of the stele. The relief appears either to depict the moon in crescent form, which was a common motif on stelae throughout Canaan and Mesopotamia, or possibly the head of a man or god. The proposed crescent moon on the Maqatir stele would open to the left, while on the aforementioned stele from Hazor the crescent opens towards the top of the stele. As the edge of the relief is broken off on the left side, it is impossible to know if the missing edge of the proposed crescent is pointed. If this is the motif on the stele, it may have been carved in homage to the moon god of Canaan, Yarikh—the god for whom the city of Jericho is thought to be named. Khirbet el-Maqatir is located in close geographical proximity to Jericho—less than 10 miles walking distance—and thus, use of some of the same gods is not only possible, but probable. Alternatively, the figure in relief on the stele may be a crude or severely weathered head of a god or a man wearing a hat. The figure in relief may show the hat, forehead, nose, mouth, chin, and beard. A parallel comes from a stele found at the Ras Shamra acropolis. It is a serpentine stele carved in bas-relief from the Late Bronze Age, and is thought to depict El, father of the gods, and a worshipper. The head of El on the stele from Ugarit wears a hat, and has a prominent, elongated, and slightly curved beard, very similar to the shape on the Maqatir stele and typical of depictions of Canaanites in Egyptian art. The hat on the stele from Ugarit is admittedly much more elaborate than the proposed hat on the Maqatir stele, but this could be due to the skill of the artist. Another explanation for the "hat" is that it could be simply hair or hair with a headband, typical of other artistic renditions of Canaanites. Yet, the depiction of gods rather than men is a more popular motif; this may be the



Titus Kennedy

Ugarit stele of a plumed god. This stele from Ugarit, like the stele from Maqatir, is made of limestone. Although basalt was a common medium for significant stone objects such as stelae, limestone, as this example demonstrates, was not unheard of. This stele from Ugarit depicts a god, which may be another feature in common with the stele from Maqatir.

preferred hypothesis. Still, because the figure in relief is unclear, the identification must be treated with uncertainty.

Concerning the function of the stele, there is not enough data for anything other than a tentative hypothesis. Khirbet el-Maqatir in the Bronze Age appears to have been an outpost, not a town, and there is very little cultic material that has been discovered at the site (cf. Wood 2000: 123–30). One cult stand and one infant jar burial were discovered in excavations at the site. Though the cultic material is extremely limited, it does indicate that there was at least some small scale religious activity occurring at the site. Stelae from this period in the southern Levant appear to be only of a religious nature, in contrast to Egypt and Mesopotamia where they also served as boundary markers, or in an administrative or historical context. Because the stele is slightly asymmetrical at the top and the carved relief is unclear, it could have been crafted by an amateur, broken (intentionally or accidentally), defaced, severely weathered, the top left asymmetrical by design (cf. the Balu'a Stele), or any combination of the five. Since the site appears to be only a small outpost, it seems plausible that a professional was not employed in crafting the stele, and thus it is not as polished as those of major urban cultural centers such as Ugarit and Hazor. However, time may have also taken a serious toll on the stele, both through weathering and damage done by people. Regardless, it does seem to add to the evidence suggesting that Khirbet el-Maqatir was inhabited by Canaanites in the Late Bronze Age, and that these Canaanites engaged in religious practices similar to those in other cities of the southern Levant.

In ancient Hebrew there is no distinction between standing stone and stele—the word *massebah* is used for both, even for an obelisk (cf. Jer 43:13), as the word comes from a root meaning to stand or take a stand. The first *massebah* that is mentioned in the Bible occurs in Genesis 28:18, when Jacob sets up a *massebah* in Luz and renames the place Bethel, where the “Jacob’s ladder” dream takes place. Later, Jacob makes a covenant with Laban, and a *massebah* is erected as a witness that they formed a covenant (Gn 31:44–53). Jacob again erects *masseboth* in Genesis 35:14 and 35:20, the first as a marker or memorial of where he spoke with God, and the second as a memorial gravestone for his wife, Rachel. During the time of Moses, God gives the Israelites prohibitions about Canaanite religion, and specifically mentions that they are to break the *masseboth* of the Canaanites into pieces (Ex 23:24). And yet, just after this, Moses erects a *massebah* for each of the 12 tribes of Israel (Ex 24:4). The difference is clearly the function and design of the *massebah*. While the Israelites were allowed to erect memorial stones to commemorate some event or represent a person or a group, such as the 12 tribes or the *massebah* of Absalom (2 Sm 18:18), they were prohibited by God from setting up a *massebah* or stele as a religious object or a representation of a god. Although Israel, like the Egyptians, Hittites, or Akkadians, often set up commemorative or memorial stones, the prohibition was against carving statues and images out of these stones and worshipping them (Lv 26:1). At times, disobedience in this arena was clear, such as the mention of the *massebah* of Ba’al which King Ahab had made (2 Kgs 3:2), or when the Judeans under Rehoboam built high places, *masseboth*, and *asherim* (1 Kgs 14:23), which were clearly emulating pagan religious practices. At other times,

As a professor, I had a three-week break between the end of my spring semester and the beginning of the summer semester. As fate would have it, the excavation dates at Khirbet el-Maqatir fit perfectly into that time frame. I supervised the excavation of two squares that were artifact-rich. The stratigraphy was Byzantine, Hasmonean, and Late Bronze. There was a great spirit among the volunteers; all knew that we were “digging the Bible.”

Dr. Wood asked me to head up the excavation and publication of the Byzantine remains at Khirbet el-Maqatir, and I agreed to take on this challenge. This will complement the Early Roman/Byzantine building that David Graves and I have been excavating (under the supervision of Dr. Steven Collins and Gary Byers) at Tall el-Hammam. The most impressive Byzantine remains at Khirbet el-Maqatir is the church/monastery complex. The Master’s College IBEX (Israel Bible EXtension) group, led by Todd Bolen, worked a few days on the monastery back in 1999; outside of that, it has been awaiting the trowel for about a millennium and a half. A team of fifteen people worked with me on the church during the first week of January, 2011. I will return in May/June 2011 to continue the project. Of note, there are a very few *tesserae* (mosaic tiles) lying around, which portends that there may be intact mosaics awaiting discovery. These mosaics could hold the key to identifying beyond a doubt the identity of the site. Memorial churches were built to commemorate biblical events, so stay tuned for more details.

— Scott Stripling, Square Supervisor

obedience to God’s commands to destroy masseboth or stelae used in pagan worship was exacted with fervor, as is the case with Jehu destroying the masseboth of the house of Ba’al and the massebah of Ba’al (2 Kgs 10:26–27). The massebah of Ba’al would have been similar to the Ba’al stele from Ugarit currently housed in the Louvre Museum—a finely crafted standing stone with the image of a pagan god. It is evident that to erect a stone massebah or stele merely as a memorial was allowed. The massebah or stele discovered at Maqatir, however, was clearly shaped and an image was carved onto it. Although the figure in relief is unclear and the exact context of the stele is not yet understood, comparisons with other Canaanite stelae and texts mentioning the standing stones or stelae of gods suggests that the stele from Maqatir was of a religious nature. The command to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 7:5 that when they enter the land of Canaan they must, among other things, “smash their masseboth” (standing stones or stelae), was necessary because

of the pagan religious function of this type of massebah or stele. The result of often disobeying this and other similar commands is seen later in the blatant religious syncretism found in the book of Judges, when the Israelites began to emulate the religious practices of Canaan. The stele found at Maqatir, on the other hand, appears to be smashed on the left side, and was discovered in a position that suggested it was knocked down, some stones placed over it, and left on the pavement inside the wall, as if invading Israelites obeyed God and destroyed one of the major types of pagan religious symbols in ancient Canaan. If Khirbet el-Maqatir, one of the candidates for Ai, is in fact the city of Ai destroyed by Joshua and the Israelites, then the presence and desecration of this stele would mesh perfectly with the narrative of Israelite conquest in the book of Joshua.

Notes

¹Object number 572, discovered May 29, 2009.

²The specific type of limestone is travertine, formed by the precipitation of calcium carbonate.

³Khirbet el-Maqatir is not a layered tel, but a shallow site which has been exposed to weather and disturbed by agricultural activities. Thus, most of the site does not contain clear archaeological strata, and sherds from more than one time period are often found together in the same locus.

⁴16th–14th century BC limestone, from the Ras Shamra acropolis. Additionally, there is a Late Bronze Age stele of Ba’al Hadad, also without an inscription, from the Ugarit acropolis at the Louvre, although much larger and better preserved. The object from Hazor is a basalt stele from the Stelae Temple of Area C in the Lower City of Hazor, dated to the LB II.

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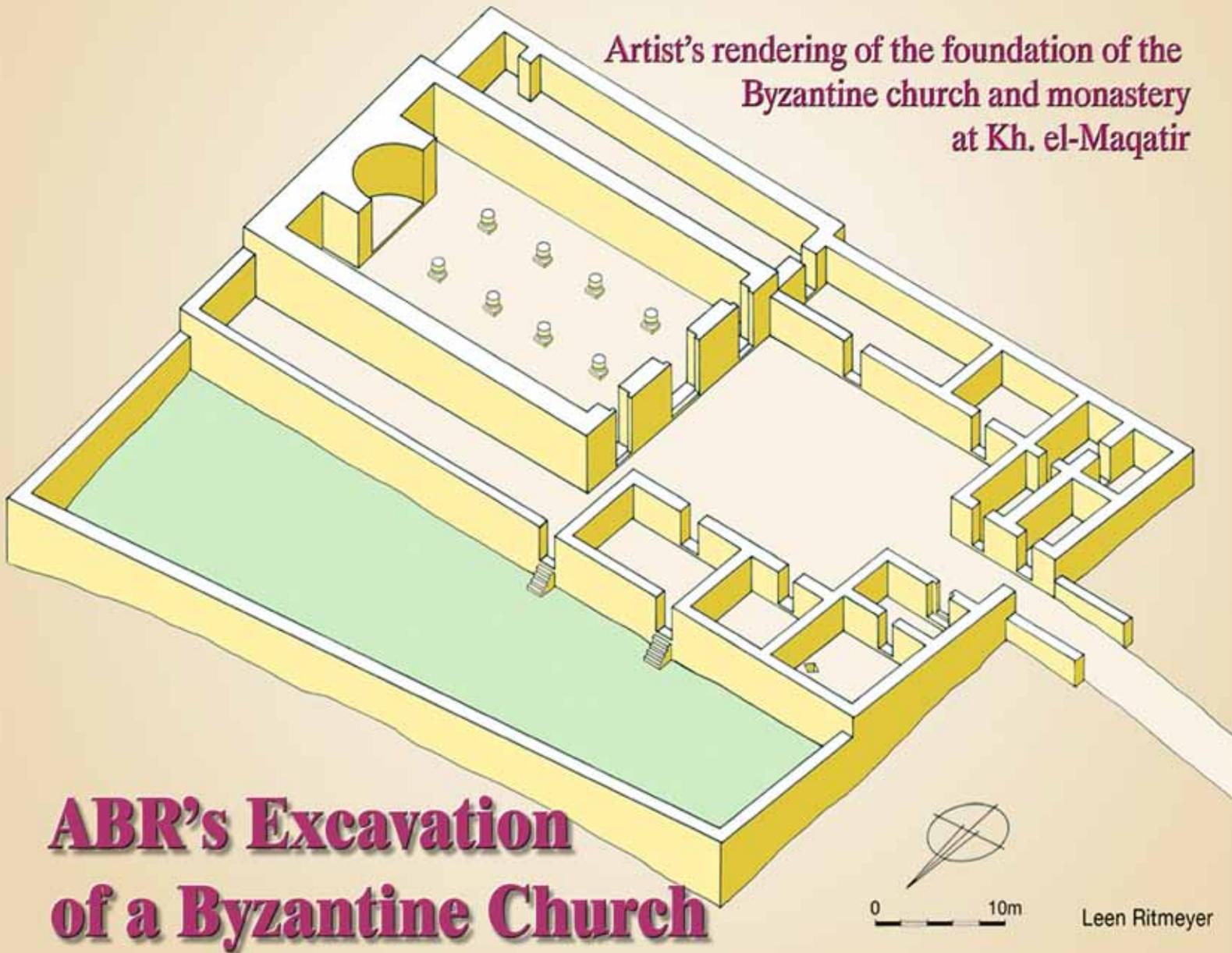
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Titus Kennedy has an MA in Near Eastern Archaeology from the University of Toronto, with plans to pursue a PhD. He has excavated in Israel at Tel Hazor and Khirbet el-Maqatir, and worked on the Temple Mount Sifting Project. Since 2008 he has worked on projects in the area of biblical archaeology and history with the Discovery Institute, Focus on the Family and Zondervan. Titus has been an ABR Associate since October 2009.



Artist's rendering of the foundation of the
Byzantine church and monastery
at Kh. el-Maqatir



ABR's Excavation of a Byzantine Church

0 10m Leen Ritmeyer

By ABR Staff

Introduction

The Byzantines were prolific builders throughout Israel. They preserved the names and identities of many significant biblical sites, providing an important line of evidence for modern archaeological investigation. The Byzantine period (AD 324–640) represented Palestine's greatest population density prior to the 19th century. This period was named after the Turkish city of Byzantium, capital of the eastern Roman Empire under Constantine. Byzantium was renamed Constantinople (today known as Istanbul) by Constantine. Palestine's Byzantine period began with Constantine's rule as the Roman Emperor (AD 324) and ended with the Moslem invasion of the region around AD 638.

Even though it is after the biblical period, and a time in which the Church became highly institutionalized, the Byzantine period is still important to biblical studies—especially in relation

to geography and religious architecture. Religious structures helped identify and preserve the locations, names and traditions of many Old and New Testament sites.

During the Byzantine period, Christianity underwent a dramatic change. Now an official religion throughout the Roman Empire, and with special encouragement by Constantine, major religious architectural projects were undertaken around the Mediterranean. At least three churches were constructed in Rome, but church construction was particularly accelerated in the Holy Land.

Beginning in AD 326, under the auspices of Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena, four major churches were constructed in Palestine. Three were obvious choices from the life of Christ: the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, and Eleona Church

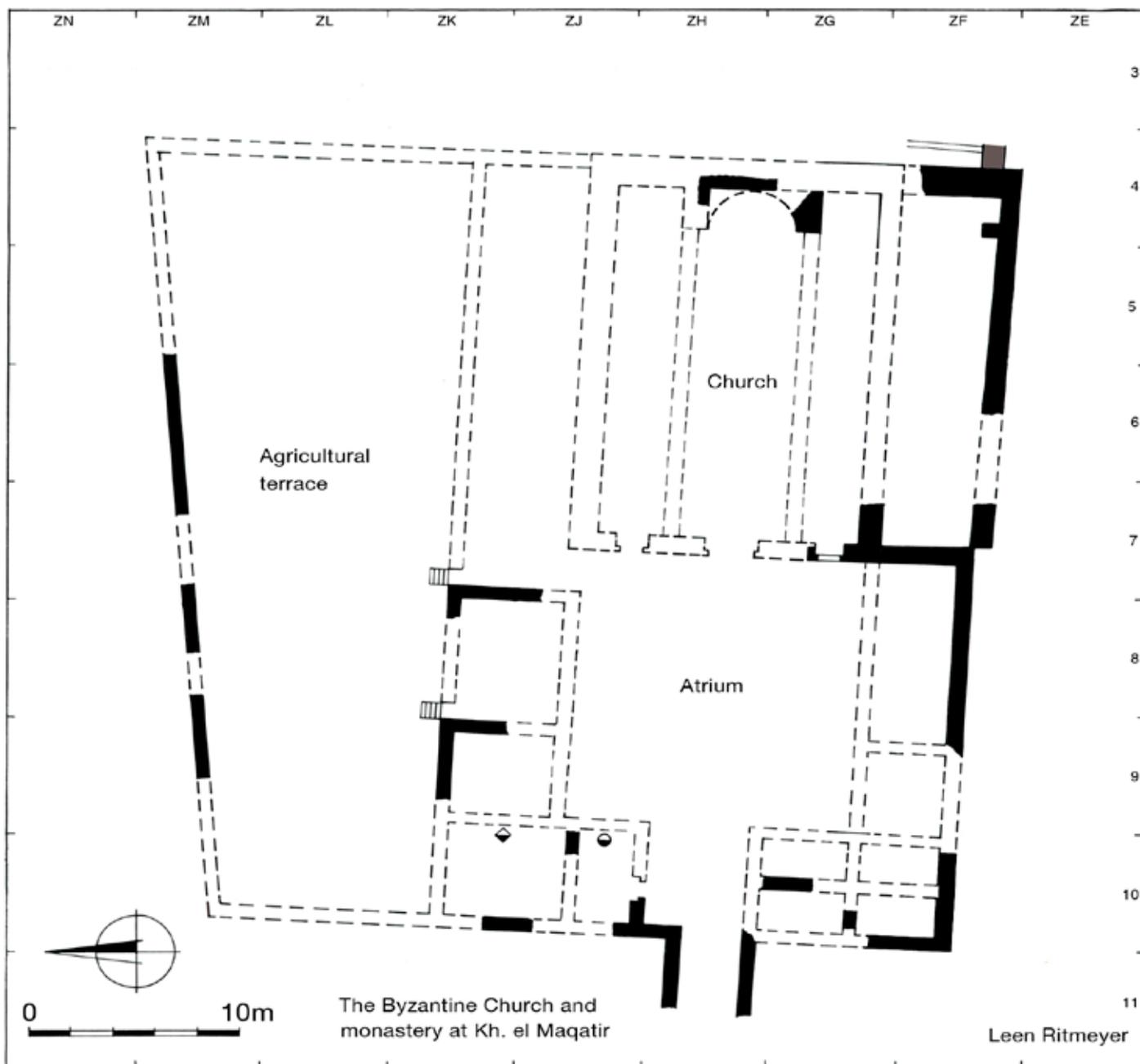
on the Mount of Olives (site of the ascension). The fourth church at Mamre (Hebron) was dedicated to Christ's Old Testament manifestation there (Gn 18:1). With royal encouragement, additional churches commemorating Old and New Testament holy places were soon constructed all over the country.

Most Byzantine churches were built on the plan of the familiar Roman civic building. Used for public, private and sacred purposes, it was called "basilica" (from the Greek word "royal"). It included a rectangular central hall (nave) with rows of interior pillar roof supports, side aisles, and a raised platform (chancel) including an apse. Churches constructed in the basilical style regularly placed the apse on the east and a triple main entrance on the west. Later Byzantine basilica-style churches added two extra apses, totaling three on the east.

Some churches were constructed to commemorate special holy locations. Emphasizing the structure's center, these churches were constructed on circular, octagonal, square or cruciform plans. The Byzantine church over Peter's house at Capernaum is an octagonal example of such a church.

In the Byzantine period, bishops were encouraged to construct more elaborate structures befitting the faith's new status. Outwardly, these structures continued to be modest in appearance, while inside they became quite ornate, fulfilling the royal urges.

After construction of the original large Constantinian churches, most of Palestine's churches were small and modest. Designed to serve rural and urban congregations as well as monasteries, virtually every village had a church by the end of the Byzantine period and many towns had more than one.



This plan reveals some areas (in black) which have been excavated or are visible on the surface.

Ruins of the Byzantine Church at Khirbet el-Maqatir



Michael Luddeni

Tell-tale evidence of the Byzantine monastery. In 1999, Photographer Michael Luddeni and Architectural Archaeologist Dr. Leen Ritmeyer walked the upper part of the site at Khirbet el-Maqatir and found many cut stones and installations.

Byzantine Monasteries in the Holy Land

The fourth-sixth centuries AD were a flourishing period in the Holy Land as thousands of pilgrims came to visit the land of their faith. Many of these pilgrims chose to leave their secular way of life and join the growing monastic movement in the Judean Wilderness. Over 65 monasteries were established in this region alone during the Byzantine period, including a complex at Khirbet el-Maqatir.

Byzantine monasteries were of two primary types—*laura* and *coenobia*. *Laura*-type monasteries were communities of recluses. Each monk lived separately and met with other monks only once a week for prayer and replenishing of supplies. *Coenobia*-type monasteries were much more common in the Judean Wilderness. In this type monks lived, worked, ate and prayed together. Well-built and well-funded, *coenobia* monasteries are often mistaken for Byzantine villas.

Our bus passes through the Israeli checkpoint before dawn, filled with the sounds of a spoken Bible passage, prayer, and song. Arriving at the base of Khirbet el-Maqatir, we climb to the dig site and pause at the top, enthralled again by the view of Jerusalem. Reflecting on the terrain and Joshua's strategy to capture Ai, the ruins underneath me transform: the ancient gate looms tall and impenetrable, and the sling stones are freshly chiseled—held in the strong hands of a warrior who used them 3500 years ago. Hoisting a pick, I'm eager for another day of digging and fellowship with my team.

— Vanessa Morton



Michael Luddeni

1999 excavation by IBEX. This room is located in the upper right corner of the plan view on page 23.



Michael Luddeni

Ruins of a granary storage facility found near the entrance of the Byzantine church.

Typically, Byzantine churches in the Holy Land were built of limestone, roofed with tiles, floored with mosaic *tesserae*, furnished with glass windows, and decorated with marble (Hirschfeld 1992: 235–36). The Kh. el-Maqatir monastery has all these features. Apses typically faced east and were semi-circular. The 1999 excavation season began to reveal Maqatir’s single semi-circular east-facing apse. Some churches had baptisteries, and one may be uncovered at Kh. el-Maqatir as well.

Sometimes *coenobia* monasteries were attached to basilica style “memorial churches” which served pilgrims coming to commemorate biblical events or people (Hirschfeld 1992: 130). Such churches in the Judean Wilderness include St. Peter’s Church on the Mount of Olives, Galgala (Gilgal) near Jericho and St. John the Baptist on the Jordan River (Hirschfeld 1992: 56). The sanctuary of Kh. el-Maqatir, of basilica design and associated with a *coenobia* monastery, may also be a memorial church.

Concerning Khirbet el-Maqatir

All scholars regard the work of Edward Robinson in 1838 as paramount in historical geography. When Robinson asked the locals about Ai, a Greek priest in the nearby village of Taibye pointed him to Kh. el-Maqatir. Yet, Robinson summarily dismissed this information. He wrote, “There never was anything here but a church...” (Robinson and Smith 1841: 126).

Where did this tradition reported by Robinson originate? What would have given the locals reason to make this identification? The Byzantine church on the summit of Kh. el-Maqatir possibly provides the answer. Perhaps Byzantine Christians recognized this hill as ancient Ai, thus preserving and passing on the tradition. The persuasion of the locals in Robinson’s day may have stemmed from a 1500-year-old Byzantine belief.

The Byzantine structure at Kh. el-Maqatir was a significant complex, of the *coenobia* type. Many early explorers visited the site, often taking measurements or drawing plans of the



Scott Stripling

A pile of tesserae excavated by Scott Stripling and his team in January 2011. *Tesserae* are individual tiles in mosaics and are typically cube shaped. The ABR team found over 7000 of these *tesserae* in a few days of work.

structure. Charles Wilson, W.M. Thomson, S. Anderson, and C. Conder and H. Kitchener of the Survey of Western Palestine all recorded this prominent and well-constructed church.

The Complex

While all early explorers recorded finding a church, it was actually only a chapel and part of a larger monastery complex. A survey of surface remains indicates a number of storage rooms, several cisterns, a well, living quarters, a kitchen and dining area. The chapel itself is the most impressive and well-built part of the complex, but constitutes only 20% of the total area of the monastery.

The Masters' College, led by Todd Bolen, performed five days of excavation work of the monastery complex in the late 1990's. Impressive remains of walls, floors and thresholds were found, yet many of the elements known to the 19th century explorers have not been identified. The plan of the church can be understood from these explorers.

Robinson noted that the church was larger than the nearby Burj Beitin church and was on the highest ground in the area. He also recorded sections of many columns lying about. Several of these columns can be seen in the plaza in the center of the adjacent village of Deir Dibwan. "Deir," interestingly, means "monastery." Wilson observed many Corinthian capitals in 1866, but they were apparently removed by the time of Conder and Kitchener's visit in 1874. Their measurements indicated

that the church was 66 ft (20.1 m) long and 48 ft (14.6 m) wide with 2–3 ft (0.6–0.9 m) thick walls. The foundation of the apse was perfectly preserved, 18 ft (5.5 m) in diameter (Conder and Kitchener 1882: 45; Thomson 1882: 94).

The January 2011 Fieldwork

Dr. Scott Stripling led an excavation team to work on the remains of the Late Byzantine complex in January 2011. He reports,

We excavated two 6 X 6 meter squares along the south wall of the monastery complex. This area, called ZF04, proved to be very artifact-rich, as we found a necklace and abundant Byzantine glass and pottery. The bottom portion of one of the walls was plastered, and fragments of red fresco were found nearby. Perhaps the most interesting discovery was a hoard of *tesserae* (mosaic tile). Over 7,000 large white *tesserae* were found in a single locus. No doubt this is evidence of the collapse of the second story floor. I remain hopeful that the mosaics on the first floor are still intact, and that they may have an inscription that reveals what the ancient people believed the site to be. Perhaps it will refer to Genesis 12–13 or Joshua 7–8. Only time will tell. I invite you to join us in May/June 2011 as we continue working on the Late Bronze Age fortress, the Byzantine monastery and church.

Conclusion

Evidence uncovered thus far suggests the Byzantine complex at Kh. el-Maqatir was an important monastery, possibly with a memorial church, serving visitors coming to commemorate a biblical event. This connection provides strong motivation to discover if it was constructed to memorialize Joshua's victory at Ai, as accepted in the local tradition told to Robinson. It could also commemorate the spot between Bethel and the Ai of Abraham's day, et-Tell, where God appeared to Abraham in Genesis 15.

Consequently, archaeological evidence connecting this church with the Ai story, or another a biblical event, is important. Digging continues in hope of finding some conclusive evidence in this regard. If this monastery was typical and if it was constructed to commemorate the battle of Ai, it may have had a mosaic floor with a Greek inscription mentioning Ai or even a depiction of smoke rising from the burning city.

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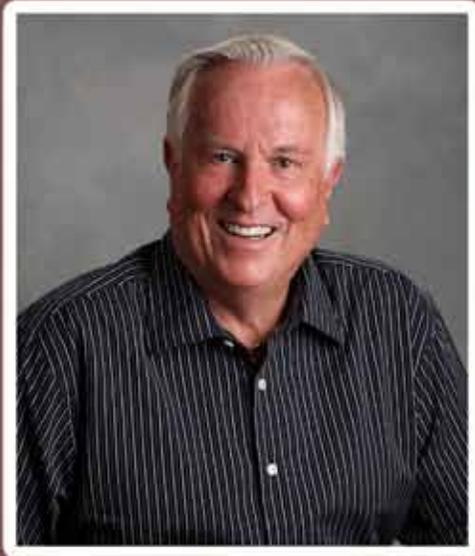
“What did you find on your dig?” my friends asked me after I returned this summer from the dig at Khirbet el-Maqatir. “A floating wall and chalk,” I proudly tell them. About that time I usually get a quizzical look. I go on to explain to them that as my group was clearing away the first bits of dirt, we noticed several large rocks all in a nice line. Our square is right inside the city wall and gate, so I'm anticipating a house or workshop. This will be great! It's my first time as a square supervisor, and I've found a wall on my first day. I'm already doing better than Gary Byers who's been looking for a wall for more than the ten years I've known him.

I lived in the excitement of my wall for a couple of days, then tragedy struck. There were no rocks below those surface rocks. The wall was floating in the dirt. To make matters worse, the following days we found little else in the square: a measly amount of pottery, a handful of slingstones, and an unusual amount of scorpions (yes, we did name them all!). It only took us a week to get to the bottom of the square. Then God decided we hadn't had enough fun, and turned the normally “rock hard” limestone bedrock into chalk. What's going on here!?

Being at the bottom of that square, we moved catty-corner to a new square with childlike anticipation. By the end of that week we had been blessed, once again, with very little pottery, a couple of slingstones, and a gopher (no, we didn't name him). Oh, and did I mention the 5m x 5m square of CHALK! This had *not* gone as I had planned! Then God reminded me of a couple of verses. Proverbs 16:9 (NIV) says, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.” I had my own idea of what I *should* have found in the square, but God had his own plans for what I *needed* to find. No matter what I had found or will find in the future, God had called me to that place and time. So even if I don't find anything in the dirt, I have found His will for me and am serving Him! Is it normal not to find anything in your square? No, not really. Everyone else was pulling awesome things out of their squares. We were kind of the black sheep of the dig. But last time I checked, God loves black sheep too! (Even one who lost their passport, but that's another story!)

— Suzanne Lattimer, Square Supervisor

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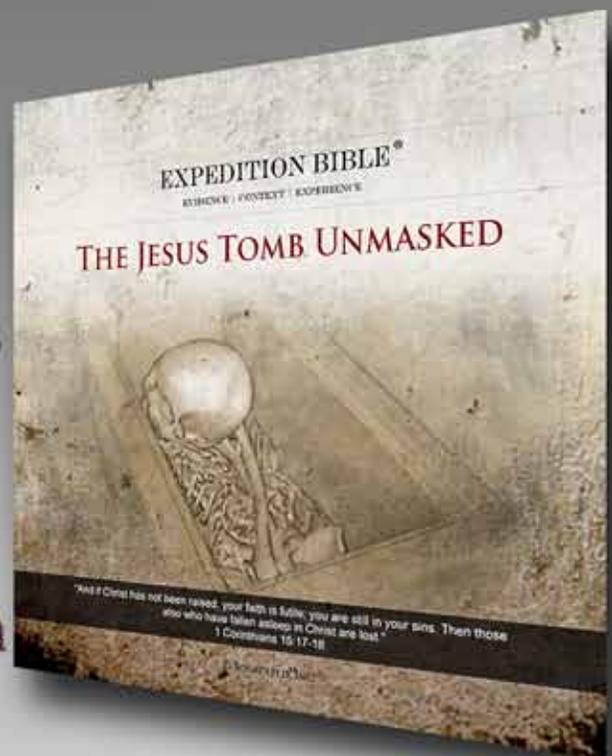
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