

## 2014 Excavations at Kh. el-Maqatir: A Proposed New Location for the Ai of Joshua 7–8 and Ephraim of John 11:53-54

See Also: [Excavations at Kh. el-Maqatir 1995–2000, 2009–2013](#).

By **D. Scott Stripling**

© Associates for Biblical Research 2015

February 2015

The Site

### *Bronze Age Fortress*

In 2014 no additional architecture from the Bronze Age Fortress was excavated; however, MB III and LB I pottery was found in all of the excavation areas. Much of the LB I pottery was refired, an indication that after initial kiln firing it was exposed to a later site-wide conflagration. The most important Bronze Age find was a scarab, discovered in the northeast corner of Square P20, or possibly P21. Since the scarab was recovered from a locus that had been disturbed by looters, the original location remains uncertain. It clearly dates from the late Hyksos or Second Intermediate period in Egypt (ca. 1668–1560) based on the circle motifs on its base (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Hyksos Period Scarab from the Kh. el-Maqatir Bronze Age Fortress, 2014. © 2014 Associates for Biblical Research. Photo by Michael C. Luddeni.

The previous year (2013) another scarab (Fig. 2) from Square P21 gives an approximate terminal date for the fortress in the late 15th century BC. This scarab was found beneath an ashy deposit within the leveling fill for a 1st-century AD house. It was 2 cm (0.8 in) above bedrock in a 5 cm (2 in) thick layer of compacted soil separated from the ashy deposit above by a layer of randomly-placed flat stones. Accompanying the scarab in the layer of compacted soil were four diagnostic LB I refired sherds. The scarab clearly dates to the 18th Dynasty, most likely in the reign of Amenhotep II (ca. 1455–1418 BC).



Fig. 2. 18th Egyptian Dynasty Scarab from the Kh. el-Maqatir Bronze Age Fortress, 2013. © 2014 Associates for Biblical Research. Photo by Michael C. Luddeni.

The two scarabs synchronize with the ceramic analysis and provide firm dates for the operation of the fortress. It now seems clear that the small fortress, likely the Ai of Joshua 7-8, was constructed during the MB III boom and was violently destroyed near the end of LB I.

Additionally, the bronze head of a zoomorphic figurine (goat) was excavated in L.4 of Square P22. L.4 is only two meters to the east of L.20 from P21 where the Amenhotep II scarab was found in 2013. The bronze goat (idol?) was apparently decapitated, perhaps in an iconoclastic manner like the zoomorphic figurines from Hazor of the same era. Further study is required to determine if this figurine is Amorite or Egyptian. Initial analysis indicates an Egyptian influence. For example, the teardrop shape of the eyes and the way the horns wrap around the head may indicate parallels with the ram god Khnum.

### *Iron Age I Village*

Pottery dispersed throughout the site dates to the Iron I period, ca. 1150–915 BC. The best-preserved remains were found in Square Q9 where a poorly-made domestic structure was built into the ruins of the LB I fortification wall. The structure, with one-stone wide walls, consists of several small rooms. The plan of one room measuring 1.5 x 2.0 m (4.9 x 6.5 ft) is complete. In Square R11 a stone-lined pit ca. 0.7 x 1.0 m (2.3 x 3.3 ft) was built into the corner of a similar structure. In it were a restorable jug and rim sherds of several Iron I cooking pots, as well as a broken mortar and a damaged limestone roof roller 21 cm (8.3 in) in diameter, 48.5 cm (1 ft 7 in) in length and weighing 32 kg (71 lb).

In 2014, a second stone-lined pit was excavated in Square Q10 (Fig. 3). It contained a bronze arrowhead and a limestone and bronze tool (specific purpose undetermined). A bronze needle, flint blades, and pounders found in Q10 suggest a domicile. Also in 2014, two poorly made Iron I walls and large amounts of Iron I pottery were revealed in Square Q21, thus indicating a larger settlement from the Judges period than had previously been observed. Significant among the pottery were IA I–II pithoi rims (Rounded groove below the rim, with no neck and no collar); these rims parallel those found at other

Benjaminite sites such as Tell el-Ful (Gibeah?).<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 3. Iron Age I stone-lined pit in Square Q10. In the background is the ruined inner face of the north wall of the Late Bronze I fortress. © 2012 Associates for Biblical Research. Photo by Michael C. Luddeni.

### *Late Hellenistic/Early Roman City*

Current numismatic and ceramic analysis indicates that the small city<sup>2</sup> began in the mid-second century BC and expanded during the reign of Alexander Jannaeus (103–76 BC). His reign saw a significant expansion of the Hasmonean kingdom and the establishment of many new cities and villages. In light of this expansionist agenda, which included the founding of Gamla after conquering the Golan Heights in 81 BC and the commissioning of the building of the Pool of Siloam in Jerusalem, an enlarged city in the highlands of Benjamin is not surprising. The pottery at Khirbet el-Maqatir supports this theory and shows a continuous occupation from the mid-second century BC until the First Jewish Revolt (AD 66–70). Furthermore, forty-four First Revolt coins discovered at the site through 2014 abruptly end in AD 69.<sup>3</sup> The logical conclusion is that Vespasian destroyed the site in AD 69 during his campaign into the central part of the country, north of Jerusalem. Amazingly, a drawing carved on bedrock closely matches the layout of the actual city, except that the tower is missing (Fig. 4). The drawing may date to the earliest phase of the city, indicating that the tower was added in a later phase.



<sup>1</sup> In the excavation report for the 1964 season, Nancy Lapp dated them to 1025–950 BCE, but the forms may have continued for another generation.

<sup>2</sup> The local population refers to the Late Hellenistic and Early Roman ruins as at-Tugra, (“the little entrance”), perhaps referring to the myriad subterranean features or the tower entrance.

<sup>3</sup> 20 were found in 2014. 17 were from Year 2, and 3 were from Year 3.

Fig. 4. LH/ER city plan etched in bedrock. © 2014 Associates for Biblical Research. Photo by Michael C. Luddeni.

This later phase can be seen in the rendering of the city (Fig. 5). The walled-in portion of the settlement measures 1.5 hectares (ca. 4 acres) and sits atop approximately one third of the Bronze Age fortress. The fortification wall is massive, ranging from 4.0 to 5.0 m in thickness. The monumental tower measures 30 x 16 m and finds parallels at Horvat 'Eleq in Israel (Hirschfeld 2000: 685-92) and Diocaesarea in Turkey (McNicoll 1997: 178-81). Fortifications on this scale indicate a small city, not a mere village. Jews clearly populated the city and practiced strict ritual purity. Along with the seventy-five pieces of ritual stoneware and an ossuary fragment, three miqvaot have been excavated in Squares M23, L26, and S22/23.<sup>4</sup> Two restorable stoneware vessels, a basin and a measuring cup, were excavated in CAV1.

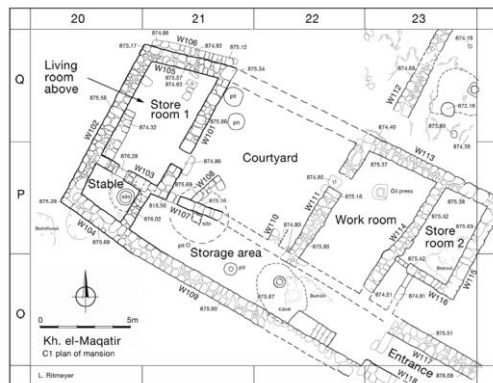


Fig. 5. Rendering of the LH/ER city (2014). © 2014 Associates for Biblical Research. Courtesy of Leen Ritmeyer.

What originally appeared to be a fourth *miqveh*, actually turned out to be the opening into an underground cavern (CAV 1), connected to a large first-century cistern (CAV 2) and a hiding system (CAV 3). Excavations in December 2013 and December 2014 revealed CAV 1 to be an olive oil production facility with an *in situ* screw press comprised of two megalithic support stones and four massive stone weights. Fifteen well-preserved steps provide ingress and egress from the industrial facility.

Fig. 6. Olive oil production cave (CAV 1). © 2014 Associates for Biblical Research. Photo by Cody French.

All three interconnected subterranean installations were part of an elaborate hiding system used in the First and Second Jewish Revolts. Coins of Tyre (AD 93/94–195/6) and Trajan (AD 114–117) found in CAV1, and a Bar Kokhba Revolt year 3 (AD 134/5–

<sup>4</sup> The miqveh in L26 was published in *IEJ*. Bryant G. Wood, Khirbet el-Maqatir, 2000. *Israel Exploration Journal* 51 (2001): 246–52. Miqveh p. 250, and Figs. 5 and 6.

135/6) coin found in CAV 2, provide the only evidence for usage to date of the site after AD 69. In addition to producing olive oil, it appears that during the LH/ER occupation a wine press may have been built into the only extant chamber of the Bronze Age gate.

A large dwelling sits in the center of the site (Fig. 7). The house is typical of the complex–courtyard houses of the LH/ER era. The size indicates the prominence and wealth of the extended family that lived there.<sup>5</sup> It has a large courtyard surrounded by rooms. Excavated walls in some rooms survive to a height of 1.5 m. Two-thirds of a well-preserved fenestrated wall was excavated in Square P20 during the 2011 season; such walls were commonly used to separate humans from animals in compliance with halakhic requirements. Excavation of the house has spanned the past four seasons.

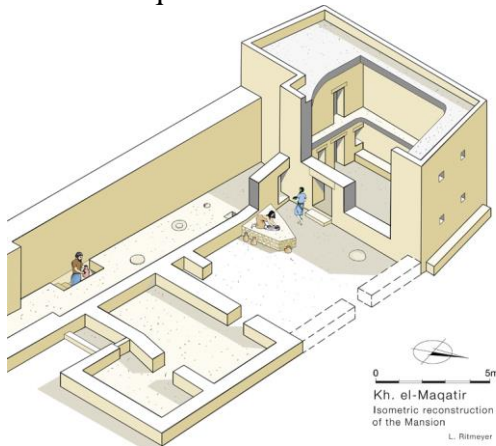


Fig. 7. Large LH/ER dwelling (2014). © 2014 Associates for Biblical Research. Courtesy of Leen Ritmeyer.

A typical Hasmonean–era “pinched” oil lamp was excavated in the foundation trench of Wall 109. An intact Herodian lamp dating to the first-century AD was found at the floor level to the north of Wall 109 and beside the entrance to a silo. These lamps reinforce the two primary phases of occupation of the city. This conclusion is further bolstered by the fact that an adjacent room in Square O23 has a doorway from the earlier phase that was sealed by flagstones in the ER period. Carbon dating done in 2014 additionally reinforces the dating of the occupation.

In Square O22, a subterranean chamber was excavated in 2014. Eight steps led into the chamber’s arched entrance. There was a secondary opening to the surface through a circular cut in the ceiling of the room. The lid to this opening was found *in situ*. A triangular niche for an oil lamp, typical of the first century, was cut ca. 30 cm below the opening to the surface. The chamber itself measured ca. 2.5 m high by 2 m wide. A sealed area to the south of the arched entrance awaits excavation. The chamber’s function is unknown at this point.

---

<sup>5</sup> After completion of the dwelling in summer 2015, a more specific classification will be possible.

The small city from the period of the New Testament is a strong candidate to be Ephraim of John 11:53-54. The arguments in favor of this identification are set forth in the author's recent article.<sup>6</sup>

### *Byzantine Monastery*

No work was done in the monastery complex in 2014, but previous excavation and survey makes it possible to offer a tentative reconstruction (Fig. 8).

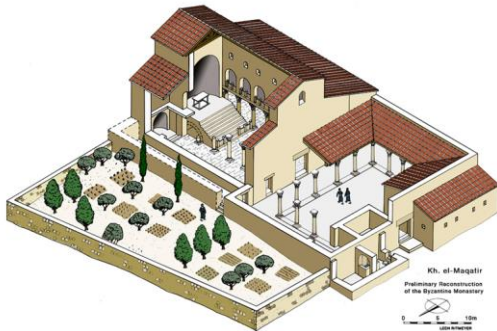


Fig. 8. An isometric reconstruction of the monastery, based on excavation results and visible remains. © 2014 Associates for Biblical Research. Courtesy of Leen Ritmeyer.

### **References**

Hirschfeld, Yizhar et al

2000 *Ramat Hanadiv. Excavations: Final Report of the 1984 and 1998 Seasons*. Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 685-92.

McNichol, A.W.

1997 *Hellenistic Fortifications from the Aegean to the Euphrates*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 178-81.

Stripling, D. Scott

2014 Have We Walked in the Footsteps of Jesus? *Bible and Spade* 27: 88–94. Available at [http://www.biblearchaeology.org/file.axd?file=2014%2f12%2f2014\\_Fall\\_BAS\\_Sstripling\\_article\\_final.pdf](http://www.biblearchaeology.org/file.axd?file=2014%2f12%2f2014_Fall_BAS_Sstripling_article_final.pdf)

Wood, Bryant G.

---

<sup>6</sup> On the identification of Kh. el-Maqatir as Ephraim, see Stripling 2014: 88–94.

2008b The Search for Joshua's Ai. Pp. 205–40 in *Critical Issues in Early Israelite History*, eds. Richard S. Hess, Gerald A. Klingbeil and Paul J. Ray Jr. Winna Lake IN: Eisenbrauns. Available at <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/04/The-Search-for-Joshuas-Ai.aspx>.