The Remarkable 2013 Season at Khirbet el-Maqatir

By Bryant G. Wood

In our 11th season of excavations at Khirbet el-Maqatir, May 20–31 2013, God gave us safety (with only one noteworthy accident, a broken rib), wonderful volunteers, and many significant discoveries. I reported a year ago that our 2012 season was the best yet, apart from the finding of the gate in our first season. But the 2013 season eclipsed the 2012 season in terms of the importance of the finds.

Important discoveries are usually made on the last day of a dig season. We broke that custom by making a major find on the very first day—a third lower gate socket stone from the Late Bronze I fortress of the time of Joshua. The pivot post of a gate (or door) turned on a stone sunk into the floor, which had a hole hollowed out for the pivot post to turn in. At the top of the pivot post was a counter socket stone. Gary Byers found the first lower socket stone during our initial 1995 season. The top of the socket stone, with its well-worn post hole, was visible on the surface. Just a few feet away we could see the tops of the surviving stones of the west chamber of the gate, measuring approximately 23 x 30 feet.

During the second season in 1996 we unearthed a second lower socket stone, as well as an upper counter socket stone, a very rare object. Although not in their original positions, the locations of the three socket stones just south of the southern pier of the west gate chamber suggest that they were part of the inside (southern) door of the gate. Now, 17 years later, we have uncovered a third lower socket stone. It was exposed only a few inches below the surface, about 33 feet east of the outer (northern) door of the gate. The other lower socket stone from the outer door is still out there somewhere!

In order to preempt looters, we have been using metal detectors to locate coins. In 2012 we recovered a record 71 coins, a number I thought would never be surpassed. I was wrong! This season, in each of the four squares excavated east of the gate we uncovered an underground pit or storage chamber carved into bedrock. From the pottery, it appears that they all date to the first century AD. In my square, S19, the pit contained many coins and other artifacts. After three days of digging the pit, we had an amazing 128 coins! Added to that were another 17 from my square and 60 from other squares, for a grand total of 205 coins. Our Israeli numismatist said he had never heard of any other dig in Israel that produced so many coins in such a short period of time!

Michael Luddeni

City of Ai gate socketstone in secondary use, discovered on the first day of the 2013 dig season.

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Square S19 excavation team posing at the opening of the pit where 128 coins were found. Left-to-right: back, Bryant Wood, ABR, Manheim PA, Square Supervisor; William Barrick, The Master's Seminary, Santa Clarita CA; Ellen Jackson, SIL International, Dallas TX, metal detectorist; front: Regina Brown, Automation Controls Inc., Valley Falls KS; Mark Hassler, The Master's Seminary, North Hills CA.

When we turned the coins over to our conservator for cleaning she too was amazed. She theorized that perhaps coins were being manufactured at our site. This is entirely feasible, since many of our "coins" appear to be square pieces of bronze left over from the making of strips of coin blanks in a mold. When first excavated, it is difficult to differentiate a fragment of scrap bronze from a genuine coin due to corrosion. Our numismatist will sort them out after all of the bronze pieces have been cleaned. It is hard to imagine the presence of such scraps in any context other than a coin-making operation. In a coin production facility the leftover bronze pieces would have been saved and melted down to be recast as coin blanks.

Then, on the last day of the season, we did indeed make a number of important discoveries. In the first-century village we were digging what we thought was a water installation. When we got to the bottom, however, it opened into an underground

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Dr. Scott Stripling poses with the possible orthostats in the underground complex discovered on the last day of the 2013 dig season.

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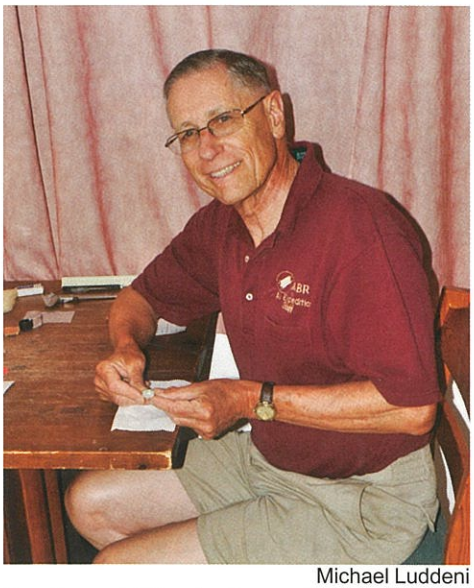
Destry Jackson of Norcatur, Kansas proudly shows off the Egyptian Scarab she discovered on the last day of the dig season. Concerning the circumstances of her extraordinary find, Destry told her square supervisor, "It just popped out!"

cavern some 30 feet in diameter. In the chamber are two passageways which lead to smaller underground rooms. The pottery indicates that the rooms were in use in the first century AD. According to the coins from 2012, the first-century village came to an end in AD 69 when the Romans were suppressing the first Jewish revolt, which began in AD 66 and lasted until the destruction of the Temple and burning of Jerusalem in AD 70. It is conceivable that the residents of the village took refuge from the Romans in the underground complex.

Inside the main chamber are two partially-buried large slabs of limestone. Although we have not yet determined their dimensions, I suspect that they are orthostats from the gate of the Late Bronze I fortress. Orthostats are large stone slabs that were used in the construction of walls of gates and temples from the Middle and Late Bronze eras. Gate orthostats are well known in Syria, but are rare in Israel. I know of only two sites in Israel where gate orthostats have been found—Gezer and Shechem. Hopefully, further excavation of the stone slabs will clarify their function.

As significant as these items were, the *coup de grâce* came in the form of a tiny object less than three-quarters of an inch long—



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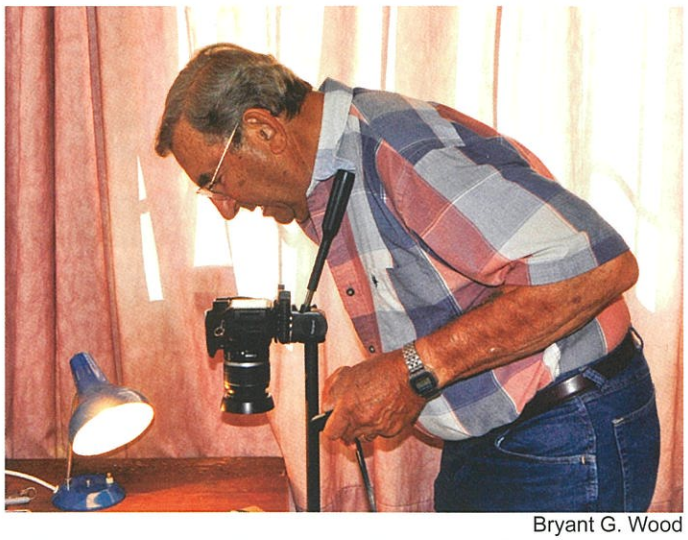
Dr. Bryant Wood shows the remarkable scarab discovered during the 2013 season at Khirbet el-Maqatir.

an Egyptian scarab. The name scarab derives from the French word *scarabée*, meaning "beetle." Ancient Egyptians especially revered the dung beetle which they related to the sun god. The dung beetle encases its food in a ball of dung and then rolls it with its legs. The ancient Egyptians associated this with the movement of the sun across the sky each day, believing that the sun was being moved by the sacred dung beetle. A scarab is carved in the shape of a beetle, with a rounded back and a flat underside. At first, they were simply used as amulets to ward off evil or bring good luck. Starting in the Middle Bronze period, however, they were used as official seals, with the name or insignia of a dignitary inscribed on the flat side of the scarab. As with most scarabs, ours has a hole drilled longitudinally through it so that it could be worn around the neck or mounted on a ring. When on a ring, it was fastened in such a way that it would rotate. It could be worn with the round side up as a piece of jewelry, or rotated with the flat side up to be used as a signet.



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ABR photographer Michael Luddeni taking close-up photos of the Maqatir scarab.

I sent a photo of the scarab to the top scarab specialist in Israel and she dated it to ca. 1550–1450 BC, the Late Bronze I period. The scarab thus verifies my dating of our fortress based on the pottery. *This is monumental discovery since it gives us an independent date for the fortress apart from pottery.* Secular scholars can criticize my dating of the pottery, claiming that I am biased, but they cannot argue with the dating of the scarab. The pottery and scarab together provide solid evidence for dating our fortress to the Late Bronze I period, the time of the Exodus and Conquest. Although the scarab was likely fashioned between 1550 and 1450 BC, it is entirely possible that it remained in use until 1406 BC, the date of the destruction of Ai according to biblical chronology. If that is the case, the scarab was being used by the last king of Khirbet el-Maqatir/Ai, the one defeated by the Israelites as recorded in Joshua 7–8!

Our continuing excavation and research is providing stronger and stronger evidence countering the attacks of critics and supplying reasons to believe for those seeking the truth. Archaeological research such as this verifies and powerfully proclaims the truth of God's word in this scientific age of doubt, skepticism and moral decay.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Scarab in the Israel Museum similar to the one discovered at Kh. el-Maqatir in 2013. It depicts pharaoh Tuthmosis III (ca. 1506–1452 BC) as a falcon-headed sphinx trampling an enemy. In front of the sphinx is the cartouche of the pharaoh, above is the title "Good God" and to the left "Lord of the Two Lands." The scarab is made of glazed steatite and is 0.59 in (15 mm) long by 0.39 in (10 mm) wide. The gold link attachment is modern.

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