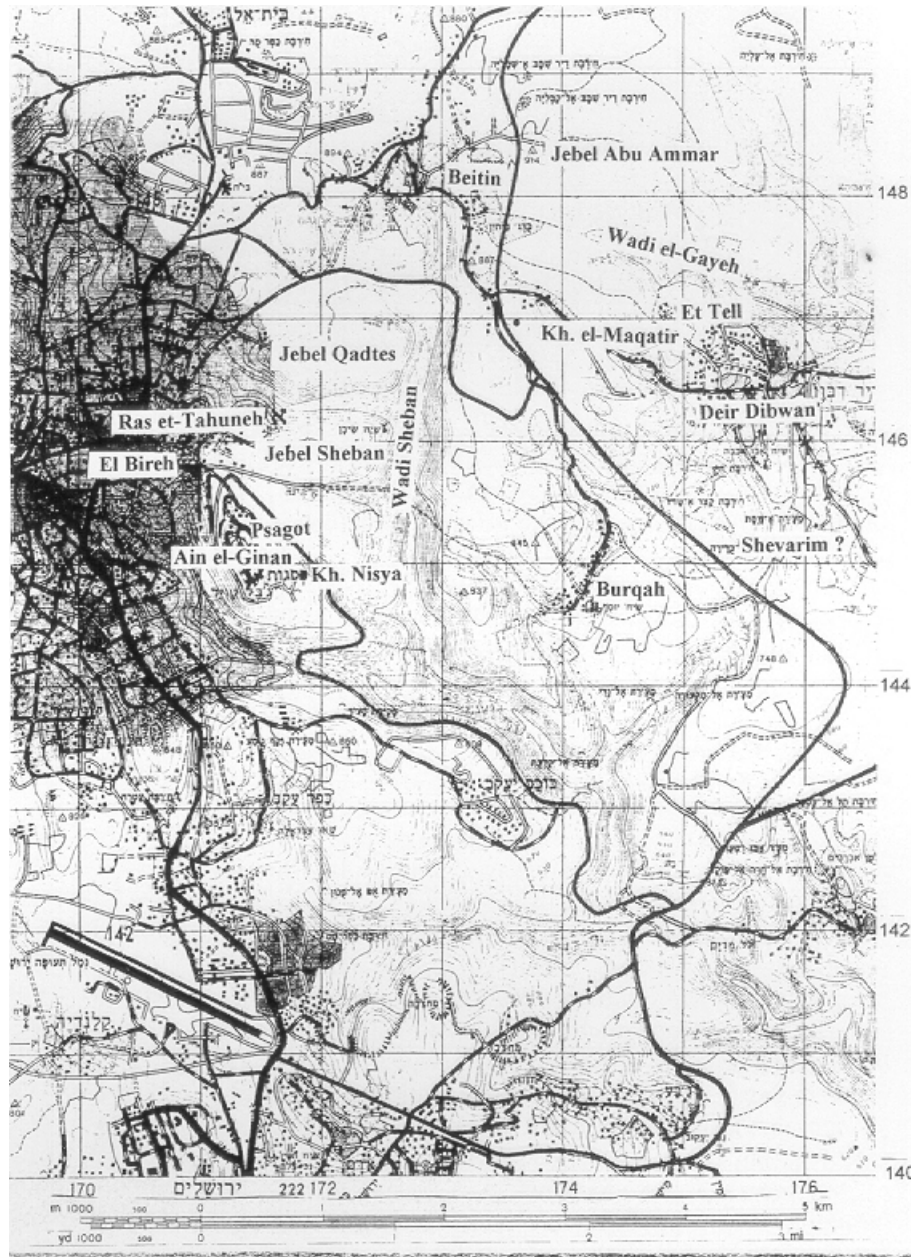


## The Search for Joshua's Ai: Excavations at Kh. el-Maqtar

Bryant G. Wood



Map of the region of Bethel and Ai.

### The Ai of Abraham

The first mention of Ai in the Bible is in Genesis 12:8. There it says that Abraham pitched his tent on a hill east of Bethel <sup>1</sup> (= El Bireh, Livingston 1998), with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. Pottery from the time of Abraham has been found at El Bireh. It was no doubt an urban center at that time, as it seems to have been throughout its history. Ai, then, would have been another major landmark in the region by which Abraham fixed his location. The word 'ay in Hebrew means "ruin" according to every published Hebrew dictionary. When used as the name of the place east of Bethel is always written with the definite article *hā*. Thus, it was called "the ruin," indicating "the big ruin" or the ruin *par excellence*.

The only site in the region which would fit this description is et-Tell, about 3 mi northeast of El Bireh. In the Early Bronze Age it was the most important urban center in the central hill country, occupying an area of some 27.5 acres. According to the excavators, et-Tell was destroyed around 2400 BC,<sup>2</sup> roughly 300 years before Abraham journeyed into Canaan. The massive ruins of the Early Bronze Age city there are still impressive

today. Significantly, the name et-Tell means “the ruin” in Arabic, matching the Hebrew name hā’ay, “the ruin.”

Abraham pitched his tent east of Bethel on a hār, a word which can mean “hill,” “mountain,” or “hill country” (used interchangeably with gib’ah, “hill” or “mountain”).<sup>3</sup> There are several hills between El Bireh and et-Tell which could qualify as the place where Abraham camped and built an altar, including Kh. el-Maqatir where the Associates for Biblical Research is excavating. Eusebius said that Abraham’s Ai was

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**Early Bronze Age ruins at et-Tell**, the site accepted by most archaeologists as the ancient city of Ai. Wood suggests it was the Ai of Abraham, but not the Ai of Joshua’s time, seven centuries later (1400 BC). The city in Joshua’s time was located 0.6 mi west of et-Tell at Kh. el-Maqatir. in ruin in his day in the early fourth century AD (Klo...

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