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## Marj Rabba: Wrapping Up the 2012 Season

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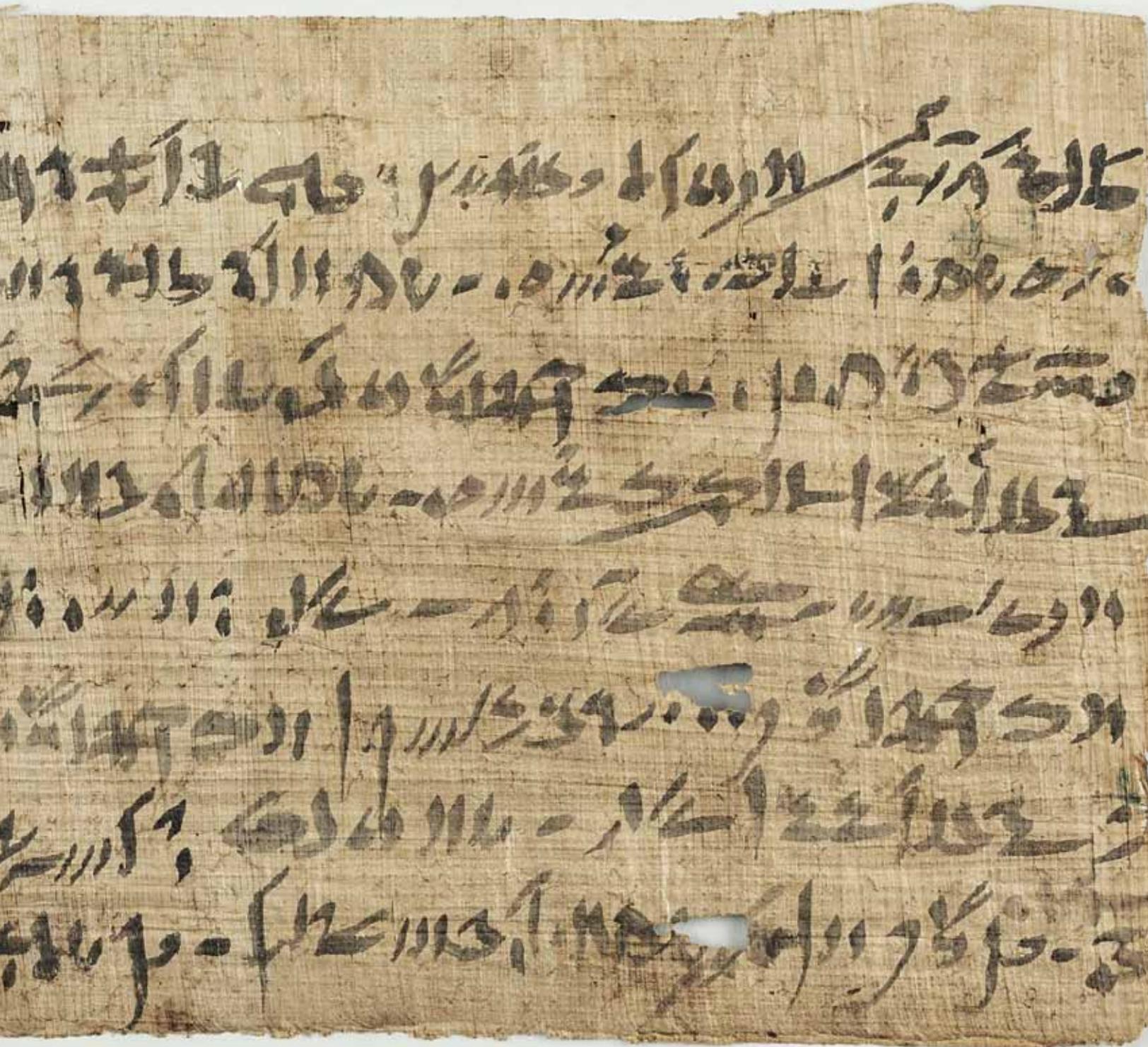
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# MARJ RABBA: WRAPPING UP THE 2012 SEASON

*Yorke M. Rowan and Morag M. Kersel*

Classes have resumed, botanical samples reached their destination, survey equipment returned, and the new academic year is well underway. As the memory of hot afternoons, pesto sandwiches, and pottery washing fade, the dispersed team of Marj Rabba 2012 begins to work on digitizing plans, processing artifacts, archiving the hundreds of photographs, and writing reports. This is the time to reflect on the successes and challenges of the 2012 season.

The great success of the fourth season at Marj Rabba, the Chalcolithic site in the rolling hills of the lower Galilee, was due to a combination of dedicated people, supportive institutions, and technological advances. Our team of twenty-four people, the largest to work in the field since the project began, worked six days a week through the hottest days of the year. Not only does everyone excavate, but we all share in the joys of cleaning, marking, and bagging the artifacts.

In the field, we have at least three buildings exposed, although the floors of these buildings may not be fully uncovered. This was made possible in part by removing many of the circular stone features (seen in earlier publications,

such as *Notes & News* 212). We are now able to see some of the earlier structures partially preserved below the stone circles and can detect at least three building phases. This was only possible through the careful and dedicated hard work of students, volunteers, and staff.

Documenting archaeological features accurately is always a challenge. Although we continue to draw all architecture and features by hand, a bird's-eye view is fundamental to seeing the bigger picture. Aerial photography can be prohibitively expensive, and as a result, most excavations in Israel document their field season with aerial photography only at the end of the season. Much more preferable is the ability to take frequent overhead photos from a variety of heights as part of a general recording system. Due to the technological versatility of Dr. Austin "Chad" Hill, this problem was surmounted through the combination of PAP (pole-assisted photography), remote-controlled model aircraft, and a "quadcopter" (fig. 1). This last item, built by Dr. Hill from parts ordered while in country, consists of four whirling blades that lift a camera taking repeated photographs at pre-set intervals. There are technological

improvements underway for next season, but the results from this season were dramatic (figs. 2–4).

Another new aspect of fieldwork at Marj Rabba was a trial run including and training high school students. Five students and their mentor from the Rowe-Clark Math and Science Academy, located in west Chicago, joined us in the field. After completing a series of weekend orientation sessions held at the Oriental Institute by Gil Stein and the Marj Rabba directors, the students and their mentor worked with our team for four weeks (figs. 5–6). As it turns out, high school students are good excavators, keen to learn about the people and places of a new land, and willing to adapt to their new circumstances. Near the end of the season, Yorke, the students, and their adviser spent two days in Jerusalem and the Dead Sea visiting sites and shopping before saying goodbye at the airport.

With the exceptional organizational skills of Andrea Dudek, we entered the twenty-first century. Using the models of the Jericho Mafjar and Tell Edfu projects, Andrea set up a Filemaker database in order to augment our on-site recording using iPads in the field. The



Figure 1 (left). Galilee Prehistory Project quadcopter (photo by A. C. Hill)

Figure 2 (right). Aerial view of Marj Rabba excavations from the remote-controlled plane (photo by A. C. Hill)

database was also used to update and modernize the registration procedures, all of which were implemented by Andrea. We now have the archaeology, the technology, the database, and the procedural manual; all we need is a way to keep Andrea in the field!

As part of the follow-up to the pedestrian survey conducted in the 2011 season, this year we carried out a small sounding in an area with a high concentration of artifacts. We wanted to test whether surface artifacts are a good indicator of sub-surface occupation. After digging down more than one meter, we did find architecture, confirming that the site extends to the southern limits identified by our survey. There are a few more loose ends to tie up with regards to the 2011 survey, which we hope to complete during the 2013 season.

Even though we are still hard at work finishing up the 2012 season, we already need to start planning for the 2013 season. We are hoping to once again include students from Rowe-Clark, from various undergraduate and graduate programs, and from our team of specialists in order to uncover the secrets of the Chalcolithic.



Figure 3 (above). Aerial view of Areas AA and BB, Marj Rabba 2012 (photo by A. C. Hill)

Figure 4 (below). Area CC excavations, aerial photograph via quadcopter (photo by A. C. Hill)



Figure 5 (left). Rowe-Clark group with Gil Stein in archaeozoology laboratory (photo by M. M. Kersel)



Figure 6 (right). Rowe-Clark students and mentor after completing pre-field seminars at the Oriental Institute (photo by G. Stein)