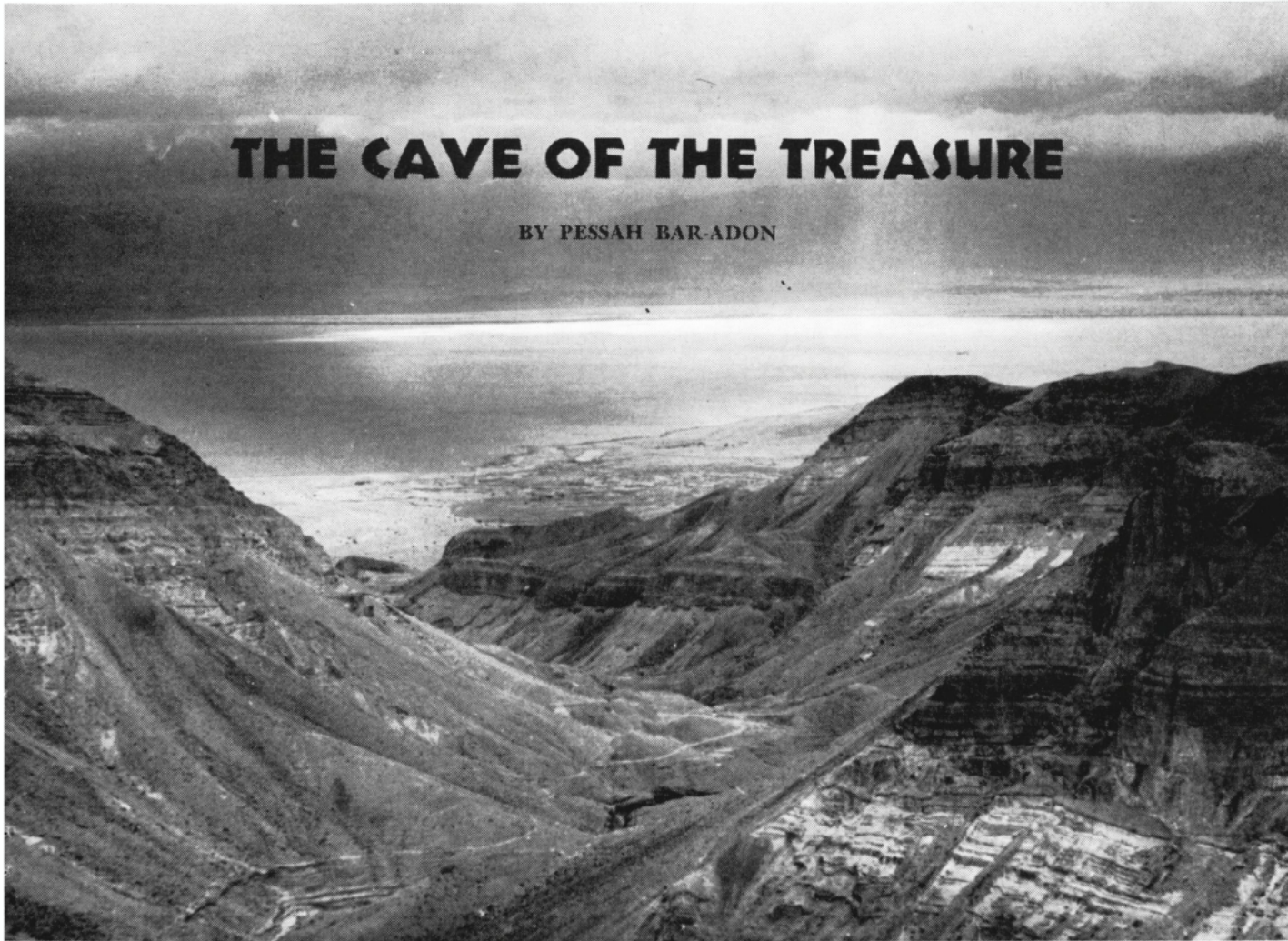


# THE CAVE OF THE TREASURE

BY PESSAH BAR-ADON



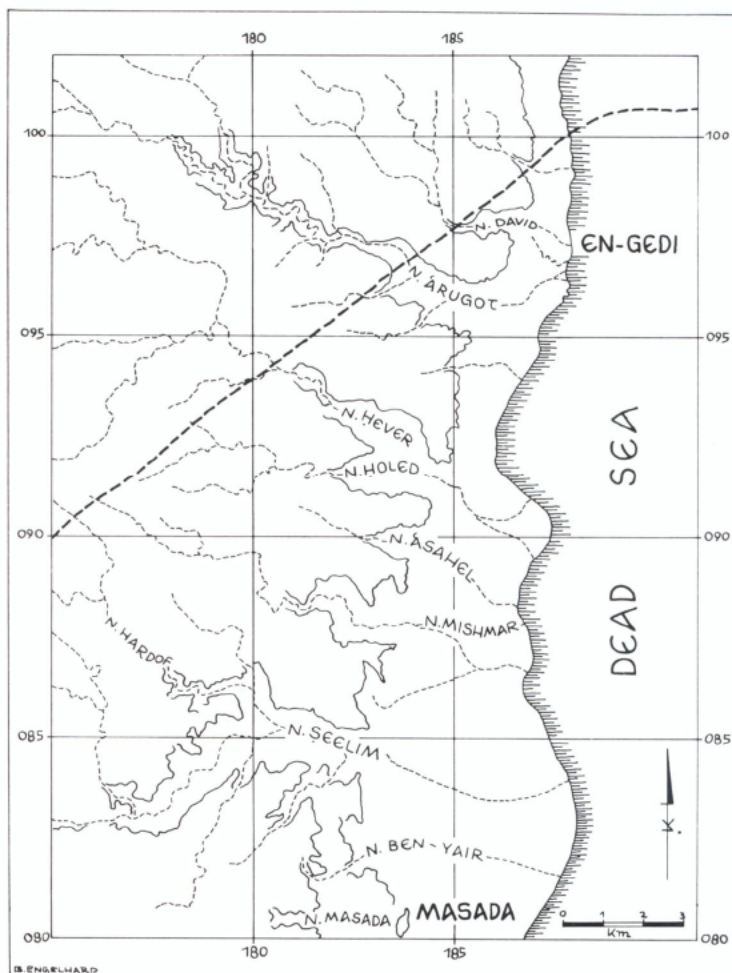
View of Nahal Mishmar, looking toward the Dead Sea. Photo Micha Piletzki.

*The region of the Dead Sea, one of the most arid areas of the world, has in recent years been one of the most fertile from the archaeologist's point of view. There seems no end to the marvelous discoveries that are made in caves hidden in the cliffs, which escaped notice until the accidental discovery of the first Dead Sea scrolls suggested that these almost inaccessible hideouts would be worth investigating.*

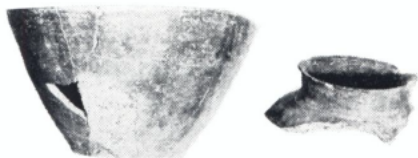
*A full-scale exploration of a great number of caves was staged in 1960 and 1961 by Hebrew University, the Department of Antiquities and the Israel Exploration Society, assisted by the Israeli Defence Forces and numerous volunteers. The amazing results of the investigation of one of these caves is described for us here by the leader of the group which explored it.*

THE EXPEDITION which explored the caves in wadis of the Judaeen desert was divided into four groups, each assigned to a specific area. The leaders of the groups were J. Aviram, coordinator, N. Avigad, Y. Aharoni, Y. Yadin and the author, for the Hebrew University, the Israel Exploration Society and the Department of Antiquities. The sector assigned to my team included the southern bank of Nahal Hever, Nahal Holed, Nahal Asahel and Nahal Mishmar. The first week was spent in surveying dozens of caves along the edge of cliffs which rose to a height of 200 meters (ca. 650 feet), climbing and being lowered into the caves by a single rope. Work in the caves was extremely difficult because of the ever-present clouds of dust. Even the use of masks was ineffective.

Map of the region bordering on the southwest portion of the Dead Sea, showing the various valleys investigated. The Cave of the Treasure is situated in Nahal Mishmar (Nahal=valley).



**TREASURE** continued



Pottery from the Chalcolithic level in the cave. Photo Mrs. H. Salamon.





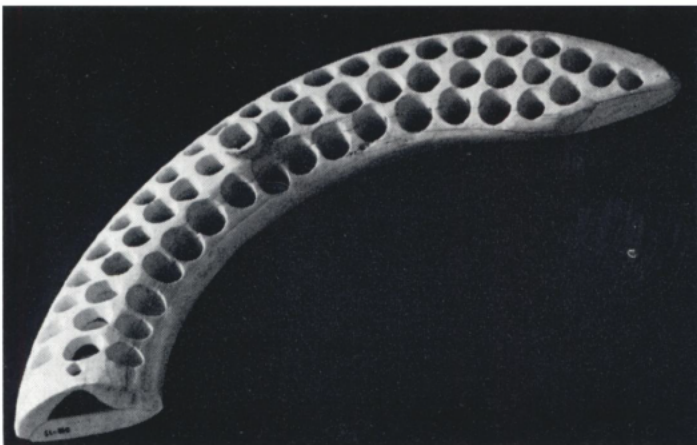
Members of the expedition descending into the Cave of the Treasure. Photo Micha Bar-a'm.



Straw sieve found in the cave, 38 cm. in diameter. The inside was worn from use, while the outside was well preserved. Photo Mrs. H. Bieberkraut.



Clay statuette of sheep from Chalcolithic level in the cave. Photo Mrs. H. Bieberkraut.



Object made from a hippopotamus tusk, from Chalcolithic level. Photo S. J. Schweig.

## TREASURE continued

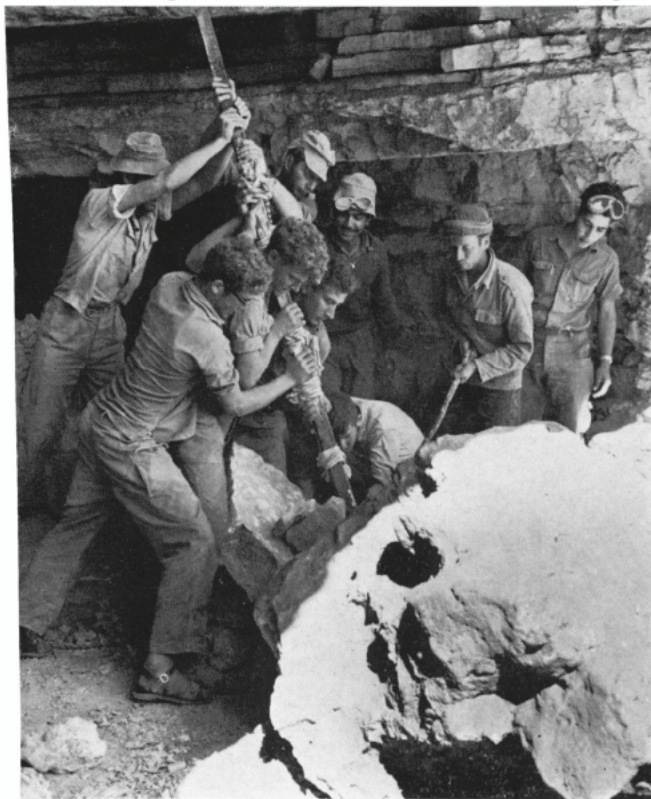
Finally we decided to excavate a cave in Nahal Mishmar which had been inhabited and which we were sure had not been visited by Beduin. Because of the variety of surface finds, dating from the Chalcolithic period as well as Roman times, it was decided to investigate this cave thoroughly.

The approach to the cave was extremely difficult and hazardous; entrance was gained by means of a rope ladder. It seems clear that in ancient times access to this cave as well as to others nearby was somewhat easier than it is today, for traces of a trail are still visible along the cliff. However, it can never have been very easy to enter the cave, and this meant that the inhabitants could not be taken by surprise. In order to overcome them it would have been necessary for an enemy to conduct a siege, cutting off their supplies of food and water. Two springs rise from the side of the cliff more than six hundred feet below the

cave, but even if they yielded water at the time when the caves were occupied they can hardly have been of much use except during peaceful periods. For even in ancient times the descent must have been very difficult, and anyone climbing down the face of the cliff would have been conspicuous. In winter, water may have been obtained from rock pools in the vicinity which would have been filled with rainwater or by flood waters pouring down the Judaean mountains.

The Cave of the Treasure—the name was acquired after excavation—is a natural cave situated near the top of a cliff which rises 984 feet above the level of the Dead Sea. The cave has two main chambers, each about 39 x 46 feet in area and from 5 to 11½ feet in height. There are also some crevices, which have not yet been entirely explored. The ceilings of both chambers were coated with soot, but on one there were large patches of unblackened stone where parts of the ceiling had fallen, presumably after the inhabitants had left the cave. A floor of beaten earth and straw extends over both chambers, and on these uppermost

Left: Moving a fallen rock in the Cave of the Treasure. Right: The treasure *in situ* in the cave. Photos Braun-Harris.





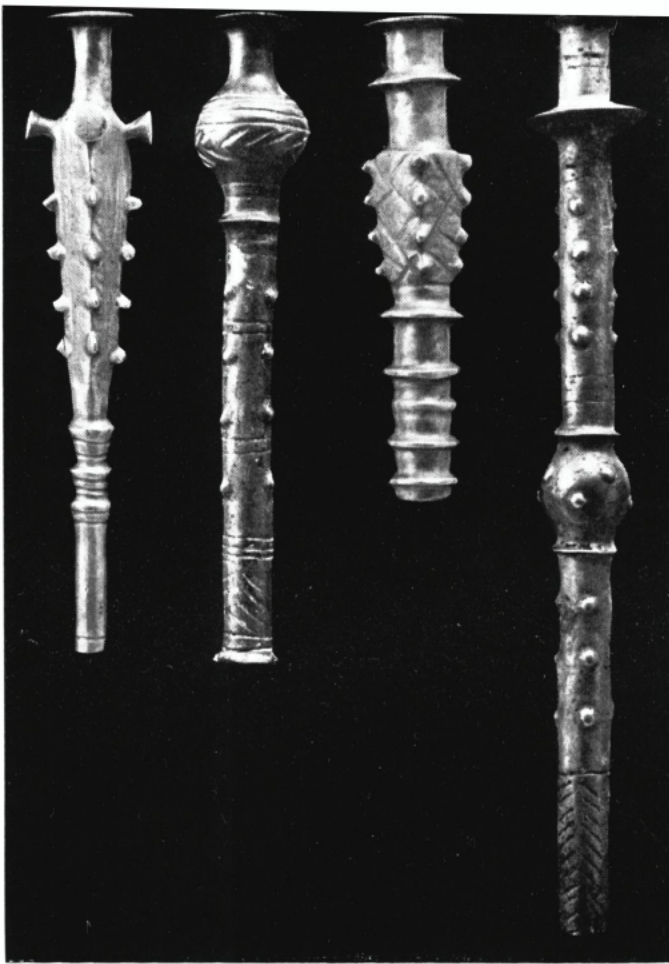
Part of the treasure, laid on tables. Author's photo.



Elaborate wand or standard, decorated with ibex heads. Height 27.5 cm. Two views of the wand, one reflected in a mirror. Photo S. J. Schweig.



The author, with students and soldiers, examining the treasure. Photo Braun-Harris.



Several of the copper wands found in the Cave of the Treasure, showing the variety of shapes and ornamentation. These objects perhaps served some ritual purpose. Photo S. J. Schweig.



Two views of a hollow wand terminating in a human head. Height 13.2 cm. Photo S. J. Schweig.

## TREASURE continued

floors were found fragments of papyri inscribed in Greek and Hebrew, as well as *ostraca* (potsherds) with Hebrew inscriptions.

In the first chamber there were two hearths, one square, the other circular. Both contained ashes, broken cooking pots and blackened remains of food. In the second chamber, on a somewhat lower level also composed of beaten earth, there were traces of other fires. This level probably represents the occupation of Jewish fugitives at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70.

From these layers came many remains of the Roman period—lamps, glassware, leather objects and fabrics. The evidence seems to show that the cave was inhabited by several families who were neither nomads nor hermits but ordinary people who had been forced to leave their homes and seek refuge here. The many valuable possessions they brought with them indicate that they made this move with relative deliberation, but there are signs that the cave was finally abandoned in a hurry, probably as the result of strong pressure from outside.

The floors of beaten earth covered an earlier level of debris dating from the Chalcolithic period (fourth millennium B.C.). There was no occupation in the intervening three thousand years. Chalcolithic remains include fireplaces and household utensils, mainly pottery but also a unique basket-sieve. There were also pieces of straw matting, straw trays, parts of a basket and a woven rope. Among the pots was a small bowl which had been used as a lamp, as is shown by marks of soot on the rim, part of a churn, and various kinds of jars. A clay figure of a sheep was found, and many animal bones were uncovered: sheep, goats, a mole, a rabbit, various birds and many sea shells. A large quantity of grain was discovered, including uncarbonized spikelets of wheat and barley, making it possible to determine the species and even the variety. The wheat was found to be emmer, and this was the first time it had been discovered in an excavation in Palestine. Also for the first time in this region was found einkorn wheat, the most primitive of the cultivated wheat species.

BUT THE GREAT SURPRISE came on the eighth day of our work in the cave, in the 1961 campaign. In the



**Metal "crown" with elaborate ornamentation: two gates, two birds and a pillar-like object above an opening in the side which is barely visible in the mirror view of the object, at the right. Photo S. J. Schweig.**



**Another "crown," with various designs, including a human face. The prominent nose is visible just below the rim on the mirror view at right. Photo S. J. Schweig.**



## TREASURE continued

north wall of the cave a sloping stone was found to be covering a natural niche. Through cracks at its edge could be seen the glint of metal. At once we set about clearing away the loose earth all around the stone until it was entirely exposed. We had to stop work when darkness came but early the next morning we started to uncover the great hoard which the niche contained. At the moment when the treasure was revealed there was an awed silence—and then in an instant the narrow space in the cave was filled with an outburst of rejoicing.

All the objects—of which there proved to be 429—were wrapped in a straw mat. It took us three hours to remove them. Almost all are of metal; six are of haematite, six of ivory and one of stone. While some of the objects can be named and their function is understood, others are of completely unknown types, not previously discovered elsewhere. We therefore devised names for them, according to their resemblance to known objects. There are about 240 metal "mace-heads" of various sizes and shapes, some with incised and relief decoration. Six mace-heads are of haematite—rounded, flattened and egg-shaped—similar to others found elsewhere in the Palestinian area. The one stone mace-head is of rounded form, much like others found in the Near East.

There are about twenty metal chisels and axes of various sizes and shapes, such as have been found on other Chalcolithic sites in Palestine and also in Egypt, Syria, Anatolia and Mesopotamia. About eighty metal "wands," or standards, some hollow and some solid, of varying shapes and ornamentation, were included in the treasure.

Five objects made of hippopotamus tusks, each perforated with many holes, have one fragmentary parallel from Beersheba. There is also a box made of elephant tusk, elongated and slightly concave in form, which is unique so far as we know.

Ten metal "crowns" were found (9 to 19.5 cm. in height), two of which will be described. The first is a hollow cylindrical object with flattened, protruding rims and concave sides in which there is an aperture about five centimeters square (barely visible in the photograph). At the top of either side of this opening is a cylindrical boss, and on the lower rim there is a boss-shaped foot and two perforations where others were to be attached. Above one side of the aperture is a spool-shaped object on a stem, and a broken projection shows that there was one on the other side to correspond with it. On the outside the crown is decorated with an incised design consisting of three horizontal broken lines with herring-bone pattern be-

tween. Fixed on the upper rim are two objects resembling gates, each decorated with small bosses and with a pair of horns protruding from the top. Between these are two rather crude figures of birds.

The second crown is similar in shape and also has incised decoration on the outside. On the upper rim is a projection shaped like a bent nail, and there are traces of six more projections. On the lower rim are seven small projections which may be either feet or simply remains of the casting process. Close to the upper rim is a representation of a human face with a prominent nose and well defined eyes. Above the head are the remains of two welded projections, perhaps horns. Another human face appears on one of the standards. Both these faces are like those on Chalcolithic stone ossuaries found at several sites in Palestine. There is also a striking resemblance between the decoration on the first crown and that painted on ossuaries and on implements of the same period. From the evidence of the ossuaries as well as from that of a fresco found at Teleilat Ghassul (see *Israel Exploration Journal* 12 [1962] 224-225) it seems most likely that the decoration of the first crown represents a temple. The crowns as well as the standards and many other objects in the hoard were doubtless of religious significance.

INTENSIVE WORK is now being done in analyzing the metal of the objects found in the cache and in identifying its source. It has been found that it is copper with a high percentage of arsenic. The cloth, wood, matting and other organic matter are being studied at the Institute of Fibres and Forest Products Research of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in Jerusalem. In addition, Carbon 14 tests are being made. The results of all these studies, as well as those of botanists, zoologists and anthropologists, will be published as soon as possible.

The discovery of this large number of objects of excellent workmanship raises questions, such as the identity of their makers, the purpose for which they were made, the method of using them, and so forth. When these questions have been answered we shall know a great deal more about the Chalcolithic Age and its people. At this early stage of research it seems that the connections of the culture represented in the cave point toward the north. If the objects we have found really are ritual appurtenances from a temple in the region, then we will want to know what made the owners of the treasure hide it in the cave, what happened to prevent them recovering it later, and, more generally, what caused the sudden destruction of many settlements in Palestine at the end of the Chalcolithic period.