

*Underground  
Hiding Complexes  
from the Bar Kokhba War  
in the Judean Shephelah*

BY AMOS KLONER



Storage room in the cave complex at Khirbet Eiton with two rows of shallow niches in the wall. The niches were meant to hold objects.

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## The recent discovery of these man-made caves has added to our understanding of the second Jewish war against the Romans.

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**I**n 1978 David Allon, an inspector for the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums, was in the field investigating incidents of cave-robbing by people searching for antiquities. While talking with villagers from west of the Hebron mountains, bordering the Judean Shephelah, he was told of the existence of subterranean warrens in the area south of Nahal Adorayim.

The department subsequently coordinated an investigation of these warrens by members of several kibbutzim in the region, members of field schools of the Society for the Protection of Nature, the staff of the Joe Allon Center for the Study of the Judean Foothills, and others. This study has discovered more than 150 cave complexes at 70 sites in an area bounded by Nahal Ayalon on the north, the Hebron mountains on the east, the Yotvata Region on the south, and the coastal plain on the west. Most of these are found beneath villages and towns located on the sites of ancient settlements.

The term *cave complex* describes a row of cavities hewn in the chalk rock, below the Nari level (the layer of about 1.5 meters of hard limestone covering the chalk), connected to each other by low and narrow passages. These tunnel-like

passages are called *meḥilot* in Hebrew (see Isaiah 2:19) and will be referred to here as *burrows*. The burrows are the characteristic that identifies the complex as a place of refuge. Passage through them requires one to crawl (on hands and knees) and sometimes even to creep (with stomach to the ground). Only in exceptional cases can one move through them by merely bending down.

The openings into chambers are always small and low, and require one to kneel down in order to enter. The rooms, halls, burrows, and even most storerooms could be sealed from the inside. Thus, the complexes were designed so that their occupants could defend themselves from within, against an enemy attempting to enter; they were intended as places of refuge and hiding, and they have been dated to the time of the destruction of the Second Temple and later.

It should be noted here that not every series of cavities in the Judean Shephelah can be considered places of refuge (and many of them date from different periods). In the area of Hellenistic Marisa, for instance, there are dozens of subterranean warrens dating from the third and second centuries B.C.E. and consisting of rooms, halls, water installations, "columbaria," industrial



**Left:** A burrow entering a square room in the cave complex at Khirbet Eiton. The opposite side of the room was closed off by the round rolling-stone seen in the bottom of the photograph.

**Above:** An entrance to a room in the cave complex at Khirbet Naqiq. The room was originally closed off with a square blocking stone.

installations, and so on. Their openings are high, allowing one to enter in an upright position. Their passages are also high and comfortable and cannot be locked; they lack camouflage, secret hideaways, and other defensive devices. The entrance stairways that characterize these caves, which were used for economic and religious functions or water reservoirs, do not appear in hiding complexes.

### Characteristic Components of the Hiding Complexes

In addition to their underground location, several characteristic components identify the warrens that were used as hiding places. These include burrows, special kinds of entrances, closing and blocking methods, shafts, defense installations, ventilation arrangements, water installations,

storage rooms and granaries, and lamp niches.

**Burrows.** The key identifying characteristic of the hiding complexes of the Judean Shephelah is the burrow which connects its various parts and which defines the subterranean warren as a place of hiding or refuge.

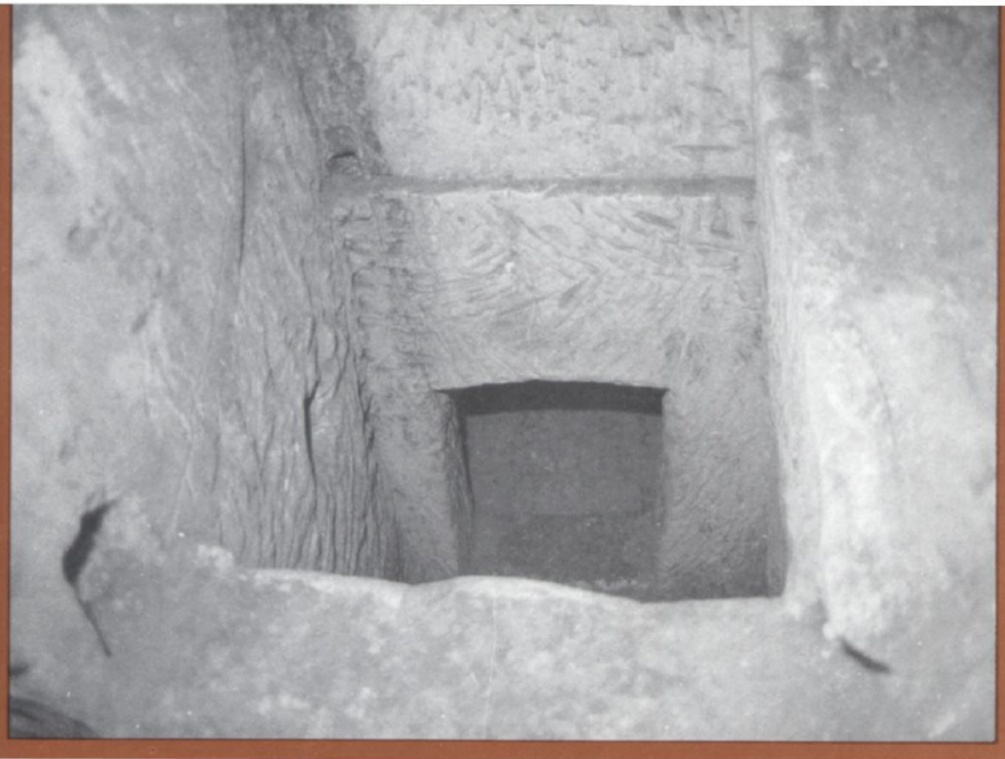
As noted above, the burrow is always hewn as a low and narrow passage that requires one to crawl and sometimes even to creep; the height between the rock flooring and the ceiling is only 0.40 meter. In one case, the height of the burrow is 0.25 meter, making even creeping very difficult. Perhaps this burrow was left low in order to save time and labor in quarrying, as well as to make the passage through it difficult. In a few cases, the height of the passage is between 0.70 and 0.80 meter, but traversing the average burrow is a slow and rela-

tively difficult process. As noted above, the entrances are also narrow and low.

The burrows connected the entrance and the various rooms that were hewn in advance and then incorporated into the hiding complex. Some passages served for ventilation, others for access to storage rooms or a water reservoir, and others as escape burrows.

The burrows were designed and hewn to serve a dual purpose. First, they could be blocked and completely sealed off, or subdivided into sections that could be closed off from the complex as a whole. Second, their dimensions and special installations made penetration and attack by an enemy difficult.

**Entrances.** The entrances to the complexes were concealed and could be blocked and defended from the inside. The entrances were situated in a variety of locations: in irregularly shaped caves which provided camouflage, storerooms, olive presses, "columbaria," water reservoirs, and tombs, as well as below the floors of private and public buildings. These openings are usually small, about 0.50 to 0.60 meter wide and 0.60 to 0.70 meter high. The original openings were not found in all the complexes; however, after the overall plan is



*A vertical shaft in the cave complex at Khirbet Naqiq. The shaft was originally hidden with a horizontal slab of stone. In the bottom of the shaft there is an entrance to a lower level room.*

known, their locations can be surmised. The entrances were camouflaged and in many cases purposely installed in a concealed corner, hidden in the floor or walls of a large cistern, above a step or artificial capital. In some of the complexes, ropes or rope ladders were probably used. Entrances were also located in vertical shafts, and can be identified from inside a complex that was entered through a later breach. These partially cut shafts are not covered by dirt on the surface. Shafts like these could be blocked by closing stones placed on both their upper and lower openings. Additional blocked entrances were apparently used during the hewing of the complex and were closed up with the termination of the work.

**Closing and blocking methods.** The narrow entrances to the burrows were closed by stones. Some sealing stones were found in the burrows; in other sites, their existence is indicated by bolts and beams used for locking them in place. The sealing stones are rectangular, similar in form to those closing tombs and crypts. In some cases, stone supports were placed behind the sealing stones.

In some cases, sections of the burrows were closed off by small heaps of stones and dirt.

Sections of the burrows near the rooms to which they led were closed by round rolling-stones similar to those sealing tombs.

Vertical shafts were installed in burrows and could be closed or blocked.

## **Entrances were sometimes hidden in corners, cisterns, or above artificial capitals.**

**Shafts.** In quite a number of cases, parts of the burrow varied in level between 2 and 4 meters, and sometimes between 6 and 8 meters or more. This occurred when the complex incorporated earlier halls, rooms, columbaria, water cisterns, and so on into the warren. These differing levels were joined by vertical shafts, with depressions hewn in the walls to facilitate climbing.

The shafts created obstacles for those traversing the burrow or entering the complex through them. Someone descending or ascending a shaft may well be surprised by a person waiting at the other end, and this while his hands are occupied with climbing and thus unavailable for using weapons. The shaft could also be blocked by a stone placed at its upper end, and its lower end, and in some cases in its center, where a landing was installed for this purpose.

**Other defense installations.** The burrows generally changed direction, forming various sharp turns at either right or obtuse angles. These turns add to the difficulty in traversing the burrow, surprising the attacker unacquainted with them and forcing him to expose his unprotected side.

As the attacker is forced to crawl or creep, he is denied free use of his weapons and defensive armor. In addition he must carry some means of lighting, such as a torch or lamp, further limiting the free use of his hands. The inability to move freely in the burrow itself, together with the need to climb shafts and navigate angles increases the ability of those hiding to defend themselves.

In most cases, the entrances to the complexes open into a burrow. Therefore only one soldier at a time can enter the complex, and he exposes himself to hand-to-hand fighting in the burrows and shafts. The one attempting to penetrate the complex is at a disadvantage; the superior fighting power of a trained army unit is lost under these circumstances.

**Ventilation arrangements.** In the large subterranean complexes in the Judean Shephelah that were not meant as hiding places, such as those from the third and second centuries B.C.E. in the area of Marisa, the openings were large and wide, providing a free flow of air. Consequently there was no need for

ventilation. The use of subterranean complexes for hiding, however, raises significant questions in regard to ventilation and air supply for those occupying them. Closure of the hiding places, or their blocking during a siege, could have been critical for those inside.

In some places, burrows were found whose function was essentially for air supply. These burrows had two openings which permitted the circulation of air. An outlet for air could sometimes be a very narrow crack in the rock; however when a ventilation shaft was needed, its dimensions would have to be the width and height of the stone-cutter installing it. While the ventilation shaft was narrow and concealed, it was nonetheless a weak point in the system of hiding and defense.

In other cases, the ventilation burrow became an alternative entrance for those hiding in the complex and included various essential elements necessary for defense. In this regard, it had been suggested that some of the ventilation arrangements were installed during the use of the complex and not during its construction. In other words, during an emergency those hiding found that they needed a supplementary air supply. In such cases, an individual solution to the problem of ventilation was found in each complex.

**Water installations.** These are found in all the warrens. A place used for refuge requires the storage of water in one fashion or another.

Some water installations were located in rooms or cisterns quarried especially for this purpose. The water supply came from channels in which surface run-off water was collected, or which were filled with water originating from other reservoirs. Sometimes they are actual cisterns, and sometimes containers of different shapes. These installations are integrated in the complexes, clearly indicating they were

designed and constructed during the hewing of the complex as a whole.

In some cases ancient water cisterns dating either to the Hellenistic or Early Roman period were incorporated into the hiding complexes. Some of them were blocked from the inside in order to conceal them from external view. On the other hand, there are some ancient water cisterns within the area of the warrens that were not exploited as reservoirs.

The cisterns, whether hewn at the time the complex was planned, or of an earlier period, had a storage capacity of up to several hundreds of cubic meters. They are usually found in the large complexes

and grains. The construction of the floors of some rooms clearly indicate their use for holding oil jars. Oil was of utmost importance to those hiding in the burrows. It was consumed as food, and also was an energy source to light lamps.

In the example from the Hazzan site, dozens of depressions are arranged in rows, with channels connecting them; the floor of the room with the jar depressions slants in the direction of one corner in which a depressed collection basin is found. If one of the jars broke, its contents would flow to this basin, and the liquid would not be wasted. The large number of rooms at Hazzan and the many depressions in

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## The inability to move freely in the burrow increases the ability of those hiding to defend themselves.

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intended to accommodate many people.

Small water-storage installations are found along the burrows, and hewn in the base of special depressions in the walls or floors of the rooms. These are bell-shaped cavities with an open top, and with a capacity of a few hundred liters. These small storage units, found in almost all the hiding complexes, were apparently for the immediate use of those in hiding. In addition, small depressions are found along the burrows and in the corners of the rooms, designed to hold pottery water jars for immediate use. Although no jars were found in situ, the depressions, and of course the discovery of many jar sherds, provide evidence of their existence.

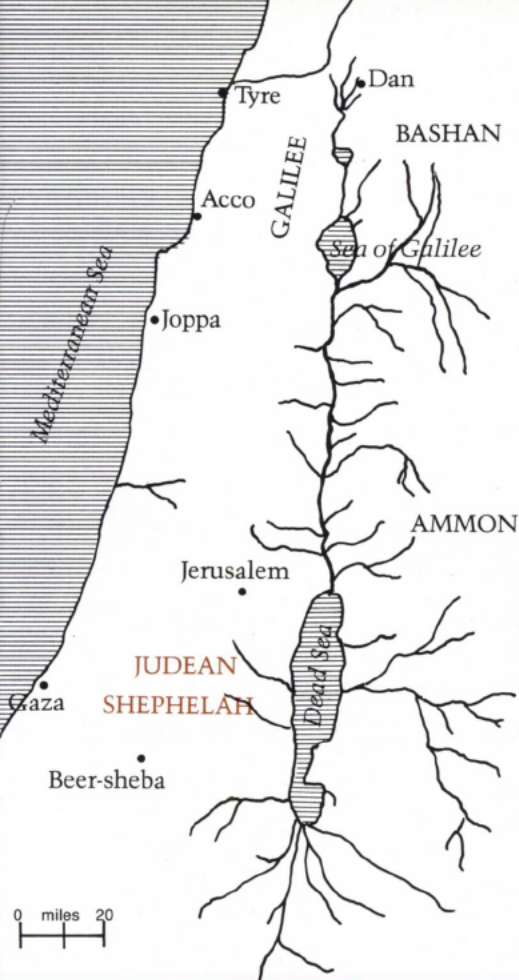
**Storage rooms and granaries.** To date, floors with depressions for holding jars have been found at five sites; in other complexes, heaps of jar sherds have been found. Jars were used for storing liquids such as oil and perhaps wine, as well as cereals

their floors indicate a public use of the site.

Cereals, legumes, and other solid foods were stored in jars too, to protect them against mold, rodents, insects, and so forth. While no jars were in the rooms with the depressions, these match the bases of jars found in other rooms.

At some sites, evidence was found of large food containers installed in the walls of the complex. In addition, other installations have been found that may have been used for food storage. However, the matter requires clarification and research, for no means of protection from mold is evident.

The complexes also contained storage rooms that could be closed and camouflaged. Some were hidden under floors. These rooms contain special niches for storing objects and they lack ventilation. Because the complexes were organized to provide a community with shelter for weeks or perhaps even months, they incorporated both large storage



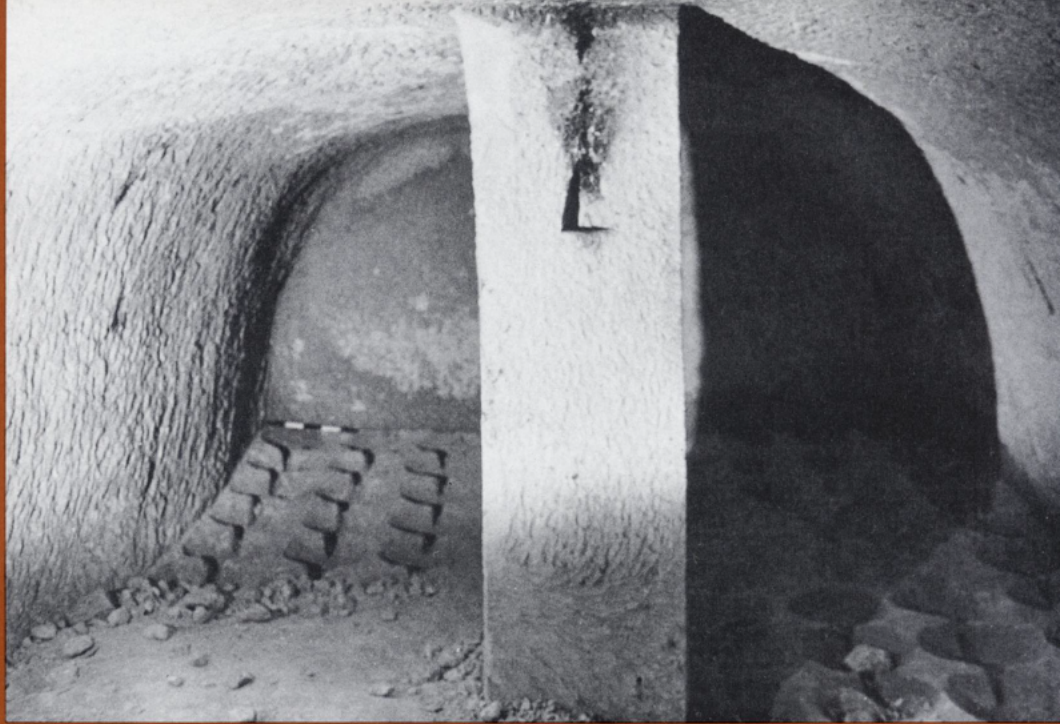
Map showing the location of the Judean Shephelah.

places for public use, and food storage installations for limited use by a small group or family.

All the jar and storage rooms had small openings that were blocked by square stones and, in most cases, camouflage devices. The burrows and passages leading to these rooms necessitated crawling, and one must realize that transporting a jar with a capacity of 15 to 20 liters required a great effort. If the only problem was hermetic closure, to produce wine for example, or to preserve other foods, small well-sealed openings at the end of a high corridor or passage would have been sufficient. But, as noted, these were places of hiding and refuge.

**Lamp niches.** Niches for oil lamps were found in many places. According to their location, two types of niches can be differentiated.

Niches in the burrows were usually installed on the left side of



Storage room in the cave complex of Hazzan. Notice the depressions on the left that are arranged in rows slanting to a corner. A lamp niche is cut into the central square pillar.

the stone-cutter as he progressed in his quarrying. The stone-cutter, holding the chisel in his left hand and the hammer in his right, would have cut the niches on his left side. If the lamp were on the right side of the narrow burrow, the striking movements of the stone-cutter would have blocked the light. The niches appear every 1 to 2 meters. The chisel marks tend forward and downward in direction and are easily recognized.

This system became apparent after the survey of only a few complexes, and remained applicable with the continuation of our research. Thus the direction in which the burrows were quarried can be determined according to the location of the niches cut for the oil lamps used during the stone-cutting. While oil lamps could have been placed in the burrows when they were used as a refuge, not as many would have been required as during the quarrying operation.

Lamp niches in the rooms, halls, and storerooms are found at various levels in the upper half of the walls. These niches are more carefully hewn than those in the burrows. Sometimes the niche is triangular and has a smooth frame

emphasizing its position. The wall niches indicate the use of the rooms for refuge, storage, and so forth, where continuous lighting was required.

### Types of Complexes

There are two main types of hidden cave complexes: small clusters probably intended for family use, and large public complexes. Both types were either quarried intentionally for the purpose, or made use of existing cavities from earlier periods that were then connected by a system of narrow subterranean burrows.

The small warrens consist of an entrance, burrow, and usually small rooms. They are generally of limited dimensions and simple in execution. Such complexes were discovered beneath the remains of living quarters in settlements; in at least two sites, nine or ten separate complexes were identified. Each family or group of families prepared its own shelter, according to a method of quarrying that was known to the public at large. This assumption is strengthened by the shelter's proximity or connection to living quarters. A small warren could be used by one or several families and

hold twenty to forty people. Usually, such a complex had its own small water source and stored a small amount of food.

A large warren is more complicated in its plan; it has elaborate entrances and relatively sophisticated means of sealing them, long branching burrows that can be blocked by various means, and large rooms—some of which are, in fact, halls that can hold scores of people and whose ceilings are high enough to permit standing upright. The quarrying of the large warrens was undertaken with relative precision, and care is apparent in the details of the entrances, steps, ceilings, lamp niches, and so on.

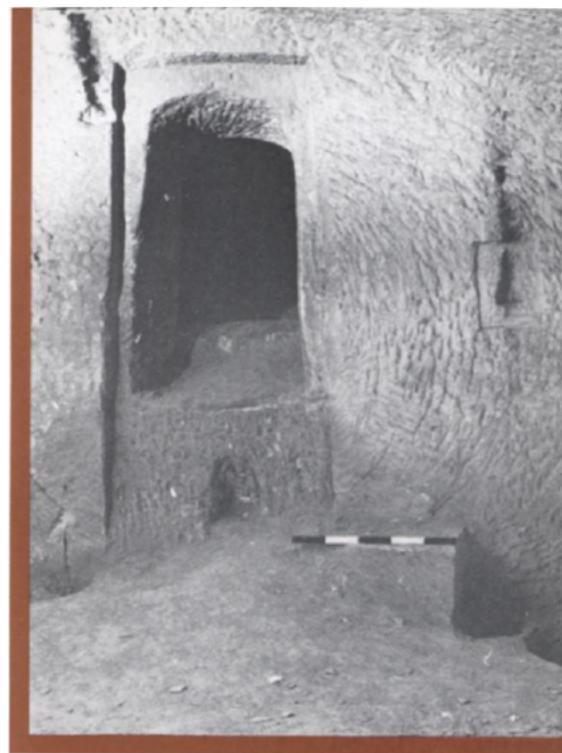
During our investigations, we came upon subterranean warrens in which the installations for water collection and food storage were so prominent that they can be considered to have served primarily for this purpose.

### Quarrying the Cave Complexes

The various parts of the warrens were hewn in different ways. More than one man could work at the same time in the small rooms and in the large caves. The burrow, however, could accommodate only one rock-cutter. He had to lie on his stomach or on his back while quarrying the different sections of the burrow, and the beginning of the rooms, until he excavated a height enabling him to kneel or stand. Each rock-cutter had a group of assistants who cleared the rock debris which he left behind. In some cases, the material was extracted through shafts that were later blocked with stones; the system of shafts, therefore, was part of the construction process.

There are rooms from which burrows were hewn in two opposite directions, enabling greater efficiency. In one complex where burrows connected earlier caves, it was discovered that quarrying might have originated at eight different

**Right:** Entrance to a storage room in the cave complex at Hazzan. Notice the lamp niches on both sides of the opening which is just 0.70 meter high. **Far Right:** An entrance to a room in the cave complex at Hazzan. The room is encircled by benches.



points at once: two entrances from a bell-shaped cistern, three entrances from a columbarium cave, and three entrances from shafts that were later blocked. It was calculated that if the rate of quarrying at each point was 0.5 meter per day, 4 meters per day would have been hewn. The total length of the burrows in the complex in question, is approximately 100 meters. Accordingly, they could have been completed within a month. The quarrying of rooms from which large amounts of chalk had to be extracted was calculated in the same way, and it is estimated that it took one month to excavate the entire complex.

Similar calculations were carried out at other complexes, for example Khirbet Eiton, that did not incorporate earlier caves. At one site, to which there is but one original surface entrance, it was calculated that quarrying the main burrow, at a similar pace, would have taken ten weeks, while rooms could have been prepared simultaneously by additional teams who also smoothed the surfaces of the burrow and carried out other tasks. In this complex, the material was extracted through the burrow itself and, as the amount of debris was great, the work probably took twice as long. The estimate is that three

months were required to complete the complex.

The chalk of the Judean foothills is easily quarried. Based on the calculations outlined above, it would seem that it took only months to prepare the complexes, and not years, as it might appear at first glance.

### Dating the Complexes

As investigation of the complexes proceeded, it became clear that the burrows postdate the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. They penetrate and nullify the original use of olive presses, columbaria, and water cisterns from the third to the first centuries B.C.E. This clear chronology cannot be established in all the hiding complexes, but in those where burrows were integrated into existing caves, it cannot be doubted, and because the complexes are one chronological unit, this conclusion applies to all.

In all the complexes, both in the burrows and especially in the rooms, halls, and storerooms, there were signs of excavation and sieving. According to reports by villagers of the Hebron mountains, the caves were robbed during the British Mandate, the period of Jordanian rule, and no less actively after the Six Day War in 1967. The villagers



would spend several days in the complexes sieving the soil and, according to the reports, many coins were found in this way—sometimes as many as “two to each sieve.” Signs of this arduous work were found in hundreds of rooms and in sections of many burrows. According to the villagers, they found “coins with palm trees”: a description fitting coins of Bar Kokhba as well as of the first Jewish war against Rome. There is reason to believe that many of the Bar Kokhba coins which reached the antiquities market over the last decades originated in these complexes and adjacent surface sites.

To date, Bar Kokhba coins have been found by archaeologists in four hiding systems.

Pottery sherds from a variety of vessels were found in the cave complexes, with jar fragments constituting 80 percent of the sherds. In addition, utensils of pottery, glass, and stone were found. Mention must be made of the finds, in some burrows, of pottery sherds from the Byzantine period and the Middle Ages (particularly from the Mameluk period), a Byzantine coin, and other items. The preliminary reports of the discovery of the hiding complexes noted pottery from the first and second centuries C.E. From a more recent study of

these vessels it appears that the jars are of the type found at sites dating to the destruction of the Second Temple, such as those from dwellings in the upper city in the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem, from Masada, and from the refuge-caves in the Judean desert. Essentially, they are jars 50 to 60 centimeters high; the radius of their opening is 7 to 8 centimeters; their neck height is 3.5 to 4 centimeters, and they have two handles on their shoulders; their body and shoulders are slightly ribbed. The body outline of all the jars is similar, but their rims are shaped in various ways; five different types of jar rims were found in the same room in one hiding complex.

These jars testify to use during the time of the destruction of the Second Temple and later, particularly during the period between the two Jewish wars against the Romans.

#### **Hiding Complexes in the Hebron Mountains**

When considering the complexes in the Judean Shephelah, one must take note of the phenomenon of complexes in the Hebron mountains, where clusters of refuge-caves have been found at a number of sites.

At Herodion, subterranean tun-

nels were discovered, hundreds of meters long, 2 to 3 meters high, and 1.0 to 1.5 meters wide. Compared to the burrows of the Judean foothills, they allow relatively easy upright walking. Some of them were hewn in the local rock, and some were dug in the fill of the artificial hill and supported by wooden beams. The complex has branches, and its construction technique differs, as apparently does its function, from the complexes in the foothills. Herodion is Herodis, according to the Bar Kokhba letters; it served as military headquarters and a center for his forces.

At Khirbet Jedûr, southwest of Gush Etzion, a hiding complex was examined in 1979, whose finds clearly indicate Bar Kokhba use. The complex was hewn in the local rock and consists of burrows with closing devices. Among the finds are oil lamps dating to the period between the two Jewish wars against the Romans.

Near El ʿArrûb a cave from the Second Temple and Bar Kokhba periods was partially excavated in 1973. It was constructed in the same way as the hiding complexes, with a burrow connecting chambers. An investigation carried out in 1968 brought to light coins of Alexander Jannaeus, Agrippa I, and the Consul Felix, eight coins from Years Two

and Three of the first war, and three coins from Years Two and Three of the Bar Kokhba War. In 1973 a coin of the prefect Gratus (15–16 C.E.) was found.

According to the excavator at El <sup>c</sup>Arrûb, other finds indicate some activity during the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., but these are the minority; most of the finds are from the period between the two wars. The discovery of coins from the first war near Bar Kokhba coins allows us to use the Bar Kokhba coins as the determining chronological factor, as it is known that coins from the first war also continued in use during the time of Bar Kokhba. Almost all the pottery from one of the halls was similar to pottery found in other complexes in the foothills: storage jars of the type common at sites dating to the end of the Second Temple period and the time of the Bar Kokhba War.

#### Subterranean Complexes Predating the Bar Kokhba War

From coins from Khirbet Midras, the finds from the complex near El <sup>c</sup>Arrûb, the evidence of the stages in the preparation of the complexes as places of refuge, and from the analysis of some written sources (see below), hiding and storage complexes can be assumed to have been readied for use prior to the Bar Kokhba period. The Judean Shephelah underwent intensive quarrying prior to the second century C.E. Josephus relates in his *The Jewish War* (Book IV, 509–13) how storage rooms were hewn on the eve of Jerusalem's destruction by the followers of Shimeon bar Giora:

Having now collected a strong force, he first overran the villages in the hills, and then through continual additions to his numbers was emboldened to descend into the lowlands. And now when he was becoming a terror to the towns, many men of standing were seduced by his strength and career of unbroken success into joining him; and his was no longer an army of mere serfs or

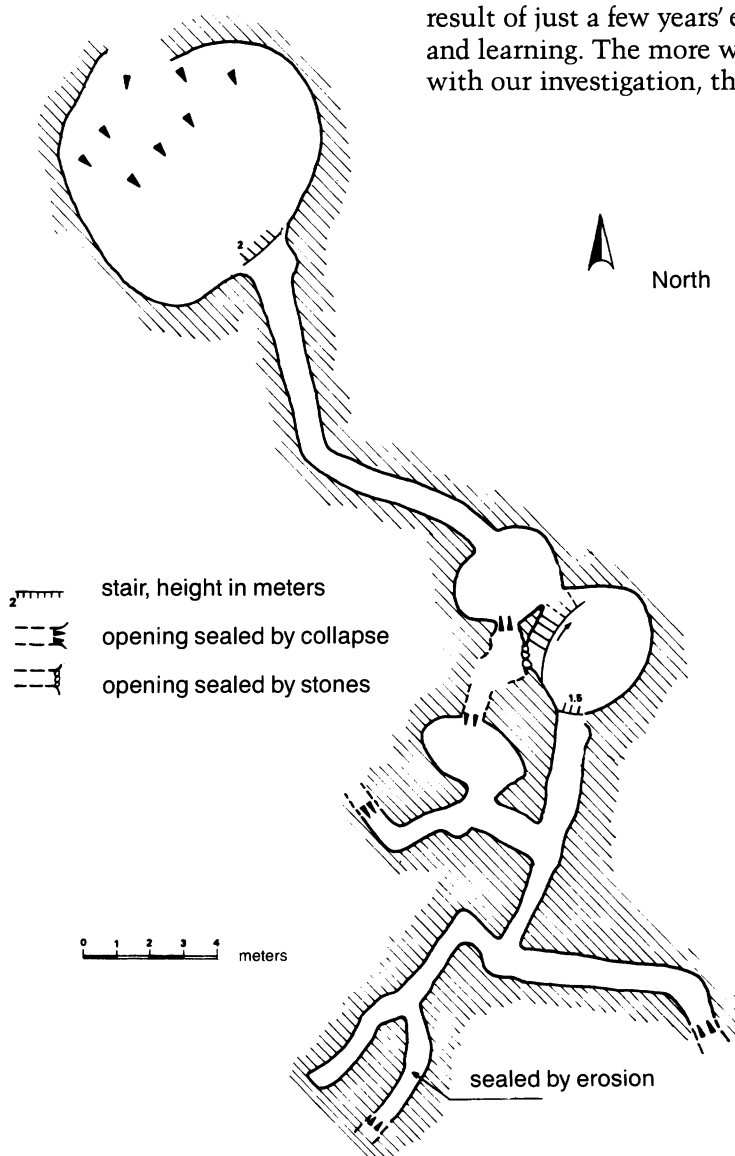
brigands, but one including numerous citizen recruits, subservient to his command as to a king. He now overran not only the province of Acrabetene but the whole district extending to greater Idumaea. For at a village called Nain he had thrown up a wall and used the place as a fortress to secure his position; while he turned to account numerous caves in the valley known as Pheretae, widening some and finding others adapted to his purpose, as store chambers and repositories for plunder. Here, too, he laid up his

spoils of corn, and here most of his troops were quartered. His object was evident: he was training his force and making all those preparations for an attack on Jerusalem.

(Thackeray 1961)

Josephus was possibly referring to a particular site in our area, and for the purpose of historical illustration, we can point to the storerooms and hiding complex of the Hazzan site, in which there were two main periods of use.

It should not be presumed that the techniques and improvements in the hiding complexes were a result of just a few years' experience and learning. The more we proceed with our investigation, the more we



*Khirbet Midras cave complex number 6.*

are convinced that a long tradition of knowledge and experience was invested in the subterranean warrens. Nor was the cave-complex a foreign importation. The warrens appear to have been of local design and execution, and their integration within and around settlements points to their extensive use during the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

### Written Evidence

The following sources relating to the Bar Kokhba War became tangibly and verifiably clear with the discovery of the hiding complexes.

Dio Cassius says, in his *Roman History* (LXIX, 12–14):

At Jerusalem he founded a city in place of the one which had been razed to the ground, naming it Aelia Capitolina, and on the site of the temple of the god he raised a new temple to Jupiter. This brought on a war of no slight importance nor of brief duration, for the Jews deemed it intolerable that foreign races should be settled in their city and foreign religious rites planted there. So long, indeed, as Hadrian was close by in Egypt and again in Syria, they remained quiet, save in so far as they purposely made of poor quality such weapons as they were called upon to furnish, in order that the Romans might reject them and they themselves might thus have the use of them, but when he went farther away, they openly revolted. To be sure, they did not dare try conclusions [join battle] with the Romans in the open field, but they occupied the advantageous positions in the country and strengthened them with mines and walls, in order that they might have places of refuge whenever they should be hard pressed, and might meet together unobserved under ground; and they pierced these subterranean passages from above at intervals to let in air and light.

At first the Romans took no account of them. Soon, however, all Judaea had been stirred up, and the Jews everywhere were showing signs of disturbance, were gathering together, and giving evidence of great hostility to the Romans, partly by secret and partly by overt acts; many

outside nations, too, were joining them through eagerness for gain, and the whole earth, one might almost say, was being stirred up over the matter. Then, indeed, Hadrian sent against them his best generals. First of these was Julius Severus, who was dispatched from Britain, where he was governor, against the Jews. Severus did not venture to attack his opponents in the open at any one point, in view of their numbers and their desperation, but by intercepting small groups, thanks to the number of his soldiers and his under-officers, and by depriving them of food and shutting them up, he was able, rather slowly, to be sure, but with comparatively little danger, to crush, exhaust and exterminate them. Very few of them in fact survived. Fifty of their most important outposts and nine hundred and eighty-five of their most famous villages were razed to the ground. Five hundred and eighty thousand men were slain in the various raids and battles, and the number of those that perished by famine, disease and fire was past

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**“Woe to me!  
I have eaten  
the flesh of  
my father!”**

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finding out. Thus nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate, a result of which the people had had forewarning before the war. For the tomb of Solomon, which the Jews regard as an object of veneration, fell to pieces of itself and collapsed, and many wolves and hyenas rushed howling into their cities. Many Romans, moreover, perished in this war. Therefore Hadrian in writing to the senate did not employ the opening phrase commonly affected by the emperors, “If you and your children are in health, it is well, I and the legions are in health.”

(Cary 1925)

In the Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations (I.16, section 45) this is said:

Hadrian the accursed set up three garrisons, one in Emmaus, a second in Kefar Lekatia, and the third in Bethel of Judea. He said “Whoever attempts to escape from one of them will be captured in another and vice versa.” . . . He immediately surrounded them with his legions and slaughtered them, so that their blood streamed [to the coast and stained the sea] as far as Cyprus. Then the Holy Spirit cried out, For these things I weep.

Those Jews who were hidden [in the caves] devoured the flesh of their slain brethren. Every day one of them ventured forth and brought the corpses to them which they ate. One day they said, “Let one of us go, and if he finds anything let him bring it and we shall have to eat.” Ongoing out he found the slain body of his father which he took and buried and marked the spot. He returned and reported that he had found nothing. They said, “Let somebody else go, and if he find anything let him bring it and we shall have to eat.” When he went out he followed the scent; and on making a search, he discovered the body [of the man who had been buried]. He brought it to them and they ate it. After they had eaten it, they asked him, “From where did you bring this corpse?” He replied, “From a certain corner.” They then asked, “What distinguishing mark was over it?” He told them what it was, and the son exclaimed, “Woe to me! I have eaten the flesh of my father!” This is to fulfill what was said, *Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers* (Ezekiel 5:10).

(Cohen 1939)

The Babylonian Talmud, commenting on Shabbath (6:2) in the Mishnah, says:

A nail-studded sandal: What is the reason—Said Samuel: It was at the end of the period of persecution, and they [some fugitives] were hiding in a cave. They proclaimed, “He who would enter, let him enter, but he who would go out, let him not go out.” Now, the sandal of one of them became reversed, so that they thought that one of them had gone out and been seen by the enemies, who would now fall upon them. Thereupon they pressed against each



**Left:** General view of the Judean Shephelah with Khirbet Kishon in the foreground.

**Below:** Area east of Beth Gubrin in the Judean Shephelah.

other, and they killed of each other more than their enemies slew of them. . . . In that hour it was enacted: A man must not go out with a nail-studded sandal.

(Freedman 1938)

Hieronymus (Jerome), commenting on Isaiah 2:15 ("And upon every high tower, and upon every fenced wall"), notes that those who apply this verse to the time of Vespasian and Hadrian say that the prophecy was fulfilled literally, for neither a high tower, nor the most fortified wall, nor the most diligent trading could withstand the force of the Roman army. The inhabitants of Judea reached such a state of desperation that together with their wives and children, and their gold and money, they remained in crevices in the ground and hid in the deepest of caves.

### Conclusions

The following conclusions emerge from the study of the cave complexes.

The warrens are a unique phenomenon showing great similarity in plan, technical details, and methods of construction.

The defense installations, water supply, storage, ventilation, and lighting all indicate advance planning.



The plan of the complexes and the safety precautions taken to prevent their discovery and invasion raised the possibility of the existence of some directives and guidelines, even if there was no overall planning authority. This may reflect the military outlook of the leaders of the revolt.

A long tradition and experience was invested in hiding warrens, and they started to be used during the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. The complexes in their last appearance were all installed around the same time.

It took only a few months to quarry the complexes; however, not every warren was necessarily finished quickly—or indeed at all. Incomplete rooms and "dead end" burrows were found.

The complexes were excavated

to be used for refuge over a period of weeks or perhaps months. They were not permanent dwellings but temporary hiding places.

From the words of Dio Cassius, we receive a picture in which the installation of subterranean complexes is part of preparation for the revolt. Attempts to discredit the words of Dio Cassius can now be refuted. The complexes, in most cases, were planned in advance. In some cases, one can hypothesize excavation during the war itself. Perhaps the incomplete rooms and burrows (mentioned above) are examples of this.

The location and dispersal of the hiding complexes illustrate the strategic planning of the leadership. The complexes are evidence of the intensive preparation of an entire area, and not only of isolated places.

These warrens in which food, provisions, weapons, and people could be concealed constitute the sub-structure and base for the outbreak of the revolt.

At the same time or slightly later, the "advantageous positions in the country" were fortified.

The entire area of the Judean Shephelah came under the control of Bar Kokhba. The dispersal of sites with hiding complexes—in villages, and not necessarily only along the main routes—indicates the existence of a rather extensive population which participated in the war. This corresponds with the historical sources.

At this stage of the investigation, there is insufficient data to provide a definite cutoff date for the use of the warrens. According to information at present being studied, many of them were still in use during 134/5 C.E.

The bronze coins of Bar Kokhba found in four sites of the Judean Shephelah are from the undated series attributed to the third year of the war. These coins demonstrate that Bar Kokhba forces were still ruling the region during the last year of the war (135/6 C.E.) and the military collapse occurred there only in the latest phase of the war.

As a result of the Bar Kokhba War it seems that the northern part of the Judean Shephelah was practically emptied of Jews, as was the case in most of the hills around Jerusalem and the Hebron mountains. The central and southern parts of the region, in which the majority of the hiding complexes were located, remained inhabited by Jews after the Bar Kokhba war.

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The photographs used here were taken by Avi Navon, Shahr Segal, and Amos Kloner,

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