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Into the Te'omim Cave

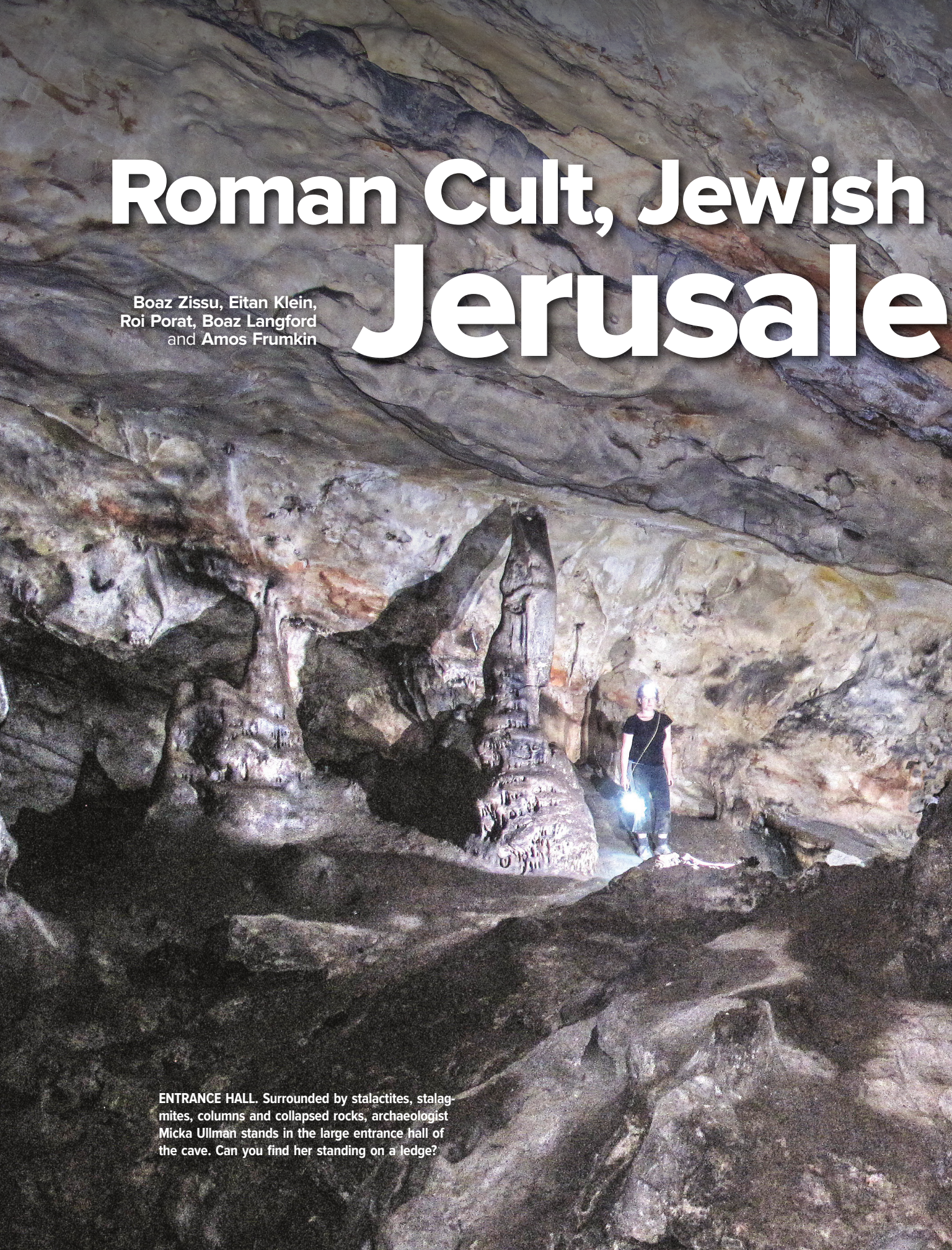
Phoenicia's Special Relationship with Israel

Excavating Naboth's Vineyard

Lachish Latrine Exposed

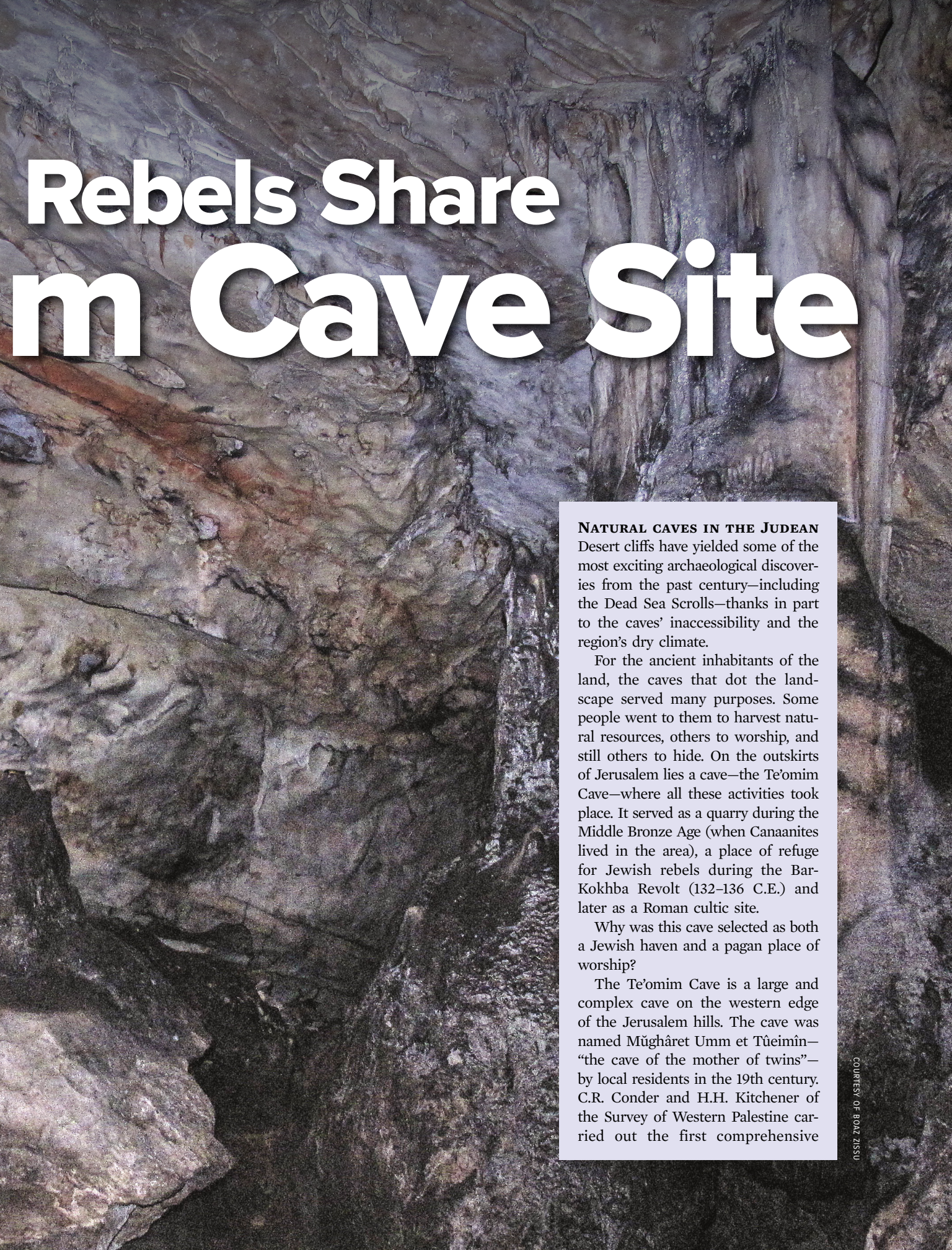
Roman Cult, Jewish Jerusale

Boaz Zissu, Eitan Klein, Roi Porat, Boaz Langford and Amos Frumkin



ENTRANCE HALL. Surrounded by stalactites, stalagmites, columns and collapsed rocks, archaeologist Micka Ullman stands in the large entrance hall of the cave. Can you find her standing on a ledge?

Rebels Share m Cave Site



Natural caves in the Judean Desert cliffs have yielded some of the most exciting archaeological discoveries from the past century—including the Dead Sea Scrolls—thanks in part to the caves' inaccessibility and the region's dry climate.

For the ancient inhabitants of the land, the caves that dot the landscape served many purposes. Some people went to them to harvest natural resources, others to worship, and still others to hide. On the outskirts of Jerusalem lies a cave—the Te'omim Cave—where all these activities took place. It served as a quarry during the Middle Bronze Age (when Canaanites lived in the area), a place of refuge for Jewish rebels during the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (132–136 C.E.) and later as a Roman cultic site.

Why was this cave selected as both a Jewish haven and a pagan place of worship?

The Te'omim Cave is a large and complex cave on the western edge of the Jerusalem hills. The cave was named Mŭghâret Umm et Tûeimîn—"the cave of the mother of twins"—by local residents in the 19th century. C.R. Conder and H.H. Kitchener of the Survey of Western Palestine carried out the first comprehensive

COURTESY OF BOAZ ZISSU

study of the Te'omim Cave on October 17, 1873. They mapped out the cave and noted a deep pit (about 40 ft in diameter) at its northern end. Their description of the cave provides information about traditions and customs of the locals, who attributed healing properties to the spring water that flowed in the cave.

In the late 1920s, René Neuville, the French consul in Jerusalem, excavated the bottom of the cave's main hall and found ceramic, wooden and stone vessels. The finds were dated to the Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Early Bronze, Middle Bronze, Iron, Roman and Byzantine periods.

From 1970 to 1974, Gideon Mann (a physician and cave explorer) studied the cave on behalf of the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel. Mann mapped a section of the cave, found passages leading to inner, hidden chambers and discovered various items, including ceramic and glass vessels.

Since 2009, the cave has been explored by our team as a joint project of the Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University and the Cave Research Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.[1]

The cave entrance—a natural opening that was widened by hewing—is located about 13 feet above the channel of the wadi. From the entrance one descends northward into a spacious hall (about 165 by 230 ft), most of which is covered by a huge pile of rocks. Several passages and fissures in this rubble lead to underground crevices and cavities, rich in archaeological finds.

A square pool (with sides 6.5 ft long) hewn in the chamber collects water that drips from the ceiling. The water then flows westward through a rock-cut canal. Today the water is absorbed by the ground, but in the past it collected in a manmade, lower pool. Additional channels were hewn in various spots in the entrance hall to collect the dripping water in pools or storage vessels.

The recent explorations undertaken at the Te'omim Cave have uncovered finds from numerous periods—from the Neolithic period to the present time. The three principal periods are the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2000–1550 B.C.E.), the end of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (c. 132–136 C.E.) and the Late Roman–Early Byzantine period (late second–fourth centuries C.E.).

During the Middle Bronze Age, an extensive quarry for the extraction of calcite-alabaster operated in the cave.[2] This is the first time a quarry of calcite-alabaster, which was used for ornamental and prestigious artifacts, has been identified in the southern Levant. Previously calcite-alabaster artifacts from this region had been attributed to Egyptian sources.

Caves in the Judean Desert were used for refuge purposes during the Bar-Kokhba Revolt. But the Te'omim Cave, a natural cave situated in the *settled* part of Judea just outside Jerusalem, was also used for this purpose. Three hoards of coins, weapons and pottery vessels were hidden in the difficult-to-access inner chambers (Halls F and G, see plan on p. 33) by Jewish insurgents who found refuge in the Te'omim Cave at the end of the revolt.

AN INCONSPICUOUS OPENING. Located in the hills on the western edge of Jerusalem, the Te'omim Cave functioned as a quarry, a refuge and a place of devotion at different times in antiquity. Its small entrance—about 13 feet above the wadi's floor—belies the cave's vast, complex interior. Author Boaz Zissu's son, Yothan (left), and father, Sergiu (right), stand outside the cave's entrance.

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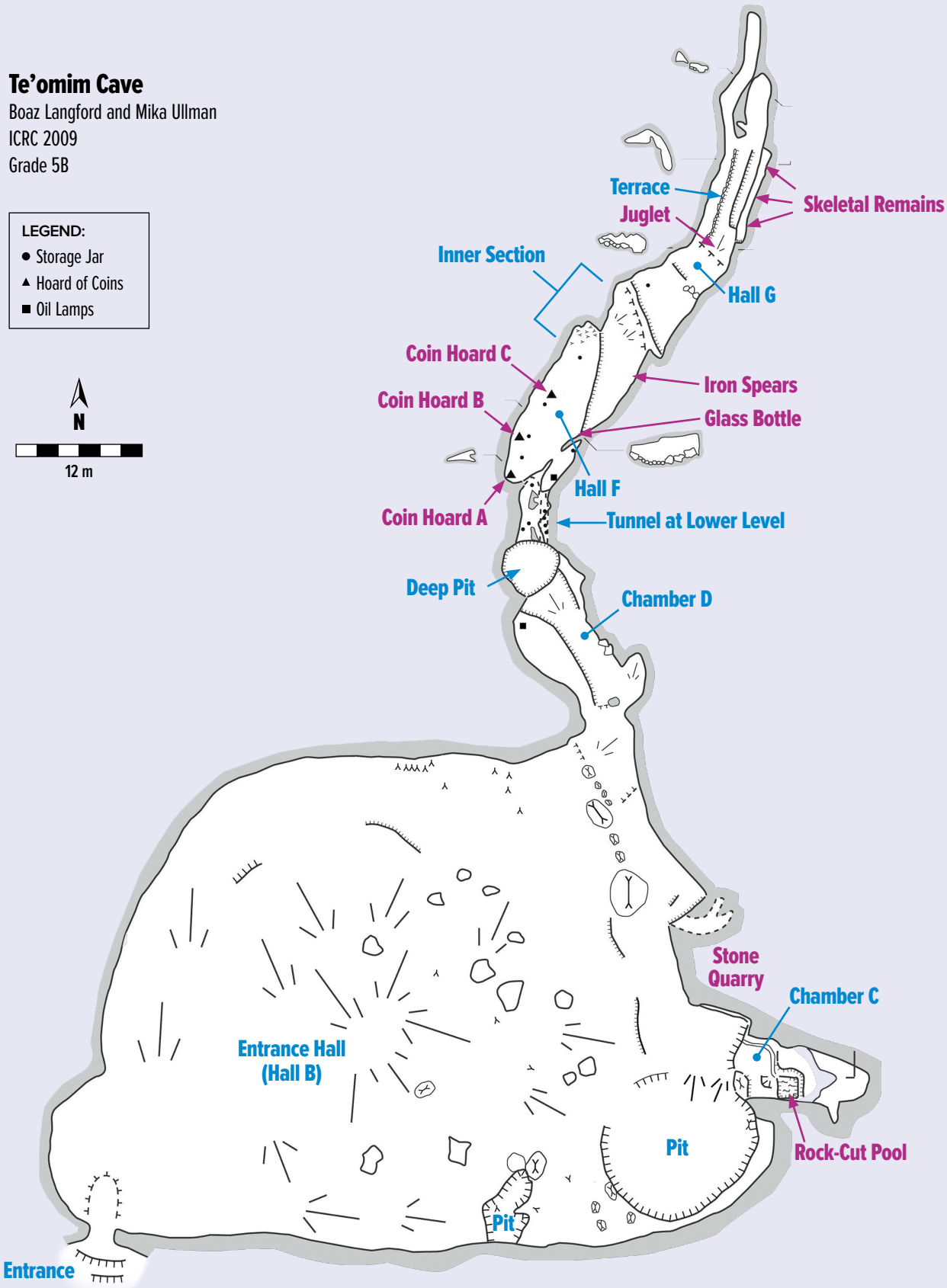
Te'omim Cave

Boaz Langford and Mika Ullman
ICRC 2009
Grade 5B



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SCARY SPELUNKING. Archaeologists Boaz Langford and Roi Porat explore the difficult-to-access sections of the Te'omim Cave (see above) and carefully record their discoveries (see, Boaz Langford, above right).

The first coin hoard (Hoard A) comprised 83 silver coins (20 *tetradrachms* and 63 *denarii*) that had been restruck by the Bar-Kokhba administration and a fragment of silver jewelry. This is the only hoard of silver Bar-Kokhba coins discovered thus far in a licensed archaeological exploration (versus illegal excavations), and the coins show little signs of wear. Nearby a bronze coin of the city of Ashkelon from the days of Hadrian was discovered.

In a crack between fallen ceiling rocks, another group of ten coins (Hoard B) was discovered, along with a bronze needle. Hoard B included nine silver coins and a bronze *prutah* (six Roman and four Judean coins dated from the Second Temple period to the Bar-Kokhba Revolt). This hoard is especially significant because it is the first time Bar-Kokhba coins have been discovered alongside earlier Judean ones, suggesting a continuity.

Between two pieces of rock, another group of 24 coins (Hoard C) was found, along with what was probably an iron needle and fragments of a storage jar. Hoard C comprised five Roman gold coins, 15 silver coins (13 Roman imperial and provincial coins and two Bar-Kokhba *denarii*) and four Roman bronze coins from the city of Ashkelon.

Since a gold *aureus* was worth 25 silver *denarii*, Hoard C (24 coins) exceeded Hoard A (83 coins) in value. Hoard C was worth 155 silver *denarii*, whereas Hoard A was worth only 143.[3]

We should keep in mind that rather than mint new coins, the rebels' administration overstruck Roman ones, a blatant declaration of sovereignty—as clearly shown by all the coins found in Hoard A. Presumably, the owners of this hoard supported the revolt since they submitted to the Bar-Kokhba minting authorities all the coins in their possession to be overstruck. In contrast, the owners of the two other hoards were more cautious; they decided to have only a few of their coins overstruck since such insurgent coins were valid tender only in areas controlled by the rebels. This may indicate that some residents preferred to keep the Roman coins that could always be used for obtaining provisions in areas beyond the rebels' control. Apparently such hoards were concealed against the eventuality of the revolt's failure.

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All of the Roman coins predate 132 C.E. The latest rebels' coins date to 134/5 C.E. Therefore, it seems that the hoards were hidden toward the end of the war, which ended in 136.

Two iron weapons—a typical Roman *pilum* (a heavy javelin) and a rare spear manufactured by the rebels—were also found in Hall F. Both weapons were kept out of sight but in a place where they could be grabbed quickly. As evidenced by the weapons, fighters fled to the cave, perhaps bringing along additional refugees from a nearby Jewish village.

Aside from the sporadic finds from the Bar-Kokhba Revolt, Hall F was empty. It seems that this hall served as the last hidden, very-hard-to-reach place of refuge—at a time of extreme distress—for a group of people who were very familiar with the secrets of the cave.

Crumbling human bones were discovered in Hall G. They had been placed in a natural crack and along an access path leading to the crack. The discovery of human bones and the hoards of coins suggests that the fugitives met their death in the cave.

The next time people came to the Te'omim Cave, it was for a very different purpose. Beginning in the late second century C.E., the cave—especially its deep pit and inner spring—functioned as a place of

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CAVE POOL. Hewn in the floor of Chamber C, next to the cave's main hall, a square pool collects water that naturally accumulates in the cave. A channel then brings the water from the pool into the rest of the cave. Here Yinon Shivtiel takes a drink of the pool's clear waters.

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BAR-KOKHBA COINS. Three hoards of coins were uncovered from the Te'omim Cave. Inside a crack in the rock of Hall F was a hoard (Hoard A) of 83 silver coins (20 *tetradrachms* and 63 *denarii*) from the Bar-Kokhba Revolt (see above and, after cleaning, left). All these Roman coins had been restruck by the Bar-Kokhba administration, which implies that the owners of the hoard supported the Bar-Kokhba bid for Jewish sovereignty.

devotion, perhaps dedicated to a chthonic (underworld) deity or other pagan ritual—no longer Jewish.

An extensive assemblage of oil lamps and coins from the Late Roman period, as well as finds and pottery from the Byzantine, Islamic and Ottoman periods, was discovered in the main hall and its ramifications—although not in the inner hard-to-access chambers (Halls F and G). Curiously, about 100 well-preserved oil lamps dating to the Late Roman and Early Byzantine period (late second to fourth centuries C.E.) were collected from the cave's cavities and crevices.

The lamps had been deliberately deposited in

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LOTS OF LAMPS. More than 100 oil lamps had been placed in crevices and pits within the Te'omim Cave. Dated to the second–fourth centuries C.E., the lamps likely had been left as offerings when the cave served as a pagan place of devotion.

narrow, deep crevices—most of which were accessible only by difficult crawling. We had to use long poles with iron hooks to extricate many of them, and long poles had probably been used to insert them in the crevices initially. But why?

The fact that these lamps had been thrust into and buried deep in these hidden, hard-to-reach crevices suggests that illuminating the dark cave was not their sole purpose. In our opinion, the cave functioned as a place of devotion. The oil lamps were probably votive offerings presented by visitors and were therefore concealed *in lieu* of disposal.

In the Greek and Roman milieu, deep, dark caverns often served as cultic sites for Demeter, Persephone, Hermes, Dionysus, Apollo and sometimes nymphs and muses. Porphyry of Tyre (third century C.E.), a philosopher who defended pagan worship, says that those faithful to Olympian gods built temples above ground, whereas those who worshiped chthonic deities and underworld heroes did so in pits or in subterranean sanctuaries or caves.[4] Shafts, pits, water sources, wells and caverns were viewed as possible entrances to the netherworld. Philostratus, in his *Life of Apollonius* (early third century C.E.), writes that the deities of the netherworld preferred rituals conducted in deep pits and in underground cavities.[5] Caves and deep pits that were cultic sites were often associated with Demeter, the Greek goddess of agriculture and the harvest, and her daughter Persephone, the goddess of spring. Greek mythology recounts that Persephone was abducted by Hades, god of the underworld, and made his wife. She spends part of the year (winter) in the underworld with her husband and the rest of the year above ground with her mother.

The cult of Demeter and Persephone existed during the Late Roman period. Sculptural, numismatic, epigraphic and architectural representations of the

TAL ROGOVSKY/COURTESY OF BOAZ ZISSU

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BRONZE AGE BLADES. Three bronze weapons—two spearheads and an axe—along with a juglet and three oil lamps were found in a narrow crevice near the deep shaft of the cave's main chamber. In the bottom photo, see archaeologist Amir Goldman at the moment of discovery of one of the spearheads. Although the oil lamps date to Late Roman–Early Byzantine period (second–fourth centuries C.E.), the weapons and juglet are much earlier. Measuring about 5 by 3 inches, the "eye axe" (far left) likely was made in the Intermediate Bronze Age (c. 2200–2000 B.C.E.). The two spearheads measure 9.2 inches and 7.8 inches long and also probably date to the Intermediate Bronze Age. The juglet dates to the Early Bronze Age.

deities have been discovered at Akko, Beth Shean, Samaria, Nablus, Caesarea, Lod and Ashkelon. Two major pagan festivals were celebrated in honor of Demeter and Persephone: the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria. During them, episodes from the Rape of Persephone were told.

Popular in the Hellenistic and Roman eras, the festival of the Eleusinian Mysteries took place at the end of the summer in the precinct sacred to Demeter in Eleusis (about 12 mi west of Athens). Participants were promised fertile soil, prosperity in this world and blessings in the afterlife. The details of the ceremonies are uncertain because participants were sworn to secrecy and threatened with death for any disclosures. Nevertheless, later sources shed light on the general outline of the Mysteries.[6]

The second festival, the Thesmophoria, was celebrated outside of cities on the first three days of autumn, before the sowing season. Only women could participate.[7] The festival memorialized the abduction of Persephone to the netherworld. According to the myth, Eubouleus's swine were present at the site of the abduction and fell into the shaft leading to the netherworld along with Persephone. To commemorate the event, pigs thereafter were thrown into pits during the Thesmophoria as offerings to the goddesses. Later in the festival, women were lowered into the pits and collected the pigs' remains. When they emerged, they laid the remains on altars and mixed them with grain in order to promote the earth's fertility. Figurines of snakes, the guardians of the netherworld, were also cast into the pit along with phallic objects, which were used as talismans to promote women's fertility. During this festival, the women carried lamps and torches.[8]

Although we may not be able fully to reconstruct the rites conducted in the Te'omim Cave, we assume they included motifs similar to those of the festivals described above. If the worshiped deities in the Te'omim Cave were indeed Demeter and Persephone, it could be that the lamps were placed in hard-to-reach crevices as offerings and to assist Demeter in her search for Persephone.

Excavations of other cultic sites dedicated to the goddesses have uncovered lamps throughout, including some that had been placed in cultic niches as offerings. For example, in the sacred *temenos* of

Demeter and Persephone at Cnidus, in Asia Minor, two crudely constructed cells about 5 feet deep were discovered that contained hundreds of lamps from the Late Roman period. Although most of the lamps were buried in the floor of the cells, some were discovered inside deep crevices in the walls.

Deposits of oil lamps in pits located within active or abandoned sacred precincts—often in or near wells and other water sources—are known from sites of other gods, goddesses and mythical characters in the Greek and Roman world, including Israel.

Some support for a possible identification of our cave as a site for the cult of Demeter and Persephone is its name: Umm et Tûeimîn ("mother of twins"). The legend associated with the cave tells of a barren woman who drank water dripping from the cave ceiling and subsequently bore twins. The association of the cave with female fertility may be a distant echo of fertility rites that took place there during the Late Roman period.

Another possibility suggested by the Arabic name of the cave recalls a shrine to the Dioscuri ("sons of Zeus"), the mythical twins Castor and Pollux. The Dioscuri were the sons of Leda, Queen of Sparta, and brothers of Helen of Troy. Castor was Leda's son by her husband Tyndareus; Pollux's father was Zeus. Nevertheless, they were born as twins. Because of their different parentage, Castor was mortal and Pollux immortal.

The twins are often depicted on horseback, each wearing an egg-shaped cap with a star above. They were regarded as divine saviors, especially as the patrons of sailors, soldiers and travelers.

Because one of the stories about the Dioscuri includes a descent to and return from the netherworld, the twins were regarded as chthonic heroes, and their cult was associated with the natural cycle of life and death. Evidence of the cult of the Dioscuri has been discovered in a number of locations in Israel. For example, in the Temple of Persephone in Samaria (third century C.E.), stone slabs have been found with reliefs of the Dioscuri's caps, surmounted by stars with eight rays. This demonstrates that at Samaria the cult of the Dioscuri was practiced alongside that of Demeter and Persephone. If the Dioscuri were worshiped in the Te'omim Cave, we believe that—as in the Temple of Persephone in Samaria—the rituals associated with them were ancillary to the main cult, probably of Demeter and Persephone.

We have suggested two possible identifications for the cultic activity. But we should keep in mind that since no inscription, iconographic material, or clear evidence was found, the nature of the pagan activity cannot be clearly identified.

According to the last coin from this cave, the end of the cultic activity would be the reign of Arcadius (383–395 C.E.). The pagan cultic activity apparently continued during the fourth century, unaffected by Christian rule. It seems that the pagan cult was suppressed only following the Theodosian Code (391–392 C.E.) that banned all expressions of pagan "superstition."

The Te'omim Cave thus provides a window into the ethnic and cultural changes in rural Judea after the Bar-Kokhba Revolt—when the Jews abandoned the region, and the area was occupied by pagan settlers of various origins.

[1] The research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (ISF-Grant No. 104/13). The survey was carried out by the authors (IAA permits S-133/2009; S-161/2010, S-287/2011, S-364/2012; G-43/2014; S-364/2016). See Boaz Zissu, Roi Porat, Boaz Langford and Amos Frumkin, "Archaeological Remains of the Bar Kokhba Revolt in the Te'omim Cave (Mŭghâret Umm et Tûeimîn), Western Jerusalem Hills," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62 (2011), pp. 262–283; Boaz Zissu, Eitan Klein, Uri Davidovich, Roi Porat, Boaz Langford and Amos Frumkin, "Votive Offerings from the Late Roman Period in the Te'omim Cave, Western Jerusalem Hills," in Oren Tal and Zeev Weiss, eds., *Expressions of Cult in the Southern Levant in the Greco-Roman Period: Manifestations in Text and Material Culture* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2017), pp. 111–130. The survey was carried out by the authors on behalf of the Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology at Bar-Ilan University and the Cave Research Center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, with assistance from the Jeselsohn Epigraphic Center of Jewish History at Bar-Ilan University and the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA).

[2] See Amos Frumkin, Miryam Bar-Matthews, Uri Davidovich, Boaz Langford, Roi Porat, Micka Ullman and Boaz Zissu, "*In-situ* Dating of Ancient Quarries and the Source of Flowstone ('Calcite-Alabaster') Artifacts in the Southern Levant," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 41 (2014), pp. 749–758.

[3] There are many different types of hoards; two common categorizations are the "savings" hoard and the "emergency" hoard. A "savings" hoard is created by gradually accumulating coins over a period of time. The coins in such a hoard tend to be of high denomination, in good condition and covering a wide range of dates. Such a hoard is concealed for safety, and if the owner dies suddenly, the hoard is left buried for future generations to discover. An "emergency" hoard typically represents the coins the owner was able to gather and hide when under threat of robbery or looting, and it thus reflects the proportions of current coin types. Occurrences of such hoards can frequently be related to periods of disruption and upheaval, like the Bar-Kokhba War, that prevented the owners from returning to recover their possessions. The long life-span of Hoard B and Hoard C may indicate that they were initially "savings" hoards, but due to the vexed times, they were taken away to the cave and hidden, and therefore they turned into "emergency" hoards.

[4] Porphyry, *L'Antre des Nymphes* VI.

[5] Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* VI.11.18.

[6] Some of its details are alluded to in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, probably composed in the seventh century B.C.E.

[7] Most of the information we have about the Thesmophoria, which was still celebrated in the second half of the second century C.E., comes from a scholion on *Dialogues of the Courtesans* by Lucian of Samosata (Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans* II.1).

[8] Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 280, 655.