THE CHALCOLITHIC TEMPLE IN EIN GEDI:

Fifty Years after Its Discovery

The Chalcolithic temple of Ein Gedi with the Dead Sea and the Hills of Moab in background. Photograph courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

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More than fifty years have passed since the excavation of the Chalcolithic-Ghassulian temple near the spring of Ein Gedi – the famous oasis at the eastern end of the Judean Desert near the shore of the Dead Sea. After half a century we can – and in fact should – review the conclusions reached at the time of discovery.

The site of the temple was first observed in 1956 by Yohanan Aharoni, who examined the structures in the vicinity of the Ein Gedi spring as part of a regional survey (Aharoni 1958). It was clear that an ancient structure stood there, but with the absence of pottery on the surface Aharoni could not date it. A year later, Joseph Naveh, at that time a graduate student of archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, continued the survey. He conducted a small trial excavation in the structure and, based on the uncovered pottery, dated it to the Chalcolithic period (Naveh 1957; 1958). Naveh suggested that it had been a public building, perhaps a temple.

In 1961, the excavation of Tel Goren, the ancient mound of Ein Gedi, was initiated by Benjamin Mazar, together with Trude Dothan and Immanuel Dunayevsky on behalf of the Hebrew University. I joined the Tel Goren excavation project as a graduate student. Ever since the first excavation day, I attempted to persuade Professor Mazar to investigate the Chalcolithic structure, since I had a particular interest in the period, concurrently with the excavation at Tel Goren. About two months later, the second season of excavations in the caves of the Judean Desert took place. In a cave in Nahal Mishmar, located a short distance to the south of Ein Gedi, Pesach Bar Adon discovered the famous Chalcolithic hoard (Bar-Adon 1980). This fantastic find emphasized the potential importance of a public Chalcolithic building in Ein Gedi, and hence the structure was completely exposed during Tel Goren's second excavation season in 1962.

The Ein Gedi excavation project concentrated its efforts on Tel Goren, and the excavation of the Chalcolithic temple located high in the cliffs near the Ein Gedi spring was thus a separate, parallel endeavor carried out in addition to the main excavation. The work here soon indicated that we were uncovering a sanctuary of an exceptional type. Professor Mazar entrusted me with the supervision of this excavation, and afterwards entrusted me with the publication of its results (Ussishkin 1980; reprinted in Ussishkin 2007). I am deeply indebted to the late Professor Mazar, who enabled me, while still a graduate student, to dig and publish a unique gem in the archaeological mosaic of the Land of Israel.

The Ein Gedi of 1962 did not resemble the Ein Gedi of today, over fifty years later. At that time, prior to the Six Day War, most of the Judean Desert was part of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and in practice it was dominated by Bedouin tribes. The border between Israel and Jordan extended a short distance to

the north of Ein Gedi. The sole route leading to Ein Gedi was a dirt road extending from Sodom to Masada and then Ein Gedi, and hence the oasis was a remote and isolated place located in the extreme edge of the State of Israel. The number of visitors to Ein Gedi was very small. The settlement consisted of a small kibbutz and a modest youth hostel where our expedition stayed.

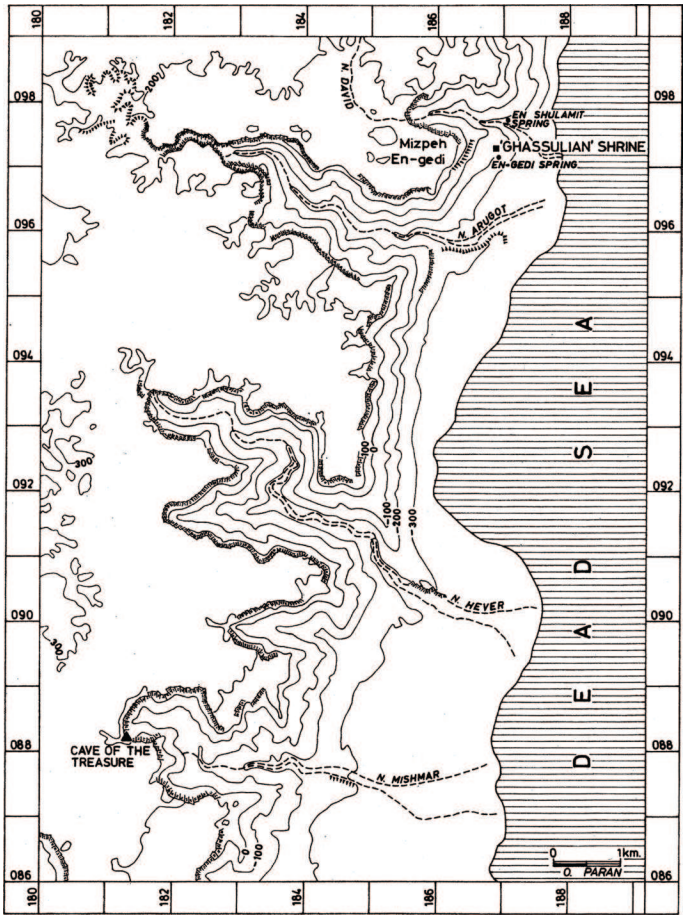


Figure 1. The region of Ein Gedi, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

The Ein Gedi Temple

The Ein Gedi spring is situated at mid-height on the face of a nearly vertical cliff, which runs parallel to the western side of the Dead Sea and marks the edge of the Judean Desert plateau (figs. 1–2). A wide rock terrace projects a short distance above the spring, and near the desert pass ascending from the valley below to the top of the cliff and the desert plateau (fig. 3) which offers a breathtaking view of the Dead Sea. The temple was built at this place – an isolated public structure, without any signs of contemporary settlement or activity remains in its immediate vicinity.

The sacred complex contained four structures connected to one another by a stone fence, which enclosed a central courtyard (figs. 4–6). The lower part of all the structures was built of stone, and the walls were founded on the natural surface. The upper part of the walls was mudbrick. The roof was constructed of reeds, branches, and palm fronds, probably secured on wooden beams laid on the walls across the structures.

Of particular interest is a tiny fragment of plaster, 2.7 cm long, decorated with wavy pink and dark-blue bands against a white background. This find suggests that parts of the walls of the structures and the installations – perhaps even the entire sacred complex – were plastered. The plaster decoration was similar to that on the painted walls at Teleilat el-Ghassul.

The first structure was the main gatehouse, opposite the Ein Gedi spring (fig. 7). It contained one room with two entrances – an outer one and an inner one. The outer entrance faced the top edge of the slope ascending from the spring to the rock terrace. A

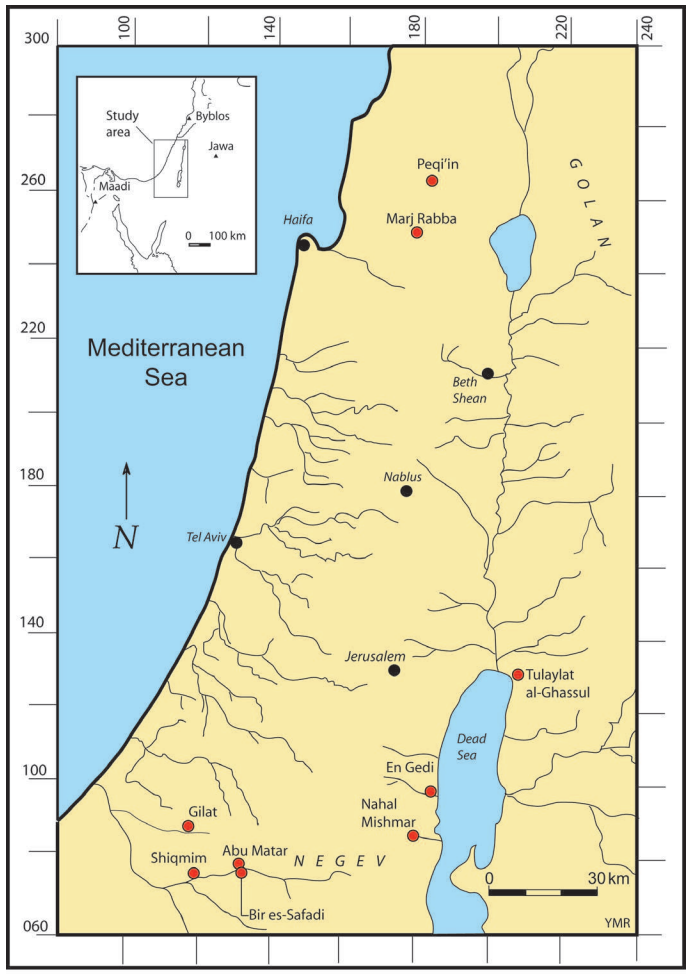
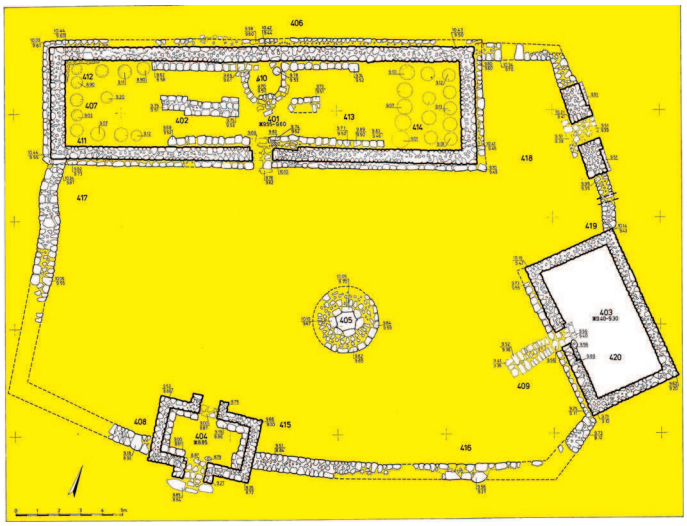


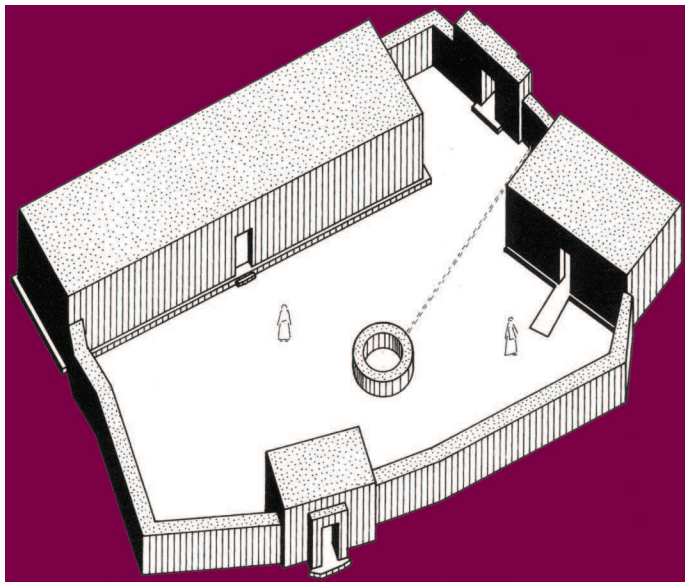
Figure 2. Chalcolithic sites in the Southern Levant, showing the location of Ein Gedi and Nahal Mishmar. Map courtesy of Yorke Rowan, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago

stone socket embedded in the threshold apparently secured the hinge of a wooden door. The inner entrance, which did not have a door socket, opened to the central courtyard of the temple. Stone benches were built along the walls of the room, probably for the convenience of priests and believers arriving at the temple.

The second structure was a gate situated at the other side of the temple compound, in the direction of the Ein Shulamit spring of the Nahal David canyon (fig. 8). This gate structure had a single entrance, yet – surprisingly – a stone socket for securing the hinge of a door was not incorporated into its threshold, indicating that the entrance was not secured by a door.

Figure 3 (above). The rock terrace on which the temple was built. Photograph by S. J. Schweig, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.
Figure 4 (bottom left). The plan of the temple, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.
Figure 5 (bottom right). Reconstruction of the temple, prepared by I. Dunayevsky, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.





The third structure, labeled "the lateral room," was probably a service or storeroom used by the priests. A paved path led to its entrance, in which again a stone socket for securing the hinge of a door was found. No installations or finds indicating the function of this room have been discovered.

The fourth structure, the largest and most important one, was the sanctuary itself (fig. 9). It was a rectangular hall, measuring on the exterior 19.7 m by 5.5 m. The entrance to the sanctuary, which faced the courtyard, was at the center of the long wall. The raised threshold contained a stone socket for securing the hinge of a wooden door. A semi-circular altar was situated opposite the entrance, its edges demarcated by a line of stone blocks with a flat top (fig. 10). The altar was found filled with ashes, some animal bones, and a clay figurine of a bull laden with two churns (fig. 11). A large, round stone base, well dressed and made of hard limestone not available in the immediate vicinity of the

Figure 6. Northwest view of the temple with the Dead Sea in the background. Photograph by S. J. Schweig, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

temple, stood at the corner of the altar. It can be assumed that the sculpture of the deity or the main symbol of cult stood on the stone base. Quite possibly it was a basalt house deity of the type characteristic of the Ghassulian sites in the Golan (Epstein 1998, 230–33, pls. 30–33). Stone benches extended along the walls of the sanctuary and additional benches or offering tables were erected in its center, flanking the altar.

A large number of pits or *favissae* were dug into the natural soil at the two ends of the sanctuary. The remains of the cultic offerings brought to the temple were thrown here. In addition to bones, the contents of the *favissae* were primarily composed of three styles of Ghassulian pottery: small bowls, fenestrated chalices, and cornets.

A circular installation crowned the center of the courtyard, facing the entrance to the sanctuary (fig. 12). At its center, there was a round basin, 90 cm in diameter and 40 cm deep, the sides of which were made of vertically-placed stone slabs, with the ground forming its bottom surface. A fragment of a cylindrical alabaster vessel with a flat bottom and straight sides was found beside the circular installation. This vessel, which originated in Egypt, is the earliest of its kind ever discovered in Canaan. The basin, which must have been plastered, was apparently used to hold water brought from the Ein Gedi spring for the cultic activities of the temple. This interpretation is supported by the discovery of a drain outlet incorporated into the stone fence surrounding the courtyard (fig. 13). The channel leading to the outlet was not preserved, but it must have sloped from the round installation and served to drain water to the area outside the sacred compound.

Amihai Mazar (2000) recently suggested that the basin in the center of the circular installation served as a kind of flowerpot built around a sacred tree that grew at this spot; it would have been this tree that inspired the construction of the temple at this particular spot. Sacred trees have been incorporated into sanctuaries since ancient times, but there are no indications that this was the case with the Ein Gedi temple. The basin is too small to contain a large tree; the bottom of the basin appears to be the natural ground surface; and the temple was almost certainly built at this particular spot due to its unique setting.

Figure 7 (top left). The main gate to the temple, from southeast.
Figure 8 (top right). The second gate to the temple, facing the direction of Nahal David.
Figure 9 (bottom left). The sanctuary, from southeast.
Figure 10 (bottom right). The altar, from southwest. Photographs by S. J. Schweig, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

The temple's location offers evidence for the cultic rituals performed at it. The main entrance faces the Ein Gedi spring and the second entrance is directed towards the Nahal David spring. It follows that the temple cult was associated with water and springs. Indeed, several rocks with eleven cup marks carved on their surface, found near the Ein Gedi spring, bear evidence of the cultic activities performed there (fig. 14).

With regard to ceramics, the cornets, which are the most prevalent vessel type found in the temple, are of particular interest (fig. 15). About two hundred cornets were counted. The function of this Ghassulian vessel type is unclear, particularly as the cornets could not stand on their pointed bases. There are sites at which many cornets have been found, as well as sites where cornets are entirely missing. Since the cornets were found in the temple, they appear to have had some cultic purpose. Recently Devorah Namder made a surprising discovery (Namdar *et al*. 2009). The cornets she examined, including some from the Ein Gedi temple, contained beeswax, the material secreted by honeybees in order to build honeycomb cells in the hive. Namder raised the possibility that the Ghassulian cornets were used as candles for illumination, a theory that is hard to accept since no soot remains were discerned on them. While it remains likely that the cornets were used in the Ghassulian cult, their function remains unclear for the time being.

One surprising observation made at the time of the excavation was that no Ghassulian remains other than the temple have been discerned in the region of the Ein Gedi oasis, particularly not in the immediate vicinity of the temple. Significant Chalcolithic-Ghassulian remains, however, were known in the Judean Desert and its caves. We concluded therefore that the temple served as a place for pilgrimage from close by as well as faraway regions, also for nomadic tribes.

Figure 11 (above). Figurine of a bull laden with two churns found in the altar. Photograph courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.
Figure 12 (below). The circular installation in the courtyard of the temple, from south. Photograph by S. J. Schweig, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

A few years ago a cave – labeled the Moringa Cave – was discovered on the lower cliff beneath the Ein Gedi spring. In one section of the cave, Roi Porath and others uncovered Chalcolithic remains, the pottery showing affinities to the pottery assemblage of the temple (Porath et al. 2007, 28–29). The excavators raised the possibility that the site was associated with the cultic activities in the temple, believing that this discovery was the "first swallow," heralding the existence of a proper Ghassulian settlement in the Ein Gedi oasis whose remains have not yet been found. In my view there is no basis for this suggestion; had there been a Chalcolithic settlement in Ein Gedi, its remains would have been detected long ago.

No indications of a willful destruction have been detected in the temple; it seems to have been abandoned by its guardians. As time passed, the wooden parts, such as the doors and the roof beams of the neglected structures decayed completely, the painted plaster and the mudbricks crumbled and melted in the winter rains, and the mudbrick debris eventually covered the lower, stone-built parts of the walls.

No structural changes have been discerned in the temple compound, probably indicating that it was in use for a relatively short period of time. It is dated by the typology of the pottery to the later part of the Ghassulian Chalcolithic period in the earlier part of the fourth millennium B.C.E. Unfortunately, the excavations from half a century ago did not yield a large enough sample size as was needed at that time to permit radiocarbon testing.

Surprisingly, hardly any finds were uncovered in the excavation of the temple, except for broken pottery and animal bones thrown into the *favissae* pits of the sanctuary. We assumed that this monumental shrine must have contained rich cultic equipment, hence the obvious conclusion that the edifice was abandoned in orderly manner and systematically cleared by its guardians who took with them all the equipment. Almost certainly the deity or cult symbol, possibly a basalt house deity, placed – as I assume – on the round stone base in the altar, was removed as well. The conclusion that seemed obvious to us at the time of the excavation was that all the cultic equipment of the temple was taken to the Nahal Mishmar cave, and that the objects of the famous hoard represented the cultic equipment of the temple. Let me consider this theory in the perspective of the fifty years which have passed since the excavation of the temple.

The Ghassulian Hoard in the Nahal Mishmar Cave

The Nahal Mishmar cave was excavated by Pesach Bar-Adon in 1961 and 1962 (Bar-Adon 1980). The cave is located about 10.5 km from the Ein Gedi temple as the crow flies (fig. 1). The entrance to the cave is situated in the vertical cliff of the Nahal Mishmar canyon, about 50 m beneath the top of the cliff and about 250 m above the wadi bed (fig. 16). At the time of excavation, the cave was only accessible with the aid of ropes and a rope ladder. It can be assumed that in antiquity a narrow path extended here along the face of the cliff and led to the entrance. The cave was occupied in two periods – the Ghassulian period and that of the Bar-Kochba Revolt in the second century C.E. Some pottery fragments indicate limited human presence also in the Early Bronze IB period (Davidowitz 2012, 7–9). The Ghassulian occupation remains include hearths, domestic utensils, and a number of burials.

Figure 13. Outlet of drainage channel, shown from inside the courtyard. Photograph by S. J. Schweig, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

The Ghassulian hoard – which contained 442 objects – was concealed in a rock cavity situated near the wall of the cave, wrapped in a reed mat (fig. 17). The entrance was covered by a large stone block. The vast majority of the objects were made of copper, including 240 mace heads (as well as six mace heads made of hematite and one of limestone), about 20 adzes and chisels, about one hundred scepters or standards, and ten circular articles labeled as crowns (fig. 18). In addition, the hoard contained five sickle-shaped, perforated objects carved of hippopotamus tusks, and a large box carved from elephant ivory. With the exception of the adzes, chisels, crowns, and ivory box, most of the objects were originally mounted on wooden shafts or reeds, remains of which were still preserved in some cases. Many of the copper objects were decorated, a typical feature being projecting decorations soldered to the objects. Various objects have parallels at other Ghassulian sites and portray characteristics of the Ghassulian artistic style. Most prominent is the motive of two large, round eyes shown en face with an aquiline nose projecting between them – a motif known as well from the wall paintings of Teleilat el-Ghassul, clay ossuaries, the Beer-Sheba ivory figurines, and the basalt house deities from the Golan sites. Significantly, several objects show signs of repairs, and in some, the attached projecting decorations are missing – clear indications that the objects had been in use for a long period of time before being concealed in the cave. The large number of objects, and the technical skill needed for their production changed entirely our understanding of the metal industry in the Chalcolithic period, which apparently had been much more developed than previously assumed.

Already at the time of discovery it became clear that the various objects of the hoard, with the possible exception of some chisels and adzes, had not been tools used in daily life. It was clear that they had not been works of art produced merely for aesthetic reasons, either. It appears that the Ghassulian metal artisans, like the Ghassulian craftsmen who created the wall paintings, ivory objects, basalt vessels, figurines, and clay ossuaries, took their inspiration from religion, and aimed at producing objects meant to play a part in the Ghassulian cultic activities. The hoard from the Nahal Mishmar cave has to be understood as a unique collection of cultic objects, and this assumption should be the starting point for any interpretation of the hoard.

The Ein Gedi Temple and the Nahal Mishmar Hoard

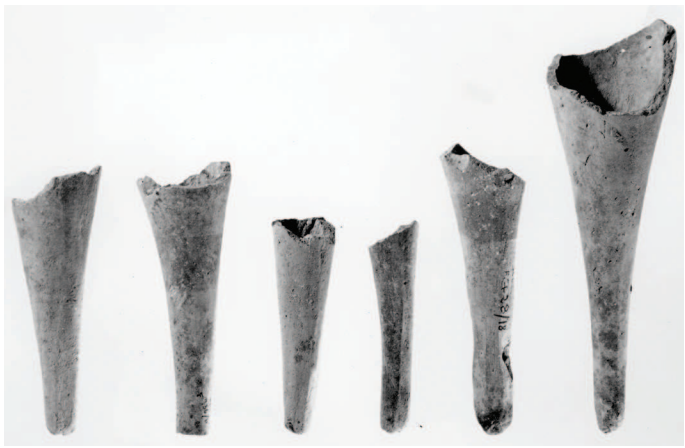
Looking back at the find after fifty years, I hold to my initial view that there is only a single, simple and logical explanation for understanding the origin and use of the objects of this unique hoard. The temple at Ein Gedi, being the sole and central sanctuary in the region, forms the only tangible place which could be associated with the hoard. All the evidence from the temple leads to this conclusion. The temple – being a monumental edifice in terms of the Ghassulian culture – was found devoid of finds with the exception of *favissae* indicating that cultic ceremonies took place here. Undoubtedly, the temple contained cultic equipment befitting its importance. The absence of any cult objects becomes even more prominent if we compare the situation here to other Ghassulian sites where cultic objects of one kind or another have

been found (e.g. recently, cult objects made of basalt, copper, and hippopotamus tusk discovered in Giv'at Ha-Oranim; see Scheftelowitz and Oren 2004). The fact that not a single cultic object was found here, with the exception of the Egyptian alabaster vessel fragment, indicates that all the cultic equipment was systematically cleared from the edifice before its abandonment.

The course of events can be reconstructed as follows. Once it was decided to abandon the temple, the priests or guardians scrupulously collected all the cultic equipment, with the exception of the alabaster vessel which may well have been already broken, and took them away. Quite possibly they removed the wooden shafts from the objects in order to ease the burden. Departing from Ein Gedi, their first station was the Nahal Mishmar cave. They stayed there for a while, but eventually decided to move on. Assuming that they will be able to return one day to the cave and the temple they concealed the cultic objects in a rock cavity before their departure. However, they never returned, the hoard remained hidden in the cave, and as time passed by, the temple slowly fell apart.

Figure 14. Cup marks carved on a rock near the Ein Gedi spring. Photograph by D. Ussishkin, courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

Figure 15. Cornets found in pits at the sides of the sanctuary. Photograph courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.



The story of the temple's abandonment, the sojourn of the Ghassulians in the Nahal Mishmar cave and other caves scattered all over the Judean Desert, the concealment of the hoard, and finally the abandonment of the caves is linked to wider events which caused the end of the Ghassulian settlements in the southern part of the country at the end of the Chalcolithic period. We can assume, as is generally agreed upon, that this demise was the result of external pressure, but this problem is beyond the scope of the present contribution. In any case, most striking is the parallel between the events as reconstructed for Ein Gedi and Nahal Mishmar, and what happened in the Cave of the Letters in the Judean Desert during the Bar-Kochba revolt in the second century C.E. (see Yadin 1964). Following the collapse of the revolt, its leaders at Ein Gedi and their families fled to the Cave of the Letters in Nahal Hever, taking with them their valuables and archives. Similarly to the Nahal Mishmar cave, this cave as well opened into the vertical cliff, and access to it was very difficult. The refugees were besieged here by the Romans, and eventually decided to move on. They hid their belongings in the cave, obviously in the hope of retrieving them in the future. However, this hope did not materialize and the concealed belongings and documents, as well as burials of refugees who died here, were preserved intact until their discovery by the same archaeological expedition that unearthed the Nahal Mishmar hoard.

The above scenario associating the Nahal Mishmar hoard with the Ein Gedi temple has been debated in various scholarly studies during the last fifty years. While some scholars accepted it as the most conclusive explanation (e.g., Epstein 1978, 26; Aharoni 1982; Coogan 1987, 3–4; Mazar 1990, 68, 75), other scholars raised different theories to explain the origin and function of the hoard.

Bar-Adon (1980, 12–13, 202), adopting the concept that the hoard contained cultic objects originating in a cult-place, did not rule out the possibility that the hoard originated in the Ein Gedi temple, but raised as another possibility that it had originated in a nearby structure which he considered to be a cult place. Roger Moorey (1988, 182) believed that the hoard consisted of a "concentration of wealth intentionally concealed at a time of stress that survived entirely by accident, since its owners were never in a position to recover it…. It is…best identified… as the 'treasury' of a community, originally housed in major public building." As to the suggestion to connect the hoard with the temple at Ein Gedi – "unfortunately not a single find from this shrine links it directly with the contents of the hoard.... Certainly the idea of a religious context is the most plausible and this particular association [that is, with the Ein Gedi temple] has been widely accepted."

Miriam Tadmor believes that the hoard "was the possession of traders or trader-smiths, in whose hands was invested the trade of such commodities and who acted as intermediaries between production centers and the Negev sites." This interpretation "ties the hoard in an organic way to the Chalcolithic cave-occupation in the Judean Desert" (Tadmor 1989, 252). Marie-Henriette Gates (1992) suggested that the Nahal Mishmar hoard "should be closely associated with the transhumant pastoralists who occupied the cave, and reflects the skill of itinerants specializing in a variety of livelihoods, including metallurgy." It formed "a store

of metal goods whose piecemeal sale was intended to provide a supplementary livelihood to the family of itinerants who wintered with some regularity in the cave" (Gates 1992, 131). Yosef Garfinkel (1994, 175) is right in remarking that "neither Tadmor nor Gates discussed the economic mechanism that led to the accumulation of such wealth in the hands of one person or family in the arid zone of the Judaean Desert."

Garfinkel himself believes that the hoard contained "cultic objects belonging to the local inhabitants of the Judaean Desert [that] were intentionally buried…after they became unsuitable for continued use in cult activity" (Garfinkel 1994, 174–76).

Finally, David Ilan (Ilan 1994; also Ilan and Rowan 2012, 93–95, 102–04), relying on the discovery of Chalcolithic burials in the Nahal Mishmar cave, raised the possibility that the hoard is a collection of burial goods of a Chalcolithic chief buried there, or a collection of Chalcolithic burial goods scavenged at the end of the period or during the Early Bronze I period. He concludes that the Ein Gedi temple served as a mortuary temple. In my view these theories are not supported by any factual data.

Isaac Gilead and Yuval Goren carried out petrographic analyses of clay vessels from the Ein Gedi temple as well as the Nahal Mishmar cave (1989, 7). Unfortunately, a list of the analyzed vessels was never published. Gilead and Goren concluded that "the Ein Gedi assemblage is petrographically different from those of the northern Negev…. *Their most probable place of origin is Transjordan, probably near the Dead Sea....*" On the other hand, the analyses of pottery from the Nahal Mishmar cave revealed that "although a part of the pottery assemblage there was petrographically similar to the one from Ein Gedi, the dominant group [has different characteristics which are] not recorded in Ein Gedi." Hence they concluded that "that fact does not accord well with [the theory] that the Nahal Mishmar hoard originated in the Ein Gedi shrine, providing that the pottery and the copper implements have the same origin" (1989, 7; italics mine).

A more detailed discussion on this issue was published by Goren six years later (Goren 1995). *Based on the same factual data and only on them,* Goren (1995, 290) now concluded that most of the Ein Gedi ceramic assemblage "belongs to two related petrographic groups: 'Motza clay-dolomitic sand' and 'Motza marl-calcareous sand'. These groups are both attributed to the different units of the Motza formation which outcrops in the Judaean mountains, and is exposed in rather small ranges even near Ein Gedi itself. Hence, this study indicates that "the pottery found at the Ein Gedi shrine was produced *exclusively in Judaea and/or the Judaean Desert*" (291–92; italics mine). As to the pottery assemblage from the Nahal Mishmar cave, which radically differs from that of the Ein Gedi temple, Goren reiterated his firm conclusion that the hoard originated elsewhere: "It seems that the whole range of finds [from the cave], rather than the treasure alone, originated in an interregional centre of some kind. Evidently, this centre was not the Ein Gedi shrine since it comprised an assemblage of a totally different nature" (297).

Figure 16. The entrance to the Nahal Mishmar cave situated in the vertical cliff. Photograph courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.

In the same study Goren discussed the analysis of a number of mace heads and standards from the Nahal Mishmar hoard whose core is made of clay (Goren 1995, 304–05). In nine out of ten mace heads the clay belongs to the "Taqiya marls-vegetal matter/calcareous sand" group. "The taqiya formation is exposed in the northern and central Negev, in the Judaean Desert and along the western slopes of the Judaean-Samarian anticline" (302). As to the core of the three examined standards it included sand, apparently "inland Aeolian sand" rather than "coastal sands" (304). Goren concluded that "the copper artefacts were

produced in several locations rather than in one production centre....” The variability of the different cores “may be explained as resulting from the presence of several workshops in southern Israel, or by the existence of a clan of mobile specialists…who manufactured metal artefacts at various locations” (305).

Thirteen years later Goren published a new study on the articles of the hoard (Goren 2008). The core of all the above-discussed thirteen objects was now defined – *based on the same data of the analyses made in 1995* – as having “the petrographic characteristics of the Moza Formation of central Israel…or rendzina soils mixed with sand of chalk or limestone and abundant vegetal matter” (379).

Goren now assumed that the examined materials were the remains of the casting molds of the metal objects which were produced using the lost wax technique. Taking into account the possibility that the clay used for the casting does not necessarily indicate the place of the casting, he speculated on the production place of the metal objects (Goren 2008, 391–93). Goren now claimed, contrary to his previous study, that the metal objects were manufactured in a single place. As some of the analyzed clay samples pointed to Transjordan as a place of origin, while others pointed to Cis-Jordan, it followed for him that the casting was carried out somewhere between these two regions. In contrast to his previous conclusions, Goren now associated the Nahal Mishmar hoard with the Ein Gedi temple, suggesting that this was the casting center of the metal objects. According to Goren “the Ein Gedi sanctuary was completely and rather hastily excavated” and hence no remains of the assumed metal industry were discerned here (392).

In my view this latest theory of Goren lacks any factual basis. Had there been any remains of metal industry in the sacred complex or in its immediate vicinity, they would very certainly have been detected in the excavations. The finds in the pits inside the sanctuary are all associated with cultic activities, and no signs of cultic or metal production activity have been discerned in the surrounding area.

One final remark. A look at Yuval Goren’s successive studies over the last 20 years (Gilead and Goren 1989; Goren 1995; 2008) reveals their inconsistencies, making it difficult to rely on them. Naturally, Goren can have changed his views and conclusions as time passes. But one would expect some explanations as to why he has interpreted the same factual data in so markedly different ways.

Figure 17. The Nahal Mishmar hoard as found in the cave. Photograph courtesy of the Israel Exploration Society, Jerusalem.
Figure 18. Copper scepters found in the Nahal Mishmar hoard. Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, Hebrew Wikipedia user Hanay. http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Treasure_of_Nahal_Mishmar_(5).jpg.

Summary

Presently the temple compound stands on the rock terrace above the Ein Gedi spring as it stood at the end of our dig. Following the excavations, Professor Mazar initiated the preservation of the edifice by Moshe Jaffe, who had previously worked with him in Beth-Shearim. Jaffe applied his expert knowledge to strengthen the walls and the circular installation. Nowadays, the Ein Gedi Nature Reserve is flooded with thousands of visitors, but only few of them make the effort to climb to the Ein Gedi spring and the Chalcolithic temple. From time to time visitors may see some ibexes, moving undisturbed in the rocky ground like they did in ancient times.

Fifty years after the excavation of the Ghassulian temple in Ein Gedi and the discovery of the hoard in the Nahal Mishmar cave we are far from fully understanding all the issues involved with them. The possible connection between the Ein Gedi temple and the Nahal Mishmar hoard remains a mere hypothesis that cannot be proven or disproven. Nevertheless, it still appears to be the simplest and most logical interpretation, providing a

solution to two complex and intriguing problems. One way or another, the discovery of the temple and the hoard are among the most fantastic cornerstones in the history of archaeological research in the Land of Israel, and it is most doubtful whether such discoveries will reoccur in the future.

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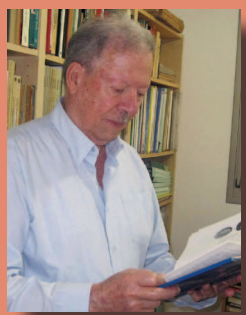

David Ussishkin is Professor Emeritus of Archaeology at Tel Aviv University where he taught for many years. He joined the faculty of Tel Aviv University after completing his studies in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. For several years he served as the Head of the Department of Archaeology and Near Eastern Studies and as Director of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University. He also edited Tel Aviv, the journal of the Institute. Ussishkin conducted a survey in the Silwan necropolis in Jerusalem, directed excavations at Lachish, and co-directed excavations at Jezreel and Megiddo. He wrote extensively on the archaeology of the biblical period and ancient Anatolian art. His most notable publication is the five-volume excavation report of Lachish.