

# **“They Shall Come into the Hollows of the Earth” (Isa 2:19): Bar Kokhba-Period Hiding Complexes at Biblical Tels—Tel Lavnin as a Case Study**

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## **Abstract**

Hiding complexes in Judea have been objects of considerable scholarly interest since the 1970s. By now, we are well acquainted with their main features and spatial distribution. Most hiding complexes in the Judean foothills were cut beneath the houses in Jewish villages. They were entered via shafts carved out of the *nari* rock, leading to underground passages quarried in the soft chalk beneath. Following recent intensive looting at Tel Lavnin, a site located in ‘Adullam Park, south of the Ela Valley, inspectors of the Antiquities Theft Prevention Unit of the Israel Antiquities Authority documented three hiding complexes. In this paper, we present these hiding complexes and the objects discovered in them. We discuss these complexes’ special architectural features and ponder why particular architectural methods were chosen. We then compare the complexes of Tel Lavnin to complexes documented elsewhere in Judea. We propose that they constitute an architectural subtype of hiding complexes from the Bar Kokhba Revolt and predict that others like them will be discovered in the future.

**Keywords:** hiding complexes; Bar Kokhba Revolt; Judean foothills; Second Temple period.

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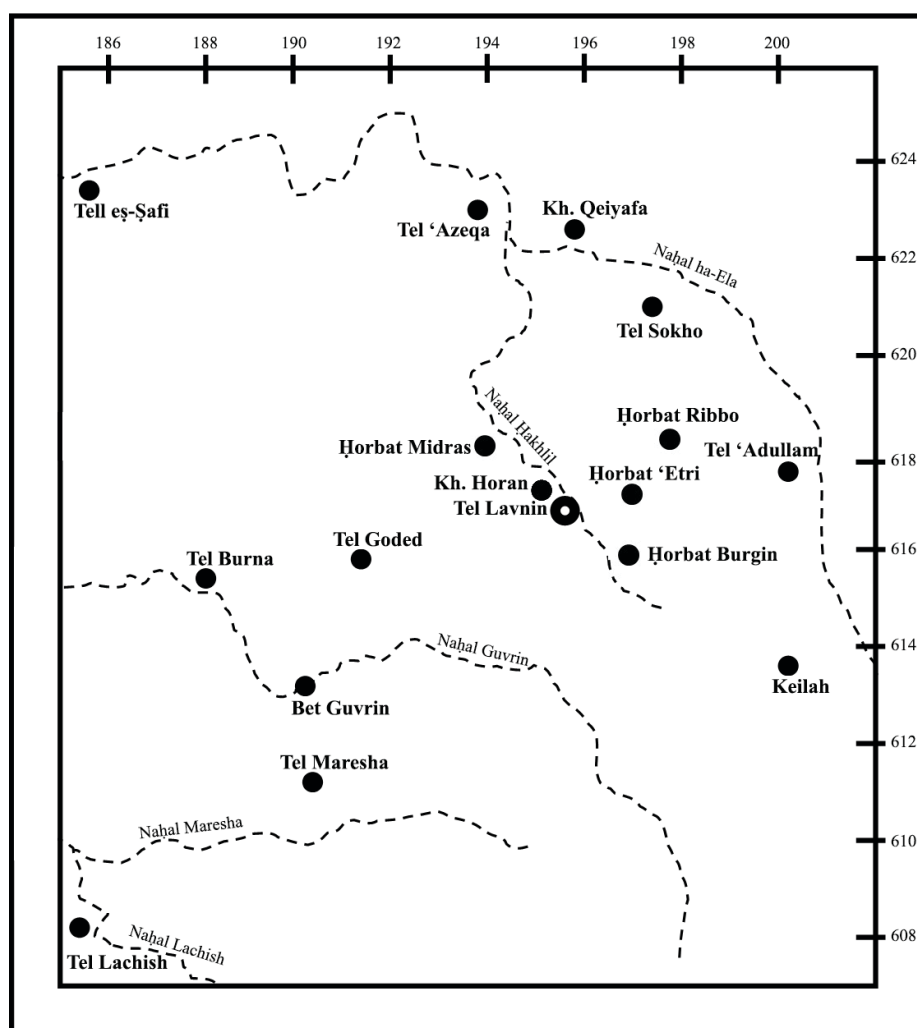
Eitan Klein, Ayelet Levy-Reifer, Amir Ganor, Gideon Goldberg, and Ilan Hadad, 2022. “They Shall Come into the Hollows of the Earth” (Isa 2:19): Bar Kokhba-Period Hiding Complexes at Biblical Tels—Tel Lavnin as a Case Study” *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology* 3: 14–44.

ISSN: 2788-8819; <https://doi.org/10.52486/01.00003.3>; <https://jjar.huji.ac.il>



## 1. Introduction

Tel Lavnin is a biblical mound surrounded by fertile valleys in the upper Judean foothills, located on the western bank of Nahal Hakhilil, ca. 3 km east of Ramat Avishur and 5 km south of the Ela Valley. Its summit is encircled by a wall made of large fieldstones. The many biblical sites and mounds in the vicinity include Tel 'Adullam, Tel 'Azeqa, Tel Sokho, and Tel Goded. The area is also notable for the many sites from the late Second Temple period until the Bar Kokhba Revolt inhabited by Jews, including Ḥorbat 'Etri, Ḥorbat Midras, Ḥorbat Burgin, and Ḥorbat Ribbo (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Map of the Judean Shefela, the location of Tel Lavnin, and other sites in the vicinity (Drawing: Eitan Klein).

The site was visited by the Survey of Western Palestine team, who referred to it by its Arabic name—Kh. Tell el-Beida—and noted the presence of caves, cisterns, building foundations, and a columbarium cave (Conder and Kitchener 1883: 369). L. I. Rahmani conducted a partial survey of the ‘Adullam region and reported Iron Age II pottery from Kh. Horan, just west of Tel Lavnin. He did not, however, note any finds from the mound itself (Rahmani 1964: 209).

In recent decades, the ruins of Tel Lavnin have been excavated illegally by groups of antiquities looters. In response, documentation efforts have been initiated, and, since the 1990s, three late Second Temple period burial caves with *kokhim* and ossuary fragments have been recorded. In one of the caves, a Hebrew graffito reading “Yah” was found beside a Greek graffito in mirror writing reading θεος (Zissu 2001a: 153–154). Hiding complexes typical of the Bar Kokhba Revolt were also reported, but, to date, no plans for these have been produced.

In 2000, Boaz Zissu and Amir Ganor surveyed the site on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority as part of the “Keramim Survey” and found pottery dating from the Iron Age, the Hellenistic, and Early Roman periods, the Bar Kokhba Revolt, and the Byzantine period. Additionally, three fragments of knife-pared stone tools of the type used by Jews in the late Second Temple period (due to meticulous observance of the Jewish laws of ritual purity and impurity) were collected, and architectural elements suggesting the existence of a Byzantine-period public building at the top of the site were recorded (Zissu 2001b: 164–165). On the hill southwest of the ruins, Zissu documented two adjacent caves. One of them was used as a cell for hermits, while the other had a Greek inscription reading “Daniel Ioannes the Priest” (Δανιήλ Ἰωάννης πρεσβ[ύτερος]) next to a schematic engraving of a lion or lioness. It was suggested that a Byzantine hermit depicted the story of Daniel in the lion’s den (Zissu 1999a). Recently, four additional burial caves were documented on the site’s western and southern slopes; they contained finds from the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age IIa, providing clear evidence of a biblical period settlement there (Klein and Shai 2016).

Karl Elliger (1934: 121–124) proposed identifying Tel Lavnin with the biblical city of Chezib, a place near ‘Adullam mentioned in the story of Shelah’s birth (Gen 38:1–5), and with Achzib that is mentioned in a list of cities of Judah between Keilah and Mareshah (Josh 15:44). These suggestions are supported by Eusebius’s 4th-century description of Chezib (Χαοβί) as located on the edge of Eleutheropolis (Bet Guvrin) near ‘Adullam (Eusebius, *Onom.* 172:6; Notley and Safrai 2005: 161). Other scholars have accepted Elliger’s identification (Aharoni 1987: 329).

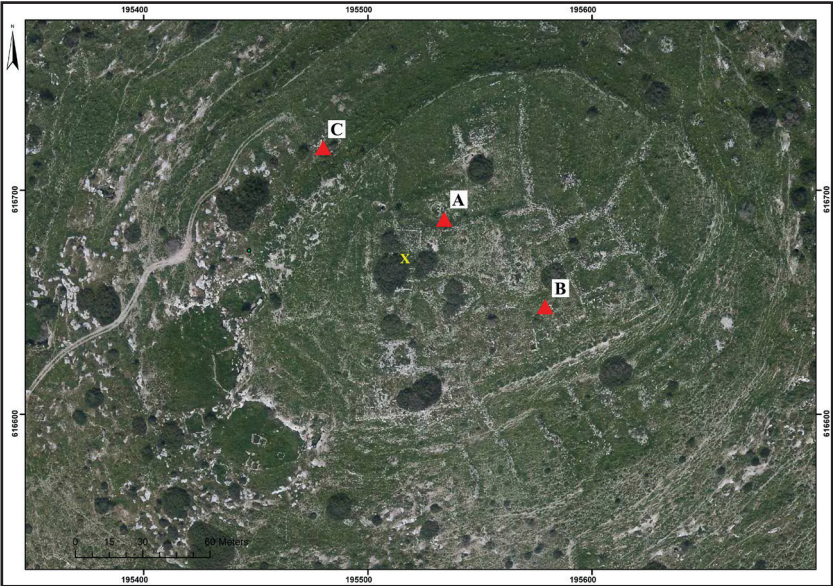
Alternatively, Yehuda Dagan proposed identifying the site as Libnah (Dagan 1982: 10–11; 1996: 142–143), mentioned between Makkedah and Lachish in the context of Joshua's conquests after the battle of Gibeon (Josh 10:28–31). Dagan bases this proposition on the equivalence of the site's Arabic and Hebrew names (Beida in Arabic means "white," pronounced in Hebrew *lavan*), its geographical location, and the occurrence of ceramics dating from the Late Bronze Age, Iron Age II, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. However, Libnah is customarily identified with Tel Burna north of Bet Guvrin mainly on account of its appearance on the list of cities of Judah together with Ether and Ashan (Josh 15:42; Aharoni 1987: 333; Tappy 2008; McKinny and Tavger 2019).

In this paper, we discuss three hiding complexes at Tel Lavnin, documented by inspectors of the Antiquities Theft Prevention Unit. We will indicate and consider some of their unusual architectural features, including deep, stone-lined access shafts and crawlways roofed with stone slabs, and we will try to determine why these peculiar architectural elements were chosen.

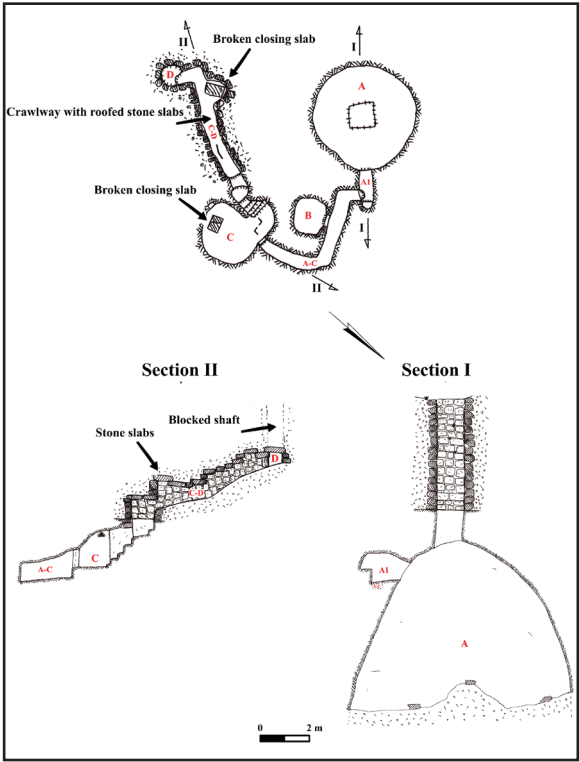
## 2. Hiding Complex A

Hiding Complex A was hewn near the top of the mound, ca. 8 m north of the site's summit, where the ruins of an ancient rectangular structure are visible (NIG 195534/616687; Figs. 2, 3). Today, one can access the complex via a rectangular shaft that descends into a rock-cut, bell-shaped chamber (Fig. 4). The shaft's upper part cuts through ca. 5 m of archaeological deposits and is lined with large-to-medium-sized ashlar blocks and fieldstones, while its lower part cuts through ca. 1.5 m of *nari* rock before reaching the soft chalk beneath, where it opens onto a broad, bell-shaped space (Chamber A; max. dia. 9 m, height 7 m from the accumulations that cover the floor). No plaster remains were observed, rendering the chamber's function indeterminate.





**Fig. 2.** Aerial photograph of Tel Lavnin, indicating entrances to the hiding complexes (GIS: Emile Aljam).



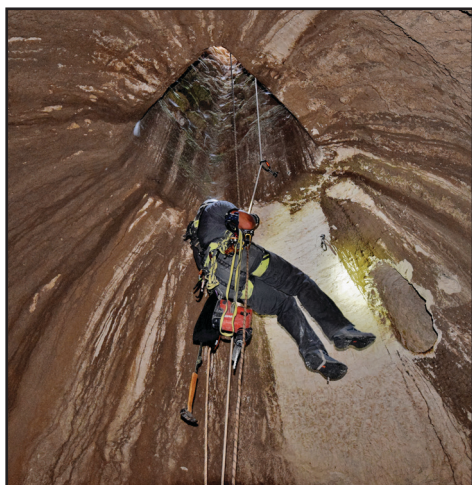
**Fig. 3.** Complex A, plan and sections (Drawing: Eitan Klein).



**Fig. 4.** Complex A, entrance to stone-lined access shaft to Chamber A, view to the east  
(Photo: Eitan Klein).

In Chamber A's eastern wall, ca. 6 m above the floor, a rock-cut crawlway (A1) was observed (Fig. 5). It is 1.7 m long, 0.6 m wide, and 1 m high. A narrow passage crossing under the middle of the crawlway's southern wall leads into another, ca. 5.5 m long, narrow crawlway (A–C). This crawlway turns at sharp angles and is furnished with niches for holding lamps. In the middle of its southern wall is a small rock-cut chamber (Chamber B;  $1.5 \times 1 \times 1$  m), in which two indicative potsherds were found. Crawlway A–C turns southward and opens onto an irregularly shaped chamber (Chamber C; max. length 3 m, width 2.2 m, 1.15 m high) through a stepped frame designed to hold a closing slab. Indeed, a corresponding rectangular stone slab ( $0.7 \times 0.5$  m) was found broken in two on the floor near the chamber's southern wall. From this chamber, a staircase leads ca. 2 m upwards through the *nari* to southbound Crawlway C–D. A stone lintel, anchored in niches carved out of the *nari*, caps the threshold (Fig. 6). Above it is a 0.3 m thick *nari* layer, which, in turn, is superimposed by a wall built of large dressed blocks. Brown mud was used to coat the junctures of these elements (i.e., the lintel, the thin *nari* layer, and the wall), marking the transition between the bedrock and the archaeological strata above.





**Fig. 5.** Complex A, Chamber A, rectangular entrance shaft and exit to Crawlway A1 near the top of the chamber's wall, view to the northeast (Photo: Amir Ganor).



**Fig. 6.** Complex A, staircase leading up from Chamber C to Crawlway C–D, view to the north. Note the mud coating where the nari ends and the built stone wall begins (Photo: Eitan Klein).

From here, Crawlway C–D gently rises southward over ca. 6 m, cutting through the mound's archaeological deposits. It is flanked by two walls built of medium-to-large dressed blocks and fieldstones, which, in turn, support a roof of stone slabs ( $0.7 \times 0.5$  m; Fig. 7). Near the crawlway's end, a niche was observed in its western wall, containing a broken closing slab presumably designed to seal the crawlway. After another meter to the south, the crawlway turns sharply eastward, leading to a blocked stone-lined shaft (Shaft D). At the time, it must have led to the surface, but it is now blocked with debris. Our examination suggests that Shaft D's opening is located inside the rectangular building whose ruins are visible on the mound's summit (Figs. 2, 8).



**Fig. 7.** Complex A, Crawlway C–D, view to the south. Note the stone-slab walls and the ceiling (Photo: Eitan Klein).

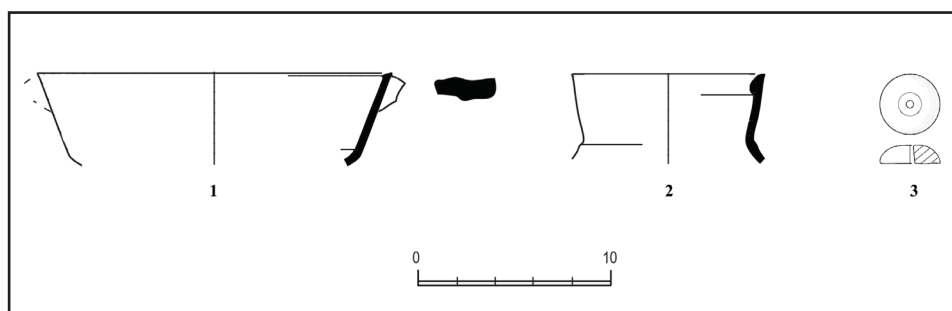


**Fig. 8.** Ruins at the top of the mound and the presumed location of shaft D (where the person is standing), view to the south (Photo: Eitan Klein).

Hiding Complex A should, therefore, be understood as serving the inhabitants of the structure at the site's summit. Essentially, the residents of this building would have descended into the complex through Shaft D and continued into Crawlway C–D until they reached Chamber C. From there, they would continue through the system of crawlways to Chamber A. Presumably, they would have needed a ladder to get down from Crawlway A1 into Chamber A.

## 2.1. Finds

Two ceramic sherds were found in Chamber B. One derives from a pan with an angled body, an everted rim, and an internal projection, from which two horizontal handles emerge (Fig. 9:1). Pans of this type have been found in assemblages from the time between the two Jewish revolts (70–132 CE) and particularly from the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–136 CE). These assemblages include the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 191, Fig. 2:4), the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 1:3), and the Mt. Yishay Cave (Porat, Eshel, and Frumkin 2009a: Pl. 1:4). The other sherd is a rim of a high-necked jar with an internally thickened rim (Fig. 9:2). Parallels from the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt have been found in the Cave of the Spear (Porat, Eshel, and Frumkin 2009b: Pl. 2:11), the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 193, Fig. 3:1), and the hiding complex at Rassem a-Rassum (Kloner 1987a: Fig. 161:4–5). Additionally, a stone spindle whorl ca. 3 cm in diameter was also found in Chamber B (Fig. 9:3). Spindle whorls are common in Bar Kokhba period assemblages, and a similar item was reported, for example, from the 'Abud Cave (Zissu et al. 2009a: Pl. 7:64).



**Fig. 9.** Finds from Complex A  
(Drawings: Irena Lidsky-Reznikov).

**Table 1: Finds in Hiding Complex A (Fig. 9)**

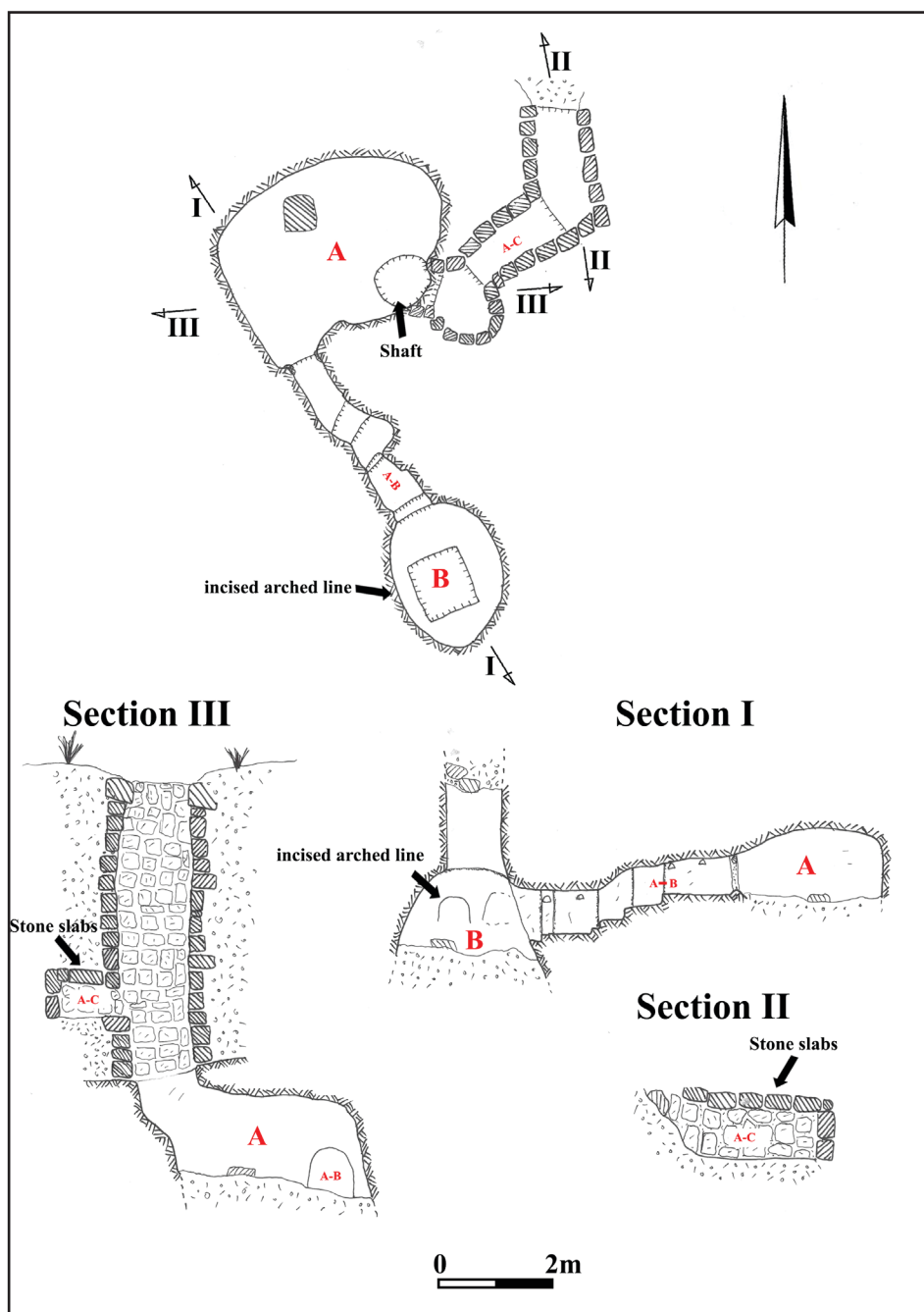
No.	Vessel type	Chamber	Basket	Description
1.	Pan	B	2000/2	Fire-blackened orange clay exterior and dark orange interior, a few medium-sized grits
2.	Jar	B	2000/1	Orange clay, light gray core
3.	Spindle whorl	B	2000/3	Black stone

## 2.2. Conclusion

Based on the architectural elements and the archaeological finds, we can suggest that this complex was used between 70 and 132 CE and during the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–136 CE). It contains all the features of hiding complexes from that time: sharp-angled crawlways, niches for lamps, locking mechanisms, shifting levels, and scarcity of ceramic sherds (Kloner and Zissu 2003; 2009). Nevertheless, some parts of this complex may have been installed as early as the 1st century BCE, as recently suggested for Nesher-Ramla (Melamed 2020) and Horbat 'Etri (Klein et al. 2021).

## 3. Hiding Complex B

This hiding complex is located southeast and one terrace lower of mound's top (NIG 195579/616648; Figs. 2, 10). It is accessible today via a shaft, 7.5 m deep and 1–1.5 m in diameter (Fig. 11). Like Complex A, the upper part of this shaft cuts through archaeological strata (ca. 6 m deep), and its walls were built with medium-sized fieldstones for support. Approximately 3 m above the shaft's base, a low, narrow crawlway (A–C; width 0.5–1 m, average height 0.6 m) bifurcated east. It had two walls of medium-to-large fieldstones, supporting a roof of large slabs (Fig. 12). The crawlway heads northeast for 3 m and then turns sharply to the north, continuing another 2 m until debris of earth and stones makes passage impossible. Notably, the crawlway's level rises towards the north, suggesting that it ultimately emerged on the surface, perhaps from the floor of an ancient building. If so, the crawlway—not the access shaft—may have been the original entryway into the complex.



**Fig. 10.** Complex B, plan and sections  
(Drawing: Eitan Klein).



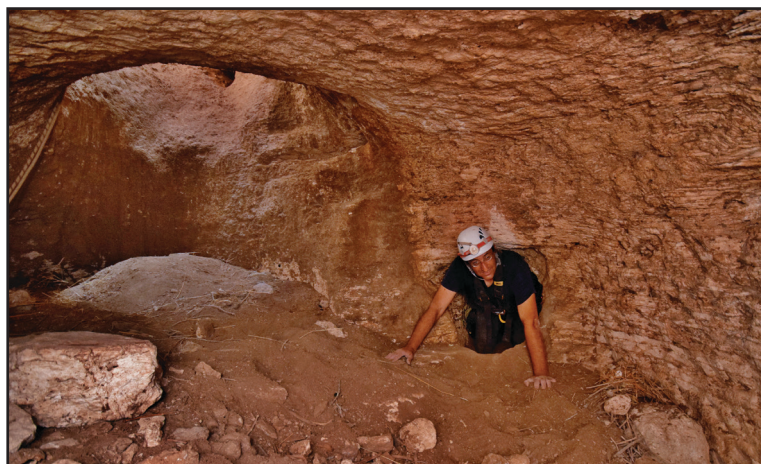


**Fig. 11.** Complex B, stone-lined shaft leading into Chamber A (Photo: Eitan Klein).



**Fig. 12.** Complex B, stone-lined Crawlway A–C, view to the north (Photo: Eitan Klein).

The access shaft terminates with Chamber A ( $4 \times 3 \times 1.5$  m). From the chamber's southwestern corner, 3.5 m-long Crawlway A–B leads southeast via a series of descending steps through the chalk rock (Fig. 13). It is furnished with niches designed to hold lamps and emerges from the upper northern wall of a bell-shaped chamber (Chamber B; Fig. 14). This chamber is oval in plan ( $2.5 \times 2$  m) and has a square-shaped shaft in its ceiling. A deeply incised arched line was observed on the chamber's western wall, probably a mark indicating where another crawlway was to be installed but never was. The floor is covered with an accumulation of soil containing numerous potsherds.



**Fig. 13.** Complex B, entrance to rock-cut Crawlway A-B from Chamber A, view to the southeast (Photo: Eitan Klein).



**Fig. 14.** Complex B, Chamber B and Crawlway A-B, view to the northwest (Photo: Eitan Klein).

### **3.1. The ceramic finds**

We collected indicative potsherds from Cavities A and B. Most of them date from the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Among them is a thin-walled bowl with an inward, sharply carinated rim (Fig. 15:1). Bowls of this type were used in Judea from the Herodian period until the 2nd century CE (Bar-Nathan 2006: 129–133, Pl. 25:13, 17), and they have been reported from refuge caves from the Bar Kokhba



Revolt (132–136 CE), including the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 1:1) and the Cave of the Pool in Nahal David (Avigad 1962: 176, Fig. 5:14).

Several types of cooking pots were found in the complex. The type depicted in Figure 15:2 is uncommon; it has a flaring neck, a thick ribbed rim, and a ridged body. While no exact parallels have been found for this pot, similar vessels have been recorded at Masada, where they were dated to the 1st and early 2nd centuries CE (Bar-Nathan 2006: 159, Pl. 29:30). Another type of cooking pot has a straight or curved neck and an everted rim (Fig. 17:3–4). Cooking pots of this type have been found in many refuge caves from the Bar Kokhba Revolt, including the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 1:16–17) and the 'Abud Cave (Zissu et al. 2009a: Pl. 2:5–7). The third type of cooking pot has a straight neck and a grooved rim (Fig. 15:5–7). This type, too, is associated with refuge and hiding assemblages from between and during the revolts (70–136 CE), including the 'Abud Cave (Zissu et al. 2009a: Pl. 2:4), the Cave of the Spear (Porat, Eshel, and Frumkin 2009b: Pl. 2:8), the el-Jai Cave (Eshel, Zissu, and Frumkin 1998: Pl. 1:7), and the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 191, Fig. 2:8).

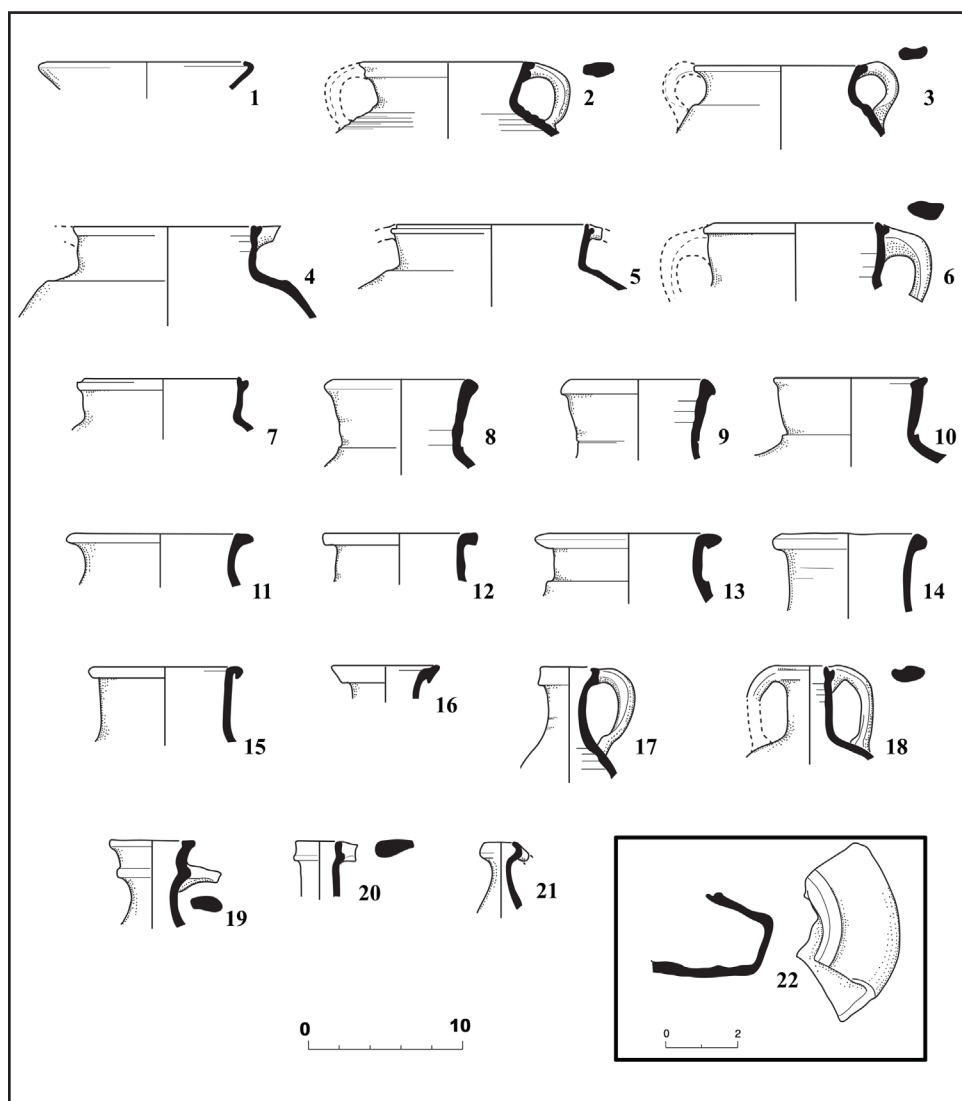
The storage jars discovered in the complex include several variants of a type that has a straight, moderately everted neck and an outwardly thickened rim (Fig. 15:8–15). Jars of this sort were dominant during and between the Jewish revolts against Rome (70–136 CE). Among others, parallels have been discovered in the el-Jai Cave (Eshel, Zissu, and Frumkin 1998: Pl. 1:9–16), the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 3:40–54), the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 193, Fig. 3:2–6), and the hiding complex at Horbat Midras (Kloner 1987a: Fig. 160:6–7).

Several types of jugs were also discovered. One type has an everted, sharp-edged, flaring rim (Fig. 15:16). Jugs of this type have been found in assemblages from the Bar Kokhba Revolt, including in the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 2:27). The second type is a high-necked cooking jug with a thick, everted rim and a handle extending from the shoulder to the rim (Fig. 15:17). Similar cooking jugs have been found in assemblages dating to the Bar Kokhba Revolt, including the 'Abud Cave (Zissu et al. 2009a: Pl. 2:21), the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 2:28), and the hiding complex at Horbat Midras (Kloner 1987a: Fig. 160:1). Another cooking vessel has a high neck and two handles extending from the shoulder to a thick grooved rim (Fig. 15:18). We did not find any exact parallels for this type, but a jug with similar features was discovered at Masada in an assemblage from the second third of the 1st century CE (Bar-Nathan 2006: 175, Pl. 31:90). Furthermore, the cooking vessel's grooved rim is a common feature on cooking pots dating

to the period of the revolts against Rome. Another jug from Complex B has a high neck with a horizontal ridge below a sharply everted rim and a handle extending from the ridge to the shoulder (Fig. 15:19). This jug is widespread during and between the Jewish revolts against Rome. Parallels have been found in the Cave of the Coin (Porat et al. 2009a: Fig. 5:11) and the 'Abud Cave (Zissu et al. 2009a: Pl. 2:20). The fifth and final type of jug/juglet found in the complex is similar to the previous one, except that it is smaller and has an erect (not everted) rim with a ridge beneath it (Fig. 15:20). Parallels have been found in the Cave of the Coin (Porat et al. 2009a: Fig. 5:13) and in the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 191, Fig. 2:14).

Also of note is a "persimmon-type" juglet with a cup-shaped rim and a handle that extends from the neck to the shoulder (Fig. 15:21). Such juglets are common in assemblages from the 1st century BCE to the early 2nd century CE (Bar-Nathan 2006: 191). Parallels to this juglet from the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt have been found, among others, in the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 191, Fig. 2:11–13), the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 2, Fig. 29), the Cave of the Coin (Porat et al. 2009a: Fig. 5:12), and the Te'omim Cave (Zissu et al. 2009b: Pl. 2:11).

A fragment of a wheel-made oil lamp of the knife-pared type was found together with these objects (Fig. 15:22). Lamps of this type are common in assemblages from the 1st century BCE to the early 2nd century CE (Rosenthal and Sivan 1978: 80; Barag and Hershkovitz 1994: 45–46). Such lamps have also been found in refuge caves such as the Caves of the Figs (Porat et al. 2009b: Pl. 1:7–8), the Cave of the Pool (Avigad 1962: 176, Fig. 5:19–20), the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 194, Fig. 4:4), and the hiding complex from the Bar Kokhba Revolt at Horbat Midras (Kloner 1987a: Pl. 160:20).



**Fig. 15.** Ceramics from Complex B (Drawings: Carmen Hersh).

**Table 2. Ceramics from Hiding Complex B (Fig. 15)**

No.	Vessel type	Chamber	Locus	Basket	Description
1.	Bowl	A	100	1000/1	Gray clay, small grits, uniformly well fired
2.	Cooking pot	A	100	1000/6	Dark gray clay exterior and dark orange interior, many white grits

No.	Vessel type	Chamber	Locus	Basket	Description
3.	Cooking pot	B	101	1001/11	Dark orange clay, gray core, medium-sized white grits
4.	Cooking pot	B	101	1001/12	Dark orange clay interior and dark gray exterior, no core, medium-sized grits
5.	Cooking pot	B	101	1001/18	Dark gray clay, orange core
6.	Cooking pot	B	101	1001/14	Dark orange clay, large grits
7.	Cooking pot	B	101	1001/16	Dark orange clay, a few small grits
8.	Jar	B	101	1001/6	Pinkish clay, small white grits
9.	Jar	B	101	1001/9	Orange clay, large grits
10.	Jar	A	100	1000/4	Orange clay, light gray core, a few medium-sized white grits
11.	Jar	A	100	1000/2	Light pink clay exterior and orange interior, pink core encased in orange, a few medium-sized white grits
12.	Jar	A	100	1000/3	Light pink clay, light gray core, medium-sized white grits
13.	Jar	B	101	1001/7	Light orange clay exterior and dark orange interior, gray core, white grits
14.	Jar	B	101	1001/8	Dark orange clay, gray core, medium-sized grits
15.	Jar	B	101	1001/3	Light orange clay exterior and dark orange interior, gray core, a few small grits
16.	Jug	B	101	1001/23	Light orange clay, light gray core, a few small white grits
17.	Cooking jug	B	101	1001/21	Dark orange clay, gray core, medium-sized grits
18.	Cooking vessel	B	101	1001/19	Dark gray clay exterior and orange interior, medium-sized white grits

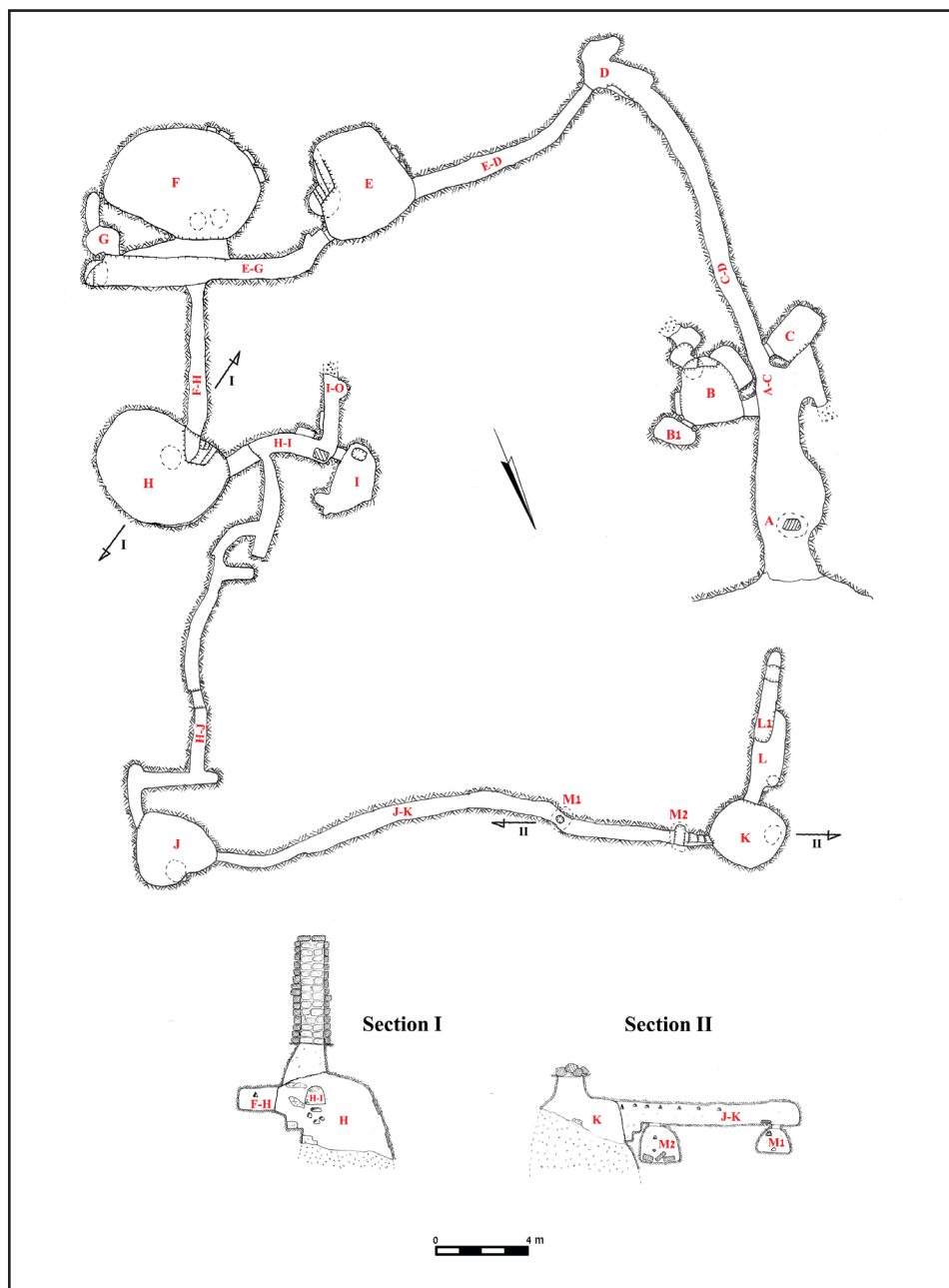
No.	Vessel type	Chamber	Locus	Basket	Description
19.	Jug	B	101	1001/20	Light pink clay, orange core, large white grits
20.	Jug	B	101	1001/22	Dark orange clay, gray core, medium-sized white grits
21.	Juglet	B	101	1001/24	Orange clay, gray core, small white grits
22.	Knife-pared lamp	B	101	1001/29	Orange clay, fine pink core, a few small white grits

### 3.2. Conclusion

Although Hiding Complex B is comparatively simple in plan, it includes all the typical features: crawlways, rock-cut niches for lamps, sharp turns, and shifting levels. According to the rich ceramic assemblage found in it, we can determine that it was used between the Jewish revolts against the Romans (70–132 CE) and until the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–136 CE). As noted for Complex A above, and in accord with recent discoveries at Nesher-Ramla (Melamed 2020) and Ḥorbat ‘Etri (Klein et al. 2021), it is possible that some of the complex’s components are earlier and that they may have been installed during the first century BCE.

## 4. Hiding Complex C

Hiding Complex C is 120 m long. It consists of drawn-out crawlways with rock-cut niches for lamps, connecting cavities, and hiding chambers of various types. We entered the complex via the mouth of a cave on the mound’s western slope and outside the settlement (NIG 195480/616719; Figs. 2, 16, 17), which led into an elongated southwest-oriented chamber (Chamber A; 10 × 1.5–2 m). A blocked shaft in the chamber’s ceiling suggests it was some sort of subterranean storeroom that was subsequently enlarged. Through an aperture in its eastern wall, one can crawl into a small, square chamber (Chamber B; ca. 2.5 × 2.5 × 1 m) that has a raised bench on its southwestern side, an entrance to another small chamber on the northeast (Chamber B1), and a sealed access shaft leading up to the surface in the southeast. These elements (Cavities B and B1) constituted a subterranean storeroom subsequently incorporated into the hiding complex. Another small chamber (Chamber C; 2.5 × 1 m) is located on Chamber A’s western side.



**Fig. 16.** Complex C, plan and sections  
(Drawing: Eitan Klein).





**Fig. 17.** Entrance to Complex C, view to the southeast  
(Photo: Eitan Klein).

A long crawlway (C–D) stretches south over a distance of 16 m, where it widens into irregularly-shaped Chamber D. From here, a narrow crawlway heads 10 m east, where it opens onto the northwestern corner of a wide, square chamber (Chamber E;  $4 \times 4 \times 1.5$  m). Rock-cut steps in the chamber's southeastern corner ascend towards a vertical blocked shaft that would have led through the chamber's ceiling to the surface (Fig. 18). From the northeastern corner of Chamber E, low and narrow Crawlway E–G extends 10 m to the east, where it meets a blocked shaft that probably leads to the surface and a small, oval chamber (Chamber G; dia. 1–1.5 m) with a short, dead-end crawlway (length 1.5 m). Apparently, the blocked shaft and Chamber G were part of a single underground storeroom subsequently incorporated into the hiding complex. An elongated window of sorts (3 m long and 1 m high) was carved in the center of the southern wall of Crawlway E–G, opening onto the upper section of a broad, oval chamber (Chamber F;  $6.5 \times 4.5$  m, height from the dirt fill to the ceiling 4 m). Two adjacent shafts, stone-lined with medium-to-large fieldstones, ascend from the chamber's ceiling to the surface through the mound's archaeological deposits (Fig. 19; height 5.5 m). We found the shafts on the mound's western side, within the perimeters of the encircling wall. Thus, this hiding complex would have provided the settlement's inhabitants with an escape route.



**Fig. 18.** Complex C, Chamber E and Crawlway E–G, view to the east (Photo: Eitan Klein).



**Fig. 19.** Complex C, Chamber F and the shafts in its ceiling, view to the north (Photo: Eitan Klein).

From the middle of the northern wall of Crawlway E–G, Crawlway F–H branches off, stretches 7 m to the northeast, and breaks through the southern wall of oval-shaped Chamber H ( $5.5 \times 4 \times 3.5$  m). Several rock-cut steps descend from the crawlway's opening to the chamber's floor. The chamber was furnished with a shaft that led to the surface; although it is blocked, it seems to have emerged on the mound's summit. The shaft's upper 5 m cut through the site's archaeological strata and are lined with medium-to-large fieldstones and dressed blocks. The shaft's lower 1.5 m, on the other hand, were carved in the *nari* (Fig. 16, Section II).



Through the western wall of Chamber H, 1.5 m above the floor, Crawlway H-I stretches west over a distance of 4 m (Fig. 20) and then turns south and continues 3 m more (Crawlway I-O) before coming upon a blockage of earth. At the corner in the crawlway is the entrance to a small, irregularly shaped chamber (Chamber I;  $3 \times 1.5 \times 1$  m). A rectangular stone used to block the chamber was found lying next to the entrance (Fig. 21).



**Fig. 20.** Complex C, Chamber H and the entrances to Crawlways F-H (left) and H-I (right), view to the west (Photo: Eitan Klein).



**Fig. 21.** Complex C, Crawlway H-I, entrance to Chamber I, and stone slab lock, view to the northwest (Photo: Eitan Klein).

From the northern wall of Crawlway H–I, a long and winding crawlway extends north and northeast (Crawlway H–J). It is 20 m long and includes several sharp turns. At each turn, a niche is placed nearby, apparently for holding an object that would close off the crawlway. The crawlway ends at a chamber's eastern wall with a blocked shaft in its ceiling (Chamber J; 3 × 3 m). From here, another crawlway (J–K) extends 22 m westward and ends near the top of the eastern wall of a round chamber with a blocked shaft in its ceiling (Chamber K; dia, 3 m). Two small bell-shaped storage installations (M1, M2) were hewn in the floor of Crawlway J–K (Fig. 18, Section I), and stone slabs for sealing them were found at the bottom of one of them.

From the southwestern wall of Chamber K, a short crawlway leads to a low, elongated chamber (Chamber L; 3 × 1.5 m), from which another crawlway extends 2 m southwards before coming upon a dead-end.

#### **4.1. Finds**

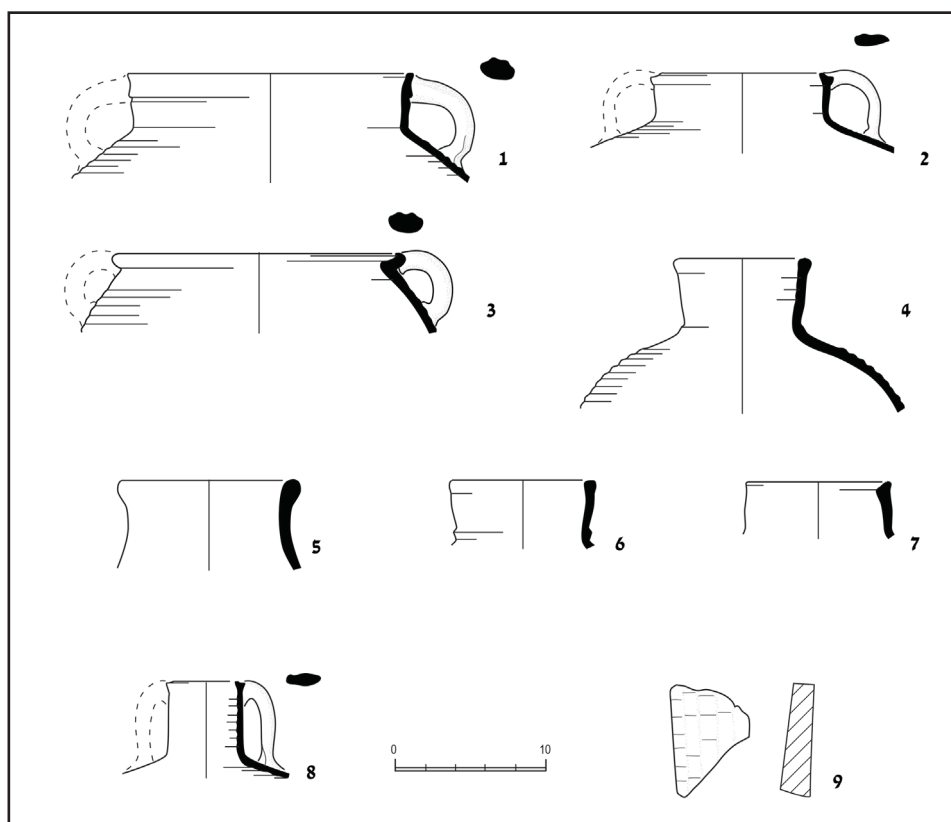
Indicative finds typical of the late 1st and early 2nd centuries CE were collected from several chambers in the hiding complex (Chambers E, H, I, and J). Two types of cooking pots and a casserole were found in the complex—all in Chamber I. One has a high, straight neck and an extended rim occupying the upper third of the neck (Fig. 22:1). Similar cooking pots have been found at Masada, where they were dated to the 1st and early 2nd centuries CE (Bar-Nathan 2006: 159, Pl. 29:30). The other type of cooking pot has a straight neck and a triple-everted and grooved rim (Fig. 22:2). Cooking pots of this type have been found in assemblages of the period spanning the revolts against Rome (70–136 CE). Among others, they include the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 191, Fig. 2:6), the el-Jai Cave (Eshel, Zissu, and Frumkin 1998: Pl. 1:6–7), the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 1:20), and the hiding complex at Horbat Midras (Kloner 1987a: Fig. 160:18). The casserole has a short neck and a flaring rim with a gutter for holding a lid (Fig. 22:3). Casseroles of this type have been found in assemblages from the time of the Bar Kokhba Revolt: the Cave of Horror (Aharoni 1962: 191, Fig. 2:3), the 'Abud Cave (Zissu et al. 2009a: Pl. 2:3), and the hiding complex at Horbat Midras (Kloner 1987a: Fig. 160:18).

Four rim fragments belonging to two types of bag-shaped jars were collected. One has a high, moderately everted neck and rim (Fig. 22:4–5). Such jars are common in Judea in assemblages from the 1st and early 2nd centuries CE. Parallels have been recorded in Bar Kokhba-period refuge caves: the Cave of the Sandal (Eshel and Zissu 1998: Pl. 4:1) and the Mt. Yishay Cave (Porat, Eshel, and Frumkin 2009a: Pl. 2:2). The second jar type has a straight neck and

a simple rim (Fig. 22:6–7). Similar jars have been discovered in Bar Kokhba-period assemblages in the Tetradrachm Cave (Amit and Eshel 1998: Pl. 3:33), the Mt. Yishay Cave (Porat, Eshel, and Frumkin 2009a: Pl. 2:3), and the hiding complex at Ḥorbat Midras (Kloner 1987a: Pl. 160:5, 8, 10, 12).

A fragment of a jug with a high neck, a grooved, triple-everted rim, and two long handles extending from the rim to the shoulder was discovered in Chamber I (Fig. 22:8). A similar jug was discovered at Masada in an assemblage from the late 1st century CE (Bar-Nathan 2006: 175, Pl. 31:90).

Another find of interest is a fragment of a chalk vessel of the sort used by the Jewish population from the late Second Temple period until the Bar Kokhba Revolt (Fig. 22:9; Magen 2002; Adler 2011:161–220). Because this is only a small body fragment measuring  $7.5 \times 5$  cm, its precise type remains uncertain, but it probably belonged to a stone bowl. This find attests to the use of the complex by a Jewish population.



**Fig. 22.** Finds from Complex C  
(Drawings: Irena Lidsky-Reznikov).

**Table 3: Finds in Hiding Complex C**

No.	Vessel type	Chamber	Basket	Description
1.	Cooking pot	I	1001/12	Dark orange clay, large grits, thin gray core
2.	Cooking pot	I	1001/9	Dark orange clay, gray core, white grits
3.	Casserole	I	1001/13	Dark orange clay, a few small grits
4.	Jar	J	1004/1	Light orange clay, light gray core, small white grits
5.	Jar	E	1005/3	Light pink clay, light gray core, many large white grits
6.	Jar	E	1005/1	Light orange clay, light gray core, a few medium-sized white grits
7.	Jar	E	1005/4	Light pink clay exterior and darker pink interior, gray core, small white grits
8.	Cooking jug	I	1001/6	Dark orange clay, small white grits
9.	Stone vessel	H	1003/1	Stone vessel with chisel marks

## 4.2. Conclusion

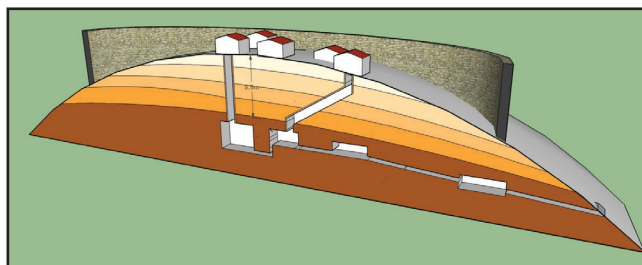
Complex C has all the standard features of an intricate hiding complex, including long, narrow, sharp-angled crawlways with shifting levels and niches for lamps and locking installations. The ceramic and stone vessels discovered in its chambers indicate that this hiding complex was used by the settlement's Jewish residents between the Jewish revolts against Rome and during the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Like the other two complexes, some parts of this complex may have been installed and used as early as the 1st Century BCE.

This complex is unique for its capacity to provide people with an escape route from inside the walled settlement at the top of the mound via deep shafts and subterranean spaces. Zissu classified complexes that constitute a means of escape from inside an ancient settlement as "escape complexes" (Zissu 2001b: 275). Such complexes have been discovered at several sites, including Aḥuzat Ḥazan (Avni et al. 1987: 127), Kh. el-Muraq (Hilkiah's Palace; Raviv and Langford 2017: 65), and Naḥal Yatir (Alon 1987: 158).

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The three subterranean complexes documented at Tel Lavnin possess physical features typical of Roman period hiding complexes found in Judea. The finds in these complexes suggest that they date from the period between the two Jewish revolts against Rome (70–132 CE) and the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–136 CE). However, the Tel Lavnin hiding complexes also have unique features that are unparalleled in other hiding complexes in the region. Whereas most subterranean complexes in Judea were carved directly into bedrock, those of Tel Lavnin first made their way through thick archaeological deposits. We identify two distinctive architectural elements (Fig. 23):

1. Stone-lined crawlways. Complexes A and B feature crawlways that cut through the archaeological deposits at the top of the mound. They have walls built of medium-to-large fieldstones and a roof of stone slabs. Their floor is inclined and stepped. The purpose of the crawlways was to reach the bedrock (i.e., the *nari* and the soft chalk underneath it) ca. 5.5 m beneath the surface. Notably, like the rock-cut crawlways, the stone-lined crawlways also feature sharp angles, and one of them even has a niche for a stone intended for locking it.
2. Stone-lined shafts. All three hiding complexes at Tel Lavnin have ca. 5.5 m-deep shafts dug from the surface, through archaeological deposits, to subterranean chambers carved into the rock. The upper sections of these shafts that transversed the archaeological deposits were lined with medium-to-large fieldstones and dressed blocks, whereas their lower sections carved in the hard *nari* (an additional depth of 1–1.5 m) were not. It is hard to determine when precisely the shafts were excavated. Were they purposefully excavated for the underground hiding complexes, or were they preexisting elements incorporated into the hiding complexes? In any case, the shafts afforded quick descent from the surface to the underground area and its various cavities. In one case (Complex C), they even enabled people to escape outside the settlement.



**Fig. 23:** Schematic reconstruction of walled settlement and hiding complex cutting through archaeological layers and the basal rock below (Reconstruction: Nir Reifer Architects).



These distinctive architectural features stem, of course, from the Jewish settlement's position on a preexisting archaeological mound. In contrast, most other contemporary Jewish settlements in Judea were built on bedrock. In other words, the different physical conditions of the settlement at Tel Lavnin compelled its residents to employ different construction methods in order to produce a system of subterranean spaces for purposes of refuge and escape.

However, Tel Lavnin is not a singular case. Zissu indicated several fortified settlements dating from the late Second Temple period to the Bar Kokhba Revolt that stood on ancient mounds: Tel Shilo, Tel 'Azeqa, Tel Gezer, Tel 'Ira, Tel 'Aro'er, and perhaps also Tel Sokho, Betar, and Tel 'Arad (Zissu 2006: 85–92). He proposed these are the settlements mentioned in the Mishnah as “cit[ies] encompassed by a wall in the days of Joshua son of Nun” (*m. Meg.* 1:1; *m. 'Arak.* 9:6) and discussed in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. 'Arak.* 32a). He suggested that the residents of these Jewish settlements used preexisting fortifications and referred to these and other ruins from the distant historical past as being of “the days of Joshua son of Nun.” We thus suggest that the pre-Bar Kokhba Jewish settlement at Tel Lavnin ought to be considered part of this group.

Nevertheless, none of these sites featured hiding complexes that cut through archaeological deposits. We found only one other site with a similar feature: Tel 'Adullam, ca. 5 km northeast of Tel Lavnin. Near the top, on its southern side, Zissu documented a hiding complex that includes a stepped entrance corridor, two crawlways, a hiding chamber, and a cistern. The upper part of the complex cuts through 3.5 m of archaeological deposits, and its walls are lined with dressed blocks. The complex's lower portion, on the other hand, was carved into the rock (Zissu 1999b).

Although not a perfect parallel, Herodium of the Bar Kokhba Revolt presents some features similar to those noted above for Tel Lavnin. While it is not a proper archaeological mound and does not consist of superimposing archaeological strata, Herodium is a cone-shaped artificial mountain built by Herod to serve as a monumental tomb. To achieve this, hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of earthen fills and stones were piled up against the outer face of the fortification wall, burying all buildings on the slopes. Herodium was one of the centers of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, and many crawlways and tunnels were carved in it. Approximately one-third of these tunnels and crawlways made their way through the artificial earthen fill and employed U-shaped supports consisting of stone walls, mud walls, and wooden beams, in a manner similar to that observed at Tel Lavnin (Porat, Kalman, and Chachy 2015: 265–266).

Underscoring the uniqueness of Tel Lavnin, it is notable that hiding complexes on other biblical mounds circumvented the archaeological strata

and were restricted to areas where the bedrock is high. Tel 'Azeqa is a case in point. It featured a late Second Temple period settlement, including at least two ritual baths (Reich 2013: 147–148), a wall, and a fortified tower (Bliss and Macalister 1902: 14). Nevertheless, and notwithstanding the many extensive excavations and surveys conducted on the mound, no hiding complexes were identified on the tel proper but only on its slopes. More specifically, they were located beneath a well-defined terrace—presumably a fortification—where the bedrock is high and easily accessible. On these grounds, it was proposed that the Bar Kokhba-period settlement at Tel 'Azeqa stood on the upper slopes of the tel and not at the top (Tepper and Shahar 1987: 171–185).

A similar situation was observed at Tel Goded, northeast of Bet Guvrin. Here, Bliss and Macalister excavated and found a Second Temple-period settlement on the mound, surrounded by a wall with four gates (Bliss and Macalister 1902: 44, 89–90, 107, 195, 199; Gibson 1994). As at Tel 'Azeqa, no hiding complexes were identified on the tel proper but only on its eastern slopes, within the territory of the Hellenistic and Roman site of Ḥorbat Ṭabaq. This location is notable for its high bedrock and proximity to the main road at the foot of the mound (Kloner 1987b: 237–238).

At Tel Gezer, Macalister documented a complex of subterranean cavities (Complex 28II) that was later identified as a hiding complex. While the complex was located on the mound, it was carved entirely out of the bedrock. However, according to Macalister, one shaft in the complex (in Cavity 6) was dug into the archaeological deposits and lined with stones (Macalister 1911: 111–141; Kloner 1987c). At Tel Sokho, too, a hiding complex was documented where the bedrock is high (Zissu 2000: 70–71).

Like the hiding complexes, ritual baths were sometimes dug and built into archaeological deposits or earthen fills when rock was unavailable. For instance, at Tel Gezer, Ronny Reich identified seven installations in the plans from Macalister's excavations as ritual baths from the late Second Temple period. According to Reich, these ritual baths were “dug and built in their entirety within the ruins of the ancient settlement strata and were not carved out of the natural rock, which in this case is deep down in the tel” (Reich 2013: 144–146).

To sum up, between the two Jewish revolts against Rome (70–132 CE) or during the Bar Kokhba Revolt, the residents of Jewish settlements produced hiding complexes under their houses. In a few cases, due to the inaccessibility of the natural rock, the construction efforts had to make their way through layers of earthen fills. To do so, they dug vertical stone-lined shafts or moderately inclined roofed crawlways down to the bedrock. In other cases, the residents created their hiding complexes where the bedrock was high and accessible.

Presumably, the phenomenon discussed in this paper—stone-lined hiding crawlways cutting archaeological deposits—will be accompanied by more examples in the future. Excavators of biblical mounds must be aware of the phenomenon so that they may correctly identify and date the remains.

## Acknowledgments

The Hiding complexes at Tel Lavnin were documented by the authors under survey license no. S-1057/2020 on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority and with assistance of S. Hajaj (Survey), E. Aladjem (GIS), C. Hersch and I. Lidski-Reznikov (Drawings), and N. Reifer (Graphic Imaging).

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