

LAND OF
GALILEE 2

PEQI'IN

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A LATE CHALCOLITHIC BURIAL SITE
UPPER GALILEE, ISRAEL

Dina Shalem, Zvi Gal, Howard Smithline

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INSTITUTE FOR GALILEAN ARCHAEOLOGY KINNERET COLLEGE



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With Contributions by

Avner Ayalon, Mira Bar-Matthews, Guy Bar-Oz, Daniella E. Bar-Yosef Mayer,
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Nimrod Getzov, Yuval Goren, Elisheva Kamaisky, Yossi Nagar,
Naomi Porat, T. Douglas Price, Noa Raban-Gerstel, Tamar Schick and Irina Segal

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KINNERET ACADEMIC COLLEGE
INSTITUTE FOR GALILEAN ARCHAEOLOGY



Ostracon

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IN MEMORY OF
ANDREW (ANDY) DAVIDSON
1952–2010
PARIS, FRANCE

WHO LOVED TO UNEARTH THE HISTORY
OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

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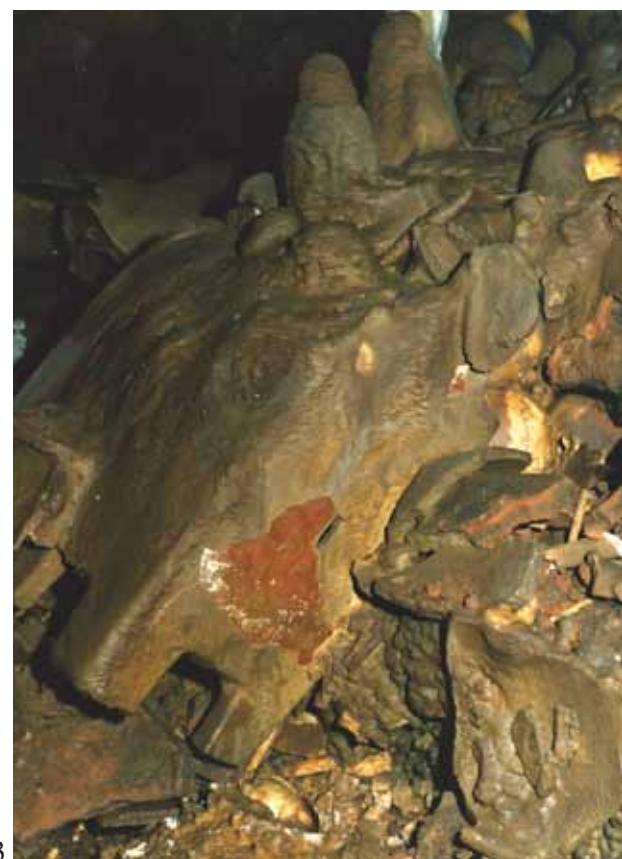
PLATE I



1



2



3



PLATE III





1



2



3

PLATE V



1



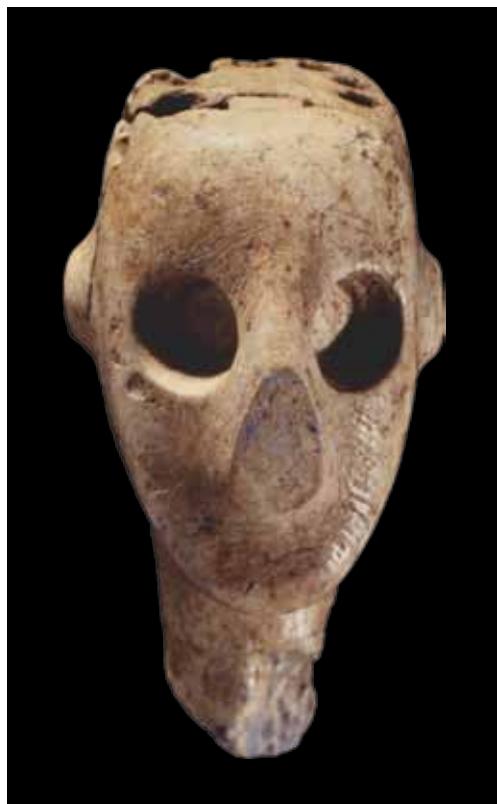
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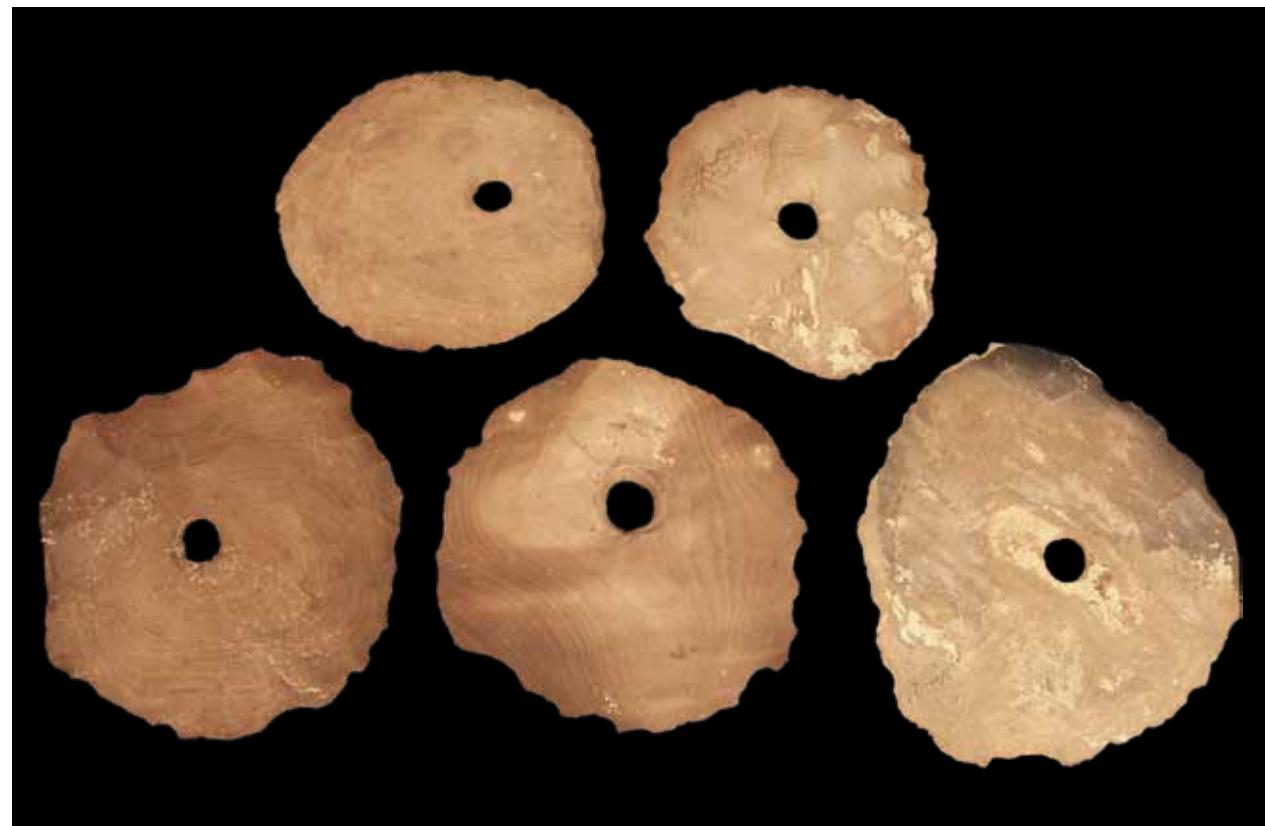


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PLATE VII





1



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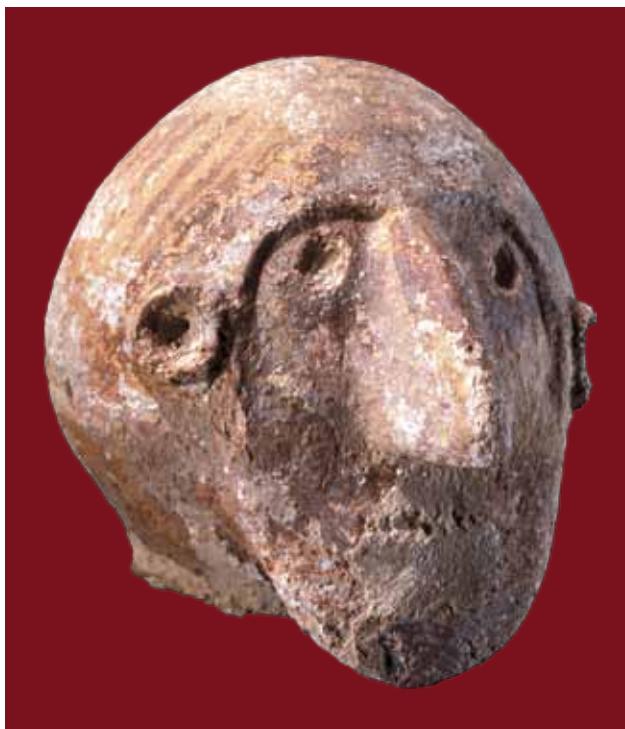


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PLATE IX



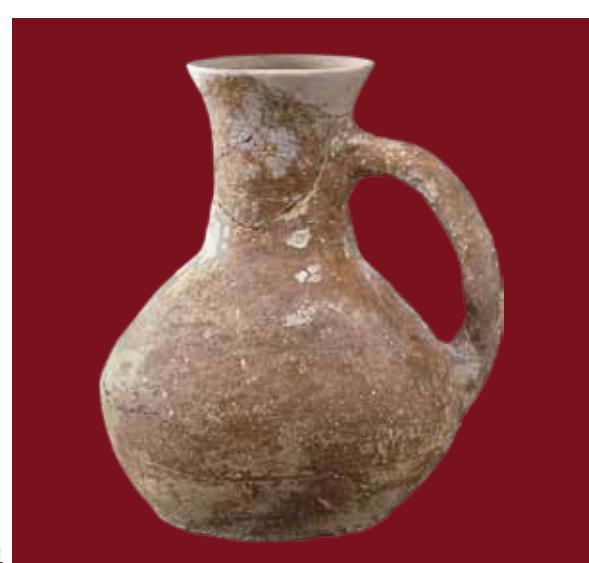
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5



6

PLATE XI



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation of the Chalcolithic burial cave at Peqi'in was a unique archaeological experience for the many people who took part in the project—from its discovery to the completion of this volume. The founder and first director of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), the late Amir Drori, who visited the site shortly following its discovery, understood well the archaeological value of the site and its finds. Straight away, Drori decided to take the burden of the excavation upon the IAA. This volume is one among the many milestones of his achievements.

The following personnel employed at that time in the IAA Northern Region enthusiastically shared this venture with us: Amitai Aharoni, Yardenna Alexandre, Mordechai Aviam, Haya Ben-Nahum, Nimrod Getzov, Yossi Moshe, Abdallah Moqari, Aviram Oshri and Idan Shaqed. Howard Smithline also served as field photographer. Vadim Essman and Viatcheslav (Slava) Pirskey surveyed the cave and a team of ten faithful workers from Kafir Manda labored daily excavating.

Following the excavation, the finds were treated in the IAA laboratories in Jerusalem, directed at that time

by Pnina Shor. The ceramic and stone objects were restored and conserved by Michal Ben-Gal, Roni Gat and Elisheva Kamaisky, who, for three years, skillfully and tirelessly revived thousands of potsherds. Ella Altmark treated the metal objects and Noga Ze'evi drew the ossuaries, burial jars and some of the fenestrated vessels, extracting hidden details from their faded colors. Lilya Kirifov drew several of the fenestrated vessels and small vessels, Hagit Tahan drew the pre-burial phase and Natalia Zak drew the cave plan. Mariana Saltzberger, Clara Amit, Tzila Sagiv and Howard Smithline photographed the finds and perpetuated them in colorful slides.

The daily work was assisted by the Peqi'in Local Council, headed at the time by Nasrallah Hir and his staff. Arieh Dahan, director of the neighboring Tefen Industrial Park, kindly provided a storage facility for the excavation expedition. The initial steps of this research were kindly supported by the CARE Foundation and The Mediterranean Archaeological Trust.

We would like to express our gratitude to them all.

PREFACE

In May 1995, during the construction of a road to a newly built youth hostel in Peqi'in, Upper Galilee, a bulldozer broke through the ceiling of a cave. Local officials notified Mordechai Aviam, then IAA district archaeologist. Aviam, who immediately identified the site as a Chalcolithic burial cave, was completely taken by surprise. He recognized the significance of the find, both for researchers of this period in general and for the study of the Galilee in particular.

Looking into the cave upon its discovery and knowing (at the time) that the northernmost known Chalcolithic burial cave was located in Hadera, 80 kilometers to the south, Aviam found it hard to believe that a burial place of this type existed in Upper Galilee. This was a unique situation and we all understood that the cave bore new evidence that could change how the Chalcolithic period was perceived.

A week after the cave's discovery, the excavation was launched on behalf of the IAA and directed by

the authors (Permit No. 2297). It lasted three months, from May 22nd to August 11th, 1995.

Until the discovery of the Peqi'in Cave, the Upper Galilee was largely outside the scope of research on the Chalcolithic period. The cave and its unique finds promptly changed scholarly perceptions of the period and the region. We thus believe that the publication of this report will reveal new aspects of the Chalcolithic period, opening new horizons for a better understanding of settlement patterns, and the cultural, artistic and spiritual life of the people who lived in this era.

The majority of the chapters were completed several years ago. However, due to a number of factors unrelated to the excavation, publication of this volume was interrupted. We have done our best to update the content and believe that it is important to publish this manuscript without further delay, as it will contribute much to the study of the Chalcolithic period.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

LOCATION

The village of Peqi'in (map reference OIG 1810 2645; NIG 2310 7645) is located in the heart of mountainous Upper Galilee, on the western foothill of Mt. Meron, which is the highest point west of the Jordan River (summit =1208 m asl; Fig. 1.1). It is 25 kilometers east of the Mediterranean, 30 kilometers west of the Jordan River and six kilometers north of Bet Ha-Kerem Valley, which marks the boundary between Upper and Lower Galilee.

The geological structure of the vicinity of Peqi'in consists of hard limestone of the Veradim Formation, which is often characterized by karstic activity that produces caves with stalactites and stalagmites. The region is densely covered by typical Mediterranean vegetation, comprised mainly of terebinth (*pistacia Palestina*), styrax, carob (*ceratonia silqua*) and mastic (*pistacia lentiscus*) trees.

The cave of Peqi'in is situated on a steep hillside, at the foot of which is the wide basin of Nahal Peqi'in that creates a small and quite isolated pocket valley (Figs. 1.2; 1.3). Several springs are known in the village and its surroundings, providing stable water sources ('Ein el-Balad, 'En Tiria, 'Ein el-Jab, 'En Yossi, 'En Ganon and 'En Rashbi). Two archaeological sites were surveyed within the boundaries of the village (Frankel et al. 2001:32). The main archaeological site is Tel Ḥarashim, located one kilometer to the south of the village and excavated by Aharoni (1957); however, it was not occupied in the Chalcolithic period (Frankel et al. 2001:32). Recently, a newly discovered Chalcolithic site was traced in the lower part of the village (Getzov 2007a; Fig. 1.2). However, situated on the western side of Nahal Peqi'in opposite the village and above this contemporaneous site, the cave was remote from both the archaeological sites and the

springs and was probably somewhat hidden within the natural vegetation.

THE CAVE AND ITS STRATIGRAPHY

The cave (c. 17 m long, 4.5–8.0 m wide) consists of three rooms (Areas I–III; Plan 1.1), sloping down from

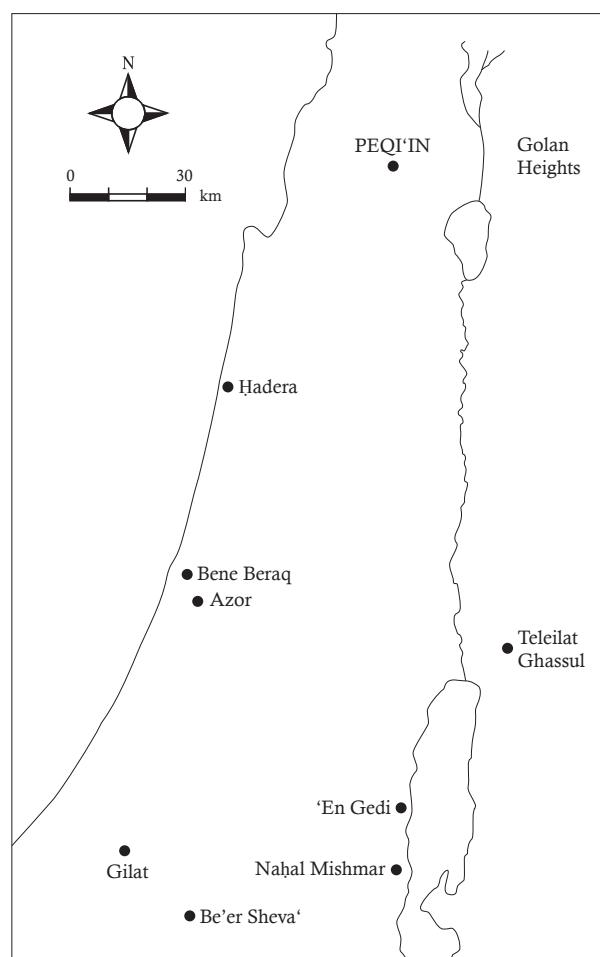


Fig. 1.1. Peqi'in and the main Chalcolithic burial sites in Israel.



Fig. 1.2. Peqi'in, looking east from the cave. The Chalcolithic site is in the basin of Nahal Peqi'in, below.

east to west (Plan 1.1). The original entrance was in the eastern end, toward the slope below. It seems that the entrance had been covered and blocked by debris and concealed throughout the ages. Possibly, a natural

corridor led from the entrance into the cave; however, it was also sealed by petrified flowstone and debris, which collapsed from the ceiling (Fig. 1.4; see below, Phase E). This probable corridor is currently under the modern road whose construction revealed the cave and brought to its discovery.

The upper room (Area I; c. 5.5×8 m; c. 5 m high), was limited on its western side by a terrace wall (W102; 1.2–1.5 m high; Fig. 1.5), which supported a pavement (L117). Both the wall and pavement were built of fieldstones and are associated with Phase C (see Chapter 3).

The middle room (Area II; c. 4×5.5 m; c. 2.5 m high) extends along a steep slope with a 2.5 m differential in elevation between its upper and lower ends. Although its original shape may have undergone changes caused by tectonic activity, it apparently served also as a passage between the upper and the lower rooms (Fig. 1.6). Two parallel terrace walls (W203, W204; both c. 0.5 m high) made of fieldstones were revealed in its northern half, W204 in the center of Area II and W203 at its western

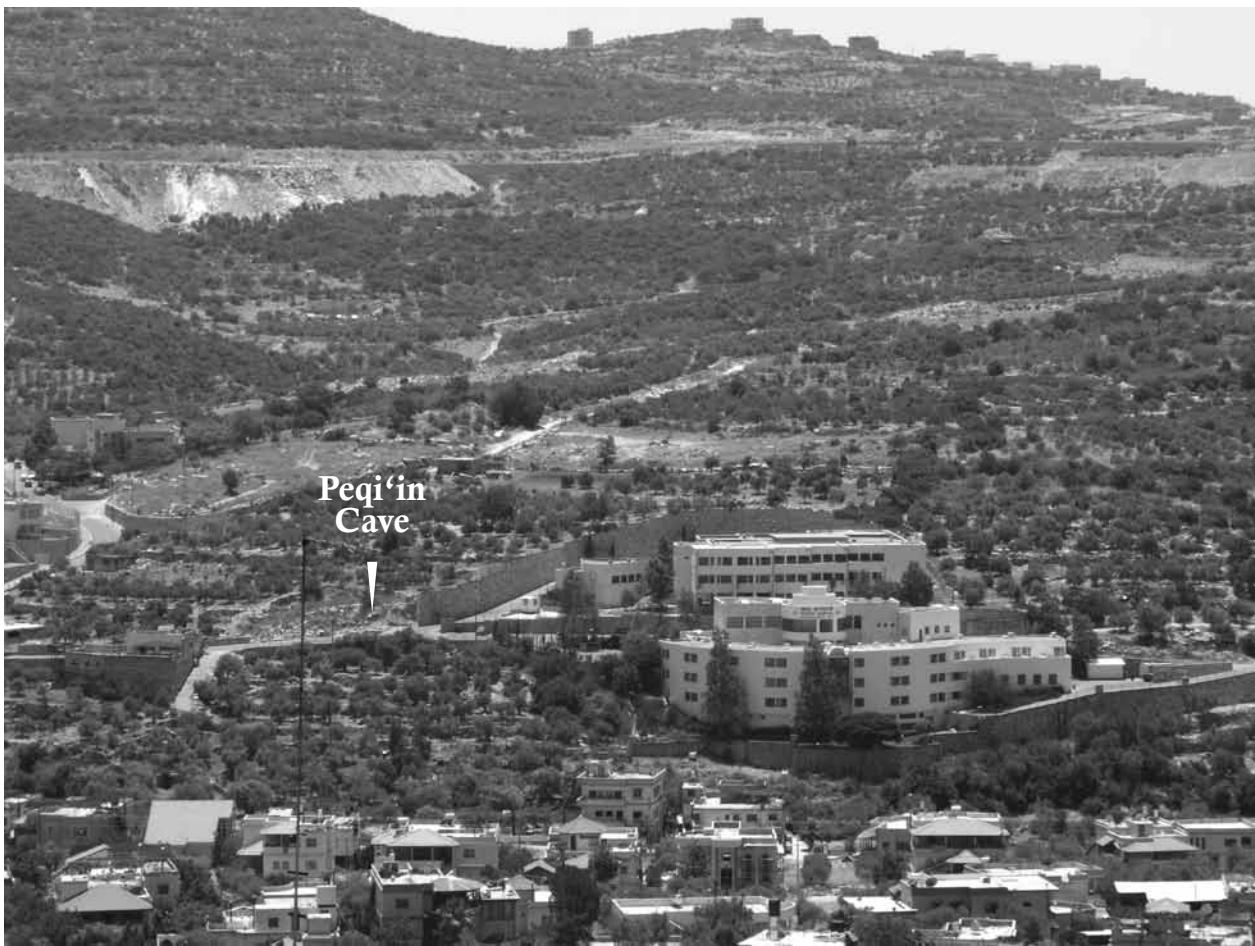


Fig. 1.3. The location of the cave, looking west from Peqi'in.



Fig. 1.4. The flowstone from the corridor into Area I.

edge (Fig. 1.7). These walls were also built in Phase C and used as a shelf or support for placing ossuaries.

The lower room, the largest in the cave, extends west of Terrace Wall 203 (Area III; 6 m × 6 m; 2.5 m high; Fig. 1.8). It is irregularly shaped and in its center was a 1 m deep depression, a karstic sinkhole, which was filled in Phase C (see below). Stone-built walls (W303, W320) supporting shelves were built in Phase C in the western and southwestern sides of the room (Plan 1.1; Figs. 1.9, 1.10) for the purpose of placing various ossuaries and other objects (see Chapter 3). On the southwestern edge of the room and c. 2 m above its floor level, there was a small irregular room ('attic'; Area VII), where ossuaries and burial jars of Phase C were found. This room was hardly accessed due to the collapse and the flowstone of Phase E (Fig. 1.11; see below), thus it is difficult to reconstruct the original structure of this part of the cave.

The present form of the cave and the views within it are the result of natural processes and human activity. Six phases, both natural and man-made, were identified in the cave in the course of the excavation:

Phase A: The Early Karstic Activity

The cave was affected by natural karstic activity prior to the first human presence in the cave. This is evident by the stalagmites found at the bottom of the probe dug in the center of Area III (Fig. 1.12).

Phase B: The Early Chalcolithic Occupation

In the Early Chalcolithic period, the cave was temporarily, or more probably, seasonally occupied. Evidently, this



Fig. 1.5. Area I, The face of Terrace Wall 102.

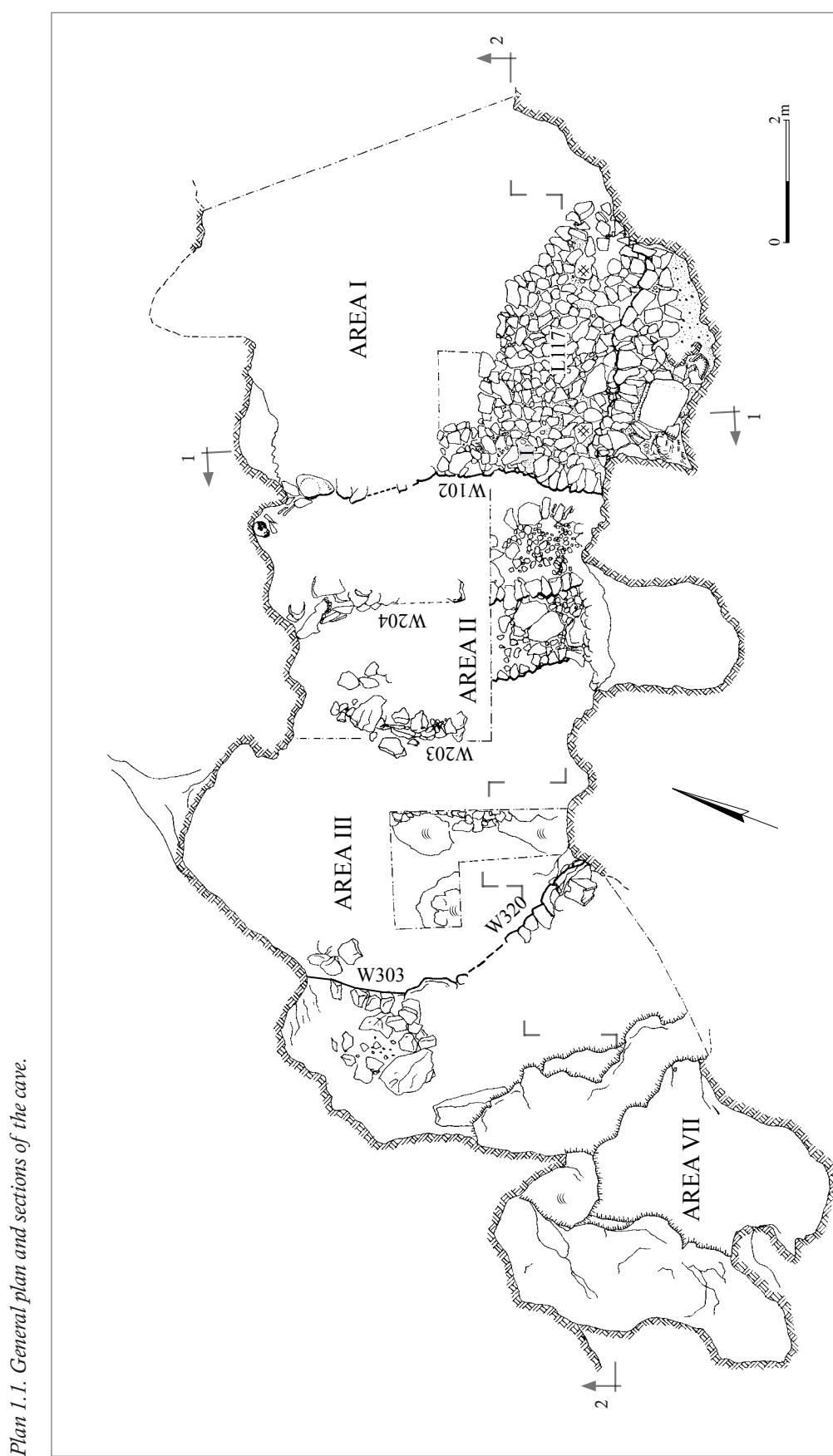


Fig. 1.6. View from Area I down to Area II.

occupation is represented by a series of pebble floors, ash layers, stone debris and pottery sherds, found in a section and a probe dug in Areas II and III respectively (Fig. 1.13; see Chapter 2).

Phase C: The Late Chalcolithic Burial Cave

During the Late Chalcolithic period, the cave was used as a burial site. For this purpose it was modified by building terrace walls W102 and W203, creating three well-defined rooms. In the upper room (Area I), a large pavement was built (L117), the lower room (Area III)



Plan 1.1. General plan and sections of the cave.

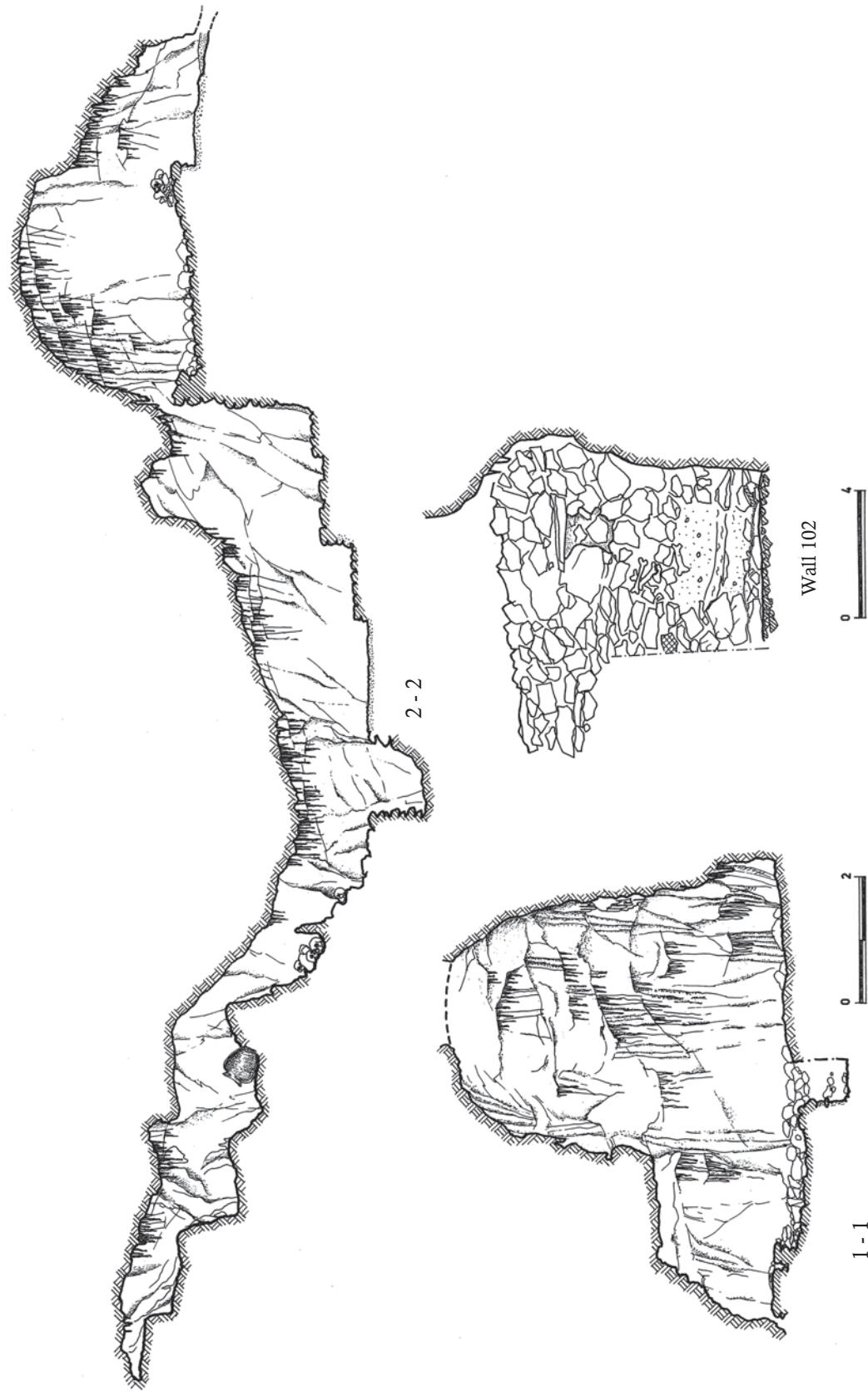




Fig. 1.7. Area II, Terrace Wall 203; Area III is in the rear.

was filled and leveled, and stone shelves (W303 and W320) were constructed along its western and eastern walls. The 'attic' (Area VII) above Area III was used for placing ossuaries and burial jars. The vast majority of the finds revealed in the excavation originated from

this phase, including dozens of ossuaries and burial jars (see Chapters 3–13).

Phase D: The Robbery

Most probably still within the Chalcolithic period, the cave was looted and its contents were turned upside down. The overwhelming disorder that existed in the cave at the time it was revealed well testifies that the looters left almost no ossuary or jar without emptying them, leaving only a very few of them *in situ*. Many of the ossuaries and the burial jars, as well as small vessels, were thrown aside, and their parts were scattered in different parts of the cave (Figs. 1.14–1.16), although a strict examination enabled a reconstruction of the original placement of most of the finds (see Chapters 3 and 20). Bones, skulls and skeletal fragments mixed with dirt and pottery sherds were spread everywhere. It seems that the looters were looking for precious materials such as copper, ivory and basalt, as evident by the small number of objects made of these materials

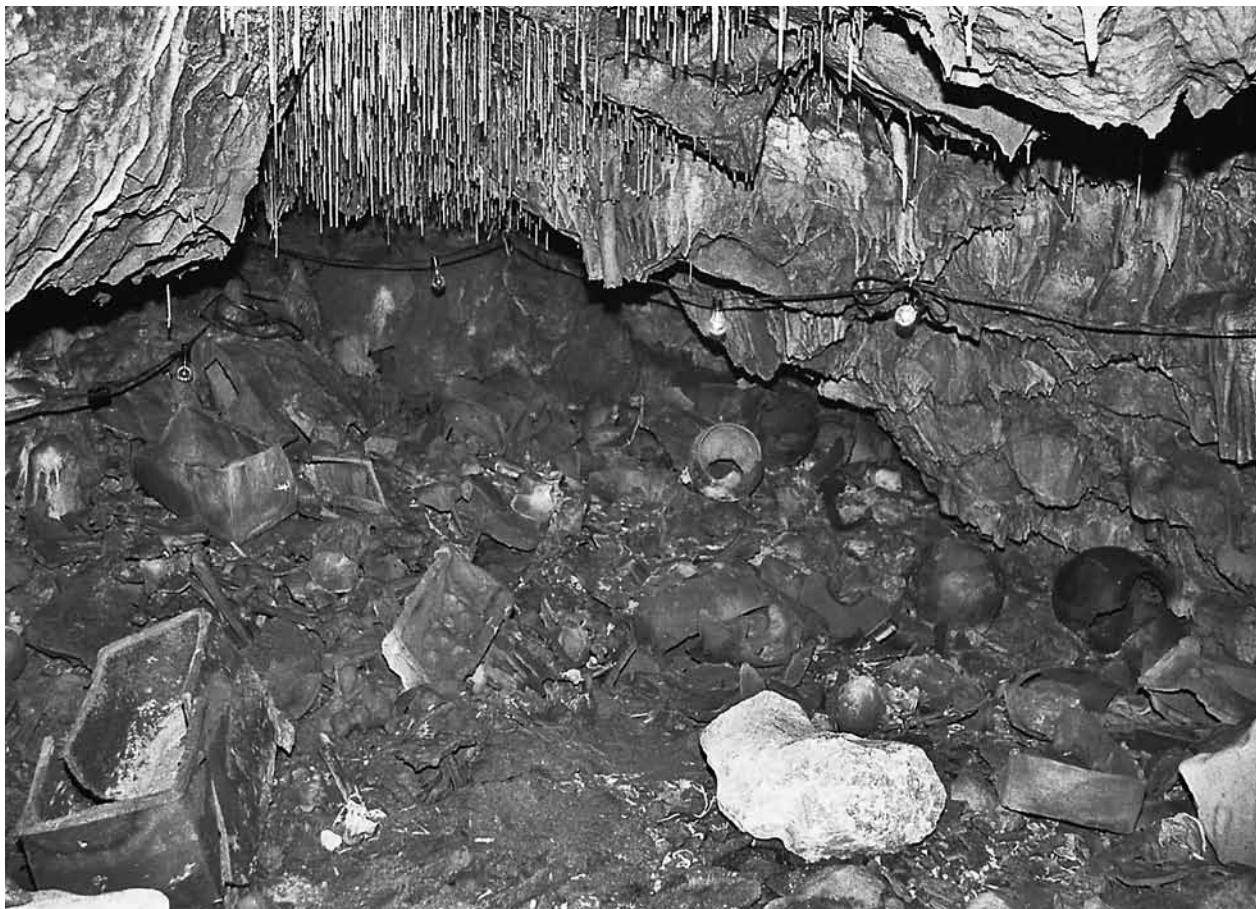


Fig. 1.8. Area III, general view.

that were found in the excavation. Following the robbery, the cave was probably never entered again.

Phase E: The Collapse

Two sections within the cave were found blocked by flowstone: the space between the entrance and Area I (Fig. 1.4) and the area between the southwestern part of Area III and Area VII. It seems apparent that this resulted from the collapse of the ceiling, as well as intense water activity. A geological study carried out in the vicinity of Peqi'in showed that it is possible that the collapse resulted from an earthquake that occurred during this period (pers. comm., Avner Ayalon from the GSI).

Phase F: The Later Karstic Activity

After the abandonment of the cave, the karstic activity was intensified, and for more than six millennia it has been creating hundreds of colorful stalagmites



Fig. 1.9. Area III, the western shelf (W303).

and stalactites on the floor and on the ceiling (Figs. 1.17–1.20). Stalagmites accumulated atop of vessels and layers of travertine covered various objects, petrifying them into chunks consisting of broken vessels, skeletal remains and skulls (Figs. 1.19; Pl. II:2). The view that



Fig. 1.10. Area III, the southwestern shelf (W320).

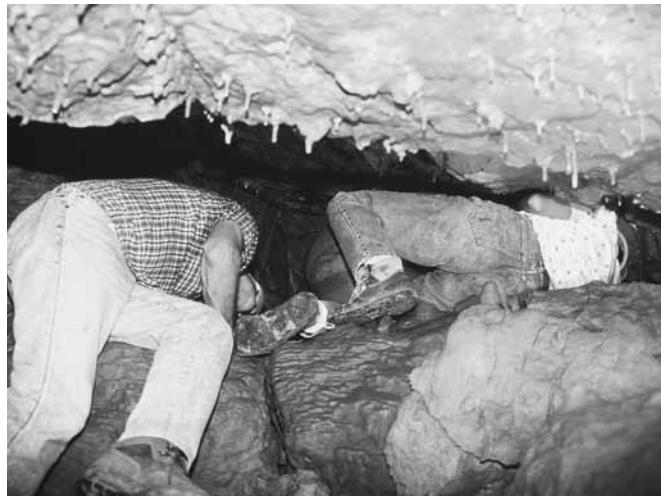


Fig. 1.11. Climbing up to Area VII.



Fig. 1.12. Stalagmites in the bottom of Area III.



Fig. 1.13. Accumulations of Phase B in Area III.



Fig. 1.14. Scattered objects resulting from the robbery.



Fig. 1.15. Scattered objects resulting from the robbery.



Fig. 1.16. Scattered objects resulting from the robbery.



Fig. 1.17. Stalactites in Area I.

was first revealed in the cave upon its discovery was a unique and rare phenomenon.

THE COURSE OF THE EXCAVATION AND ITS METHODS

The bulldozer that exposed the cave created an opening in the ceiling of the upper room (Fig. 1.21), through which the cave was entered and the excavation was operated.

A 1×1 m grid was set in order to accurately locate and document the objects. In general, the grid was along the main east-west axis of the cave, but due to its internal complicated structure and topography, the grid was adjusted to the outlines of each area (Plan 1.1). The upper, middle and lower rooms were designated as Areas I–III, from top (east) to bottom (west) respectively, and each area (room) has been allocated the following serial numbers of loci and baskets (Table 1).

As mentioned above, the vast majority of the objects originated from Phase C and was spread throughout the surface of the cave. Shortly after the dig was launched, it became clear that it would be impossible to get into the cave without literally stepping on the finds. Therefore, the initial part of the excavation was practically collecting the vessels, rather than digging them, and the actual dig was conducted mainly through sections and probes underneath the floor levels of Phase C.

The excavation started by collecting all the vessels from the surface of Area I. Consequently, a vacant area was created in Area I, enabling to easily maneuver there and use the elevator more efficiently (see below).

In the following stage, the objects from Area II were picked up. It was covered by scattered bones, broken ossuaries and jars, some possibly thrown from Area I.



Fig. 1.18. Stalagmites on top of ossuaries and other objects.

This allowed us to reach Area III, where most of the finds were. It then became possible to collect and dig the lower, inner Area III. Here, too, the scattered objects were first collected, as well as the vessels from the Area VII. Following, the accumulations on the floor level of Area III were excavated, continuing in a deep probe dug in the center of the area down to bedrock (Phase A).

After Area III was excavated, a 2 m long section was dug along the sloping surface of Area II, from the bottom of Terrace Wall 102 in the east, to the western edge of the area. A series of beaten earth and pebble floors limited by poorly built walls was found. Evidently,

Table 1.1. Loci and Baskets Numbers Assigned to the Areas

Area	Loci Numbers	Basket Numbers
Area I	100–199	1000–1999
Area II	200–299	2000–2999
Area III	300–399	3000–3999
Area IV (below fallen ceiling debris in Area I)	400	4000–4999
Area VII	700–799	7000–7999
Unassociated objects*	—	6000–6999

*These objects were taken from the cave by local villagers who entered it shortly after its discovery. They were returned to the possession of the excavators due to the efforts of Yossi Moshe, then head of the IAA Robbery Prevention in Galilee.



Fig. 1.19. Stalagmites and stalactites in Area VII.



Fig. 1.20. General view of the stalagmites and stalactites.



Fig. 1.21. The opening created by the bulldozer in the ceiling of the cave.

these floors and the pottery associated with them are dated to the Early Chalcolithic occupation of Phase B (see Chapter 2).

In the course of the excavation, elevations were relatively measured from a benchmark at the opening in the ceiling of the upper room (Area I), close to the surface outside the cave. An electric generator supplied power to operate spotlights and an elevator by which the earth and the objects were lifted up through the opening in Area I (Fig. 1.22). All the dirt was sieved with water by a 4 mm sieve—a method that successfully implemented and guaranteed the saving of even the smallest finds, such as beads, from the wet dirt (Fig. 1.23). A large amount of very small bone fragments was found during sieving, as well as in the dig itself. These were packed in bags and permanently deposited in Area I.

Due to ethical considerations, but also due to safety and technical reasons, the cave was intentionally not

entirely excavated. As mentioned above, the entrance and the possible corridor were not excavated because of safety problems. The eastern part of Area I, which was covered by flowstone slide from the corridor, was left unexcavated as well. The northern part of Area III, which contained petrified skulls and several vessels, also remained untouched. A large chunk of mixed petrified skulls, bones and ossuaries between the northwestern (W303) and the southwestern (W320) walls in Area III was also left unexcavated. The purpose of leaving these sections untouched is to save some of the unique views that resulted from both ancient human activity and natural processes in the cave, as well as reserving some potential for future research.

At the end of the excavation, the opening in the ceiling of the cave was closed by an iron-made door and then sealed with a heavy layer of concrete (Fig. 1.24).



Fig. 1.22. The elevator.



Fig. 1.23. Water sieving.

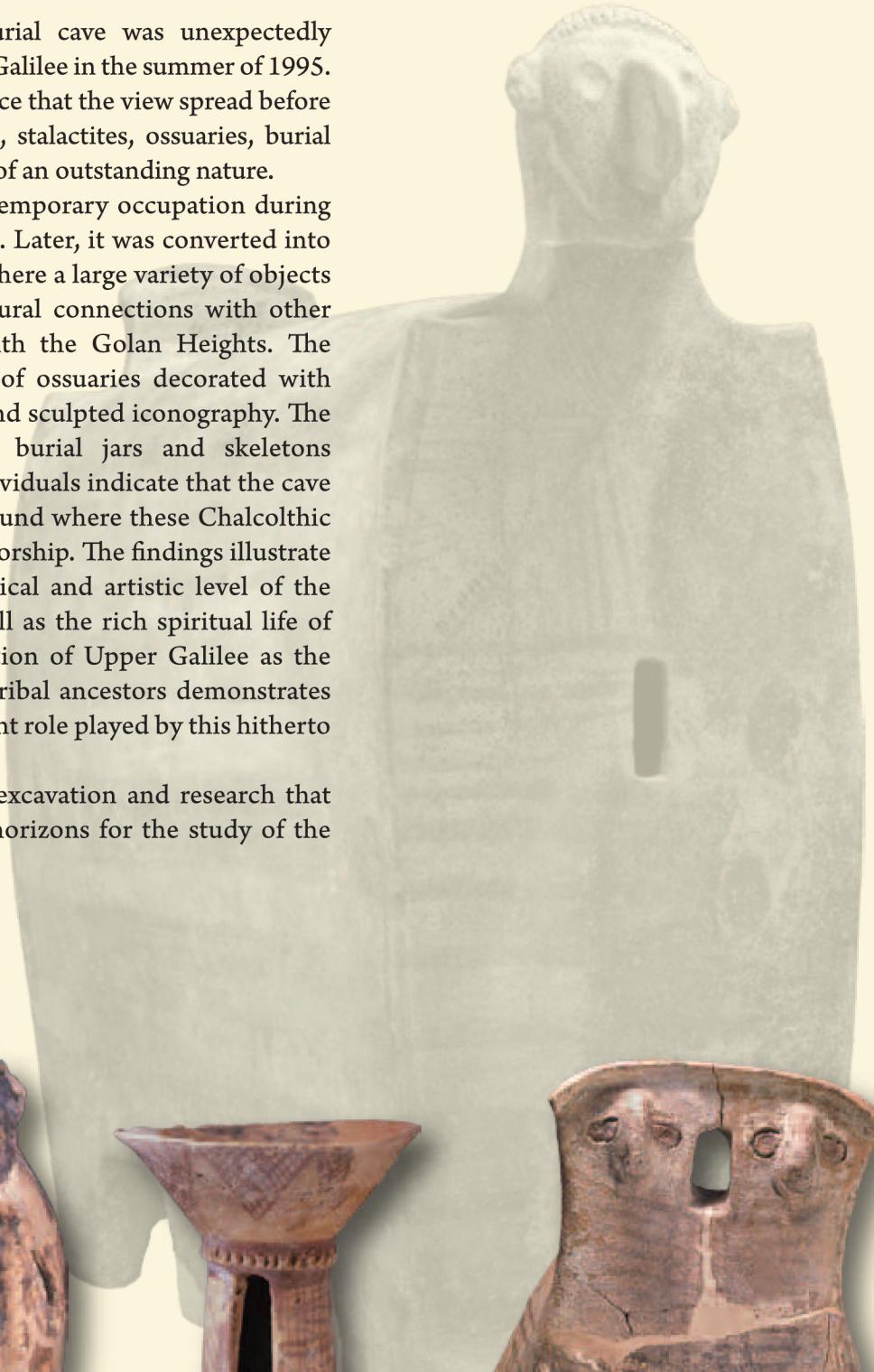


Fig. 1.24. The concrete sealing of the cave.

The unique Chalcolithic burial cave was unexpectedly discovered in Peqi'in, Upper Galilee in the summer of 1995. It was clear from the first glance that the view spread before the excavators of stalagmites, stalactites, ossuaries, burial jars and skeletal remains was of an outstanding nature.

The cave was first used for temporary occupation during the early Chalcolithic period. Later, it was converted into an extraordinary cemetery where a large variety of objects was found, attesting to cultural connections with other regions and particularly, with the Golan Heights. The main findings were dozens of ossuaries decorated with hitherto unknown painted and sculpted iconography. The vast number of ossuaries, burial jars and skeletons representing at least 600 individuals indicate that the cave served as a central burial ground where these Chalcolthic peoples practiced ancestor worship. The findings illustrate the high cultural, technological and artistic level of the makers of these items as well as the rich spiritual life of their community. The selection of Upper Galilee as the final resting place for their tribal ancestors demonstrates for the first time the significant role played by this hitherto poorly known region.

This volume concludes the excavation and research that followed it and opens new horizons for the study of the Chalcolithic period.



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