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## A History of the Archaeological Museum of the State of Israel in Jerusalem, 1949–1965

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*This paper reviews the forgotten history of the museum of the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (hereafter IDAM) in Jerusalem, which until 1965 was the central archaeological museum of the State of Israel. From its humble beginnings with a small temporary exhibition in 1949, the creators of this museum gathered together a large and important collection of antiquities. These founders hoped to create the cornerstone for the future new central museum of Israel. However, the State entrusted the general manager of the Prime Minister's office, Tedi Kollek with the establishment of this new museum. In 1962, Avraham Biran, who worked closely with Kollek, was appointed director of IDAM. Biran eventually transferred the treasures of the IDAM to the new Bronfman Museum, the archaeological section of the Israel Museum.*

### **Introduction**

Several museums existed in Jerusalem since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, including a short-lived Ottoman Imperial Museum (St. Laurent and Taşkömür 2013; Shay 2007; Cobbing and Tubb 2007). In 1938, the British Mandate government established the large Palestine Archaeological Museum in Eastern Jerusalem designed by the renowned architect Austen Harrison with a \$2M donation given by John D. Rockefeller, still known today as the Rockefeller Museum (Ilfie 1938; 1949; Sussman and Reich 1987; Shay 2009). A small, little-known museum for archaeology, established by the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (IDAM) existed in Jerusalem from 1951 to 1965. The objects from this collection were transferred to the new Israel Museum situated in Western Jerusalem, overlooking the Monastery of the Cross, in 1965, before being inaugurated that year.<sup>1</sup> This study is dedicated to the museum of the IDAM, which closed fifty years ago and has rarely been mentioned since (e.g., Broshi 1994: 325–326; Inbar and Shiller 1995: 20, 32–33).<sup>2</sup>

### **The Temporary Exhibition in 1949**

In July 1948, after the establishment of the new State of Israel, and when the first Israeli Antiquities Unit was established, there were few antiquities and no

physical place to exhibit those objects (Yeivin 1955: 20).<sup>3</sup> After independence, the Rockefeller Museum was under Jordanian control, on the other side of the border. To maintain governmental continuity after the establishment of the State, employees of the Mandatory Department of Antiquities continued to work in the newly formed Antiquities Unit, under the auspices of the Public Works Administration. However, without a central museum building, it was felt that no position for Keeper of the Museum could be established. Hence, one year later, in 1949, Dr. P.P. Kahane was nominated instead as the first Keeper of Regional Museums, even though few museums existed at that time (*Alon* 3, 1951: 64; GL1340/14, Yeivin, memorandum 18.11.1949: p. 1).<sup>4</sup>

In the summer of 1948, excavation of a rich Roman period tomb in Netanya provided the catalyst for the first thoughts concerning a public exhibition. Already during the excavation, Emanuel Ben-Dor, then Deputy Director of the Antiquities Unit, raised this idea in an unofficial talk to the Head of the Public Works Administration. In September, the Antiquity Unit's Director Shemuel Yeivin proposed creating an exhibition during the coming Succoth holiday several weeks later, with invited guests including both governmental ministers and civil servants (GL44864/14). In October, a 'series of exhibitions' was discussed after more finds were discovered at Tiv'on, near Haifa (GL44864/14, report 14.10.1948).

By November, Yeivin wrote that when the Antiquities Unit was funded, the fate of the Rockefeller Museum was not yet clear. Hence, discussions about a museum were avoided. Yet, in Yeivin's words the number of antiquities that flooded into the Antiquities Unit:

...require registration and treatment... Therefore, we suggest in the budget estimation to start modest activity in this field by nominating a treasurer to handle all this museum material. To this unit should belong also the Keeper of Regional Museums and Private Collections. (GL44883/8, attached to letter of 29.11.1948)

Yet, this was merely a plan as there was no physical museum. Preparations for the exhibition lagged, and by June of 1949 there was still no available venue. The opening was postponed several times until, eventually, a temporary exhibiton was opened at School C in Tel-Aviv on July 27<sup>th</sup>, marking one year of operations for the Antiquities Unit. The numismatist Bruno Kirschner (cf. Kersel and Kletter 2006) helped with the exhibition and David Remez, Minister of Transportation, formally opened it. This first, modest exhibition had several sections: ancient sites, preservation of monuments, excavations of the Antiquities Unit, surveys, relations with the public, and knowledge of antiquities (GL44846/14, May and June 1949; *Alon* 3, 1951: 56). Unfortunately, no detailed descriptions survive.

While Jerusalem was besieged in 1948, the Antiquities Unit began work in Tel-Aviv. In August 1949 this Unit relocated to offices in Jerusalem (Kletter 2006: 322–324). The temporary exhibition was moved too and re-opened by Zalmann Shazar,



Fig. 1: Temporary exhibition, Jerusalem 1949, unknown photographer (Courtesy Israel Antiquities Authority, i299).

Minister of Education on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September in the ‘Palace Building’ (Fig. 1). For the next three weeks, until its closure on 6.10.1949, more than 7000 persons visited (GL44874/3, summaries; GL44864/14, 14.10.1948; Yeivin 1955: 20; 1958: 54).<sup>5</sup>

In December 1950 the inventory book of the future ‘museum’ was started. According to Kahane:

From now on, every item and every group of items shall be registered in the inventory [book] immediately upon entering the Unit’s offices. Therefore, all the workers should pay attention to the following rules:

A) Each object will be brought to the room of the museum with an attached label describing its whereabouts (coordinates), date of finding, relation to the file and to the [supervision?] report number, signature of bringer, and date of arrival.

B) An object brought to the Unit for checking or cleaning, or any other treatment, will also be registered in the inventory [book]; therefore it too shall be first brought to the museum room.

C) One should brief the museum about returning any object to owners after cleaning or checking, in order that it will be erased from the inventory. (GL44873/10, Kahane, 29.12.1950).

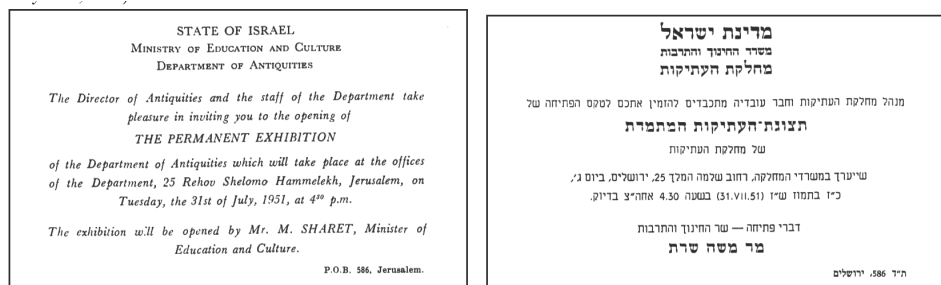


Fig. 2: Invitation for the opening of the permanent exhibition, July 1951 (GL44874/3).

Apparently, there was a museum book before a physical museum existed. The room where these objects were placed must have been part of the director's office. Registration procedures were complicated, as a slightly later document reveals. Objects were registered in two stages according to three different categories. In the first stage, the objects entering the IDAM permanently were registered by a running number preceded by the Hebrew letter 'resh' (Hebrew for *rishum* – registration). Temporary objects (e.g., private antiquities brought for cleaning) were registered under 'resh zayin' (Hebrew for *rishum zemani* – temporary registration). Coins received the label 'resh mem' (Hebrew for *rishum matbe'ot* – coin registration). In the second stage, three separate card indexes were used to identify the objects (by serial number; type; and site name). The basic registration number was composed of the year and a running number. For example, object '53–115' meant the 115<sup>th</sup> object registered in 1953 (GL 44873/10, letter 30.3.1959). This number is known today as the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) or State Treasures' number.<sup>6</sup>

### The Permanent Exhibition (1951)

By the summer of 1950, as the number of antiquities increased greatly, the Antiquities Unit focussed on creating a permanent exhibition.<sup>7</sup> On 31 July 1951, Moshe Sharet,<sup>8</sup> acting as Minister of Education opened this permanent exhibition to 350 invited guests and dignitaries (Fig. 2). In size, the exhibition occupied one room and part of a corridor. A slightly later source (GL44883/9, 13.5.1953) mentions two modest halls with approximately 1000 objects. These finds were exhibited by periods, but also as 'sections' through time (e.g., the oil lamp in various periods) or in an 'educational' (i.e. typological) arrangement (Fig. 3). The periods ran from the Paleolithic to the Byzantine, with one vitrine displaying Umayyad period pottery. There were also some objects from neighbouring countries, acquired by indirect exchanges (GL44874/3, summary 26.7.1951). Yeivin hoped that the exhibition would form a kernel for a future central museum, which must 'fully



Fig. 3: The Permanent Exhibition, 1951, unknown photographer (Courtesy Israel Antiquities Authority, i4502).

display the culture of the Land and the history of its development' (GL44874/3, summary 26.7.1951; letter 27.7.51; *Alon* 3, 1951: 4; *Alon* 4, 1953: 1; Yeivin, 1955: 20; 1958: 54).

The opening was positively portrayed by the journalist Avramski in the *Ha-Dor* newspaper:

If we take in consideration the short period of work of the Antiquities Unit, the condition of work, and the excavations and surveys it dealt with, than the exhibition will not seem so poor in our eyes. That, since it forms no continuation to Rockefeller Museum, which is detached from us; but creation from zero; as simple as that ...

Anybody who happens to visit the exhibition will see what was done in the field of Archaeology in the State of Israel during three years. At the entrance to the exhibition room are written on a table the places where the Unit made excavations during this time... The capital cities, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, occupy a major place ... The few finds in the exhibition are arranged by periods and also by subjects: lamps, coins, Israeli art. There are no surprising or amazing exhibits, but the material has the power to draw the attention of educated persons, even if they are not professionals... In fact we can divide the remains, in our imagination, into two sections: the practical, material section – house items, lamps, building remains; and the artistic-magic section – earrings, rings, amulets... Few remains – but by added imagination they have the power to reflect some trends of the development of material culture of the Land in many places and periods. (Sh. Avramski, *Ha-Dor* 8.8.1951)

Stressing that archaeology should be a wide humanistic science, rather than a narrow professional one, Avramski praised the Antiquities Unit and Yeivin as having such wide humanistic awareness. Considering Yeivin's professional work, this is a suitable and fitting appreciation of this man, who kept his integrity in the face of severe trials.

Others in Israel at the time were far less supportive. The broadcasting service Israel Voice radio (*Kol Yisrael*) ignored the opening completely. Yeivin was offended and complained:

I heard three times on August 2<sup>nd</sup> ... a fairly detailed broadcast about the opening of an Israel National Fund (*Keren Kayemet LeYisrael-KKL*) exhibition. I do not envy your announcements of KKL activities, which surely are of great interest to all Israel; but why do you discriminate and pass in silence acts of other Governmental Bodies, to which you should allegedly help – since finally you too are a governmental body? (GL44874/3, 5.8.1951)

### **The Museum Develops (1951–1957)**

A permanent exhibition meant that the doors had to be open regularly for the general public. This required two guards and moderately priced entry tickets (GL44874/3, letter 13.8.1951; GL1340/14, budget proposal 1951/2, 15.11.1950; *Alon* 4, 1953: 14). In the summer of 1952 the museum was enlarged by temporary exhibitions in two corridors. In 1953 three more rooms were added, by shifting workers to a wooden hut outside the building. The exhibition grew to a total of 1,400 objects. By September 1955, approximately 9,000 people had visited (GL44883/9, budget summary 13.5.1953; Yeivin, 1955: 20; 1958: 54; *Alon* 4: 1953: 14).

In 1953 the Keeper, Kahane was responsible for the first exhibition sent abroad, entitled: 'From the Land of the Bible.' This successful exhibition travelled through Europe and the USA, from New-York, to Washington, Boston, followed by Britain, Holland, Sweden, and Norway. In total, 191,000 visitors came to see it (Yeivin, 1955: 20–21; 1958: 56).

Two years later, in 1955, the Antiquities Unit was renamed and became the



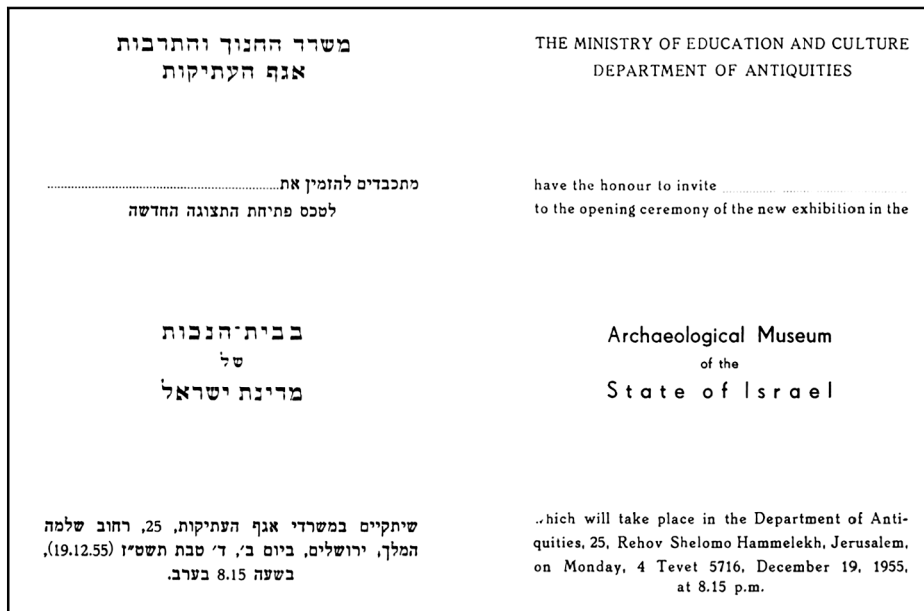


Fig. 4. Invitation to the enlarged museum, December 1955. Notice the proud title 'Archaeological Museum of the State of Israel' (GL44874/3).

Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums (IDAM), receiving more space in a building on King Solomon Street (*Alon* 5–6, 1957: 3). The museum was enlarged, occupying most of the ground floor, (c. 250 m<sup>2</sup>) and opened daily, even in the afternoons (Fig. 4). The announcement for the re-opening stated:

Now it is possible to present the exhibitions in a more educational way, since it is not enough to bring the object itself in front of the viewer; one must exhibit it in context with its technical making and its use in former daily life. Sometimes, even in addition to groups of other finds from a certain place or site.

Near the exhibits are short inscriptions explaining their nature, date and relation to biblical or external written sources. The exhibition includes also side-photos, which describe sites [and] methods of excavation... There are also gypsum replicas of finds that are of interest for an Israeli exhibition, or finds found in Israel but exported (during the Ottoman time) to the central Museum in Istanbul. In addition, the exhibition holds maps and diagrams that explain various aspects of the discussed archaeological periods. (GL44873/4, summary 22.12.1955; *Alon* 5–6, 1957: 4)

The document described the finds by rooms (following is a summary):

*Entrance corridor:* mosaic pieces, ossuaries and architectural fragments, Hellenistic to Byzantine periods.

*First Hall:* architectural pieces, mosaics and funerary *stelae* of 'post Second-Temple' periods, mosaics from the Samaritan Synagogue of Sha'alabim (Selbit), and Roman period statues.

*Room 1* (left of Hall 1): educational exhibition with finds from neighbouring cultures (Egypt, Assyria, Syria, etc.); fragments of Rhodian jars; jewellery; Jewish coins from neighbouring countries; indicative shards (Neolithic to Mamluk periods).

*Room 2* (west of Hall 1): Stone Age finds.

*Room 3* (south of Hall 1): temporary exhibitions from new excavations.

*Room 4* (corridor): finds from Beth Shean, 'Talmud and Sages' (=Byzantine) periods.

*Second Hall:* 'early' periods.

The visitor proceeded from the Yarmukian to the Late Bronze Age, but the highlight was reached near the end:

Finally, in this hall are exhibited the material remains of the Israelite Culture of the days of the Judges and the Kingdom [meaning Israel and Judah], with their wealth of pottery forms, decorated or plain, seals, [seal] impressions, bone tools, jewellery, and a few examples of typical Philistine pottery vessels...

The collection [=Museum] should draw mainly school children, who can see here with their own eyes the material background for the periods on which they study in Bible, History, and Knowledge of the Land classes in school. (GL44874/3, 22.12.1955)

On June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1956 Yeivin invited Prime Minister David Ben Gurion to visit the museum. Yeivin hoped that the visit would occur soon, before the excavation season, so that he would be able to guide the prime minister personally. However, no such visit materialized.

In 1955–1958 the IDAM Museum presented numerous exhibitions (Table 1). Perhaps the most successful was 'Religion and Cult in Eretz-Israel in Antiquity'. Miriam Tal praised it in *Haboker* newspaper:

The exhibition touches many periods; it is composed of statues, cult vessels, other vessels, decorations, items from cemeteries, etc. The explanations that accompany the exhibits are clear even to those who are not experts, and the entire exhibition is arranged with good taste, clarity and logic.

From the Neolithic... to the Byzantine period, many are the exhibits. A mysterious-poetic atmosphere overtakes the viewer who is not an expert (perhaps even a few experts too...). The corbelled ceilings of the old house in which the archaeological museum is located add much to the exhibition's atmosphere.

Cult and religion: how large this world, how rich, and how many surprises still await a discoverer! This land, our homeland, was as is well known a meeting place

No.	Year	Topic	Theme
1	April 1952	'New acquisitions: Kebara cave, Bney Brak, Beth Yerah, Na'an, etc.'	Sites
2	April 1953	Beth Yerah	Site
3	Early 1954	Chalcolithic sites in the Beer Sheba region	Sites
4	Spring 1954	Excavations at Nahal Hever	Site
5	August 1954	Nahariya excavations	Site, cult
6	1954	New mosaics	Mosaics
7	1955–56	Beth Shearim, Ginosar, Bir Mata, Ma'ayan, Baruch, Caesarea	Sites
8	October 1956	Exhibition for UNESCO Museum Week	Special
9	October 1956	How to arrange an 'antiquities corner'	Educational
10	1956–57	Enlargement, new rooms: prehistory, Israeli (Iron Age), Jerusalem (for IES conference)	Various
11	1957–58	Two week-exhibitions: Gath (al-'Areini); Enan; Metzger; Kh. Sheikh Ali; Yasin Tomb, Jerusalem	Sites + lectures
12	July-Dec, 1957	Religion and Cult, for the 2 <sup>nd</sup> World Congress of Jewish Studies	Cult
13	March 1957	Pottery vessels, lamps and new finds - for the Friends of Antiquities seminar	Pottery
14	May 1958	Ten Years Special Exhibition	
15	1958–59	Two-week exhibitions: Gath, Achzib, Kabri, Azor (two exhibitions); Beer Safad; Ruhama; Kfar Truman; Roglit; Jaffa; Givataim; Adulam region survey.	Sites + lectures

Table 1. List of exhibitions.

of cultures and religions: the Bible told us much about the struggle of the religion of Moses and Israel against the various kinds of idol worship. However, in the last generation the archaeological discoveries filled in a vary tangible way what we knew from the pages of the book of books. Here we see how the Land was full of various beliefs, gods, images, spirits, and magic.

A great French poet, Gérard de-Nerval (who hanged himself in Paris one hundred and one years ago), felt more than any other poet, in any time, the cry of the ancient idols ... "They will come back, the gods that I always mourn", said de-Nerval in one of his poems,<sup>9</sup> the poems of a 'Kabbalistic gentile'. In these low rooms with corbelled ceilings I feel as an echo the words of the French poet, who sang on Jesus, Isis, Osiris, Artemis, and the Great Goddess – in the same breath!

One among the idol statuettes was imprinted on my memory – a statue of a horned-Astarte, elongated, tense; the Goddess has a sensuous-cunning smile; the style, if I may say so, recalls the modern sculptures of our age. Another statue (one leg broken) describes, if I am not mistaken, the god Ba'al. He is elongated and 'tense' just like Giacometti's sculptures. Almost all the jugs, plates and other vessels are nicely, cutely beautiful. Those who renew pottery making in our Land can learn from their ancient brothers simplicity and natural sense for the pure form. (Miriam Tal, *Haboker*, 13.9.1957)

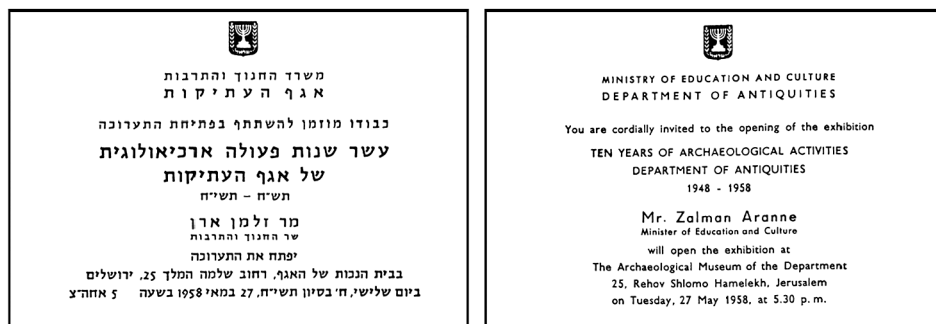


Fig. 5: Invitation for the opening of the Ten Years Exhibition, May 1958 (GL44874/3).

Tal's *affaire d'amour* with the space was not shared by Yeivin or employees of the IDAM. Time and again Yeivin complained about this inadequate, damp and badly maintained building (Kletter 2006: 194–197).

In 1955 the museum had 1,985 fee-paying visitors (free visitors were not counted). There were 6,008 visitors in 1956 and 8,995 in 1957 (GL44873/4, 1.12.1957). By 1957–58 there was a Museum Unit with eight workers, laboratories for pottery restoration and a small chemistry lab. The Museum occupied three halls, four rooms and two small corridors.

### The Anniversary Exhibition (1958)

By late 1957 Yeivin wrote in the annual report of plans for a special exhibition marking the achievements of Israeli archaeology in the last decade (GL44883/12, 4.12.1957:18). This was in tandem with the celebrations of the State's ten-year anniversary.

This particular exhibition was opened by the Minister of Education Zalman Aranne in May 1958 (Fig. 5) with the title: 'Ten Years of Archaeological Activities of the IDAM, 1948–1958' (GL44873/4, 27.5.1958). The exhibition described the achievements of the IDAM in three aspects:

1. Archaeological progress in Israel, from 320 IDAM excavations with finds 'from the prehistoric to the Byzantine periods', including seven synagogues and 25 churches.
2. Conservation of monuments.
3. Establishment and growth of the 'Archaeological Museum of the State of Israel'. The author (unsigned, but certainly Yeivin) described briefly the history of the Museum, various exhibits, and the addition of a special room dedicated to finds from Jerusalem. (GL44873/4, 27.5.1958)

Media coverage of this exhibition was brief and factual:

As its names indicates, the exhibition covers only exhibits found or acquired from the beginning of the State and those by the IDAM alone. One area was dedicated to surveys and to conservation of monuments. In the large hall there are remains of ancient synagogues ... and ossuaries, especially from Herodian period tombs. In a corner in another hall there are Christian-Byzantine exhibits, and in the rest of the hall – Greco-Roman art (mainly sculpture). This creates a kind of an axis covering – Jewish-Christian-Pagan [art]. (GL44873/4 6.6.1958)

Yeivin's decision to stress only the IDAM backfired. Yeivin wanted the IDAM Museum to lead visitors from the pagan through the Christian to the Jewish world, without referring to Moslems. Yet, a reporter sensed the opposite direction: backwards, from the Jewish world to the pagan (GL44873/4 6.6.1958).

### **Deterioration and Closure (1958–1965)**

The summary of the anniversary exhibition concluded:

Not everything collected by the IDAM can be exhibited in the limited area at the service of the Museum in this building. Steps have been taken for establishing a proper house for the museum, and one should hope to be able to arrange in the new building a permanent exhibition fitting itself and the IDAM too. (GL44873/4, summary 27.5.1958).<sup>10</sup>

These words hide a major power shift in Israeli archaeology, which affected the IDAM Museum. Until 1955, the IDAM's position was strong, with quick growth, and establishment of its own central museum. The IDAM made hundreds of excavations including large-scale excavations with prestigious foreign teams, established a popular magazine called *Alon* and a scientific journal called *'Atiqot*, and was a significant contributor for the preservation of ancient sites.

In 1955, Yeivin was involved in two prolonged and bitter conflicts. The first occurred with the Hebrew University. Yeivin inexplicably refused to allow either of his workers, Ruth Amiran or Yohanan Aharoni, leave to excavate at the university-sponsored excavation at Tel Hazor under Yigael Yadin. This is perplexing, since this occurred after the university had often assisted the IDAM by 'lending' students to help with their salvage excavations. Yeivin certainly did not anticipate the consequences. The archaeological council, an IDAM advisory body, was paralyzed, and later replaced by one dominated by Hebrew University professors. As a result, the IDAM's status quickly deteriorated.

The second conflict occurred with the new Government Tourist Company, headed by Tedi Kollek, later the mayor of Jerusalem and a man of great political influence. Yeivin was misled to think that the IDAM would be an equal partner involved in governmental decisions concerning preservation and development of ancient sites and a new museum building. In fact the opposite happened, and

when the government created a committee to establish a new central museum in 1957, Kollek was given overall responsibility for the project. The IDAM was not represented at all (Kletter 2006: 214–283).

As the number of visitors continued to grow, the IDAM Museum remained open until the end of 1964. By March 1959, 36,291 people visited; almost half were school children. Yet, the museum was living in limbo. As the new Israel Museum started to be built in the early 1960s, the contrast with the IDAM Museum could not be clearer. This status change found expression in the museum's title, from the proud 1955 'Archaeological Museum of the State of Israel', to just the 1958 'Archaeological Museum of the Department [of Antiquities]'.

Few documents exist concerning the museum from 1960 to 1965. Apparently, Yeivin's successor, Avraham Biran, as Director of IDAM from 1961 to 1964 (cf. Ilan 2009) wrote far less than his predecessor. Soon after Biran's nomination, Hanoch Rinot, then General Manager for the Ministry of Education, visited the IDAM and expressed his 'joy from exhibits and archaeological achievements on the one hand, but being aware of cramped, difficult work conditions on the other hand.' Rinot discussed with Biran, 'matters of the national museum... the composition of the managing committee and a representation of the Ministry of Education in it' (GL44871/7, Rinot to Minister of Education, 9.8.1961).

The new Israel Museum was a conglomerate of several entities, including the Bezalel Art Museum, the Shrine of The Book, and Bronfman Museum for Bible and Archaeology.<sup>11</sup> In his handwritten notes, Biran often used the term 'museum' without further specification. Here, we added specific names as possible. A brief note by Biran summarized the conversation with Rinot:

...the establishment of [the Bronfman] Museum and the problems related to it concern an institution among institutions (Bezalel, Shrine of the Book). The relationship that will be between the museum and the IDAM, therefore also the Ministry of Education. The [Israel] Museum's committee has no representative from the Ministry [of Education]. (GL44871/7, handwritten note)

Biran viewed these issues from the point of view of the Israel Museum, without even mentioning the IDAM Museum. Two highly surprising handwritten drafts follow (Docs. 1–2). Both are undated and untitled, showing considerable alterations (translated fully, with additions marked by italics; words deleted by strike-through were originally marked). We lack final, printed documents (perhaps Biran decided not to print them, despite the note at the top of Doc. 1: 'print in triple space!').

Note that the first document was written on Hebrew University headed paper (Fig. 6a-b):

[Page 1] [The] Bronfman Museum is intended to be *in my view* the central museum for archaeology [*in Israel*]. [This should be] a living institute, which reflects

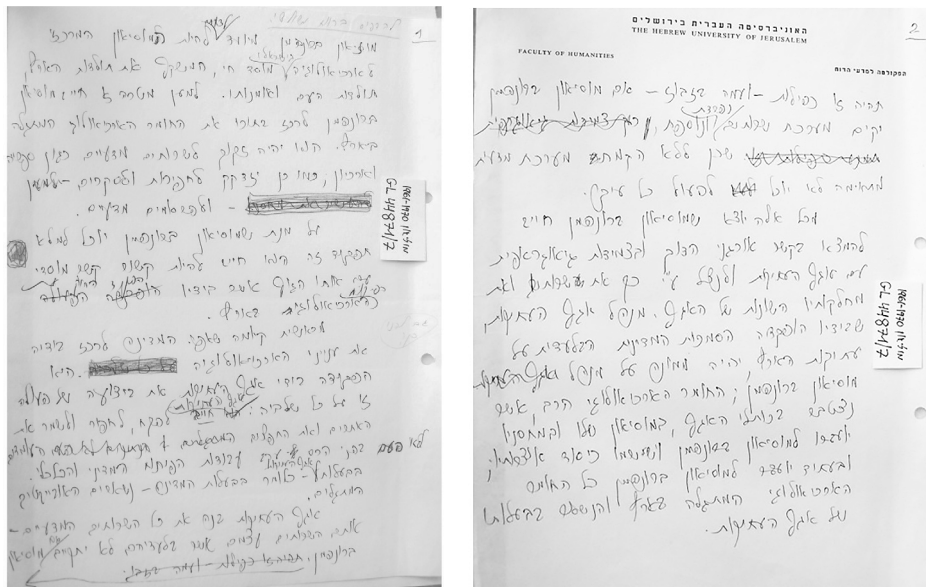


Fig. 6a-b: Biran, Document 1, September 1961 (GL44874/3).

the history of the Land, the history of [its] people and its art. For that aim [the] Bronfman Museum must concentrate inside it the archaeological material that is being discovered in Israel. It will need scientific services such as a library and archive; and also [carrying out] excavations and surveys – for enriching its stores – and [for] scientific publications.

In order to fulfil this role the Bronfman Museum must be tied institutionally with that body, which was entrusted with *the Law and the archaeological activity* [replaced by: supervision] in the Land [of Israel].

From its beginning [right margin note: ‘even before that!'] the State strove to concentrate in its hands the matters of Archaeology in all its stages. It entrusted the IDAM with performing this activity in all its stages: it [replaced by: the IDAM] must supervise, excavate and preserve the sites and the objects discovered in given at standing not once in the face of destruction due to economic and political development. The discovered objects remain in the IDAM’s ownership – that is, in the State’s ownership.

The IDAM built all the scientific services – the same services without which the Bronfman Museum will *also* not exist.

[P. 2] It will be a duplicate – with it a waste – if Bronfman Museum will build a *separate* additional system of services. **Only an immediate geographical proximity will prevent such duplication.** Since without establishing a fitting scientific system it could not act at all.

Therefore, it transpires that Bronfman Museum must stand in close, organic

connection and in immediate geographical proximity with the IDAM, and by this use the various departments and services of the IDAM. The Director of IDAM, in whose hands were entrusted the sole political authority over the antiquities in the Land, will be responsible over the director of IDAM Bronfman Museum; the considerable archaeological material, which was gathered among the walls of the IDAM, in its Museum and in its stores, will be moved to the Bronfman Museum and serve as basis for its treasures. In the future all the archaeological material, which is discovered in the Land and which stays under the ownership of the IDAM, will be moved to the Bronfman Museum. (GL44871/7)

Document 1 begins with the Bronfman Museum. The main issue allegedly concerned services including a library and laboratory, which the IDAM had, but the new Bronfman Museum lacked. As if shocked to realise that this new museum could have been planned without crucial services, and stressing that a double set of services would be wasteful, Biran suggested transferring the IDAM Museum to the Bronfman Museum and placing himself, as Director of the IDAM, responsible for the Bronfman Museum.<sup>12</sup>

Most telling is the Freudian slip: ‘The Director of IDAM ... will be responsible over the Director of IDAM’, later corrected to ‘the Director of Bronfman Museum’. It suggests that in Biran’s mind the two positions were unified in one person. When he thinks about the future Director of Bronfman, he thinks about the Director of IDAM, namely, himself.

Yet, this raises a thorny problem, since the IDAM Museum belonged to the State but the Israel Museum did not. Could the Bronfman Museum be put under the responsibility of a civil servant, without it becoming property of the state?

A simple solution would have been to lend antiquities from the IDAM to the newly-created Bronfman Museum, as lending to any other non-governmental museum. Placing Biran responsible over the Bronfman Museum did not need to involve the closure of the IDAM Museum. The problem was neither Biran’s position, nor duplication of services (such as the laboratory or library), but duplication of museums. Each museum could have had a distinctive character, for example, turning the IDAM Museum into a museum for Jerusalem alone. Yet, such an idea is never mentioned.

This second document is written on plain paper (Fig. 7a-b):

[Page 1] ‘As in all cultural countries, *so in Israel* the antiquities discovered in Israel ~~belong~~ to are the property of the State. ~~Responsibility for them~~ In certain conditions it gives the ownership to another body (excavator) or individual (discoverer). The ancient objects that are State property are gathered in the IDAM Museum, partly exhibited, partly undergoing work (cardexing, mending, photography, etc.), and partly in stores. ~~To a certain extent~~ The Director of IDAM is responsible over them *and on all the antiquities (sites, buildings, and objects)*; the highest authority is at the hands of the Minister of Education and Culture.



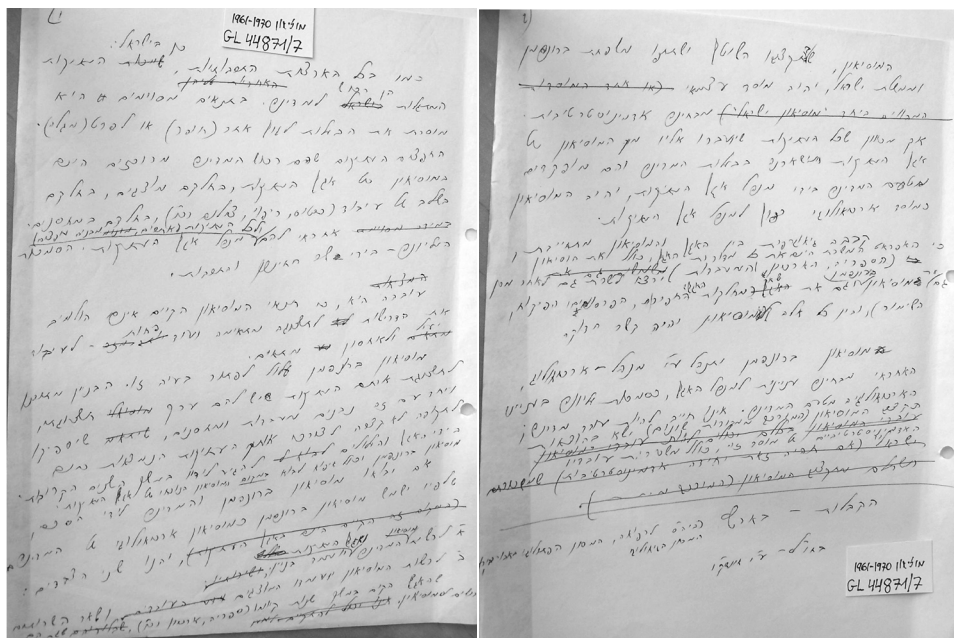


Fig. 7a-b: Biran. Document 2, September 1961 (GL44874/3).

**The reality**

It is a fact that the conditions of the present [IDAM] Museum do not fit the requests for permanent exhibition, and even more less so efficient work and proper storage.

Bronfman Museum might [sic, 'alul] solve this problem. The building fits the exhibition of these antiquities that have ~~museat~~ exhibitional value. Yet labs and stores are built, which will fit suffice for a considerable period for the sake of the antiquities found at present in the hands of the IDAM, and [these] which might reach its hands within the coming years. Therefore, Bronfman Museum can come instead of the present IDAM museum.

Should Bronfman Museum and the State reach agreement, according to which Bronfman Museum will serve as the archaeological Museum of the State ~~instead of the museum existing now in the IDAM~~, than both sides will benefit:

- A. At the disposal of the State ~~Museum and the IDAM~~ will be placed a building, and its services.
- B. At the disposal of the [Bronfman] Museum will be placed the exhibits, the workers, and the other services that the IDAM established during the years (library, archive, etc.), ~~without which it cannot exist~~ which are also needed for the Museum.

The Museum, in which running budget the Bronfman family and the State of Israel will share, will administratively be an independent institute (or one of the institutions that form together the 'Israel Museum'). However, since all the

antiquities delivered to it from the IDAM Museum will remain under the State's ownership, and are entrusted by the State to the hands of the Director of IDAM, the [Bronfman] Museum will be as an archaeological institution under the Director of IDAM.

Geographical proximity between the IDAM and the Museum is a must, since *the apparatus that serves all the departments of the IDAM, including the [IDAM] Museum (the library, the archive, and the labs) serves also the* will want to serve also later the *Bronfman* museum as well as the ~~IDAM~~ rest of the IDAM's departments, such as: excavations, surveys, supervision, restoration); so between all these and the [Bronfman] Museum will exist a close connection.

Bronfman Museum will be managed by an Archaeologist-Manager [*menahel-archeolog*], responsible factually to the Director of IDAM, as the highest authority in matters of archaeology on behalf of the State. The Manager does not have to be a civil-servant. The budget of the Museum (which is composed of various sources) will carry the *administrative expenses of the workers of the museum in general can be workers of the Israel museum (if it will be an administrative unit), whose salary is paid by the budget of the Museum (which is composed of...)*: of this institute, including salaries of its workers.

Comparisons – in Israel, the School of Medicine, the Pathological Institute at Abu Kabir, the Geological Institute.

Abroad – by UNESCO. (GL44871/7)

Here Biran slightly refined his ideas, while keeping the same plan. He wrote at first that the IDAM Museum was the central museum ('instead of the museum existing now in the IDAM'); but erased these words later. Biran declared it unfit as an immutable fate. The main issue remained how Biran could have control over the Bronfman Museum.

This was Biran's suggestion:

1. Bronfman Museum receives the IDAM Museum's treasures, the State's antiquities, and the good IDAM services (laboratory, library). It would become the central Archaeological Museum of the State, but not property of the State.
2. Biran receives responsibility over Bronfman Museum.
3. The Ministry of Education acquires a representative in the Israel Museum management [In theory, Biran himself, since as future director of IDAM, he would also be considered an employee].
3. The IDAM finds new accommodation within the Israel Museum [and leaves its present location].
4. The State saves the rent on the old IDAM building [yet will pay rent for the new IDAM accommodation].<sup>13</sup>

Documents 1–2 date around the time of Rinot's visit. Their location in the file is one clue. A date before 24.9.1961 can be deduced from a letter from Biran to Rinot, in which Biran already took the above-mentioned deal as done: 'To the [Israel]

Museum will be moved all the antiquities in the IDAM Museum, the Hebrew University, and Bezalel' (GL44871/10, Biran to Rinot, 24.9.1961).

Authority over the IDAM was vested with the Minister of Education. The Hebrew University collection was never given to the Israel Museum. Biran letter from 24 September 1961 did not reflect any official ministerial decision, but only his own rather grand plan. This was also Kollek's plan, for, on behalf of the future Israel Museum, Kollek signed on February 1961 an agreement with Bronfman family about Bronfman Museum. Section 7 stated:

Archaeological objects of museum quality presently at the Hebrew University, the Bezalel Museum and the Department of Antiquities will all be housed in the new 'Samuel Bronfman Museum of Archaeology' (GL 44871/10, 27.2.1961).

This letter is not the first instance where Kollek made promises which were not under his responsibility. In 1958, Kollek headed the establishing committee of the Israel Museum, and nominated Biran to participate (GL44871/10, 21.10.1958). Biran worked closely with Kollek, arranging the architectural competition of the Israel Museum in 1959 and serving as member in various committees.<sup>14</sup>

One issue Biran raised was of the new constitution for the Israel Museum. A committee was established, with a certain Judge Vitkon as chair, to recommend the way forward. In late 1961 Biran wrote letters to several institutions abroad, seeking advice on how to run a 'Biblical Museum'. Two responses are kept on file. One dated 10 August 1961 was from J. Leibovitch, who worked in the Cairo Museum from the 1940s. The second was from James L. Swauger, Assistant Director of Carnegie Museum, Pittsburgh, dated 11 March 1962. In the same month, Biran reported the results of his tours abroad investigating the issue to the limited management of the Israel Museum.

Dr. Biran gave a brief report on his visits of various museums. He has reached the conclusion that forms of managements of the institutions are so different [from each other], that it is possible to find a precedent and an example for any suggestion that the Vitkon Committee will hand. Therefore we have, in his view, complete freedom in deciding the final form of management of the Jerusalem Museum. (GL44871/10, protocol of limited management committee, 26.3.1961).

In 1962, in preparation for the same visit by Rinot mentioned above, a list was made of the main exhibits in the IDAM Museum. We present it here in full, as it shows the vast scope of objects given to the Bronfman Museum:

Dr Biran gave a brief about the composition of the collection in the IDAM Museum. The IDAM has finds from all the periods in the Land. Following is a representative selection from all the IDAM's collections:

*Paleolithic Period.* A lot of material from Geshar Bnot Yaacov, including flint and basalt hand tools and fossilized bones of extinct animals, including elephants' teeth and a tusk.

*Mesolithic Period.* Material from the excavations at Eynan, including flint and stone tools and skeletons with shell decorations. From Nahal Oren flints, mortars, jewellery and objects of art.

*Neolithic Period.* Finds from the excavations at Sha'ar ha-Golan, fertility statues and pottery vessels from the beginning of pottery making.

*The Chalcolithic Period* is represented by very rich material including: 1) material from the Beer-Sheba excavations: pottery such as bowls and churns, fabulous basalt vessels, metal and stone tools and a group of special ivory statuettes. 2) The Judean Desert treasure with c. 450 items, mostly Bronze cult and weapon vessels, ivory vessels and a reed made of papyrus stems. 3) c. 10 pottery, house-shaped ossuaries from the Azor cemetery; 4) Pottery vessels and Bronze axes from the excavations at Metzger, Givatim, etc.

*From the Early Canaanite Period* material from the Beth-Yerakh excavations including typical Beth Yerakh wares, jewels and figurines. Also a lot of material from various tombs.

*From the Middle Bronze Age* many weapons and tools from various graves, such as Hazorea, Benaya, Yavneh, Ma'ayan Baruch, etc.

*From the Middle Bronze Age II*, finds from the Canaanite Temple at Nahariya – various cult vessels, figurines of animals and birds, stone mould for an Astarte figurine, and Astarte figurines made of hammered silver. In addition, many vessels from tells and burials including scarabs and jewels.

*In the Late Bronze Age* collections there are finds from various tells, including Hazor (the part of the IDAM) – Basalt stelae from the Canaanite Temple and cult and pottery vessels, including large storage vessels. [Also] groups from tombs such as Kfar Yehoshua and Tell Abu-Hawwam; Astarte figurines typical to the period and vessels from neighbouring countries: Cyprus, Greece, Egypt, and Syria. Among the epigraphic material, a fragment of the Gilgamesh epoch found at Megiddo.

*From the Israelite Period* finds from the tells: Hazor, Tel Mor, Tel Qasile, Afulah, Nir-David, Mesad Hashavyahu, and Ramat Rahel. Tomb groups such as those from the Phoenician cemetery at Achzib and those from [Philistine] Azor. The IDAM has a series of weight-stones and many *Lmlk* stamps. Between the Hebrew inscriptions one should note the 'Gold of Ophir' ostrakon from Tel Qasile, a Hebrew ostrakon from Mesad Hashavyahu, and Hebrew inscriptions from the Amazyah cave, including one mentioning Jerusalem. In our collection there is a selection of typical Astarte figurines of the period, including figurines and a pottery mask from the Phoenician cemetery at Achzib. A large number of amulets and scarabs. The IDAM has three Proto-Aeolic stone capitals from the Ramat Rahel excavations.

*From the Persian, Return of Zion Period*, a large number of 'Yehud' and 'Jerusalem' seal impressions on jar handles, mainly from Ramat Rahe; Phoenician clay figurines and a statue of the 'temple boy' from Tell et-Tuyyur, Achzib, Tel Gath ['Areini] and Machmish.

*From the Hellenistic Period* an olive press for oil making with all its parts and many pottery vessels from Tirat Yehudah; vessels and snails from purple dye installation and two amphorae of imported wine from Rhodes with seal impressions on the handles – all these from Tel Mazar; a long Greek inscription on marble from Antiochus III' days, found at Hefzibah; and a wealth of impressed handles of Rhodian wine amphorae. In addition, finds from the Jason tomb in Jerusalem; cooking pots, bottle-like vessels, lamps, gaming piece and an ivory fork, net for holding hair, etc.

*From the Roman Period*, finds from Jerusalem: Iron hewing vessels from the Sanhedriya tombs and many decorated ossuaries, including many with Hebrew, Aramaean, and Greek inscriptions from various tombs; seal impressions of the 10<sup>th</sup> Legion on bricks from the excavations at Givat Ram and Ramat Rahel; fabulous jewels and a lead coffin from Shemuel ha-Navi Street. Objects bearing inscriptions: Moses Cathedral from the Korazin Synagogue; Aramaean inscription on a lintel from the Almah synagogue; Aramaean inscription on a pillar base from Tel Yizhaki. Architectural items from various synagogues in the Galilee and sections of mosaic floors describing fish, etc., from Beth-Shean. The IDAM collections hold a Roman inscription from Caesarea mentioning Pontius Pilatus and a number of marble statues: Cypriote Artemis from Caesarea, a young God from Beth-Shean, God Pan and a Boy's statue. Also the statue of the Goddess Nemesis with a Greek inscription on the base. A gold crown inlaid with glass and stones and a gold bracelet found in the Kfar Giladi Mausoleum.

*From the Byzantine – Talmud Period* a collection of finds from the Nirim Synagogue including *Mezuzoth*, various marble decorations and a mosaic describing birds, various animals, *Menorah*, lions, *Ethrog* and *Lulav* and an Aramaean inscription. Also a mosaic floor from a Jewish building in Huldah with decorations of a *Menorah*, *Shofar*, *Lulav*, *Ethrog*, fire-pan, and a Greek inscription. The IDAM has a large number of mosaics from monasteries and churches, including some decorated with floral and animal motifs and others decorated by geometric patterns. Also, two decorated marble screens. The collection also holds Hebrew and Greek inscriptions from the Shaalabim Samaritan Synagogue. From Beth-Shean a rich collection from the Patrician House: various pottery vessels, figurines, statuettes, weight-stones, decorated wooden plaques, lamps, Bronze chandeliers, etc. From Beth Safafeh near Jerusalem several lead sarcophagi with Crusaders' impressions. The IDAM has c. 250 glass vessels from various tombs.

*From the Arab period* decorated and glazed pottery vessels from Kh. Minya and Tiberias; a hoard of gold and silver jewels; amulets and stone beads found in a glazed jug in Caesarea; a Crusader capital from Nazareth and Crusader period pottery vessels from various sites.

The coin collection of the IDAM holds c 10,000 coins. Mention must be made of one Athenian coin which is the earliest coin found so far in Israel. Twelve hoards from various periods are especially important, including a hoard of *tetradrachmae* from the days of Alexander the Great from Tell et-Tuyyur; a hoard of *prutot* of

Alexander Yannai from Jaffa; part of the Osfiyeh hoard, and a hoard of gold and silver Arab coins from Caesarea.

The IDAM has pottery and metal vessels from the neighbouring countries: Egypt, Cyprus, Syria, Persia, and Greece. Also gold jewels from the Roman period found in Macedonia. This collection has educational as well as exhibitional values' (GL44871/7).<sup>15</sup>

This list was not made for Rinot or the needs of the IDAM. The probable aim of this list, which included exhibited 'highlights' and finds in storage, was for Biran and the needs of Israel Museum. With this dowry of "IDAM goodies" Biran hoped to seal his permanent marriage to Bronfman Museum.

At that time the Israel Museum was desperately searching for donors of antiquities and art. As the list above shows, here was a very opulent donor, the IDAM Museum. As a benefit, its name would not have to be mentioned anywhere in the new museum.

Biran's efforts for the 'living museum' continued. Biran dryly reported in a budget proposal:

Already in the present year we have stopped special activities of the [IDAM] museum such as arranging [new] exhibitions and buying equipment for the museum; most of our efforts were addressed to acquiring rare antiquities and completing collections as far as possible. (GL44884/8, budget proposal for 1964–65, 6.9.1963).

With IDAM Museum budgets, Biran took care of completing the Bronfman Museum exhibition which moved in 1965 to the Israel Museum complex. Biran's plan fully materialized. He became chair of the Bronfman Museum Board. Kahane, former Keeper of IDAM Museum, became Chief Curator of the Bronfman Museum. Hanoch Rinot was appointed the Ministry of Education representative in the Israel 'Museum's Acting Board of Governors.'

With the closure of the IDAM Museum, the position of 'Keeper of Museum' became 'Manager of the State Treasures', a department that still exists. This was necessary since the IDAM remained the largest source of antiquities in Israel. The responsibilities of this position included the registry and storage of objects, as well as allocating these to various museums.

### **The end of the IDAM Museum**

From its establishment until 1964, more than 100,000 people visited the IDAM Museum (GL44873/3, summary 29.12.64). The exhibition halls were closed on January 1, 1965 and all the exhibits were moved to the Israel Museum, which opened four months later, on May 1. The following short letter testifies to a literal change of guard from IDAM Museum to the Israel Museum:

To: the Israel Museum Management

For: Dr. P. P. Kahane, Manager of Bronfman Museum

D[ear] S[ir],

After working c. 14 years in the IDAM Museum, I am now on pension. As all know, pension does not suffice for a living, therefore, I ask you to hire me in the Israel Museum as a replacement guard or [to] any other work, even partial, which suits me.

Mrs. H. Kazenstein, Ruth Hestrin and Miriam Tadmor can testify to my loyalty at work.

With blessing, M. Misch' (GL44872/4).

## Conclusions

Before the Israel Museum existed there was a central museum for archaeology in Israel, established by the IDAM, the Israel Department of Antiquities and Museums. The work conditions were inadequate and the area for exhibition limited and ill-suited. However, a rich collection of important exhibits accumulated. The founders hoped that it would serve one day as the seed for a new, central State Museum. This indeed happened, but in such a way that little mention of the former museum exists. The first Archaeological Museum of the State of Israel was sadly forgotten.

The IDAM Museum was modelled on the Rockefeller Museum. There were close similarities in exhibition methods, aids and labels. The core of the museum was a 'traditional' exhibition that followed a chronological order of periods. In tandem with other museums in Israel at the time, under the heightened nationalism of the young State, a Jewish past (Israelite, Judean, Jewish) was stressed. The visitor progressed from early to later periods, with the culmination of periods of Jewish political rule. To give a few examples, the Islamic periods were not part of the exhibition in 1955. The description of the 1958 exhibition stressed synagogues and churches. In the 1961 long list of exhibits (GL44871/7), the 'Arab period' is not emphasised, and its scope was far less than the earlier periods.

In Israel in the early 1950s, French culture was fashionable as France at that time was a keen political and military supporter of the country (Bialer 2002: 58–60, 68–69; see also Golani 1997; Shemesh and Troen 1994). This is reflected in Tal's report, and her comparison of an ancient Ba'al statue with Giacometti's art is not overly fanciful. A recent exhibition of Giacometti's work stressed how much his art was influenced by ancient art, although Etruscan, not Levantine (Zevvi and Restellini 2011).

Tal's review reflects a time when 'biblical archaeology' was at its zenith (Davis 2004). The Biblical narrative was grasped as historic evidence, which archaeology 'proved.' Israeli 'Biblical Archaeology' of the early decades of the State was mostly secular. Thus, for example, Tal admired the statuettes of Ba'al and Astarte as art,

and treated them as respectable old gods, rather than as lifeless idols. This stands in strong contrast to present Israel, and also to the mainly protestant religious backgrounds of scholars who have funded ‘Biblical Archaeology’.

When government officials in 1957 decided to build a new central museum in Jerusalem, the IDAM was ignored. This was largely the result of Yeivin’s gallant but hopeless conflict with Kollek. In 1961, Biran, as the new Director of IDAM had a conflict of interest between the IDAM and Bronfman museums. Biran’s management of the situation considerably improved the work conditions of the IDAM workers, and one certainly could not foresee that barely two years later the IDAM would have at its disposal the large Rockefeller Museum complex. However, this deal was motivated mainly by Biran’s personal ambition to control the Bronfman Museum. Yet, the IDAM paid a high price in losing its museum. When in 1967, the Rockefeller building was allocated to the IDAM, the exhibition halls and the exhibits were consigned to the responsibility of the Israel Museum.

Much has been written on the nationalistic aspects of archaeology in the Levant (cf. Meskell 1998; Pollock and Bernbeck 2005; Oestigaard 2007; Feige and Shiloni 2008; Boytner et al. 2010). Yet documents such as those discussed here reveal a complex reality. Often, nationalistic expressions were one level of the issue. Below the surface, the reality was shaped by power struggles, intrigues and random circumstances. This multi-coloured history leaves traces, often in unexpected places. Visitors to the Israel Museum today can still find in its midst an area which is today occupied by the Israel Antiquities Authority, the last remnant of Biran’s deal.<sup>16</sup>

## Notes

- 1 The vision of a complex of museums in Jerusalem was made by J. Avrech at the Ministry of Education. The first plans came from the IDAM. The first donation that established the Israel Museum came from USA’s intelligence funds, and the Americans also chose the name of the new museum (Kletter, 2006: 108–113, 197–213).
- 2 This study is based on written documents, mostly from the Israel National Archive (Ginzach Leumi, hereafter GL). Translations from Hebrew are by the author. The transliteration of names is notoriously complex. Persons ‘Hebraised’ their names and used various spellings (e.g., Cimbalist, Tsoi, Tzori, Zori). I use common spellings whenever possible.
- 3 By 1949, hundreds of finds arrived from the Custodian of Deserted Property in Jerusalem and from a bequest of the late Lieutenant-Colonel Mordechai Nimza-Bi (Kletter 2014: 396–7).
- 4 Kahane was later followed by Y.L. Rahmani (Kloner and Zias 2013). Ruth Amiran was Keeper of Regional Museums for a short while (Katz 2011: 99; Kletter 2006: 222–224).
- 5 The first exhibition of coins at the Bezalel Museum, Jerusalem was opened when Israel celebrated its first Independence Day; the third was a Tel Qasile exhibition at the Tel-Aviv Museum of Art: Alon 3, 1951: 4.



- 6 Compare today <http://www.antiquities.org.il/ProceduresHeb.aspx>, procedure 4.1, Hebrew, accessed 1.11.2014.
- 7 By late 1951 the unit performed 75 excavations.
- 8 Sharet was Minister of Foreign Affairs, and when Minister of Education David Remez passed away unexpectedly (19.5.1951), Sharet became temporarily Minister of Education too, until the following 1951 elections.
- 9 From de-Nerval's *Delfica*, 1854: 'Ils reviendront, ces Dieux que tu pleures toujours!'
- 10 Compare Yeivin 1958: 55: 'The museum is still very short of space. Plans are being worked for the erection of an appropriate building to house the Archaeological Museum of the Department'.
- 11 The name derives from a donation from the Bronfman family in February 1961. Earlier the building was called the 'Archaeological', 'Jerusalem', or 'Central' museum. Some correspondence refers to 'Antiquities' or 'Building A'.
- 12 The Israel Museum did develop services, for by 1969 it had four labs (GL44871/5). These were created mainly after 1962, but it shows that moving the IDAM to the Israel Museum did not save on expenses.
- 13 The area under discussion was sold to the Ministry of Education by the Israel Museum (GL44781/9, protocol of the establishing committee, 10.4.1963).
- 14 In 1965 Biran was chair of the Israel Museum 'manpower and appointments committee'; member in five other Israel Museum entities (constitutional board, executive board, finance committee, programmes committee, and building committee); and also of its acting board of governors.
- 15 Compare the description of Bronfman Museum's exhibits in Inbar and Shiller 1995: 33–36.
- 16 A new center is now being built for the Israel Antiquities Authority in Jerusalem.

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