

# Israel Museum

## General Remarks

Advanced

▶ The Israel museum in Jerusalem is the major archaeological museum in Israel. It is a definite must if you ever get there, second only to the temple area (and shopping in the old city if you are female). Not only does it display a large number of interesting items, you actually can see them. The display cases are made from non-reflecting glass and the exhibits are generally not kept in the dark like in so many other museums.

● The explanations, however, are rather short and often placed in locations (like all the way down in the back) where reading is difficult (especially for the elderly). They are also a bit peculiar on occasion, if not outright off the mark.

▶ In the first room an old guy from [Jericho](#) gives you the good old "look Ma, no arms" greeting. Weird, but very old:



**Ancestor statue from Jericho, Tahunian culture.  
Reconstruction, around 7000 BC  
Note 6 (?) toes**

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017

▶ There is plenty more of really old and interesting stuff. The following figurines, for example, illustrate the hardship of ancient life without benefit of a bra (first perfectes and mass produced by [Suebians](#), by the way):



**Female figurines, Jerusalem area; 8th - 6th century BC.  
Having no bra tends to make you hollow-eyed, it seems.**

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017

There are also a few interesting things relating to events that took place around 30 AD:



**Heel bone and iron nail from some crucifixion  
Jerusalem, 1st century AD**



**Ossuary (bone box) with the inscription: "Jesus son of Joseph"**

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017

● The museum wisely refrains from any comment on the possible significance of these things.

▽ Of course, there are also breathtaking sculptures:



**Head of Athena, marble, 2nd century AD**

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017



**Statue of emperor Hadrian (detail), 117 - 138 AD**

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017

- There is much more. Reserve at least 3 - 4 hours just for the archaeological part of the museum (there are plenty of other parts, too).  
But now to the important stuff: old metal, especially rusty iron.

### **Metallic Objects**

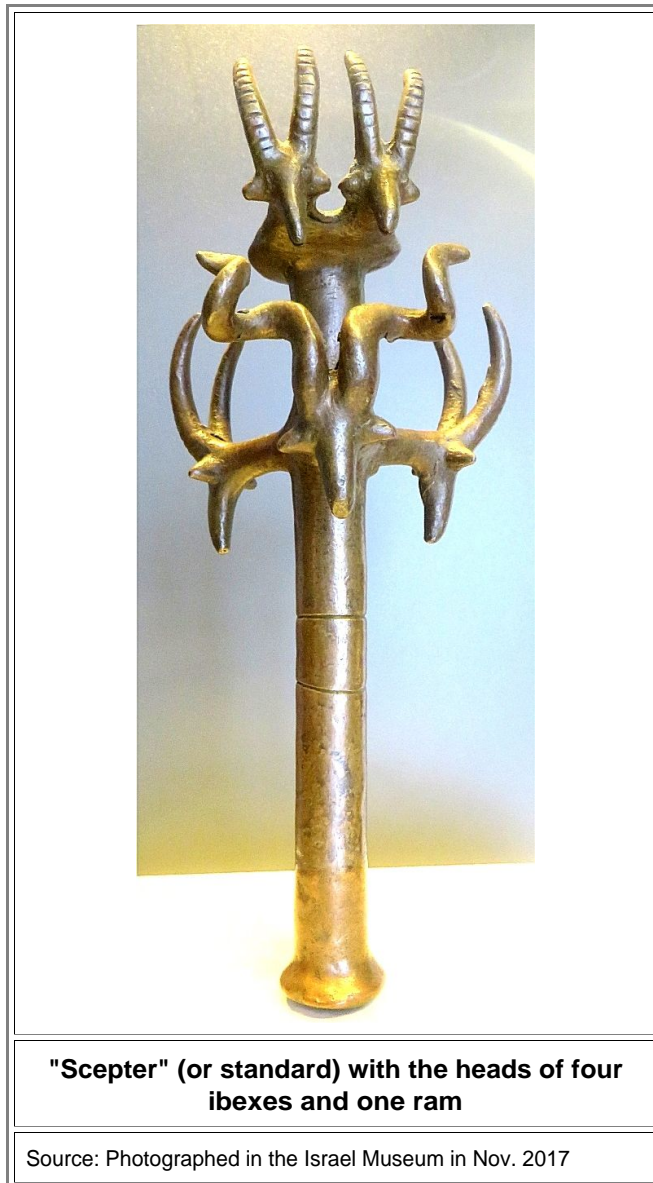
- First and foremost, the museum displays most of the objects from the "Cave of the Treasure", **Nahal Mishmar**, Judean desert. I have mentioned the [Nahal Mishmar hoard](#) in the backbone; suffice it to say that most of the 442 decorated objects made of copper and bronze about 3500 BC (or earlier) are nicely displayed in the museum.
- Below is a taste treat, more (large) pictures can be found [here](#).



**A "crown" - actually rather a model of a burial site.**

[Large picture](#)

- The museum dates all the treasure objects to "6.500 - 5.500 years ago", i.e. to 4.500 - 3.500 BC. The [radiocarbon](#) data indicate 3.800 - 3.000 BC; which makes those things very old, indeed, but not spectacularly old (like 4.500 BC). To confuse things a bit, the first metallurgical analysis was not quite correct <sup>1</sup>. It assumed that most objects were made from copper while more modern investigation showed that many objects contain substantial amount of arsenic (As) and - surprise - antimony (Sb).



- All objects were made with the "lost wax" casting method, an involved technique that must have been in use for some time before something as complex as the scepter or the "crown" could have been made. The Nahal Mishmar hoard still raises a lot of questions. It must have represented incredible riches, so who owned it? Were these objects donations to a temple? What do the objects signify? Some, after all, are rather strange. Why were they hidden (and not retrieved later)? Who made them where? Local stuff or imported? From where? As one researcher (P.R.S. Moorey <sup>2</sup>) put it: "(The Nahal Mishmar hoard) spectacularly illustrates the recurrent restrictions of the surviving material record as evidence for ancient metallurgy and dramatically reinforces the danger of assuming, for any material so readily recycled, that poverty of evidence is evidence of poverty of production, even at an early stage of metal working".

[Link](#)  
to large size  
pictures

There is more interesting metal in the museum. In Nahal Qana cave in West Samaria, eight very old gold or electrum (a natural gold - silver alloy) rings were discovered, weighing almost a kilogram!



Recall that the oldest gold so far comes from [Varna](#) and is dated to 4500 BC. The museum claims that it was mined in southern Egypt, cast in a (simple) sand or clay mould, and that it is the oldest gold in the land and among the oldest in the world.

Of course the museum has the "usual" bronze objects. Here are a few:





**"Dagger and swords, Akko and Tel el-Aijul"**  
 14th - 15th century BC; Bronze" (one handle  
 reconstructed)  
[Large picture](#)

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017



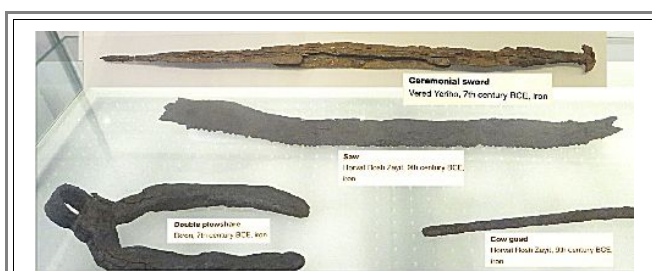
**"Scimitars; around 15th century BC"**  
[Large picture](#)

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017

● The figure captions in the 3 pictures above are what the museum provides. A bit short and a bit questionable in parts. [Scimitars](#)? I would have called these swords "[kopesh](#)".

▸ Finally some iron. The museum actually has a quite interesting rather large Luristan mask sword; you find the picture [here](#). Then we find rather interesting very old iron things from the 7th - 11th century BC. Recall that there isn't much from this early, in particular not many large objects.

Here we have a large "ceremonial" sword and some tools, including a saw:



**An iron sword and some tools from the 7th - 9th  
 century BC**  
[Large picture](#)

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017



**Iron daggers from the 11th century BC.**

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017

By now you are exhausted and in need of a drink. How about taking it from a nymph fountain? Those ancient guys did have special ideas about what constitutes a nice place for taking a mouthful of spring water. Being refreshed in that way might even give you ideas about hardening other things than steel.



**"Nymph fountain, Eastern Bathhouse, Beth Shean, 2nd century BC, marble"**

Source: Photographed in the Israel Museum in Nov. 2017

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- 1) S. Shalev, J.P. Northover: "The Metallurgy of the Nahal Mishmar Hoard Reconsidered"; *Archaeometry* 35 (1993) P. 35-47
- 1) P.R.S. Moorey: "The Chalcolithic Hoard from Nahal Mishmar; Israel, in context". *World Archaeology*, 20(2) (1988) p171-189