

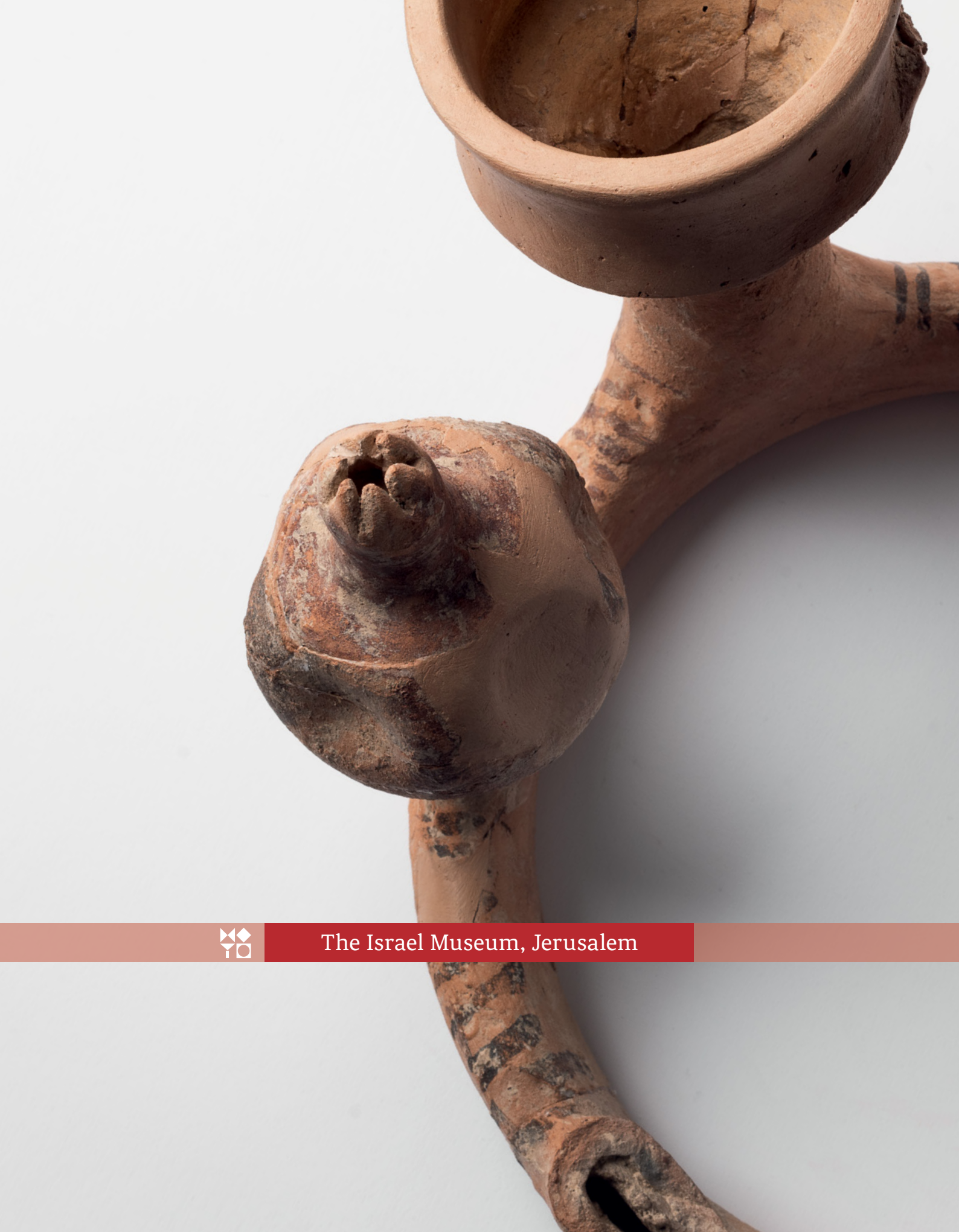


**An Object Lesson:
Rediscovering Iron Age
Artifacts from the
Israel Museum
Collection**

Eran Arie

Israel Museum Studies in Archaeology

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The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

An Object Lesson: Rediscovering Iron Age Artifacts from the Israel Museum Collection

Eran Arie

**This volume is dedicated to the
Israel Museum's former curators
of the Iron Age and Persian Period
Department Ruth Hestrin and
Michal Dayagi-Mendels.**

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Cover: Detail of the kernos from Tel Sasa
IAA collection, Photo: © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Laura Lachman

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In Memoriam

Rivka Merhav, 1926–2022



* The photo, courtesy of her family, shows Rivka Merhav a week before her passing. Some biographical details cited herein are from the Freedom Fighters of Israel Heritage. (FFI-LEHI) website, <https://lehi.org.il/en/merhav-rivka/>, while others were kindly provided by her daughter, Anat Shvadron, and son, Hadar Merhav.

Rivka Merhav was a pioneer curator of Neighboring Cultures and Western Asiatic Antiquities at the Bronfman Archaeology Wing of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. She passed away at her home in Jerusalem on June 19, 2022, at the age of 95.

Rivka was born on November 14, 1926 in Haifa where she studied in the Bialik Gymnasium and joined the youth group Mahanot HaOlim. In 1941 she was recruited into the Lehi movement and in 1943 was imprisoned because of her political activities against the British Mandate. After she started a family in 1946 and completed her studies at the HaOvdim teachers' seminary, she moved to Jerusalem in 1951, where she became a superintendent of kindergartens in the Jerusalem Municipality and also had her own kindergarten in the Nahlaot neighborhood.

In 1958, she pursued a bachelor's and then a master's degree in archaeology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In 1963, the family left Israel for New York, where her husband served as the Israeli Delegation's Economic Attaché at the United Nations, while she pursued her studies at Columbia University. There, she specialized in ancient Iranian art and archaeology with the renowned Edith Porada as her supervisor. She went on to pursue her PhD studies under the guidance of R.D. Barnett, Keeper of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities of the British Museum and

visiting professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, yet chose not to finish her degree.

In 1968, she returned to Israel and, from then on, Rivka worked, for a quarter-century, at the Israel Museum, directing the Western Asiatic Cultures Department, which she founded. She served in this position until her retirement in 1995. As curator, Rivka meticulously built the Ancient Near Eastern collection of the Israel Museum year after year, recruiting donors and cultivating numerous professional relationships in Israel and abroad, curating several outstanding exhibitions, and editing catalogues of the principal collections gifted or bequeathed to the Museum. Her scholarly publications became cornerstones in the field, especially her work on Urartu that accompanied an exhibition she curated close to her retirement.

Rivka will always remain known for her curatorial vision dedicated to the assembly and exhibition of artifacts and written documents from the various Neighboring civilizations that had a lasting impact on the ancient cultures of the Land of Israel. She envisioned the Neighboring Cultures section of the Israel Museum's Archaeology Wing, which was eventually divided into three departments – Western Asiatic Antiquities, Egyptian Archaeology, and Classical Archaeology – as an important complement to the Archaeology Wing's main display and collection, which focus on antiquities excavated in Israel.

The legendary Neighboring Cultures permanent exhibition, most of which comprised Western Asiatic antiquities, stood for almost 40 years in “Gush (Bloc) T” (the gallery dedicated today to the three main monotheistic world religions). It displayed chronologically and geographically hundreds of objects from ancient Mesopotamia, Persia, Anatolia, Arabia, and the Levant.

As part of her vision, Rivka would locate in private collections and auctions artifacts related to the history of ancient Israel and Jewish people, mainly monuments and inscriptions of Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian kings mentioned in the Bible. Together with the aid of the Israel Museum generous donors, she worked tirelessly toward their acquisition for the permanent collection. Thanks to her, there are several “jewels” in the

collection, including one of the three prisms of the Assyrian king Sennacherib known to date (<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/372815-0>) (QR code 1), in which the siege of Jerusalem (ca. 701 BCE) is mentioned, and a huge bronze lampstand dedicated to the main Urartian god, which exemplifies how the shaft of the menorah that stood in the Temple may have looked.

Her initiatives to reconstruct monumental artifacts were ahead of her time. Some of the restoration projects directed by her, such as the reconstruction of fragmentary sculptures and inscriptions from Pasargadae and Persepolis of the Achaemenid king Cyrus the Great, who allowed the exiled Jews to return to Jerusalem (referred to in the Bible in the Book of Daniel), are unfortunately no longer on display due to space restrictions. However, it is surely the unique inscribed stele of biblical Pul, the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III, that bears a reference to Menahem, king of Israel, which is paralleled by a biblical passage, still remains the Gallery's highlight (<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/198926>), (QR code 2). Rivka reconstructed this almost 2.5 m high stele from three fragments she “dug up” in three different private collections, two of which she obtained as gifts to the Museum.

Rivka's life was nearly a century-long celebration during which she was privileged to bear witness to and participate in the formative, calamitous, and important events of our nation and the world. Rivka was blessed with children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. She will be sorely missed by them and by her friends and colleagues, who will remember and cherish her enthusiasm, steadfast opinions, deep sense of justice and endless compassion.

Laura A. Peri

Rodney E. Soher Curator of Western Asiatic Antiquities



QR code 1



QR code 2

Selected Publications of Rivka Merhav:

- 1974 *Past and Present: Jan Mitchell Gift to the Israel Museum. I: Archaeology*. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, cat. 124. Jerusalem (co-eds. R. Hachlili and U. Avida).
- 1975 *Painted Greek Vases: An Exercise in Observation*. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, cat. 135. Jerusalem.
- 1976 Ceremonial and Everyday Use of the Bucket in Mesopotamia and Neighbouring Lands. *The Israel Museum News* 11: 67–83.
- 1979 The Attire of a Canaanite Goddess. *Israel Museum News* 15: 90–97 (co-author T. Ornan).
- 1980 The Palmette on Steatite Bowls in Relation to the Minor Arts and Architecture. *Israel Museum News* 26: 89–106.
- 1981 *A Glimpse into the Past: The Joseph Ternbach Collection*. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, cat. 218. Jerusalem.
- 1985a *Promised Gifts*. The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, cat. 260. Jerusalem (co-ed. S. Rachum).
- 1985b The Stele of the “Serpent Goddess” from Tell Beit Mirsim and the Plaque from Shechem Reconsidered. *The Israel Museum Journal* 4: 27–42.
- 1985c The Menorah of the First and Second Temple Periods in Light of the Sources and Archaeology. *Eretz-Israel* 18 (Nahman Avigad Vol.): 256–267 (co-author R. Hachlili; Hebrew).
- 1987a *Treasures of the Bible Lands: The Elie Borowski Collection*. Tel Aviv Museum of Art, cat. 87/8. Tel Aviv.
- 1987b An Anatolian Trinket Mould from Lipchitz Collection. *The Israel Museum Journal* 6: 38–50.
- 1991a *Urartu: A Metalworking Center in the First Millennium B.C.E.* The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, cat. 324. Jerusalem (co-ed. B. Oktay).
- 1991b The Construction and Production of a Monumental Bronze Candelabrum of King Menua of Urartu. In *Anatolian Iron Ages*, eds. A. Cilingiroglu and D.H. French, 75–96. Oxford (co-author A. Ruder).
- 1993 Scepters of the Divine from the Cave of the Treasure at Nahal Mishmar. In *Studies in the Archaeology and History of Ancient Israel in Honour of Moshe Dothan*, eds. M. Heltzer, A. Segal and D. Kaufman, 21–42. Haifa (Hebrew).
- 1994a Gold and Silver Pins from Urartu: Typology and Methods of Manufacture. *Tel Aviv* 21: 129–143.
- 1994b Two Limestone Stelae Depicting Canaanite Deities in the Hecht Museum, University of Haifa. *Michmanim* 7: 7–24 (Hebrew; English summary, pp. 37*–39*).
- 1996 A Bronze Leg from a Piece of Hellenistic Furniture – A Find from the Seabed near ‘Atlit. *Eretz-Israel* 25 (Joseph Aviram Volume): 427–433 (Hebrew; English summary, pp. 104*–105*).
- 1999 The Menorah of the First and Second Temple Periods in Light of Literary Sources and Archaeological Finds. In *In the Light of the Menorah: Story of a Symbol* (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, cat. 425), ed. Y. Israeli, 4–10. Jerusalem (co-author R. Hachlili).