

# THE EARLY DAYS

The 70th Anniversary of the **Museum for Jewish Antiquities**  
Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University, Mount Scopus



Museum staff at work in the Collections Hall before moving to the new building, 1941



The Museum building on Mount Scopus upon the completion of construction, 1941



Preparation of a replica of the frieze from the Tomb of the Kings façade, in the Collections Hall of the Museum building.

The exhibition brings to the public the story of the establishment of The Museum for Jewish Antiquities – the consolidation of the collection, the University's first excavations, and the founding of various research disciplines in the early days of the University. In 1936, Gedaliahu Morris Kootcher of South Africa bequeathed his estate to the Hebrew University for the purpose of building an archaeological museum that would include a Jewish Department. His donation enabled the establishment of The Museum for Jewish Antiquities on Mount Scopus in 1941, first headed by Eleazar Lipa Sukenik. The Hebrew word for Museum, "treasure house," is of biblical origin and is referred to as a place in which valuable objects are kept.

*Hezekiah was pleased by their coming, and he showed them his treasure house – the silver, the gold, the spices, and the fragrant oil – and all his armory, and everything that was to be found in his storehouses (Isaiah 39:2).*

The Museum for Jewish Antiquities was originally intended to display objects that would present the history of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora. The original collection, containing a core of artifacts already used in the University for study purposes, continued to grow. Many objects were subsequently added through acquisitions and donations, including artifacts from the collections of the Baron Edmond de Rothschild and the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society, in addition to finds from the Hebrew University's various expeditions in Samaria, Tel Gerisa (Tell Jerishe), ancient synagogues in the Galilee, and Second Temple-period burial caves around Jerusalem. Since The Museum for Jewish Antiquities was originally intended to present the history of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, the Jewish population of the country under the British Mandate considered this museum a central institution bespeaking the history of ancient Israel.

The Museum for Jewish Antiquities, which faces the Old City of Jerusalem, was planned by the architects Carl Rubin and Isaac Yavetz, who were chosen by Erich Mendelsohn, Zalman Schocken, and Alexander Klein in a competition for its design. It was constructed as a cubic block with clean and straight lines; some of its architectural elements, such as windows and a balcony, are rounded. The high windows were meant to illuminate the exhibition and collection halls with natural light and to emphasize the high ceilings. All these features characterize the "international style" and are also found in other contemporary buildings in Jerusalem. The original building of The Museum for Jewish Antiquities had two stories. It was entered from the east through a roofed courtyard fronted by a row of stone columns. The Hebrew University commissioned the first version of the Nimrod statue from Israeli sculptor Yitzhak Danziger. The planned sculpture was to be placed at the entrance to The Museum for Jewish Antiquities, however the completed sculpture never reached the University. Instead, Danziger sculpted the Nimrod statue that today stands in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

The entranceway of The Museum for Jewish Antiquities led to a second story, which housed the exhibition hall, a large hall for the archaeological collection, as well as classrooms and work areas. The lower story contained the library, offices, and laboratories. Incorporated into the modern wall of the building's façade north of the courtyard was a stone brought from the excavations of the Third Wall in Jerusalem, the first archaeological project undertaken by the Hebrew University.

Following the War of Independence in 1948, Mount Scopus became an Israeli enclave in Jordanian territory, causing academic activity to cease on the University's campus. After the Six-Day War in 1967, with the University's return to Mount Scopus, a new wing was added to the museum building, which today functions as the Institute of Archaeology. The museum collections also returned to the building and are used to this day for learning, research, and exhibits in Israel and abroad.