

## TRAVEL

# Excavations Uncover Hoard of 1,600-Year-Old Bronze Coins at Underground Rebel Hideout in Israel



Volunteers from Hukok, Israel, uncovered 22 bronze coins dating back to the 4th century A.D. when Jewish rebels revolted against Emperor Constantius Gallus. Courtesy of Israeli Antiquities Authority



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Editor and Writer

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Hidden under a tiny village in Israel, students, soldiers, and volunteers from a local cavers club have been digging up artifacts in an ancient underground rebel hideout. They recently unearthed a lost stash of bronze coins stamped

with the heads of Roman emperors whose reigns trace back to Jewish revolts against the empire.

It appears whoever stowed the cache never returned to claim it.

A sum of 22 bronze coins was found within a network of cramped passages and cavities and are believed to date back to 1,600 years ago when rebels took cover from Roman forces under the village of Hukok, in the region of Galilee. The caves themselves are even older, predating the coins by several centuries. The cavity was originally a water cistern before being converted into a tunnel system used for clandestine purposes.

“On [the coins] are the portraits of the emperors who ruled this land during the time of the Gallus Revolt,” said Yinon Shivtiel, a professor at Zefat Academic College, referring to an uprising between 351 and 352 A.D., in a press release.

“Over the years we have reached hiding complexes from three periods of distress.”





Twenty-two bronze coins were found in an underground Jewish hideout that was used to shelter rebels during revolts against the Roman Empire. Courtesy of Israeli Antiquities Authority



(Left) Local volunteers helped conduct excavations at the caves, and they were responsible for discovering the coins; (Right) Yinon Shivtiel, a professor at Zefat Academic College, worked alongside the Israeli Antiquities Authority to explore the ancient rebel hideout. Courtesy of Israeli Antiquities Authority

Found in a pit at the end of a winding passage, the hoard's location suggests whoever stowed the coins intended to return for them after the danger had passed.

“These underground shelters weren’t for living, they were like small, underground bomb shelters,” Shivtiel said.

The researchers were more than a little surprised to learn these ancient tunnels had been reused several times, during separate rebellions, over the centuries. The hoard of coins—one of the few relics ever found from the Gallus Revolt—now proves this fact, as it followed two much earlier conflicts.

The tunnel complex under Hukok first became a rebel shelter during the Great Revolt, between 66 and 70 A.D., before seeing further development with the Bar-Kochba Revolt, between 132 and 136 A.D. The coins themselves

were deposited during a third struggle when Jewish rebels rose against Emperor Constantius Gallus over two centuries later.



Locals from the village of Hukok uncovered 22 bronze coins stamped with the heads of Roman emperors dating back 1,600 years ago. Courtesy of Israeli Antiquities Authority

Strategically located under homesteads, the hideout allowed Jewish rebels to move about freely and go unseen while thwarting pursuing Roman authorities. The network consists of eight main cavities connected by claustrophobia-inducing passages designed to impede Roman soldiers.

Since the hideout's discovery only a few years ago, the Israeli Antiquities Authority (IAA) has worked alongside Zefat Academic College to investigate inside them. Local volunteers, including members of the Israel Defense Forces and a cavers club, have also pitched in. Finding the cache of coins was a communal win.

“Excavations between 2019–2023 became a large community project, engaging students, volunteers, soldiers, and local residents,” the IAA stated.



“This rare evidence [the coins] shows the tunnels were reused centuries after they were first dug.”

Other artifacts pulled from the site include broken clay and glass dishes, utensils, and a bronze ring, believed to have been worn by a woman holding out in the shelter.



Volunteers congregate in the underground tunnels beneath Hukok. Courtesy of Israeli Antiquities Authority



Markings on the bronze coins helped archeologists from the IAA to date the coins to the time of the Gallus Revolt between 351 and 352 A.D. Courtesy of Israeli Antiquities Authority

Hukok is a settlement with heavy history. It is mentioned in ancient texts like the Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmuds. Now contributing to this history, the rebel hideout—one of the largest of its kind in Galilee—is adding to the village’s sizable archeological worth. The new cache sheds further light on the “hardships and crises” of that time period, the IAA said.

The Gallus Revolt ended tragically for the rebels, who were crushed by the Romans. Yet the people of Hukok later rose from the ashes to create a magnificent, thriving civilization aboveground, constructing a synagogue with gorgeous ancient mosaics. The IAA also aims to embrace that vibrant history.

“Time after time, there are periods of hardship here,” said Uri Berger, an IAA researcher working at Hukok. “In the end, the settlement recovers and continues to thrive here for hundreds of years to come.”



New plans will soon enshrine Hukok as a flagship archeological destination for tourists to explore. Besides the underground rebel holdout, a new visitors' center and the 1,600-year-old synagogue, with its ancient mosaics, will attract visitors from near and far.

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Michael Wing is a writer and editor based in Calgary, Canada, where he was born and educated in the arts. He writes mainly on culture, human interest, and trending news.

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